



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

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

Dydd Mercher, 13 Mawrth 2013
Thursday, 13 March 2013

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Cynnig o dan Reol Sefydlog Rhif 17.42 i Benderfynu Gwahardd y Cyhoedd o'r Cyfarfod
Motion under Standing Order No. 17.42 to Resolve to Exclude the Public from the Meeting

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

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

Aelodau'r pwyllgor yn bresennol
Committee members in attendance

Peter Black	Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru Welsh Liberal Democrats
Janet Finch-Saunders	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Mike Hedges	Llafur Labour
Mark Isherwood	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Ann Jones	Llafur (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor) Labour (Committee Chair)
Gwyn R. Price	Llafur Labour
Kenneth Skates	Llafur Labour
Rhodri Glyn Thomas	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales
Joyce Watson	Llafur Labour
Lindsay Whittle	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales

Eraill yn bresennol
Others in attendance

Steve Barry	Rheolwr Archwilio Perfformiad—Rhanbarth Llywodraeth Leol, Swyddfa Archwilio Cymru Performance Audit Manager—Local Government Region, Wales Audit Office
Nikki Cole	Pennaeth Datblygu, Tai Wales and West Head of Development, Wales and West Housing
Shirley Davies	Cyfarwyddwr Cartrefi a Chymdogaethau, Cartrefi RCT Homes and Neighbourhoods Director, RCT Homes
Sioned Hughes	Cyfarwyddwr Polisi ac Adfywio, Cartrefi Cymunedol Cymru Director of Policy and Regeneration, Community Housing Cymru
Emma Reeves-McAll	Swyddog Cyfartaledd ac Amrywiaeth, Tai Pawb Equality and Diversity Officer, Tai Pawb
Nick Selwyn	Arweinydd ar Archwilio Perfformiad—Llywodraeth Leol, Swyddfa Archwilio Cymru Performance Audit Lead—Local Government, Wales Audit Office

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

Sarah Bartlett	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk
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Jonathan Baxter
Marc Wyn Jones

Y Gwasanaeth Ymchwil
The Research Service
Clerc
Clerk
Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 9.30 a.m.
The meeting began at 9.30 a.m.

Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon Introductions, Apologies and Substitutions

[1] **Ann Jones:** Morning, everybody. Welcome to the Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee. I will do the usual housekeeping rules. I ask Members around the table to make sure that they have switched off their mobile phones and pagers because they affect the translation and broadcasting. We operate bilingually, or, at least, some members of the committee operate bilingually. We have translation facilities on channel 1, from Welsh to English, and channel 0 is the floor language for amplification. We are not expecting the fire alarm to operate, so, if it does, we will take instructions from the ushers. Do Members have any interests that they wish to declare that they have not already declared for this inquiry? I see that they do not.

9.31 a.m.

Ymchwiliad i Addasiadau yn y Cartref—Sesiwn Dystiolaeth 8 Inquiry into Home Adaptations—Evidence Session 8

[2] **Ann Jones:** We are delighted to have Community Housing Cymru with us for the first evidence session this morning. You are all very welcome. If you introduce yourselves for the record, we will then go straight to questions, because we have quite a lot of questions that we want to get through. Who wants to start?

[3] **Ms Hughes:** I will start then. Bore da; good morning. I am Sioned Hughes, director of policy and regeneration at Community Housing Cymru.

[4] **Ms Cole:** I am Nikki Cole, the head of development for Wales and West Housing Association.

[5] **Ms Davies:** Good morning. I am Shirley Davies, the homes and neighbourhoods director at RCT Homes.

[6] **Ann Jones:** Thank you for that and for coming to give us evidence today. I will start with the first question. Have home adaptation services improved in recent years?

[7] **Ms Hughes:** We can certainly say that, since the initial review in 2005, the Welsh Government and the registered social landlord sector have worked together closely, focusing on that one aspect, which is the funding aspect through physical adaptations grants. We have seen improvements in the speed and fast-tracking bundles of those aspects. However, my colleagues and I would question the fact that there is yet another review. That might answer the question in itself, in that maybe there has not been much improvement across the board on adaptations.

[8] **Ann Jones:** Is that a view that you both share?

[9] **Ms Cole:** Yes, definitely.

[10] **Ms Davies:** It is. I also think that there is absolute confusion, from a customer's perspective, about the variety of funding streams available. The single point of contact really needs to be hit home. We still have evidence of waiting lists. People are really suffering as a result of the fact that, yes, there is money there, but there is not enough funding in place.

[11] **Ms Cole:** With the inconsistencies between local authorities as well, it is confusing for the RSL sector to provide a consistent service to customers. Ultimately, our customers are the primary recipients of the adaptations.

[12] **Ann Jones:** You mentioned people's confusion over the system. What other difficulties are faced by the people who need those adaptations to their homes?

[13] **Ms Davies:** There is a lack of understanding as to where to go. If you live in an area where there are good advocacy services, you will have a benefit. As an RSL, we work closely with our local authority, so we get additional funding. However, my other RSL partners in the area do not. There is also confusion about what adaptations are. People need help to understand that, if they have an extension, their existing rooms will be reduced in size to provide access to it. Computer-aided design and that sort of thing can help with understanding. I know of people who have gone back to a property that has had an extension and have said, 'I can't live there; I really can't'. They just do not understand it. We are not in the same realm in that sense.

[14] **Ann Jones:** Okay. Does anybody else have anything to say on other difficulties they face?

[15] **Ms Cole:** An issue that adds to that confusion is that, sometimes, people do not understand what the adaptation is. Extensions are an issue, and they are the most costly. There is also the impact that extensions can have: they can increase the number of bedrooms that a property will end up with and, therefore, the rent will change. Welfare reform is one thing, but this is just a standard rent. So, there are all of these other layers, which, at the point of contact with the occupational therapists, are sometimes not fully explained.

[16] **Ann Jones:** So, who decides? Is it you, as the registered social landlords, that decide what the adaptation is, or is it the person or the carer who decides what the adaptation is?

[17] **Ms Cole:** I think it is fair to say that this goes back to confusion. I am fortunate; I deal with 12 local authorities. Some think that it is fortunate, but some say that it is unfortunate. However, I think that it is fortunate. It used to be 16, so I am getting better.

[18] **Ann Jones:** Does that mean that you have worn them down and they have gone away? [*Laughter.*]

[19] **Ms Cole:** Yes, as though I had said, 'Please go away'. Each local authority has a different process but, for adaptation, the point of contact is the resident. It is not the property that has the grant but the resident. That is the focus, which I think many people forget. Sometimes, in most local authorities, the resident will be directed straight to the occupational therapists. It could be the resident, through social services, or the carer, who is required to go there. On some occasions, we do not even know about it until a piece of paper hits our desk stating that an assessment has been made. Sometimes, that assessment is inconsistent with what the resident actually needs. With many local authorities—and I know that my colleague, Shirley, does this—we try to engage in joint visits with the OT and officers from the association so that we can fully explain to the customer, the resident, at that point what the options are. Sometimes, the adaptation is not best for them. Sometimes, moving to a more appropriate house is more suited to their needs.

[20] **Ann Jones:** I could go on, but I will not because we will be here all day. I think that I will leave that now. Would you like to take the next question, Peter?

[21] **Peter Black:** Yes, thank you. I am a bit confused. You are registered social landlords and the 2005 review, undertaken by Chris Jones, was quite clear that, in terms of funding for adaptations, RSLs should be using the revenue stream that was available to them and that stock transfer companies should include it in their business plans. I am confused about your engagement with local authorities in terms of adaptations for your tenants.

[22] **Ms Hughes:** The physical adaptations grant—the funding bit—is one part of it, and the occupational therapists need to be brought into the process.

[23] **Peter Black:** Why are you buying from the local authority? Can you not buy them in from other providers?

[24] **Ms Davies:** I think that there is an issue there and I think that we would supplement the service. The local authority is keen to work alongside us. At the end of the day, the local authorities do have a budget and we actually help them to spend their budgets. So, although we have money in our business plan, if the local authority has other funding, it will come to us to discharge its funds or budgets. We see a lot of common clients. These people are customers of the local authority, perhaps through social services, who are also tenants of ours.

[25] **Peter Black:** Are you saying that local authorities are having difficulty spending their money?

[26] **Ms Davies:** They have waiting lists.

[27] **Peter Black:** Yes, they do.

[28] **Ms Davies:** If we can help them to discharge their funding, then we will do, because it is of benefit to the residents of the whole community.

[29] **Peter Black:** It seems to me that there is confusion. You are the landlords; you have tenants who need adaptations; you provide the funding streams for those adaptations; you bring in occupational therapists, as required, either from the local authority or from some other source; and you oversee that process. So, why are people confused?

[30] **Ms Davies:** I think that they are confused because if they do not know at the first point of contact who to go to, they will not even access an adaptation.

[31] **Peter Black:** You have housing officers to deal with these tenants who can help to advise on this.

[32] **Ms Davies:** We do, if a customer engages with us. Just because we are a landlord does not mean that people tell us everything about themselves. People are private people.

[33] **Peter Black:** The Welsh Government has stated as part of its White Paper that it wants to review the adaptations process. How would you recommend that that review tackles the confusion that you have identified?

[34] **Ms Davies:** We have done some customer profile work with people who have had adaptations. For those customers, a single point of contact is the preferred method so that they do not have to deal with the local authority, the occupational therapist or the surveyor—they would like a single point of contact. It may be one person in an organisation, it may be a team of people, but, in effect, it is a cradle-to-grave service when people have an adaptation done;

it is not various people dipping in and out.

[35] **Peter Black:** So, you are looking to enhance and reinforce the role of Care and Repair, basically.

[36] **Ms Davies:** We do not access Care and Repair, so, no.

[37] **Peter Black:** It acts as a single point of contact at the moment for a whole range of tenants.

[38] **Ms Davies:** Yes, it does.

[39] **Peter Black:** So, it is that sort of agency.

[40] **Ms Davies:** That would be one way of doing it, yes.

[41] **Ms Hughes:** It certainly would be. We are talking about making the front end simple for the customer. The reality is that—because this is yet another review—it is a complex area with many different pools of funding, so, we as organisations, local authorities, OTs and RSLs need to collaborate, and we can demonstrate areas where that is already happening so that the back end is streamlined and knows what it is doing, but the front end also has to be very simple.

[42] **Ms Cole:** If I may pick up the point about whether we appoint OTs directly, in Cardiff, all the RSLs part-fund occupational therapists through the Cardiff accessible homes programme, but we have access to those OTs for only a certain number of hours per week. It is 15 hours a week for my association. During the summer months, we have no access at all, so there is a constant backlog. Sometimes, those people get pushed over to the local authorities' occupational therapists. In other local authority areas, where our stock is smaller, it is not financially viable for us to access independent occupational therapists. I must say that some local authorities are good at turning around the referrals when they come through, so we have no need to go outside them. We access not just local authority OTs, but other OTs as well.

