

CONTENTS PAGE

Committee Membership		3
Chair’s Introduction		4
Introduction		5
Background and Policy Context		6
Legislative Framework		10
Evidence Gathering		12
Key Issues		13
Theme 1: Inequality of Services Available across Wales and across Tenure		14
Theme 2: Workforce Issues, Skills Mix and Partnership Working		18
Theme 3: Performance Management Data		22
Theme 4: Resources		24
Theme 5: Bureaucracy		28
Theme 6: Identification and Sharing of Good Practice		29
Other Themes		30
Conclusions And Recommendations		32
Annex 1	Welsh Assembly Government Progress Against Implementation of the Recommendations of the 2005 Review of Housing Adaptations Including Disabled Facilities Grant – Wales	35
Annex 2	List of Written Responses and a Schedule of Witnesses	45

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP



Ann Jones AM (Chair)
Labour
Vale of Clwyd



Eleanor Burnham AM
Welsh Liberal Democrats
North Wales



Jonathan Morgan AM
Welsh Conservative Party
Cardiff North



Janet Ryder AM
Plaid Cymru
North Wales



Joyce Watson AM
Labour
Mid and West Wales

CHAIR'S INTRODUCTION



While the vast majority of us enjoy the freedom and activity of retirement, few of us stop to think about what happens later when our mobility may begin to ebb away.

Many older people highly value their independence and want to remain living in their own homes for as long as possible. The work carried out by local authorities and other agencies to maintain homes of a decent standard and provide adaptations to make this possible is, therefore, vital.

It was with this in mind that we, the Equality of Opportunity Committee, began our inquiry into home maintenance and adaptations services for older people in Wales. We believe that older people should enjoy the same independence, dignity and rights as younger people.

This inquiry has demonstrated that the system of applying for and delivering home adaptation grants to older people across Wales is complex and often inconsistent. As a consequence, older people – whether they are home owners or tenants – suffer from inequalities in the services they receive.

We found that older people are waiting unacceptably long times for adaptations, and that these waiting times can be longer for people living in different parts of Wales or different types of housing.

15 recommendations have been made to the Welsh Assembly Government in this report. We urge the Government to put older people at the heart of its decision making process so that they can continue living happy and healthy lives at home.

I would like to thank all those who submitted both written and oral evidence to the Committee and, in particular, the valuable evidence from older people in North and West Wales who met with Committee members to share their experiences of maintenance and adaptations services. Their insight has been much appreciated and has ensured that we have kept in mind the very real situations faced by older people across Wales.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ann Jones". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Ann Jones
Chair, Equality of Opportunity Committee

INTRODUCTION

In October 2008 the Equality of Opportunity Committee began taking evidence as part of its inquiry into Home Maintenance and Adaptations Services for Older People in Wales. During the course of the inquiry a wide range of views were sought, including two sessions with older people, on the problems that older people in Wales face in accessing these critical services. The terms of reference for the inquiry are set out below.

Terms of Reference

To inquire into the effectiveness of the Welsh Assembly Government's arrangements for providing home maintenance and adaptations services for older people in the light of the former Social Justice and Regeneration Committee's review of housing for older people in Wales in 2004 and the Welsh Assembly Government's review of adaptations in 2005. Including:

- The availability and effectiveness of home maintenance and adaptations services for older people across Wales and between housing tenures.
- Waiting times for Disabled Facilities Grants and the installation of adaptations.
- The maintenance of installations and equipment.
- The effectiveness of performance management tools used to assess the performance of agencies providing home maintenance and adaptations services.
- The allocation of resources to home maintenance and adaptations services by the Assembly Government and the agencies charged with providing them.
- The effectiveness and convenience to older people of the process for obtaining adaptations and maintenance and repair services.
- The availability and accessibility to older people of information and advice on home maintenance and repair and adaptations services.
- To take evidence on what works, and what doesn't, and on what action needs to be taken to enable suitable provision of home maintenance and adaptations services for older people.

BACKGROUND AND POLICY CONTEXT

Older people place significant value on the role of home maintenance and adaptations services in enabling them to stay in their own homes, maintain their independence and dignity and avoid injury. This not only benefits older people, but can result in large financial savings for the health sector and social services if the need for hospital, nursing or residential care is avoided.