[43] **Ms Hughes:** We have examples of some members, even though scale is a factor, that employ their own OTs, but this is scarce and linked with the large Welsh housing quality standard programmes, so, as you can imagine, it is probably more of the large-scale voluntary transfers—

[44] **Peter Black:** Are you saying that there is a shortage of OTs?

[45] **Ms Cole:** I would say that there is across all regions in Wales.

[46] **Joyce Watson:** I will stay with the theme of confusion and complexity. Do you think that the complexity and bureaucracy of the adaptation system contributes to delays or are there other reasons for those delays?

[47] **Ms Cole:** I think that we make the system complex. I do not think that the system is that difficult; it can be broken down into three clear stages, but it is in between those stages that we make it complex. As we said, we are not in control of that front end of the referral, which is the most important bit, namely the customer-focused or customer-facing element. Where we move through the bureaucracy where we deal directly with the Welsh Government, in general terms, it is a lot smoother than it used to be. There are still some layers of bureaucracy that could be smoothed out. As we move forward, a lot of associations are moving away from the frameworks that they have in place, which means that where we could

get one price for the works, we now have to get three prices, and that means that the resident has three visits from three contractors to assess the works, so that adds time to the whole system. However, I think it is us who make it more complex than it should be.

[48] **Joyce Watson:** We have discussed the availability of OTs, so I do not need to go into that, but I will ask whether all housing associations deal with minor adaptations in the same way. You should have experience of this. [*Laughter.*]

[49] **Ms Cole:** We fund minor adaptations directly. If it is £500, we will do it ourselves, and, sometimes, we will go up to £1,000 depending on what the works are. We do not have a hard rule that says that it has to be that level. Other associations go up to a limit of £300. I cannot speak for everybody, but I would say that the majority of associations fund minor adaptations themselves.

9.45 a.m.

[50] **Ms Hughes:** The vast majority will. There are no data—and I am sure that we will come on to that later—which means that this is not captured. We did send out a questionnaire and we had 13 responses. Of those, 11 fund the minor adaptations themselves. So, two do not.

[51] **Joyce Watson:** So, there is variation.

[52] **Ms Hughes:** There is variation, but I would say that that straw poll of 13 would probably be representative if you expanded it to the whole sector.

[53] **Mark Isherwood:** Would a single adaptation system in Wales across tenures be beneficial? If so, why?

[54] **Ms Hughes:** I think that I have referred to this previously. What sits behind adaptations? When I first started looking at adaptations at a policy level, I was struck by the complexity; the number of different professions that come into it is really complex. I think that we have made the point that, actually, we would want one point of access, with collaboration between each of us, recognising that that will probably bring more efficient and faster improvement to the services. It is the first point of contact that we would want, with collaboration then among the key sectors.

[55] **Mark Isherwood:** Do you believe that that point of contact should be the landlord, whoever that may be, and regardless of whether it is a transfer association or not? How could that better integrate health, social services and the landlord in delivering improvements?

[56] **Ms Hughes:** Shirley referred to the point at which a tenant identifies a requirement; they are referred at the point of need. There needs to be quite a wide campaign of information and quite strong branding, I should imagine, so that more than one person in the agencies involved recognise and know about a common referral system. Otherwise, you are never going to capture it—that person would always need to know to go to Care and Repair if they wanted to be that first point. We cannot ensure that that would always happen, so it has to be quite a strong campaign. I think that Nikki and Shirley both work on a local level in Cardiff and RCT where those organisations have come together to try to streamline the system.

[57] **Ms Davies:** I think that there is a challenge in engaging with health. We have done two emergency vaccinations involving bariatric patients in the past six months, and the anecdotal evidence that we get from people living in adapted homes is that they get admitted to hospital and the dieticians are tearing their hair out. We also know, from the previous debrief, that there are another four or five bariatric patients in RCT borough. What is going to happen to them? We know about some of them anecdotally but, of course, health cannot tell

us because of data protection.

[58] **Mark Isherwood:** I am conscious that all RSLs will claim to have some very effective tenant engagement programmes. Is this sort of message routinely not part of that; should it not be identifying the best ways of engaging with tenants? Sometimes, it is not just a quarterly or monthly newsletter; sometimes, it is social events on the street, and that is an opportunity to talk to people and to make them aware of wider issues.

[59] I have a second point related to this. You talked about working across the sectors of health, social services, housing and so on. Should that include design as well as delivery? I am conscious that, when I discussed this with one particular local authority where OTs and housing officers were working closely together, they were reaching out to their local stock transfer association, saying that in any environment, regardless of whether they have more or less money, they have to work smarter, and that means designing the systems together as well, as a board.

[60] **Ms Hughes:** I do not know whether my colleagues want to pick up on the design aspect, but on the point about tenant profiling, at the moment, with welfare reform emerging and coming over in April, it has really been under the spotlight in terms of the relationship of the landlord knowing exactly the profile of the tenancies, and I suppose that the point I probably need to make at this point is that, obviously, the impact of welfare reform is going to have a huge impact on those people who are in adapted homes. I suppose that we will touch on that later, but in terms of making good use of adapted homes, thousands of them face having increased rents or having to move out of those adapted homes.

[61] The other point is, talking about housing and health, before we go on to design, that it is about resource. Whatever we are talking about here—we have mentioned PAGs, for example, the pot for which has increased from £3 million in 2006 to £8 million now. That is being top-sliced from the social housing grant, which is a decreasing pot in terms of delivering a further supply of housing. So, we need to look to other sectors and demonstrate to them the benefits and savings that we are making, including health and social care. Shirley will pick up on the point on design.

[62] **Ms Davies:** If you are talking about the physical design—

[63] **Mark Isherwood:** No, it is more about the design of the system to deliver what you say that they are seeking.

[64] **Ms Davies:** It very much depends on the local authority that you are working with, its size and the resources that it has available. We work very closely; we meet on a regular basis to review high-cost cases and difficult cases. That has certainly streamlined things considerably within RCT.

[65] **Ms Cole:** I agree. The design of the system is the important aspect, especially when we start to incorporate health into the whole process. Health should be one of the key partners in this process, because, although we do not have the evidence, there must be a way to find out the saving to health from every £1 spent on an adaptation that keeps people from hospital admission, or enables getting someone out of hospital earlier. I do not think that we have the design of the system right at all; it is something that needs to be looked at, but it needs to be done as a partnership, and not as individual organisations.

[66] **Ms Hughes:** Care and Repair has demonstrated that £1 spent on the rapid response service has saved £7.50; we have heard that figure quoted many a time.

[67] **Mark Isherwood:** That leads to my final, very brief question. Should the rapid

response adaptations programme be open to social housing tenants?

[68] **Ms Hughes:** It should be open to them, and it should also be open to the RSL sector. We have heard that many registered social landlords are delivering their own minor adaptations, which adds complexity to the system, but it should be open to social tenants as well.

[69] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** How can the adaptations system be more focused on the needs of disabled people and on achieving ongoing positive outcomes?

[70] **Ms Davies:** Funnily enough, we have debated this long and hard. At the moment, the system is around property and not around people. The measures all relate to time, which is great as it means that we put in an adaptation sooner rather than later. However, there is no monitoring of the quality-of-life improvements that are made. Those improvements are not expressed upfront as an outcome. For example, installing a walk-in shower it is not just about someone's personal hygiene but also their wellbeing and confidence, and we know that there is a shortage of that type of measurement.

[71] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** You talked earlier about there not being a consistent approach. Is it fair to say that best practice is not being shared across Wales?

[72] **Ms Hughes:** Yes, we were saying that good practice is a bad traveller in Wales, which is probably not the first time that you have heard that. We have seen examples; we see them here in the Cardiff accessible homes budget. Conwy, also, has reduced its figures and its timings substantially. Again, it is a question of whether we are measuring the right things. However, there are pockets of good practice, and, in terms of the leadership of Welsh Government and of the sector itself, we should be sharing those examples and learning from them. We are a small country and I do not see why we are not able to do that a bit more effectively.

[73] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** On the back of that, how would you recommend that we share this best practice?

[74] **Ms Hughes:** A big stick or a big carrot. [*Laughter.*] We are in the age of collaboration, and we need to look innovatively at service delivery. Now is the time to look at where organisations, local authorities and RSLs are working together. There needs to be some kind of push, pressure or nudge in terms of saying we cannot have another review and be here in three or four years' time saying that time is still a huge factor.

[75] **Peter Black:** Are not organisations such as Community Housing Cymru the sort of organisations to spread best practice?

[76] **Ms Hughes:** Oh yes, and we are doing that all the time. [*Laughter.*] The point I would make is that we have worked collaboratively with Welsh Government on the PAGs and the funding aspects. We need to tweak that again, but we have speeded that up and we have a fast-tracking system with the Welsh Government. We have been able to do that and we are in control of that area, but what we need to do absolutely is push and raise the profile of the good practice that is going on. At the end of the day, you can take a horse to water, but there has to be some push from another side to get people together to actually see that it has to be customer-focused and it has to deliver for them.

[77] **Peter Black:** Are you saying that your members are too wilful?

[78] **Ms Hughes:** You are putting words in my mouth; I certainly did not say that. [*Laughter.*]

[79] **Kenneth Skates:** You have already touched on the issue of the lack of information that is provided to the people who need adaptations, as well as their families and their carers. Could you just talk us through what process you think should be followed in order to achieve a clearer adaptation experience?

[80] **Ms Cole:** I will speak from my association's perspective. We are just finishing an intervention into our PAGs system. So, we have literally stripped it down from the very beginning when we are involved, to the end, and it was the front end, the customer experience, that we found was definitely lacking. Now, wherever possible, we will do a joint visit with the occupational therapist, and sometimes try to get somebody from the health service as well, depending on the situation, so that the customer, client or resident can understand or have explained to them the full implications of the adaptation they are seeking, any impact, as Shirley said, on their living environment, any impact on their rent, and also to identify whether having an adaptation in their property will be fit for purpose in the long run for them, so that we, as the landlord, can understand what their future housing needs are going to be. It could be that something has to be done now to improve their quality of life, but we look to provide a longer-term solution. That is what is missing from a number of referrals that cross our desk where we have not had the opportunity to be involved upfront. This way, we are finding that the quality of response back is much improved.

[81] **Kenneth Skates:** Do you find that the presence of someone from the health service—you say you try to get someone—

[82] **Ms Cole:** We try. It is not always possible.

[83] **Kenneth Skates:** Do you find that it is beneficial to have someone there, and would it help if their attendance was obligatory?

[84] **Ms Cole:** I do not think it would be, if it was obligatory. We have done it where a specific need has been raised with a resident in a particular situation and it has helped to have a professional from that side of things to explain and also to help us as the landlords to understand exactly what the situation is. We are not medically trained and we do not understand; we rely on the experts who are providing the information to us to have got it right. I must say that what we have is not always correct.

[85] **Ms Davies:** The sorts of things that are helpful for tenants are pictures of things and examples and the CAD walk-through, so that people can see the impact of having something installed in their homes. Some of the adaptations are quite ugly, unobjectively speaking, and if something—

[86] **Ann Jones:** Usually, the cheaper ones are the ugly ones, so, if people end up with ugly adaptations, it is because they are the cheapest that somebody could find.

[87] **Ms Davies:** Yes.

[88] **Kenneth Skates:** So, essentially, it is about presenting visual impressions of the work that is going to be carried out.

[89] **Ms Davies:** Absolutely. Literacy levels are very low and pictures and so on are what people can take in.

[90] **Ann Jones:** Joyce, did you want to come in?

10.00 a.m.

[91] **Joyce Watson:** Briefly. I am perfectly literate, but I cannot understand maps, diagrams and things, so there is another issue there. I heard you talk, Nikki, about what you can do now, while you have, more or less, a holding position for somebody while you look for something that is more suitable in future. My question is simple—I see a danger in that approach, because there could be issues about dignity and I want you to explain it further, because I have heard about cases where people have been asked to use a commode downstairs for six months or a year, which is not a good solution, so, can you explain that further?

[92] **Ms Cole:** With regard to what can be done now, in some of the areas in which we operate, we may know of alternative accommodation that is coming through fairly quickly—within weeks. Somebody, for instance, may have put in a notice to quit, so, the ideal solution could then be to move the resident straight across. In other situations, a purpose-built property may be needed. You then carry on with the physical adaptations grant, but you have in mind the needs of somebody else who is coming through, and so it is almost about designing the physical adaptation to fit somebody else as well. That is about making best use of the money, whereas sometimes, in the past, we have just been reactive—somebody has requested a physical adaptation and we just went and did it, without thinking of the long term. That is what I meant by dealing with it now.

[93] **Ann Jones:** We will move on to performance monitoring, and questions from Lindsay.

[94] **Lindsay Whittle:** I speak as someone who was a housing manager for 25 years with a registered social landlord, so this is really interesting for me. Someone mentioned best practice earlier—I think that it was you, Sioned, who said that nine out of 11 RSLs already spend up to £1,000. The reason for that, of course, is that it reduces bureaucracy, and it is a lot easier. I do not need an occupational therapist to tell me that Mrs Jones needs a handrail; it is easy. However, how can the performance of adaptation services across Wales, including RSLs, best be monitored, in your opinion? I have my own answer to that question, so I may answer it with you.

[95] **Ms Hughes:** We were discussing this matter earlier, and I am sure that colleagues will want to come in on it. From a PAGs point of view in particular, the whole process is not monitored. From the point of view of public money being spent, we would be very keen to be able to have some kind of monitoring. However, the caveat would be that it has to monitor the right things. It has to be very much customer-focused, looking at the experience of the customer and the benefits to them. It should not, necessarily, look at the time frames and those other different aspects—cost, speed and having one visit. It is about being really customer-focused. As a sector, we have a regulatory framework that is outcomes-focused. We would want to encourage putting a monitoring system in place, but we believe that that system should be proportionate to the amount of money that is being spent.

[96] **Lindsay Whittle:** In other words, you are saying, ‘Break it down at every stage of the adaptation process—down to the assessment and building works—and monitor the quality of works and whether or not the builders turned up on time’. It is easy to do a job and walk away, but the important thing to monitor is the benefit to the customer—the tenant—as a performance indicator. That is my opinion, and you seem to be echoing it; is that the case?

[97] **Ms Cole:** Yes, definitely. I think that a common monitoring process across the disabled facilities grant as well as the PAG route would make so much more sense. The risk with performance indicators is that they drive the wrong behaviour—people become target-driven. That is not what we are looking for; we are looking for quality and the right outcome for the resident. If we look at them more as trends than measures, we would then be able to identify where the problems and gaps are and put the right solutions in place to deal with

them, hopefully improving the whole system. However, everybody would have to work to the same measures.

[98] **Lindsay Whittle:** There would also have to be a proper and consistent standard throughout the whole of Wales. Nikki, you mentioned that you have worked with 12 local authorities. I was fortunate that I only worked with five, so you have my greatest sympathy. *[Laughter.]*

[99] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Hoffwn fynd yn ôl at y dangosydd perfformiad. Rydych wedi awgrymu ei fod yn annigonol, ond a ydych yn derbyn bod hefyd angen dangosydd perfformiad sy'n ymwneud â'r cyfnod o amser sy'n mynd heibio wrth ddarparu'r addasiad, a bod hynny'n bwysig yn ogystal â'r pethau eraill yr ydych wedi'u crybwyll?

Rhodri Glyn Thomas: I wish to return to the performance indicator. You have suggested that it is insufficient, but do you accept that we also need a performance indicator relating to the period of time that elapses in providing the adaptation, and that that is important as well as the other things that you have mentioned?

[100] **Ms Cole:** Using the time period as a performance indicator can be misleading. When we broke down the PAG system ourselves, one of the things that we identified was to do the right thing for the resident when they want that piece of work. In a report that was put on my desk, there was one PAG that took over 200 days. When I queried it, I was told that it was because the resident went into hospital and did not want the work being done without her being there. She wanted to make sure that she knew and understood the whole thing. So, sometimes, looking at the end-to-end measures is wrong. If we break it down into stages, and we get the stages right, the benefit for the customer is much improved, rather than looking at it as a whole.

[101] **Ms Davies:** Sometimes, it is like comparing apples with pears. My own local authority is in the bottom quartile, but it spends a substantial amount of money on aids and adaptations. A neighbouring authority is in the upper quartile, but it has a small budget and is able to spend that money quickly and make the adaptations quickly. You need a level playing field and to compare like with like.

[102] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** A ydych yn dadlau, felly, y dylid cael gwared yn gyfan gwbl ar y dangosydd perfformiad sy'n canolbwyntio ar y cyfnod o amser?

Rhodri Glyn Thomas: Are you arguing, therefore, that we need to get rid entirely of the performance indicator that focuses on the time period?

[103] **Ms Hughes:** Roedd digwyddiad yn ôl ym mis Gorffennaf lle cafwyd diwrnod cyfan yn edrych ar addasiadau. Roedd y data i gyd yn ymwneud â'r grantiau cyfleusterau i'r anabl oherwydd nad oes gennym ddata yn ymwneud â'r grantiau addasiadau ffisegol. Roedd gwahaniaeth anferthol o ran yr amser yr oedd yn ei gymryd i awdurdodau lleol wneud y gwaith. Nid oedd dealltwriaeth ychwaith ynglŷn ag a oeddynt yn mesur yr amser o'r pwynt yr oedd y person wedi dechrau'r drafodaeth ynglŷn â'r addasiad yr oedd ei angen arnynt, neu a oeddynt yn stopio'r addasiad nes cael adroddiad gan y therapydd galwedigaethol. Felly, nid yw'r amser yn golygu dim os nad ydych yn canolbwyntio ar brofiad y person. Yn

Ms Hughes: There was an event back in July when we spent a whole day looking at adaptations. All the data related to the disabled facilities grant because we do not have data for the PAGs. There was a huge difference in terms of the time that it took for local authorities to do the work. There was no understanding either of whether they were measuring the time from when the discussions commenced about the adaptations that the person needed or whether they stopped until they received the report from the OT. Therefore, the time taken means nothing unless you are focusing on the experience of the person. Personally, I do not like monitoring performance indicators in that way, because it means that people focus

bersonol, nid wyf yn hoff o fonitro dangosyddion perfformiad yn y ffordd honno, oherwydd gall olygu bod pobl yn canolbwyntio ar y targed hwnnw ac nid ar y person.

[104] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Felly, os ydym am gael fframwaith monitro perfformiad a dangosydd perfformiad sy'n fwy eang ac sy'n canolbwyntio ar brofiad y person sy'n derbyn y gwasanaeth, ai dim ond pan mae'r gwasanaeth yn cael ei gyflawni y byddech yn mesur hynny, neu a fydddech am fynd yn ôl ar ôl chwe, 12 neu 18 mis? Unwaith mae'r addasiad wedi'i wneud, mae ymdeimlad o ryddhad gan y person bod yr addasiad wedi'i wneud. Ar yr adeg arbennig honno, byddent yn dweud, 'Mae'n wych, mae'n ffantastig—dyma'r union beth yr wyf ei eisiau', ond, hwyrach, ymhen blwyddyn neu 18 mis, byddent yn dechrau teimlo nad dyna'n union beth yr oeddynt ei eisiau.

[105] **Ms Hughes:** Rwy'n siŵr y daw Nikki neu Shirley i mewn ar hyn, ond rwy'n credu ei bod yn bwysig i'r sector ein bod yn monitro yr hyn yr ydym yn ei arbed i sectorau eraill. O ran y person, mae'n hanfodol ein bod yn monitro ymhellach i mewn i'r cyfnod amser ar ôl cael y defnydd hwnnw. Rwy'n siŵr y gall Nikki neu Shirley roi enghraifft i chi o hynny.

[106] **Ms Davies:** It is key to go back to people, because people's circumstances change for a whole variety of reasons. As a landlord, we monitor satisfaction on a regular basis and it is one of the areas that we would not necessarily ask questions about. At the end of the day, it is about the experience of people living in their homes, so it would be very valid to measure it.

[107] **Ms Cole:** I totally agree.

[108] **Gwyn R. Price:** Could better use be made of existing adaptations, for example recycling equipment such as stairlifts and developing an accessible/adapted housing register? Would all that help?

[109] **Ms Cole:** We do recycle stairlifts. This year, so far, we have fitted three that we have recycled, because they were taken out in very good condition. We store them and we get somebody to refurbish them to make sure that they are fit for use for the new resident. The accessible housing registers are a very good tool, if they are used right. Most local authorities are moving to common housing registers. We are working with them to try to ensure that adapted property information is captured on those. However, what tends to happen is that where you have a property that becomes vacant and has had an adaptation, sometimes it slips through the net. In addition, the people who are sent to us from common waiting lists might not need to have an adapted property. However, one of those people may be on the homeless register and they have to accept something quickly. So, they will accept it, but it may be a three-bedroomed house with a walk-in, level-access shower and they have four children. We

on that target rather than on the person.

Rhodri Glyn Thomas: Therefore, if we are to have a broader performance monitoring framework and performance indicator that focuses on the experience of the person who receives the service, would you measure it only when the service is delivered, or would you go back after six, 12 or 18 months? Once the adaptation has been done, there is a feeling of relief for the person that it has been completed. At that particular time, they will say, 'It is great, it is fantastic—this is exactly what I want', but maybe in a year or 18 months' time, they might start to feel that that was not quite what they wanted.