Roles and Responsibilities

The context within which home adaptation and maintenance services for older people are commissioned, funded and delivered is extremely complex. A number of public, private and voluntary agencies fulfil a range of different and sometimes overlapping roles. Legislation imposes some duties on, and provides powers to, public authorities in relation to the provision of services but many are delivered as a result of local policies and aims.

The Welsh Assembly Government

The Welsh Assembly Government sets the overarching policy framework for home maintenance and adaptations services, and provides guidance to local authorities on delivering services. The National Service Framework for Older People¹ has 'Challenging Dependency' as one of its standards and this seeks to ensure that:

“a range of enabling, community based services is available to intervene promptly and effectively when older people’s independence is threatened by health and social care needs, with the aim of challenging dependency and maximising well being and autonomy”.

The National Service Framework refers to housing adaptations and maintenance as a means through which independence can be achieved.

One of the objectives of the Strategy for Older People in Wales² (2008-13) is Well being and Independence, which seeks to:

“ensure that older people - especially those with disabilities - have access to the help they need to remain in their own homes including timely access to heating, adaptations, repairs, telecare as well as other assistive technologies and supported housing programmes”.

The Welsh Government provides funding to a number of organisations and in a number of ways, including:

- local authorities through the General Capital Fund;
- Registered Social Landlords through the Social Housing Grant; and
- Care and Repair Cymru for delivery of the Rapid Response Adaptations Programme.

¹ Welsh Assembly Government, National Service Framework for Older People (2006)

² Welsh Assembly Government, Strategy for Older People in Wales (2008-13)

Local Authorities

Local authorities are the main providers of help for older householders, and there are a range of mandatory and discretionary powers available to them to do so.

Disabled Facilities Grants are mandatory and means tested and can fund adaptations up to a maximum value of £36,000 per application in Wales, where as in England the maximum is £30,000. A person can claim if they are, or someone living in their property is, disabled and:

- they, or the person on whose behalf they are applying, are either the owner or tenant (including licensees) of the property; and,
- they can certify that they, or the person on whose behalf they are applying, intend to occupy the property as their only or main residence throughout the grant period – which is currently five years.

A landlord may apply on behalf of a disabled tenant. There is a requirement on local authorities to notify applicants of whether or not they have been successful within 6 months, and to pay for the work within 12 months of the date of application. However, in practice this can take a lot longer.

Local authorities also have discretionary powers to provide assistance in place of, or in addition to, Disabled Facilities Grants. Local authorities have their own arrangements and grant schemes and some of these are low cost, fast track schemes.

Registered Social Landlords

For older people living in homes owned and managed by registered social landlords in Wales, the Welsh Government supports the cost of adaptations through the Physical Adaptations Grant Scheme. Physical Adaptations Grants are discretionary and fund 'fixture and fittings' adaptations. The Welsh Government funds Physical Adaptations Grants through its Social Housing Grant budget.

A system of fast-track adaptations, via Physical Adaptations Grants, was introduced following the Welsh Government's Essex Review into Affordable Housing in Wales 2008³ and allows certain adaptations to be carried out without first requiring approval from the Welsh Government. The adaptation can therefore be carried out promptly with the cost being subsequently reclaimed from the Welsh Government.

Care and Repair Cymru

The Rapid Response Adaptations Programme is a service aimed primarily at addressing minor repairs and adaptations (hand and grab rails, ramps, door entry systems etc) in the homes of older and disabled homeowners or private sector tenants. The programme was launched in July 2002 and is administered for the Welsh Government by Care and Repair Cymru. The Rapid Response Adaptations Programme has a ceiling of £350 for a single payment, and is used extensively by NHS and Social Services Occupational

³ The Essex Review into Affordable Housing in Wales (2008).

Therapists and other Health and Social Care professionals. They can provide non means-tested repairs and adaptations to the homes of older people, deferring transfers into residential care and enabling transfers out of the clinical care environment (hospital discharge).

Reviews of Adaptations Services

A considerable amount of work on reviewing and improving the arrangements for Disabled Facilities Grants and other adaptations services has been undertaken in recent years, including a report by the National Assembly for Wales' Social Justice and Regeneration Committee on housing for older people, a Welsh Government review of Disabled Facilities Grants and adaptations, and a Welsh Local Government Association benchmarking report that is due to be published this summer.