Ms Hughes: I am sure that Nikki or Shirley will come in on this, but I believe that it is important for the sector that we monitor what we are saving for other sectors. In terms of the person, it is essential that we monitor further into the time after they have had that use. I am sure that Nikki or Shirley can give you an example of that.

then have to rip that out and put a bath in. You cannot reuse those showers. We have been looking at trying to reuse systems, but it is not always possible, unfortunately. It is not quite right, but it is getting better in some areas. There is still a lot of work to be done on that.

[110] **Gwyn R. Price:** Are there any prime examples of authorities where a register is used in such a way that is closer to what you think is right?

[111] **Ms Cole:** [*Laughter.*] I would not like to go there, because we all have different expectations, do we not? What I might think is ideal, may not be ideal in somebody else's mind.

[112] **Gwyn R. Price:** That is a good answer. [*Laughter.*]

[113] **Mike Hedges:** Should housing associations created following a stock transfer be able to access physical adaptations grant funding and do you have any concerns that, with the ending of direct funding, income could be reduced for registered social landlords? More importantly, perhaps, if interest rates for borrowing went up, would that have any effect on the adaptations that you are doing?

[114] **Ann Jones:** I think that is a good question to end on. [*Laughter.*]

[115] **Ms Hughes:** Yes, we will end on a light note. [*Laughter.*] We have welfare reform, a capital squeeze and we are now possibly looking at a revenue risk in terms of the changes that are coming under direct payments. We are working very hard with both our tenants and other organisations to ensure that the tenants have the right options to meet the increased rent that they might have with the bedroom tax. We are working with the Welsh Government on the digital inclusion projects, making sure that people are online. However, there is a risk, but I think that lenders, with the recession and the current financial situation, have been taking every opportunity to increase the base rate of borrowing for the sector. Probably, that is why we would be calling for more funding to be coming through the next consequentials, since you asked that question. On a serious note, we need to meet the supply and need for more one and two-bedroomed houses. We do not have that stock profile in many of our local authorities and we will either need to move those tenants or have a revenue deficit. Tenants will be facing very tough decisions, as landlords will too.

[116] Turning to PAGs, large-scale voluntary transfer landlords—in the local authorities at the time of the shadow boards and building the business plan—should have been building in the capacity and projections for future demand for adaptations. On whether they did not have the right data or could not foresee what the demand would be, Shirley will probably want to come in on that in terms of whether what is in the business plan does not meet the need. With regard to LSVTs accessing PAGs, I have made the point previously—it is £8.5 million out of a possible sum of £40 million or £50 million overall that is available to build houses. We would not want to see that increased. That is why I would make the point that it is important that we get other sectors to come in to put funding together from health and social care. There is a resource issue. Speeding up processes and getting more people through the door is no good if you have to say to Mrs Jones, as Nikki said, 'I'm really sorry, but you might have to wait until next April, because we don't have the resources'. Putting more demand on PAGs does not feel like the right solution.

10.15 a.m.

[117] **Mike Hedges:** Social care and health are both under severe financial pressure. They would argue that they are under far more financial pressure than you are.

[118] **Ms Hughes:** My answer to that is that there is a much wider discussion to be had

with health and social care. Some of our members are working with health and social care to say that they are under a lot of pressure because they have wards of people who should not be in hospital. We are having those discussions. We would not be asking them to fund adaptations in isolation; it would be part of a wider programme.

[119] **Mike Hedges:** What I would say in response to that is that what you would then have is wards of different people. If you stopped doing hip replacements, the waiting list for knee replacements would go down, for example. You would have the same number of people on wards, but for different reasons.

[120] **Ms Hughes:** It needs to be looked at in terms of the fact that everybody is going to be picking up the costs. There needs to be a better solution for the customer.

[121] **Ann Jones:** That is a hobby-horse of Mike's. We allow him, once a term, to say that. *[Laughter.]*

[122] Do you have anything else to add?

[123] **Ms Davies:** No.

[124] **Ann Jones:** Thank you for coming to give evidence. We will send you a copy of the transcript to check for accuracy, in case we have put words into your mouth. I am sure that you will get a copy of the report when we have finished it. We hope that this will be the last review that we have to do. I have taken part in three, as have other Members around the table. Hopefully, we will make a difference this time. Thank you to all three of you for coming today.

10.16 a.m.

Ymchwiliad i Addasiadau yn y Cartref—Sesiwn Dystiolaeth 9 Inquiry into Home Adaptations—Evidence Session 9

[125] **Ann Jones:** I am delighted to welcome to the table, from the Wales Audit Office, Steve Barry, performance audit manager for local government, and Nick Selwyn, performance audit lead for local government. You are both very welcome. Thank you for your written paper. We will go straight to questions, unless you have any opening comments.

[126] I am not sure whether you caught the back end of our previous session, when, in winding up, I said that we hope that this will be the last review that we will do. Some of us have sat through three reviews. Since the last review in 2009 by the Equality of Opportunity Committee, have local authority adaptations services improved in recent years? What more needs to be done to improve those services?

[127] **Mr Barry:** Looking at the performance indicator only, it has fluctuated. If you look at the average over Wales, you will see that there is no significant improvement to the average time. However, there are certainly some improvements in some of the poorer performing authorities, which we have done some work around. To qualify that, we have not done an all-Wales study of all local authorities. The focus, in recent years, has been on the three authorities that were among the poorest performers. We have seen some improvement with them, but that is only by using the indicator for speed of completion. However, as I am sure that the questions that we will come to later will highlight, that is not necessarily an indicator of improvement.

[128] **Ann Jones:** Why is there an inconsistency among waiting times, or a significant variation in delivery times with the disabled facilities grant?

[129] **Mr Selwyn:** In terms of our work, we would say that there are probably four main causes. First, the applicants themselves are generally vulnerable and have some form of disability, and they have to go through quite a difficult process to apply for a grant to secure the funding to have the property updated. Their needs can change over the life of that process. It is quite a difficult decision to come to terms with—having your property changed in that way. There is an onus on the applicants, and that can be quite difficult for them to manage.

[130] The second part of it is the funding aspect. Budgets have reduced in most authorities as part of the capital challenge that they will face, so the level of resources expended on DFGs tends to be spent far quicker in the year. We are currently doing some work in Monmouthshire, and it expended its DFG budget in the autumn. So, for the remainder of the year, it was just preparing itself for next year's allocation. That builds up the process and length of time.

[131] The third part is the way that local authorities and partners work creates some systemic problems. You do not find that there are too many services that are integrated. We are aware of a few. Torfaen, for example, has created a service for disabled people that brings health and social care together. Generally, it is a system that has different players in different areas, which does not give you an end-to-end process that you can manage as one block.

[132] The final part is the process itself, which is the DFG and how it is administered and delivered. It is quite complicated with different means tests, the appointment of contractors and so forth. It can make it quite a lengthy process.

[133] **Peter Black:** You mentioned that you have worked with the three poorest performing authorities to try to improve their performance. I am interested in best practice. It seems to me that those authorities may not have been carrying out best practice, and you have helped to bring them around to that. What are the barriers for authorities such as those with regard to taking up best practice? What is stopping them doing the good things that other authorities are doing to get better performance?

[134] **Mr Barry:** Two out of the three authorities began with focusing on how long it takes to deliver the grant. Some of the reports that we saw going through to scrutiny committees were sometimes dismissing the quality of the indicator that another authority was providing. The first line of defence was that you cannot actually believe the figures, which is something that we quite often come across. [*Laughter.*] The first line of attack is let us attack the data.

[135] There is also a preoccupation with their processes. You had a degree of troubleshooting, with occupational therapists, perhaps, carrying the blame for delays in systems and occupational therapists being deployed into teams. You see some improvement, but when demands for OT services came from elsewhere, they got pulled out of the team and things went back to the way that they were. There is almost an inclination not to want to find out what others were doing, even with the three authorities that we were working with that were within fairly close proximity to each other. The exception probably was Neath Port Talbot—I know that it has sent a response to the committee detailing the approach that it took. On the back of systems reviews that were telling it to always put the client first, it first looked at its DFG process and talked to the customer and found out that the customer was not that interested in the DFG; the customer was interested in the support for independent living. That led to the authority broadening its view and it discovered that the DFG was part of the solution, but not always the solution and that it needed to take a wider picture. You will see in Neath Port Talbot's submission that it was breaking down the process into its core component elements and it was very much trying to measure what it was doing based on whether what it had done had been appropriate for that particular individual. We did not find any benchmarking or any discussion with other authorities when we were doing the work with

these three authorities. It tended to be a process-orientated view of what they were doing and how they could do it more quickly.

[136] **Peter Black:** The Neath Port Talbot indicator shows that it has one of the worst times in Wales.

[137] **Mr Barry:** Yes, and even of the three, while you can see some improvements, it is still languishing at the bottom. When you look at Neath Port Talbot's data, two things have happened: there has been a slight improvement in the delivery times, but the waiting list for DFGs has reduced as well. It will be interesting to see whether it has significantly improved. If it has a waiting list anyway, it can take some time. The Vale of Glamorgan was a good example: it was on almost 1,000 days about five years ago and it is now in the hundreds. So, it is still not good performance, but it is improving.

[138] **Peter Black:** So, is the lesson here that you can only go so far with best practice, and actually, the big problem is the system itself?

[139] **Mr Barry:** It is the objective that you are trying to achieve when you go into a review. If your objective is to reduce your delivery times, that is not necessarily the right way to improve what you are doing for the person receiving the grant. So, there has been an element of the indicator being too strong an incentive, if you like, and too strong a focus for improvement.

[140] **Joyce Watson:** I want to explore the main reasons for delays in the adaptation system and how they can be reduced.

[141] **Mr Barry:** The delays that were proposed to us were based on the length of time that it was taking to get occupational therapists to do the initial assessments. That was at a time when, within social care, there was high demand for occupational therapists anyway, so you could see that that part of the service was under pressure.

[142] The other thing that we are looking at across Wales is that it was very difficult to pin down any one thing within the system. It was built into the grant arrangement that, if your grant had been approved, you had a year to do the work and draw the money in. So, even working fairly effectively and getting to approval stage, the grant requirements enable somebody to sit there and perhaps do nothing. We could not find any correlation with the age of the applicant. When the opportunity came to look at how long it had taken to provide a grant for children as opposed to a grant for adults, you might think that a lack of means testing for under-19s would mean that they would be quicker, but if you looked at the data for a couple of authorities, they did not correlate. One of them was doing grants for children more quickly than the other and vice versa for adults. So, it was very difficult to pin down what the reasons were. Average grant across Wales varies significantly, so it was not necessarily the value of the work that was being done that was slowing things down. It was very hard to hone in on any particular reason.

[143] **Joyce Watson:** That leads me to whether you think that there is effective corporate leadership and accountability on this issue.

[144] **Mr Barry:** That is a difficult one. You look at DFGs and the totality of what the local authorities are facing—certainly the social care agenda and adult services agenda—and you look at the budget commitments that have been made to it, you are talking about less than £1 million in some authorities and up to £3 million in others, on a global budget of about £200 million with pressures on children's services and adult services. It is in the system, but it is not really seen as a key priority area when you come to look at the bigger picture in terms of the services that authorities are providing. There almost seems to be a bit of a shrug of the

shoulders in the sense that people seem to be saying, 'We've put funding into it, we'll protect that level of funding, but it is part of a bigger problem', and the focus is not only on DFGs.

[145] **Mr Selwyn:** Where it is valued is where people recognise the importance that they can contribute to support and independence. So, in Gwent, for example, for the Gwent frailty programme, there has been an identification by those five authorities and health bodies that DFGs are an important solution to assist the health board in addressing delayed transfers of care and other health pressures. As Steve said, within the authority, it tends to be a small budget in comparison to some of the big spending service areas, and at this time, it does not figure significantly as one of the main areas for improvement objectives that authorities are setting. It might be within the broader picture of a health improvement objective, but as a specific one, DFGs do not stand alone.

[146] **Joyce Watson:** So, you have talked about working together; have you seen much evidence of local authorities, social services and health bodies working together?

[147] **Mr Barry:** Not on health.

[148] **Mr Selwyn:** The main collaborative work tends to be with social care and the housing service. The only one that we are aware of that has an integrated service—we have done work there recently—is Torfaen. However, one of the by-products of that is that its performance, like Neath Port Talbot with the lean system thinking review, has gone down in recent years. So, there has been an increase in time, but I think that that is part of the process of working through how to integrate the two services.

[149] Health sees DFGs as a solution; that comes up frequently in discussions on an operational level. Strategically, I think that it is recognised as having more of an important role. However, at this time we are not seeing a significant impact in that relationship that is using DFGs in that way.

10.30 a.m.

[150] **Joyce Watson:** Carmarthenshire also signed up to a joint system with social services and health, yet you have not mentioned that at all.

[151] **Mr Selwyn:** I have not done any recent work in Carmarthenshire.

[152] **Mark Isherwood:** In your experience, how does access to adaptations vary between social tenants, private tenants and owner-occupiers?

[153] **Mr Selwyn:** I would say that there is a difference in tenure. If you are a social housing tenant you have greater support provided by your landlord to assist you through the process. They manage and control the delivery of the building works to physically improve the building. If you are an owner-occupier or private tenant, it is slightly more onerous and difficult. It depends very much on the system that the authority uses to secure contractors; if they act as an agent on behalf of the applicant, that assists them through the process. However, in some instances, they may just provide a list of contractors to select from and then the onus is on that disabled or vulnerable person or their family to work through the process. So, I think that there is a difference between tenures. As to how well that is measured and the impact of it, I am afraid that we do not have any information from our work. I am not aware of anything across Wales that really draws that information out either.

[154] **Mark Isherwood:** On the back of that, do we need more information or can you say now whether you feel that a single adaptation system across tenures would be helpful?

[155] **Mr Selwyn:** I would prefer to think of adaptations or work on DFGs as part of a wider system around independence. So, the contribution of that area of operation can provide the support for people to maintain independence, since it is an area of work that local authorities, housing associations, Care and Repair and so forth deliver. However, you need to think of it in the broader sense; there are other services that equally assist people in maintaining their independence, through the work around supporting people and the work through telecare and so forth. It is a broader picture. It is around independence. In terms of the questions earlier about how health becomes engaged, if the focus is more about this being one solution to a bigger picture I think that you have a better chance of getting health involved in the process.

[156] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** How focused on meeting the needs of disabled people, and achieving positive outcomes, is the current adaptations process?

[157] **Mr Selwyn:** I would say that it is very focused, simply because the start of it is the assessment, which will determine the individual's needs, and the work that follows comes from that assessment. So, needs are paramount in terms of what they provide. However, that has to be balanced with how much they want to spend and how much budget they have available, and what is the best solution, on cost terms as well as in terms of need, to be delivered to that individual. However, needs are paramount.

[158] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** How good is customer feedback currently? Do you feel that authorities are engaging in getting really good feedback after people have had adaptations?

[159] **Mr Barry:** Where we have done work, two are collecting information about process—the people's views of the process. We are beginning to see one where the feedback is more about such questions as, 'Did this deliver an appropriate solution for you?', 'Is it a long-term solution, rather than having dealt with a particular application?' So, many of the reviews that we did showed that, while customer satisfaction information was gathered, it was very much process orientated, with such questions as, 'What was your experience of dealing with the customer helpdesk?', 'What was your experience of using the agency through the process?', and less of, 'How good a solution has that work been for your particular problem?' That, again, is where we are talking to authorities about measuring improvement. There is a dearth of information on that, but the qualitative aspects are just not there and are not being collected. It is primarily this focus on the particular indicator.

[160] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** How could that be improved?

[161] **Mr Barry:** By doing what I suggested. It is the qualitative side of the arrangement that needs to be part of the measures, looking not only at a resolution of a particular need at a particular time. If you are talking of major adaptations, it is a matter of looking at how appropriate those works are for the potential longer-term prospects for that particular individual. If you are in a situation that is a cycle of minor adaptation works, is that the most effective way of dealing with things? It is about pulling the user perspective in about the advice at the time, because, sometimes, maybe a DFG is not the solution that that individual requires. So, there is that qualitative almost first-phase contact with the individual that is not being evaluated in any way at all under the current system.

[162] **Ann Jones:** On procurement, is there any work around whether local authorities that have procured services have tested whether they are value for money?

[163] **Mr Selwyn:** We have not done a piece of work that covers all authorities, but through our local work with individual councils, we have looked at the systems that they adopt. It probably breaks down to several approaches—I will answer the bit about value for money, but understanding the system will probably be helpful. Some have what I would call quite

traditional approaches, which are basically to cost up a job on a job-by-job basis with little market testing or comparison with others. The experiences and the practices that they have adopted allow them to get an understanding and a fair price for the work delivered. Others have gone for the tendering of works, where they market test and use other systems to deliver it, and others take a quasi-approach in which they market test with a few organisations, but use a schedule of rates and work against that.

[164] On value for money, very little information comes out to draw out and compare the costs across authorities. We are aware that, in Gwent, there has been some recent work between the five councils to see how much their services cost and whether there are any opportunities to rationalise how they procure services. They concluded that, because they have different agency arrangements in place, moving towards a standard specification—even though value for money was eminent, because they all have tight budgets—was not a suitable solution. Around the margins, they are looking at getting some standard specifications that will drive down some elements of cost, but value for money as a principle in terms of delivery is not that obvious and it is hard to demonstrate, simply because the systems that they use relate to individual grants and the way that they measure performance does not capture those rounded data.

[165] **Ann Jones:** Is there any evidence out in the world of adaptations that local authority DFG work could be undertaken at a certain price, but the same work could be done for a private funder for less money, because private funders are more adept at getting discounts or are able to negotiate a better price, whereas a local authority will take the price from the contract?

[166] **Mr Selwyn:** They negotiate on the contracts and try to get the best price, but there is no evidence currently available that draws out that information, I am afraid.

[167] **Peter Black:** On another aspect of procurement, quite a number of witnesses have referred to issues around occupational therapists, their access and use, and problems around them. Have you done any work on the availability of OTs, access to them and how they are procured as part of this process?

[168] **Mr Selwyn:** The only work that I am aware of is some work that we did in Torfaen that had some OT services paid for by Bron Afon Community Housing, which were based within the single service. Their services were different to the services provided to private tenants and to owner-occupiers. They tended to be a lot quicker, but that is the only information that we have had locally.

[169] **Kenneth Skates:** We have had a series of witnesses who have said that the information available to people who would like to have adaptations in their homes, their carers and their families, is very poor. What improvements do you believe could be made to the provision of information?

[170] **Mr Barry:** I think that improvements could be made to the options right at the start. Again, we have not seen any of the authorities that we do specific work with that have anything available to guide people through the issue. The difficulty is complexity, because we spoke earlier about things being tenure specific and that your route to an improvement can depend on who your landlord is and the budget that your landlord has available. So, we have not seen anything. One of the areas where we have made recommendations has been around the kind of information that is available to people. Going back to the Neath Port Talbot scenario, a lot has been made of the personal contact at the time, which is not written documentation, but advice about the options that are available and the impacts, because sometimes, with means testing, information about what it is likely to cost you, if that is provided early enough, might actually dictate what choices you are able to exercise as a

potential grant applicant.

[171] **Mr Selwyn:** With the social housing tenants, they tend to get more of a supportive environment because of the landlord relationship, so the way that information is provided is that advice and services of that nature are provided to everyone equally. The DFG is another aspect of the service, and the principles are still the same around customer care and information. If they were owner-occupiers it would be slightly different, as Steve said, because they may have to make a contribution and buy in the service because they may not receive it necessarily.

[172] **Kenneth Skates:** Do any local authorities operate a one-stop shop for information where people can go, right at the outset, to access all the information and advice that is required?

[173] **Mr Selwyn:** We are finding through our work that there are more and more systems for the provision of information. I know that Caerphilly has a number of one-stop shops spread across the county borough that provide a range of data, but quite a few are moving towards the internet as being the main source of data in response to the financial challenges that they face. They are moving away from having that front-line service and providing a lot more information online or in written form.

[174] **Kenneth Skates:** What about people who are not so proficient in using the internet or, indeed, do not have access to the internet?

[175] **Mr Barry:** We have not come across many methods that are going beyond that. As I say, we are fairly limited in the examples that we have done some detailed work around. One of the things that we identified was that gap: that information was rarely there at the outset.

[176] **Ann Jones:** Joyce, you have a supplementary.

[177] **Joyce Watson:** There is a way for county councils or unitary authorities to engage with people right across the piece, and that is the quarterly or annual newsletters that they put out. You would be aware of those. Have you suggested to them that that might be an avenue that they could use, because that will go through everybody's letterbox regardless of tenure?

[178] **Mr Barry:** We have not done so specifically in relation to DFGs, but our general work recently has looked at local authorities, which are supposed to be publishing an annual report of their performance, and part of our assessment of how well they have done that is how well they have publicised it. So, in general principles, we have been talking to them about not only the need to make the information available generally to the public, but to think about particular target groups and interest groups that they may want to promote particular parts of the information to. I guess we have been making fairly common recommendations across Wales that that is not happening particularly well, and there is scope for improving that. Quite often, the response we will get is, 'Well, in times of austerity, how much do we spend on doing it, and where should our priorities lie?', and 'Of all the stakeholders the authority has got, how do we identify those who should be particularly targeted for that sort of information?' We have been given general messages, but because of the limitations in terms of the numbers of authorities that we have looked at, it has been part of the feedback that we have been given around the DFG service.