In 2004⁴ the National Assembly's Social Justice and Regeneration Committee published a report on its review of housing for older people in Wales. The review was wide ranging but considered which services most effectively enabled older people to remain in their own homes, including the provision of Disabled Facilities Grants. It concluded that long delays caused problems for disabled people, and that these delays could partly be attributed to a shortage of community-based Occupational Therapists and over-rigid operation within the system which created long waiting times for assessments.

The Welsh Government's review of adaptations undertaken in 2005⁵ made a number of recommendations. The report identified long delays in waiting times for adaptations, variation in services across tenures and between local authorities, complex administration and poor availability of information for service users. The report made recommendations accordingly and the Welsh Government responded, for the most part⁶, by "considering" or "accepting" the recommendations.

In light of the review, the Welsh Government issued revised guidance to all local authorities in Wales. Seminars were held in the autumn of 2005 to discuss the review and disseminate good practice. As part of this inquiry the Deputy Minister for Housing provided the Committee with an update on progress made against each of the recommendations. This can be found at Annex 1.

Despite the review in 2005, the picture does not appear to have significantly improved. Many of the issues that emerged during that review - for example long delays, inconsistency across local authority areas and housing tenures, poor access to information and poor performance management - have arisen again during the course of this inquiry. There appears to have been limited evaluation of the progress that has been made at all levels of Government to implement the recommendations of the 2005 review and this makes it difficult to draw firm conclusions about why many of the problems identified still remain an issue for older people today.

⁴ National Assembly for Wales, Social Justice and Regeneration Committee, Housing for older people (2004)

⁵ Review of Housing Adaptations and Disabled Facilities Grant (2005)

⁶ National Assembly for Wales, Social Justice and Regeneration Committee, Response to Recommendations of the Review of Housing Adaptations (2005)

Home Maintenance and Repairs Services

Little evidence emerged during the course of the inquiry around home maintenance services. It is clear that they play an important preventative role in addressing minor problems before they become a significant issue. However, there appears to be inconsistency in the provision of maintenance services across Wales.

LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

The legislation covering Disabled Facilities Grants and housing adaptations is complex and wide ranging. Local authorities across Wales are subject to both statutory duties to provide effective Disabled Facilities Grants and discretionary powers to deliver a wide range of adaptations services as they deem appropriate.

The main legislation covering Disabled Facilities Grants and adaptations is:

- The Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 (the 1996 Act); and
- The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 (the 2002 Order), which amends the 1996 Act.

Disabled Facilities Grants are a mandatory entitlement, assessed by need, and are means tested. The 1996 Act imposes a statutory duty on local authorities to pay Disabled Facilities Grants to a disabled person for certain purposes provided it is satisfied that an application is in respect of works that are:

- a) necessary and appropriate; and
- b) reasonable and practical to carry the works out having regard to the age and condition of the building.

The statutory timescale requiring local authorities to notify applicants in writing whether the Disabled Facilities Grant application is approved or refused is as soon as reasonably practicable and not later than 6 months after the date of the application. The statutory timescale for payment of a Disabled Facilities Grant is within 12 months after the date the application is made. However, in practice, the process can take longer and timescales are extended because of the numerous steps in the process.

The Disabled Facilities Grants (Maximum Amounts and Additional Purposes) (Wales) Order 2008 specifies that the maximum amount local authorities may pay in relation to a Disabled Facilities Grant application in Wales is currently £36,000. The maximum amount in England is currently £30,000.

Local authorities are also able to provide funding for adaptations using their discretionary powers under the 2002 Order. The 2002 Order amended the 1996 Act to confer wide ranging powers on local authorities to provide assistance and enables them to supplement mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants in any way they deem appropriate.

In accordance with the 2002 Order, local authorities may provide any assistance in any form to any person including for the acquisition of living accommodation, the adaptation or improvement of living accommodation, and the repair of living accommodation.

Other legislation, including the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970, and the Children Act 1989, also include provisions dealing with housing adaptations.

Under current legislation, it appears that local authorities across Wales:

- determine their own priorities for using their discretionary powers as outlined above;
- determine the amount of finance they use to support this;
- have systems in place for prioritising cases for applicants receiving adaptations, some of which may be fast tracked; and
- vary their practices and systems for adaptations, with different types of assistance, different emphases, and different methods of delivery evolving.

EVIDENCE GATHERING

In conducting their inquiry, the Committee took evidence from a range of witnesses, reflecting a variety of views and perspectives, including those of the Deputy Minister for Housing, the Older People's Commissioner for Wales, representatives of local government, front line agencies, professional bodies, voluntary and charitable organisations, and older people themselves.