[179] **Ann Jones:** We move on to performance monitoring with Lindsay.

[180] **Lindsay Whittle:** Good morning. Performance indicators monitor delivery times, really. How effective is that? Does it still serve a useful purpose?

[181] **Mr Selwyn:** We have recently done some work looking at how people value this particular indicator with Welsh Government and the councils. The one thing I would say is that everyone values it in the absence of anything else being reported, simply because it highlights an important service area and gives some information on what is provided. Saying that, everyone acknowledges that it only captures one very small element of a bigger process, and there would be better more appropriate measures that could be used around satisfaction, quality of work, cost of work, and the impact it has on improving the individual's life. It is a useful measure because it is there, but there are a lot of other things that could be measured that are more important.

[182] **Lindsay Whittle:** I do not know if you caught the evidence from the registered social landlords prior to your coming into the room, but we were talking about consistent performance across different tenures, and some of the housing association sectors working with as many as 12 different local authorities. That cannot be effective, can it, with all the different standards?

[183] **Mr Selwyn:** I am not aware specifically of any engagement and what impact that would have, other than, I guess, on the way that they deliver the grants, if they use the local authority to provide those services. We have not done any work on the housing associations specifically to say whether that is the case or not, I am afraid. However, I guess that, in principle, if you are using 12 different systems, that must cause some difficulty in standardising your approaches, and that would probably lead to less use of resources in terms of—

10.45 a.m.

[184] **Lindsay Whittle:** We heard that some of the registered social landlords use their own money; they do not bother to approach the local authority or, indeed, the health authority, because it is quicker simply to do it yourself, which is my motto on Facebook, actually. So, that is interesting; thank you.

[185] **Mr Barry:** The point is that things are so tenure specific. There is a particular measure in local government around the grant process, but that is not a specific measure that looks at what the individual has received and the quality of what the individual had. There is certainly the potential to agree a qualitative measure for the people who need those particular services, but it is not there at the moment.

[186] **Mr Selwyn:** While everyone acknowledges that it is not a good measure, we have yet to come up with a suite of indicators, certainly from our local work, that suggests, 'These are the better measures to put in place and we would suggest that people use these'.

[187] **Lindsay Whittle:** It would be like everybody choosing the Welsh rugby team on Saturday: I think that there would be lots of different answers, would there not? [*Laughter.*]

[188] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Rydych chi wedi awgrymu'n gryf yn eich tystiolaeth y bore yma nad oes ffordd o asesu perfformiad awdurdodau lleol drwy Gymru, gan nad yw'r data ar gael. Rydych wedi awgrymu yn eich ateb i Lindsay Whittle fod y dangosydd perfformiad sydd ar gael ar hyn o bryd yn rhy gul a'i fod yn annigonol. Felly, o ran creu fframwaith monitro perfformiad, rwy'n tybio y byddech yn cytuno bod angen fframwaith felly drwy Gymru, ond cyfrifoldeb pwy a

Rhodri Glyn Thomas: You have suggested strongly in your evidence this morning that there is no means of assessing local authorities' performance throughout Wales, as the data are not available. You have suggested in your response to Lindsay Whittle that the performance indicator that is available at present is too narrow and inadequate. So, in terms of creating a performance monitoring framework, I assume that you would agree that we need

fyddai creu'r fframwaith a fyddai'n edrych yn ehangach ar ansawdd y gwaith sy'n cael ei wneud? Mae pobl wedi awgrymu mai Swyddfa Archwilio Cymru a ddylai creu'r fframwaith hwnnw, ac os nad chi, pwy arall?

such a framework throughout Wales, but whose responsibility would it be to create the framework that would look more widely at the quality of the work being done? People have suggested that the Wales Audit Office should create the framework, and if not you, then who?

[189] **Mr Barry:** Shall I give you the auditor's answer to that? We do not design the framework; we audit the effectiveness of it.

[190] We have been saying to local government for the past few years now that the way that it reports performance does not give any indication of the outcome being delivered for a particular client group or citizen, and we are looking for more of an explanation of the outcomes being achieved, rather than the processes that have been supporting delivery. There is work going on within local government itself around the development of better outcome-focused measures. As we have to audit the quality of what they do, we do not actually get involved in the design of it, but we will give an opinion on it. Also, you have organisations like the WLGA that are supporting local government in the development of these new approaches. Again, however, we have no all-Wales method of bringing together the different tenures.

[191] You were talking to CHC earlier as the representative body for social landlords. It is a body independent from the WLGA. So, while there may be some consensus that the indicator does not tell us the quality of it, there is no one organisation that is putting a framework in place that will help to improve that, and I would suggest that the Welsh Government or the Assembly may wish to do that. We have a situation in which we are moving away from performance indicators as the prime means of assessing performance, but it has been left to the sector to determine what it does as an alternative. We are seeing changes in local government, but they are taking place slowly. There are some in local government who are now asking the questions, 'What are we doing?', 'Why are we doing it?', and 'Who is better off as a result?' and they are starting to report in that way, but there is still some way to go. When you look at DFGs and that area of work, that is probably some way behind; it is only Neath Port Talbot that I have come across that is trying to design something that is different in that respect. You may get some input from other authorities that they are trying to move in that direction. However, the answer to the question of whether the WAO should design it is that we do not see that as our remit.

[192] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Ond, yr ydych yn cytuno bod angen fframwaith sy'n gyson drwy Gymru. O wrando ar eich tystiolaeth chi, nid wyf yn gallu gweld sut y gallwch asesu perfformiad llywodraeth leol, gan nad oes gennych fodel i weithio iddo. Y cyfan y gallwch ei wneud yw cymryd tystiolaeth o rai awdurdodau ac edrych ar yr hyn maent yn ei wneud. Fodd bynnag, nid yw hynny'n asesiad gwirioneddol o sut y mae'r gwaith hwn yn cael ei gyflawni ledled Cymru. Felly, a ydych yn derbyn, os nad Swyddfa Archwilio Cymru ddylai fod yn creu fframwaith monitro perfformiad sy'n gyson drwy Gymru, bod angen i rywun arall ei wneud?

Rhodri Glyn Thomas: But, you would agree that there is a need for a framework that is consistent throughout Wales. Having listened to your evidence, I do not see how you can assess local government performance, because you have no model within which to work. All you can do is to take evidence from some authorities and look at what they do. However, that is not a real assessment of how this work is undertaken throughout Wales. Therefore, do you accept that, if it is not the Wales Audit Office that should be designing a performance monitoring framework that is consistent throughout Wales, then someone else needs to do it?

[193] **Mr Barry:** Yes.

[194] **Ann Jones:** We will move on to funding. Gwyn?

[195] **Gwyn R. Price:** Good morning, both. What are your views on the current funding arrangements for disabled facilities grants, where it is for local authorities to allocate resources from the general capital resources?

[196] **Mr Barry:** I see that we are moving into the hypothecation arena.

[197] **Gwyn R. Price:** Yes. The next question is: do you think that it should be hypothecated?

[198] **Mr Barry:** They are linked, are they not? Before I worked for the Wales Audit Office and predecessor organisations, I worked in local government for some time, in the day of the renovation grants and DFGs, when funding was hypothecated. However, that also introduced some perverse behaviour, because the allocation depended on what had been spent the year before. So, once again, you were not driven by quality, but by spending. It is a highly sensitive area. Where would you stop and how would you come up with a figure? When you look at what local authorities in Wales are spending, you see that it is less than £1 million in some areas and £3 million in others. Usually, authorities think, 'Well, this was the budget we had last year; we are in a time of austerity, so if we protect it, at least we are doing something rather than cutting it.'

[199] It is too wide a question for us to give an opinion on it. As I have said, I have given you my perspective as an ex-local government officer that it was great if you were working in the service and the funding was protected, but it was not necessarily the best way of determining priorities at a national and local level. I suspect that, when you look at the amount that is being spent on DFGs at individual authorities, it would be difficult to come up with a figure and difficult to argue for authorities to support that.

[200] **Gwyn R. Price:** So, it is a political answer: yes, but no. [*Laughter.*]

[201] Are adaptations given sufficient priority at a local level in all local authorities?

[202] **Mr Selwyn:** Given that they are mandatory, they will always get that level of resource being provided to them. The bit that we do not see is the way in which they determine the needs with regard to DFGs in comparison to investment in other areas. Steve's point is that, historically, there has always been an element of continuing with that level of funding or, at present, the tendency is that it is being reduced, as is true in other areas. So, the mandatory aspect gives them the way in to get the resource. However, you are asking whether it is based on an assessment of need and whether there is the right level of investment to address what we think is important locally; I would say that that information is not available.

[203] **Mr Barry:** What we did find—and we criticised authorities for it because performance was poor—was that, when they did undertake a review, they reviewed the process to try to speed things up. They did not step back to look at the strategic need in the authority's area or at the demand that they were facing and the demand that they were likely to face in the future with the demographics that they have so that they could plan and prioritise properly. Once again, going back to the scenario of chasing the indicator and assuming a base level of funding.

[204] **Mr Selwyn:** We are aware that some authorities—but not so many in Wales—have looked at other options to secure funding. I know that Nottingham City Council, for example, uses an equity-release scheme for owner-occupiers, where it places a charge against a

property to secure an income to pay for the adaptation work. So, there are alternatives that others use. From the work that we have done with Welsh councils, it tends to be a matter of using the resource that each council is allocated to spend and not looking for other ways of delivering the service.

[205] **Gwyn R. Price:** What is your opinion on the means-test part of it? Do you think that this adds to the level of bureaucracy and provides little or no benefit?

[206] **Mr Selwyn:** The means test is important, simply because, if people can contribute to the cost of the adaptation, then that is used. If the principle is that you do not have sufficient resource to pay for all of the work that all of the people require, and if people can contribute, then the principle is right. However, if you want to move to a universal system, you have to accept that you will deliver fewer grants and have more people waiting a longer time for the work to be completed.

[207] **Mike Hedges:** Apologies for having to leave during the first part of your presentation. I have two questions. How efficient are adaptations services, and do they provide value for money? My second question is about one of my hobby-horses. Could better use be made of existing resources, especially adapted housing registers, so that you do not have the situation of £30,000-worth of work being done on a house, but that 12 months later the person dies and large chunks of that work gets ripped out before someone else moves in?

[208] **Mr Barry:** There are two elements to that question. You would probably expect someone from an audit organisation to say this, but one of the things that we are also looking at is the strength of the probity protection against fraud arrangements that authorities have in place. Over time, because the value of the grants has reduced, it has gone off the internal audit radar. Part of the value-for-money aspect would have been about making sure that public money is protected, but because internal audit did not seem to be looking at teams any longer, some of the old controls that used to be there have been abandoned in this desire for speed. So, there is a balance to be struck for public organisations to make sure that those arrangements are in place. Sometimes, value for money has been demonstrated simply by tendering procedures that have taken place before the works have been done, so there is an element of that.