Evidence was received in a number of ways. The Committee received 15 responses to its call for written evidence, issued in October 2008. A list of respondents, along with a schedule of the oral evidence the Committee took over the course of six meetings, is detailed at Annex 2. The Committee also took evidence from older people themselves through informal meetings in North and West Wales. Quotes from some contributors are utilised within the report to illustrate particular issues.

Committee papers, meeting transcripts and consultation responses relating to the inquiry can be viewed on the Committee's webpage on the National Assembly for Wales' website: <http://www.assemblywales.org>

KEY ISSUES

It quickly became apparent during the course of the inquiry that the context in which home adaptation and maintenance services for older people are commissioned, funded and delivered is not clear cut.

Systems and arrangements for the delivery and performance management of services vary across housing tenures as well as across Wales. Adaptations, for example, can be delivered through a variety of mechanisms including Disabled Facilities Grants, Rapid Response Adaptations Programmes, Physical Adaptation Grants, Home Improvement Grants and Relocation Grants. Availability of information for services users is vastly inconsistent and performance management information is collected and published in a variety of ways which creates difficulties for the Welsh Government in monitoring consistency across Wales, and for local authorities in driving performance improvement.

Despite general agreement amongst witnesses about the problems facing older people in relation to home maintenance and adaptation services, the complexity of the issues make it difficult to draw firm conclusions about what the solutions might be.

The key themes that emerged strongly during the course of the inquiry were:

- Inequality across Wales and across housing tenure
- Workforce issues, skills mix and cross sector working
- Performance Management Data
- Resources
- Bureaucracy
- Identification and sharing of good practice

THEME 1: INEQUALITY OF SERVICES AVAILABLE ACROSS WALES AND ACROSS TENURE

A major theme to have emerged from the Committee's inquiry is the inequalities in the services available to older people in different parts of Wales. The Committee has heard how these inequalities take different forms, ranging from the length of time people wait for adaptations to be installed in their homes to the type of home maintenance and repair services on offer. Concerns were also raised by witnesses about possible inequalities in the provision of adaptation and home maintenance services to people across different housing tenures.

This means that older people do not have equal access to timely services regardless of where in Wales they live or the type of housing they live in and the Committee believes such inequalities are unacceptable. Effective, efficient and equitable services should be available to all older people who need them.

Inequality in Relation to Waiting Times across Wales

Age Concern Cymru and Help the Aged in Wales

"It is clearly unacceptable for older people in need to have to wait an extended period of time for basic adaptations that are essential for their safety, dignity and hygiene".

Unreasonable waiting times for adaptations raise basic fundamental questions about the human rights of older people because the effects of prolonged waiting times on quality of life can be significant. In their written contribution, one housing association stated that "essentially residents required work to be completed within a short space of time as their health necessitated the work sooner rather than later". Long waits for work to be completed also have an impact on the health sector through admissions and delayed discharge.

Anecdotal evidence points to an older person who waited for over three years for an adaptation to have a shower installed and during that period of time experienced several falls getting in and out of the bath. Injuries from falls are the greatest cause of hospitalisation amongst older people and are a leading cause of death from injury in people aged over 75. Falls are also the reason for a large number of admissions into nursing homes. Another older person had to use a bucket as a toilet for two months while waiting for the provision of a commode.

There are limitations to the conclusions that can be drawn from the official data that is available, and this is discussed fully in Theme 3. Local authorities have made some progress in reducing waiting times in recent years. However, there is still significant room for improvement and data available from the Local Government Data Unit Wales on average waiting times for adaptations to private and local authority properties indicates significant variation across Wales. Data available for 2006/07 shows that the average number of calendar days to deliver a Disabled Facilities Grant varies from

310 in Torfaen to 868 in the Vale of Glamorgan⁷. In addition, the total number of grants awarded varies significantly across Wales. In 2007/08 final payments for Disabled Facilities Grants were made in a total of 931 cases in Monmouthshire, by comparison with only 41 cases in Pembrokeshire. The average number of days taken to deliver an adaptation for a local authority tenant outside the Disabled Facilities Grant process also varied from 32 in Flintshire to 525 in Denbighshire in 2007/08.