[209] **Mr Selwyn:** The adapted housing register is quite an important aspect. It can play a role, but the principle is whether the policy you are trying to deliver is about allowing someone to stay in the home in which they currently live and supporting them through the provision of grants to do that, or about giving them the choices and options that are available, because that may not necessarily mean that a DFG is provided and that they might have to move property, which can be quite difficult for people to address.

[210] **Mike Hedges:** I only know about Swansea, as people here are well aware. In Swansea, there are a large number of purpose-built bungalows for people with disabilities, and there is always a long waiting list for people who have disabilities for those bungalows. There is also a lot of housing that has been adapted, and when the person who is in a property leaves, that house returns to general offer and the adaptations are taken out. That is the point that I am trying to get across. Yes, some people will not want to move, but my experience is that a lot of people want to move to specially adapted properties, rather than having disruption in their own home.

[211] **Mr Selwyn:** If people are prepared to move, that is a good solution. You also asked about the removal of equipment and its use. We have found that some equipment can be reused if it is safe and in working order that will allow it to be reinstalled in a suitable property. That is fine. However, a lot of the equipment that is taken out tends not be in a condition where it can be reused. We are aware of some regional approaches that have been

used to store and use equipment—not just within authorities themselves, but in neighbouring authorities if they have use for it. In Gwent, for example, there is GWICES, the Gwent-wide integrated community equipment service, which provides that service.

[212] **Ann Jones:** Do Members have any other questions? I see not. Thank you for coming in to give evidence and for your written evidence. I think that you heard me say that a copy of the transcript will be provided to you to check for accuracy, as well as a copy of the report when we publish it. If the committee is in agreement, we will break until 11.05 a.m. I see that it is. Thank you.

*Gohiriwyd y cyfarfod rhwng 10.58 a.m. ac 11.08 a.m.
The meeting adjourned between 10.58 a.m. and 11.08 a.m.*

Ymchwiliad i Addasiadau yn y Cartref—Sesiwn Dystiolaeth 10 Inquiry into Home Adaptations—Evidence Session 10

[213] **Ann Jones:** We will now reconvene. I ask Members to check that they have switched off their phones, if they turned them on in that very brief break.

[214] We will carry on with our inquiry and I am delighted to have Emma Reeves-McAll with us, who is an equality and diversity officer with Tai Pawb. You are very welcome; thank you for coming and for your written evidence. We will go straight into questions, if that is all right with you. We are undertaking this inquiry to see whether we have made any improvements since the Equality of Opportunity Committee's report of 2009. Do you think that progress has been made in implementing all those recommendations?

[215] **Ms Reeves-McAll:** There has been some progress. I do not think there has been wholesale progress. From our point of view, given that we are a pan-equalities organisation, and given that the previous report was based on age, a lot of things have tended to be missed out and the remit needs to be broadened. There are lots of issues around how things are monitored across the general equalities. For example, recommendation 9, which has been completed, needs to be wider. In terms of recommendation 7, which is centred on ownership of adaptations and maintenance, I think that there are issues around that now with the changes in housing benefit, and issues around how the maintenance is paid for; this has an effect on whether people choose to have adaptations. The short answer to your question is that progress has been made in part.

[216] **Ann Jones:** You have started to outline some of the difficulties that you feel disabled people face when they try to obtain adaptations. Do they face different difficulties, or is it just a difficulty in the system? Is there an additional set of barriers that disabled people face, or is it just the system that makes it complicated?

[217] **Ms Reeves-McAll:** I think that the system certainly does not help. There are going to be additional barriers that are faced in line with the disabilities that people have. This is certainly the case with communication, getting accessible information, getting the right information and getting information that is right for the individual not only because of their disabilities, but so that people understand that the information they need might be slightly different because of other protected characteristics.

[218] **Peter Black:** You will be aware from the Government's White Paper on housing that it is proposing to carry out a review of adaptations. Is there anything in particular that you would like to see coming out of that review that would improve the system?

[219] **Ms Reeves-McAll:** I think that the Government needs to be looking at the way that

systems are monitored and evaluated. If you are keeping a rapid-response approach to the DFG and PAG, and you have different pots of money, some parity in how that is monitored would be very useful, because it is going to enable you to make those decisions. In addition, I think that means testing will need to be looked at, as will how it is funded. The review probably also needs to look at discretionary housing payments and whether or not those are linked, and at who gets them and for what disabilities.

[220] **Peter Black:** What about independent living grants?

[221] **Ms Reeves-McAll:** I believe that I am correct in saying that the independent living grant was for older persons. Ideally, we would like to see it being broadened out, because it worked well, but it was a curtailed amount of money and was available to such a small group of people, realistically. It would be nice to see it being widened.

[222] **Joyce Watson:** Good morning, Emma. How can the adaptations system be simplified and made more effective?

[223] **Ms Reeves-McAll:** It can be simplified through having a single route into the adaptations process, using something like an accessible housing service rather than simply using housing registers. Having one standard way of doing things—not a means test—would also help. I would look at having operational therapists who are easy to access, with housing associations and providers perhaps sharing resources with regard to occupational therapists. It is largely about the quality and availability of information and making the process as streamlined as possible. I think the thing that perhaps needs not to be forgotten is that while this process is going on, there is still somebody waiting in a home somewhere, somebody who is in a hospital environment because they are unable to live at home, or somebody living in a house that is completely unsuited to their needs. Our view would be to make the process as streamlined and as quick as possible.

[224] **Joyce Watson:** You have outlined the layers of bureaucracy that can be associated with the adaptations system. Would you include the means test for DFGs in that bureaucracy?

[225] **Ms Reeves-McAll:** The short answer is ‘yes’. The means test is very difficult for people to understand. We did some research online to get some basic information, but we could not find the formula. When I spoke to our members and asked for the information to be sent to me—what I wanted to do was to be able to give you some examples to see how it affects different people at different stages in their lives—I was told that I needed a two-day training course. All joking aside, it is very complicated, and I do not think that that helps to enable disabled people and their families to make sound decisions. It affects their ability to live independent lives, because those decisions have been taken away.

11.15 a.m.

[226] **Joyce Watson:** Do you think that housing tenure has an impact on access to adaptations, and do you believe that there is a level playing field for all?

[227] **Ms Reeves-McAll:** No, there is no level playing field. We do not have a tenure-blind system, which means that, if you are in council accommodation, in the private rented sector, or are an owner-occupier, you are likely to be means-tested. Within that means test, my understanding is that older people tend to have a larger disregard element—for every £500 of additional money that they have, compared with somebody who is younger, and it is £250. However, as I explained earlier, I am not an expert on the means test. The way that we do it currently forces people into housing association accommodation, because, if you go into housing association accommodation, you will get free access through a PAG. In terms of our housing crisis, that is not necessarily the best way of doing things. I would have thought that

it would be helpful to try to keep people in their home environment, if that is what they want. Otherwise, they are moved away from that and into social housing, and we currently do not have the resources.

[228] **Joyce Watson:** Do you think that people are being denied adaptations because of the area that they happen to live in or the policy of their landlord on under-occupation?

[229] **Ms Reeves-McAll:** We have some evidence that under-occupation is beginning to be a problem. It is difficult to answer, because under-occupation has not kicked in and we need to see how it progresses. Within under-occupation, it is also difficult to know whether there is a carte-blanche approach—if you are under-occupying, you do not qualify, and they need to move you—or whether you are under-occupying and you receive housing benefit and you need to be moved; but, if you do not receive housing benefit, you can stay in your property. It is then further complicated by the possibility of discretionary housing payment. It is not an easy nut to crack. There are differences in policies dependent on area; there are some differences as regards waiting times as well, but that is what we would expect, because you have different demographics and topography, and all that is going to play into it.

[230] **Mark Isherwood:** As under-occupancy rules have applied in the private rented sector for some time, have there been lessons learned there that might be shared?

[231] **Ms Reeves-McAll:** In terms of under-occupancy in the private rented sector, I am not sure whether you are aware, but there has been recent case law that is looking at shared bedrooms and the types of elements that play into it. We work predominantly with the social housing sector, so we would not have that information. However, it is something that needs further investigation, by looking at the lessons that have been learned as well as looking at what has not worked so well. That provides a goldmine of information that will ensure that we do not make the same mistakes again.

[232] **Mark Isherwood:** I am aware of some of that case law. Moving on to the issue of best practice, where do you believe that good or best practice is being applied, and why do you think that some other areas have not also adopted it?

[233] **Ms Reeves-McAll:** The best practice elements sit with Care and Repair, in the way that it deals with quick responses. There is good practice in Cardiff Accessible Homes. How it deals with physical adaptation grants is a very good example. Further than that, the reason it has not been applied is because we do not have a wholesale approach. We party up adaptations into three or four different funding areas. We party up our approach to accessible housing. Some areas have accessible housing registers and some do not. Some areas will look at an accessible housing service. Until you bring everything together, it is very fragmented, and my feeling is that, because it is fragmented, people get a bit lost in the wilderness.

[234] **Mark Isherwood:** What role could the Welsh Government play in driving both adoption and delivery of best practice?

[235] **Ms Reeves-McAll:** There is currently some work being undertaken with the review of accessible housing registers. The way that services are delivered and what you would expect is a really good place to start. With regard to looking at parity of approach, that would need to be driven by the Welsh Government. Another role that the Welsh Government could play is in looking at key performance indicators and ensuring that they are monitored. So, that would mean having ongoing conversations with local authorities. Establishing a forum that meets regularly with local authorities would perhaps be a good idea as well.

[236] **Mark Isherwood:** Do we need to improve corporate leadership in certain local authorities and, if so, how would you go about doing that?

[237] **Ms Reeves-McAll:** I am putting the world to rights. *[Laughter.]*

[238] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** That is not a very fair question. *[Laughter.]*

[239] **Ms Reeves-McAll:** That is probably not for Tai Pawb to have a decision on. If you are looking at a continuous improvement and an innovations basis for delivering services, then, irrespective of whether a local authority is doing excellently or not so well, you should be striving for continuous improvement anyway.

[240] **Mark Isherwood:** So, a proper performance management culture, acknowledging what works well and agreeing on what needs to be done differently, and then doing it.

[241] **Ms Reeves-McAll:** Exactly.

[242] **Mark Isherwood:** Great. Thank you.

[243] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** How can current adaptation systems be improved so that they are more focused on achieving positive outcomes that meet the needs of disabled people?