The reasons for these variations are numerous and not straightforward, but include delays in Occupational Therapist assessments, issues relating to contractors, and the bureaucracy surrounding the grant application process. These are discussed under separate themes below. However, it is clear that a large number of older people across Wales are waiting too long for adaptations.

Inequality of Access to Services across Wales

There is a variation in the range of home maintenance and adaptation services available to older people across Wales. In terms of adaptations services, eligibility for Disabled Facilities Grants is set out in legislation and so they are available to all disabled people in Wales who meet the qualifying criteria. However, local authorities are also able to provide funding for adaptations in any way they deem appropriate using their discretionary powers under the 2002 Order.

Home maintenance and repair services are delivered by a range of organisations including local authorities, Care and Repair agencies and Age Concern Cymru and Help the Aged in Wales. The type of service on offer and eligibility criteria varies between counties. Age Concern Cymru and Help the Aged in Wales is considering the introduction of charges for services in one area because it has been unable to secure funding to provide an ongoing free service there.

Inequality of Services Available across Housing Tenure

Different systems for accessing home adaptation, maintenance and repair services are in place for people living in privately owned, local authority, housing association, privately rented and other types of accommodation. The Older People's Commissioner for Wales stated that it is vital that the nature of tenure does not disadvantage individuals. There is limited official data available to allow for a comparison between tenures of the quality and type of services on offer, but evidence points to both a variability within the same local authority but across tenures, as well as across the same tenure but in different local authorities.

Several witnesses expressed concerns about inequities across tenure. The Welsh Local Government Association stated that the same adaptation can be done more quickly in public sector housing than through the Disabled Facilities Grant process in private sector housing. The Physical Adaptations Grant has speeded up the process for some housing association tenants, but there are particular issues facing older people living in properties that have been transferred from a local authority to a housing association (commonly

⁷ Data source: the Local Government Data Unit - Wales

known as stock transfer). In these cases they are not eligible for the Physical Adaptations Grant. However, the housing association is responsible for ensuring funding is available for adaptations, and there is a need for strategic, long term planning for funding of adaptations when business plans for stock transfers are drawn up.

Age Concern Cymru and Help the Aged in Wales state that older people living in privately rented property struggle to get adaptations and repairs carried out by landlords in a reasonable timeframe and that landlords are not always aware of, or willing to accept, their responsibilities in meeting the housing needs of their tenants. More information is needed to draw definitive conclusions about the issues facing people in different tenures.

Inconsistent Access to Information

Royal British Legion

“Overall the information on home maintenance and adaptations supplied to applicants and potential applicants varies between local authorities. There should be greater effort and investment in publicising the various schemes available. In our experience there are many older people in need who are unaware of the help potentially available to them”.

Given the complexity of the adaptations process, clear communication with those using the services is vital. The process of applying for adaptations grants can be a barrier in itself. There is variability in the availability, accuracy and usefulness of the information provided to older people from a range of agencies including local authorities, housing associations and voluntary sector organisations. The issue around access to information applies in communication between the statutory, healthcare and voluntary sector as well as between these organisations and the public.

The Older People’s Commissioner for Wales stressed the importance of making sure that the information provided is relevant, jargon free and that it reaches people who are not part of formal processes or already on the radar for established services. Suggestions for dissemination include GP surgeries, supermarkets, pharmacies, Post Offices, older people’s fora and the Pensions Service. There also needs to be clarity about the process for complaining about a service or appealing against a decision.

The College of Occupational Therapists called for an audit of the information that is available, and some witnesses suggested that older service users should be more involved in the development of information resources to ensure they meet their needs.

Limited evidence emerged but there was a suggestion that the problem is worse for those with additional needs (for example, older people with learning difficulties or those from Black and Ethnic Minority communities and backgrounds) and it is important that information is available in the format and language of people’s choice. Easy access to information not only benefits the older person but also their family, carers, the agencies involved in provision of services and those carrying out the work.

Views from older people gathered during visits to North and West Wales

Advocacy was felt to be really important. Forms are difficult to understand and guidance on completing them should be sent out with the form. Other organisations that provide services to older people (for example, Community Transport) should be told about services so they can signpost older people.

Information should be put in newsletters which go to ratepayers from councils. Good neighbour schemes and lunch clubs should be able to signpost older people to relevant services.