[244] **Ms Reeves-McAll:** Dare I say it, but I think that that is relatively simple. You talk to the disabled person and their family. You have an understanding that this is about getting not just something that will be functional, but something that somebody wants and understands will be useable for them. It is their home; it is where they live every single day. For example, if you look at accessible kitchens, some are done beautifully and very well, while others can look quite industrial or hospital-like. I think we need to stand back—I understand that there are value-for-money aspects and that it is a difficult economic climate—and really accept that these are people's homes. They live in them day-in, day-out.

[245] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Do you think that local authorities use customer feedback to find out whether the adaptation system has worked for the individual? Is that an important process?

[246] **Ms Reeves-McAll:** Customer feedback is hugely important. We did a quick survey of our members, but we did not have a huge amount of responses, unfortunately. The way that feedback is gathered is sporadic, so we do not necessarily get it through each stage of the process. So, if somebody has had a problem or a difficulty during the process, you will not necessarily be certain at what stage it happened. Alternatively, if someone is not terribly happy about the outcome, there are further questions about whether they understood what was going to be suitable for them and whether their expectations were raised. Generally, much better use needs to be made of those responses.

[247] **Kenneth Skates:** Before I move on to my specific question about information provision, do you agree that best value is sometimes ignored in favour of lowest cost? Best value has a qualitative value to it as well, does it not, whereas lowest cost is purely about getting the cheapest items into a house?

[248] **Ms Reeves-McAll:** That is a very difficult question, because you also then have the value judgment of the person having the adaptations done on top of that. Currently, the climate is driven by cost, and that does play a part.

[249] **Kenneth Skates:** With regard to information, do you think that disabled people are given sufficient information about the process and the work that will be carried out?

[250] **Ms Reeves-McAll:** It is sporadic. It depends on the route you are going down and the

local authority or housing organisation that you are with. Some housing providers do not have any of that information on their websites—certainly nothing that is accessible. Others will have contact details, where you have to physically go to speak to somebody. Local authorities tend to have a quite detailed explanation of the process online, but, again, it is about making that accessible. Wider than that, there are issues about whether the people who you have come out are skilled in providing information for people with learning disabilities and things such as that, and I would question whether they are British Sign Language users.

[251] **Ann Jones:** We are going to move on to performance monitoring. Lindsay has the questions.

[252] **Lindsay Whittle:** How effective is the current disabled facility grants performance indicator? What could be done to improve the performance monitoring of all home adaptation services? We are aware that performance indicators merely monitor delivery times, but it is not all about that, is it? Could you enlighten us with some of your experiences as an organisation?

[253] **Ms Reeves-McAll:** It certainly needs to be wider than performance indicators being based on delivery times. An issue was brought up earlier about satisfaction levels. That needs to be broken down into the areas. If you have a problem, for example, with the occupational therapist, if you monitor right at the end, you will not know about that until then, and you need to be able to track that, so that you can tweak the system appropriately. The other huge problem is that there is very little data gathering across the protected characteristics. So, clear evidence about who is accessing what adaptations and linking that to speed of delivery is also missed. That could be very important. There needs to be a parity of approach. The way in which information and key performance indicators are gathered does not provide any ability to look across the different forms of grants either. When you are trying to model a system, if you do not know what the PAG is doing up against the DFG, it becomes difficult. You cannot necessarily take good practice from that, because you do not know what is working and what is not.

[254] **Lindsay Whittle:** Do you think that good practice should allow comparisons between different types of tenures across Wales?

[255] **Ms Reeves-McAll:** Certainly. You would want to check that being in a certain tenure does not substantially disadvantage you compared to being in another tenure. That goes back to the issue that, currently, you are probably better off in housing association accommodation with a physical adaptations grant.

11.30 a.m.

[256] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Rydych wedi dadlau'r achos dros gael dangosydd perfformiad sydd yn llawer mwy cynhwysfawr na dim ond cofnodi'r cyfnod o amser sy'n mynd heibio cyn bod addasiad yn cael ei gwblhau. A ydych yn meddwl hefyd, er mwyn sicrhau bod gwaith gwerthuso ansawdd y gwaith yn gynhwysfawr, fod yn rhaid edrych nid yn unig ar yr hyn sy'n digwydd ar ôl i'r gwaith gael ei gyflawni, ond dychwelyd ato'n ddiweddarach er mwyn sicrhau bod y sawl sy'n derbyn yr addasiad yn teimlo ei fod wedi gwneud gwahaniaeth gwirioneddol i'w sefyllfa?

Rhodri Glyn Thomas: You have argued the case for having a performance indicator that is much more comprehensive than just recording the time that has passed until an adaptation is completed. Do you also think that, in order to ensure that the evaluation of the quality of the work is comprehensive, we need not only to look at what happens after the work is delivered, but to return to it later to ensure that those who have received the adaptation feel that it has made a genuine difference to their situation?

[257] **Ms Reeves-McAll:** It is not only about ensuring that the adaptation has worked and worked well, but about looking at whether further adaptations are needed. That provides you with a double-check system, which means that, ideally, you either reopen the case or you have some linking, which means that, if something was missed the first time around, you can say that something was missed, or it was not missed, but this is just a natural change or progression of the disabled person's condition.

[258] **Ann Jones:** We will now move on to funding, and the questions are from Gwyn.

[259] **Gwyn R. Price:** Should funding for DFGs be hypothecated or does this risk setting a limit for expenditure?

[260] **Ms Reeves-McAll:** Yes and no.

[261] **Gwyn R. Price:** We have another politician. [*Laughter.*]

[262] **Ms Reeves-McAll:** If you look at ring-fencing money, it is helpful. The difficulty is in setting a formula that will work, understanding and forward planning. We have good ideas about demographics for ageing populations. What we will struggle with is service personnel returning back home injured, and accidents and emergencies. Life happens, and people become disabled in ways that are not planned. We would also struggle to find a formula that will work across all local authorities. Instances of disabilities will be different, and types of disabilities will be different. There is added complication by the housing stock—when it was built, whether it is compatible with lifetime homes and so on. Furthermore, the topography of Wales can be vastly different. That can exponentially increase the amount of money that is spent on DFG. So, the answer is 'yes and no'.

[263] **Gwyn R. Price:** Do you think that health budgets are being utilised at a local level to support adaptation programmes?

[264] **Ms Reeves-McAll:** That is very complicated. It will depend on the element of the health budget. There are some instances where continuing healthcare is used. There are other instances where that is not appropriate for the disabled person, because they do not have access to that. With regard to wider health budgets, it is always very difficult, because, if you save the NHS money, I am pretty much certain that it can find somewhere else to spend it.

[265] **Mike Hedges:** First, thank you for that last sentence—I have been saying that for the last three weeks.

[266] **Ann Jones:** Mike's been saying that all the way through. [*Laughter.*]

[267] **Mike Hedges:** I have two questions. First, could better use be made of existing resources, such as recycling some adaptations? Secondly, and more importantly, could better use be made of adapted and accessible housing registers? Quite often, £30,000 will be spent on adapting a property, for example, and then the person will either move into a nursing home or die. That property will then be put out on general offer, and, all of a sudden, someone comes in and takes £30,000-worth of adaptations out and turns the wet room back into a bathroom and so on, but somebody down the road could still be waiting for adaptations. Could better use be made of those resources?

[268] **Ms Reeves-McAll:** The simple answer to both questions is 'yes'. The more complex answer is that there are processes in place in some areas for sharing adaptations, which work well, but you have to be able to make sure that they are safe and can be reused, and not all adaptations can be used. You also have to be aware that our approach to adaptations is—

hopefully—what is best for the individual. So, that solution might not be the best one for somebody else. So, it is a very good system, but I do not think that it is the answer. I think that it comes up with accessible housing registers; I would prefer to see, and I think that Tai Pawb would prefer to see, accessible housing services that bring everything under one roof. That would be easier for the disabled person, with just one place to go. We have an added complication with the under-occupancy charge now with regard to the reuse of houses, which is not going to make life very easy. Traditionally, we would have put a disabled person in a suitably adapted house and not worried too much about whether they were under-occupying. If we do not have that flexibility—we would need to see how discretionary housing payments play out and what resources they can bring—we may be forced into turning houses back into general-needs properties. I wonder whether there is an element of agreement that could be taken with tenants. So, if somebody is happy to have a walk-in shower, could we not leave the walk-in shower there and have an agreement that is signed on that basis, rather than just assume that we need to take it out? I think that we perhaps need to look at things a bit differently.

[269] **Mike Hedges:** I have one final question. You talked about one of the changes in housing benefit, but one of the biggest problems facing registered social landlords is direct payments, which could have a serious effect on what they are paying in terms of their debt charges. Do you see that impinging on their ability to undertake adaptations?

[270] **Ms Reeves-McAll:** I think that that runs the risk of causing difficulties for a whole host of their services, and, when you are talking about low-cost adaptations, which are generally done in-house—normally just under £1,000, sometimes a bit more—then, yes, that certainly could have an impact, because it is a financial decision that they have to make. Interestingly, the other issue with the changes to housing benefit, is that previously, service charges would cover maintenance of adaptations and that is not happening now, either. So, you might well have people who have disabilities who will earn less money, traditionally, if they are in work at all, who are then hit with under-occupancy charges and expected to pay towards the maintenance of the adaptations as well. The other side of that is that, when that person leaves the property, if you are looking at a housing association or council, they both, in some respects, have the benefit of that property, because they can re-let it.

[271] **Joyce Watson:** I think you used the words ‘permissible charging’ in your paper. I am not really au fait with what that means and I do not know whether other Members are, but, through you, Chair, I wonder whether we could have a note to help us to understand the real impact of the permissible charging—in other words, what you have just talked about, where landlords can now actually charge for maintaining the adaptations that they have put in the houses.

[272] **Ms Reeves-McAll:** I do not have the documentation with me, but I can certainly forward it to you.

[273] **Ann Jones:** Yes, that would be fine. It would just help when we come to review all the evidence.

[274] **Joyce Watson:** Yes, so that we have everything.

[275] **Ms Reeves-McAll:** That is fine.

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

[277] **Ann Jones:** I see that Members do not have any further questions. Thank you very much for coming. We will send you a copy of the transcript to check for accuracy and, if we can have that note as well, that would be fine. Thank you for coming.

[278] **Ms Reeves-McAll:** Thank you for your time.

11.39 a.m.

**Cynnig o dan Reol Sefydlog Rhif 17.42 i Benderfynu Gwahardd y Cyhoedd o'r
Cyfarfod
Motion under Standing Order No. 17.42 to Resolve to Exclude the Public from
the Meeting**

[279] **Ann Jones:** I move that:

the committee resolves to exclude the public from the remainder of the meeting in accordance with Standing Order No. 17.42(vi).

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

*Derbyniwyd y cynnig.
Motion agreed.*

*Daeth rhan gyhoeddus y cyfarfod i ben am 11.39 a.m.
The public part of the meeting ended at 11.39 a.m.*