THEME 2: WORKFORCE ISSUES, SKILLS MIX AND PARTNERSHIP WORKING

The Number and Role of Occupational Therapists

The College of Occupational Therapists states that Occupational Therapists handle 40% of referrals to adult social services for people with physical impairments, but they only make up 1% of the workforce. They claim that the added value they can bring is not fully recognised, and that they can engage in preventative work as well as the enablement process, and in a wide range of settings within the public sector.

The College of Occupational Therapists also claims that there is currently a 7% vacancy rate among Occupational Therapists across Wales. In their oral evidence to the Committee, they stated that to date there has not been any workforce planning outside of the secondary NHS needs. This year, the Care Council Wales asked local authorities about their needs and submitted their findings to the Welsh Government as part of the overall recommendation for commissioning of Occupational Therapist places. Evidence also indicated that there is no questioning of the needs of the voluntary sector, despite widespread use of Occupational Therapists.

A number of contributors to the inquiry have expressed concerns that a lack of Occupational Therapists employed within local authority housing departments and housing associations can result in increased waiting times in the delivery of adaptation services. As well as speeding up waiting times Occupational Therapists in housing departments can assist in improved allocation of adapted housing stock, assessment of empty properties suitable for adaptation, introduction of housing registers and property management. The College of Occupational Therapists recommended asking all local authorities what investment they have made in the establishment of Occupational Therapist services over the last 15 years to match the increased volume of older people requiring assessment.

Some witnesses alluded to the use of private Occupational Therapists to speed up the process, raising questions about the creation of a two tier system where those who can afford to pay can be assessed more quickly. It was claimed that some local authorities accept these private assessments, while others do not. Under the Disabled Facilities Grant process the local authority must be satisfied with the assessment before awarding the grant. The College of Occupational Therapists stated during their evidence that they would rather that agencies use public sector Occupational Therapists rather than going down the private route.

A small number of witnesses alluded to the benefits of having more Occupational Therapists employed in strategic, higher level positions to inform development of policy, determine the right skills mix required and drive change.

The College of Occupational Therapists argued that the employment of an Occupational Therapist in the Northern Ireland Housing Executive has had a positive impact, for example, by developing research and design guidelines for wheelchair standard housing in high density environments and plotting

the population of wheelchair users on a map, which is constantly updated when people are issued with new wheelchairs.

Effective Skills Mix

Most contributors to the inquiry highlighted the importance of a skills mix in reducing waiting times and delivering effective adaptations services. Occupational Therapist skills are best used in complex situations where their ability to analyse the physical and social environment, the demands of the task and the ability of the person enables identification of the best solution. 'Trusted assessors', progress chasers and technical officers are better deployed in certain less complex situations, freeing up the time of Occupational Therapists. Good equipment delivery services release the time of Occupational Therapists, who would otherwise be wasting time chasing deliveries.

Some local authorities have dedicated adaptations teams in their housing departments, which they report have been effective in improving services. Caerphilly Borough Council have a team made up of the Principal Housing Officer, an Occupational Therapist, 5 technical officers, a Clerk of Works and associated liaison and administration staff.

There is a need for more technical officers and trained support staff to ensure applications flow through the application process more quickly. The College of Occupational Therapists guidance, Minor Adaptations Without Delay, provides advice for Registered Social Landlords on undertaking small adaptations without an Occupational Therapist assessment. However, evidence suggests that a greater uptake of this approach in Wales would be beneficial.

Partnership Working across Sectors

A wide range of agencies can be involved in the delivery of home maintenance and adaptation services including NHS agencies, social services, private contractors, housing services and family members and carers.

Poor cross sector (and cross departmental in the case of local authority housing and social services departments) working arrangements can result in delays in the delivery of adaptation services. There are reports of disputes between the NHS and local authority bodies about who is responsible for the provision of services. The Older People's Commissioner for Wales advocates making better links between the Older People's Champions in local authorities and those in the Health sector to improve working relationships and shared understanding.

Some local authorities are good at working in partnership with other public sector bodies and agencies, reaching out beyond their professional status and boundaries, and a number of examples of good practice have been identified by witnesses. It is not clear whether these arrangements have been evaluated and good practice shared. A willingness to allow decisions to be made in a more flexible and responsive way is required. In some cases local authority housing departments, social services, the NHS and other agencies

work together to provide a “one stop shop” service, and there is some evidence that suggests this has resulted in reduced waiting times.

However, it is clear that varying partnership arrangements in different areas in part contributes to the variability in waiting times and provision of services and witnesses would like to see good practice rolled out across Wales. Care and Repair Cymru pointed to the Social Justice and Regeneration Committee’s Review of Housing for Older People in Wales (2004) as creating the blueprint for partnership working. Recommendation 4 stated that:

“The Welsh Assembly Government should discuss with Care and Repair Cymru, how that organisation, in collaboration with partners from statutory, voluntary and commercial sectors and linking with older people’s forums, might lead an initiative to promote the development of an integrated community based support service for older people”.

Part of recommendation 15 also included the recommendation that the Welsh Government:

“support the expansion of support services for older people with lower levels of need through partnerships between local authorities and the independent sector using the model outlined in recommendation 4”.

A number of witnesses also see opportunities for improved cross sector working in the reorganisation of the NHS in Wales. If the future of primary health care is more community based there are opportunities to form hubs and join up services across housing, social services and health. More use could be made of joint budgets and joint Occupational Therapist posts.

The Deputy Minister for Housing, in her evidence to the Committee, alluded to the potential role for Local Service Boards in relation to improved cross sector working. This is something that should be investigated further.

Contractor Issues

Care and Repair Cymru

“In the case of grants and minor adaptations, it was often extremely difficult to find a contractor (not enough contractors and a lot of demand for them). Care and Repair agencies saw a niche and many employed their own Maintenance and Repairs Officer to do the smaller adaptations such as grabrails, door locks and chains, keysafes, repairing gates etc. Some local authorities funded this, some not”.

In relation to contractors, lack of availability, delays in the production of quotes, invoices and tender submission and difficulties for local authorities and other agencies in attempting to verify information were some of the issues that emerged during the inquiry. Service Level Agreements had been used in some areas to overcome these problems. Fear of incompetent contractors carrying out defective works and overcharging for work emerged as real concern for older people.

Views from older people gathered during visits to North and West Wales

One person complained that, when work for an adaptation was being carried out, the workmen had left his home unsecured.

In their evidence to the inquiry, the Welsh Local Government Association suggested that the Welsh Government should use the Strategic Capital Investment Fund to stimulate work in the area of home maintenance and adaptations through providing funding to local building contractors. This would not only provide extra resource for adaptations, but would also give a boost to the building trade in this time of economic uncertainty.

THEME 3: PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT DATA

Value of Performance Indicators

Several witnesses believed that local authorities' performance indicators relating to adaptation services have resulted in reductions in average waiting times and that extending the application of performance indicators across all housing tenures is a good idea. Good partnership working is a necessary requirement for consistent and useful data collection which provides a basis for assessing what is working well and where the problems are.

Patchy Coverage of Performance Indicators

There is a need for consistent, accurate and comparable data on performance in relation to provision of adaptations services across Wales. The Welsh Government requires that local authorities provide performance indicator information on average waiting times for Disabled Facilities Grants and non-Disabled Facilities Grants adaptations to private dwellings. The Local Government Data Unit National Performance Indicator Guidance for Wales 2009-10 shows that a further performance indicator on "the average number of calendar days taken to deliver an adaptation for a local authority tenant where the Disabled Facilities Grant process is not used" has been deleted for 2009-10. No equivalent performance indicator information exists for housing association, privately rented or other types of tenure.

There are separate performance management systems in place for social services and housing departments, as well as for agencies delivering services in part funded by central and/or local government (for example, Care and Repair agencies). The Older People's Commissioner for Wales suggested that shared targets would be interesting to pursue.

Limitations in Existing Performance Indicators

The Local Government Data Unit National Performance Indicator Guidance for Wales 2009-10 states that performance indicators relating to average number of days taken to deliver Disabled Facilities Grant and non-Disabled Facilities Grant low cost adaptations in private dwellings "should provide an accurate representation of how long the process takes from the client's perspective". However, evidence taken during the inquiry suggests that while the introduction of performance indicators in relation to adaptations has helped focus local authorities on waiting times, the information that is currently collected has limited use and does not give a clear and accurate picture of performance. Collecting the data more effectively will help set standards for delivery and help identify the real problems in the process.

A number of witnesses have highlighted the limitations of these performance indicators in that they do not differentiate between waiting times for initial assessment (in local authorities generally the responsibility of the social services departments), adaptations for people of different age groups (i.e. children, adults and older people) and the length of time people wait for work to be agreed and then completed (in local authorities, generally the responsibility of the housing departments and contractors). There are also gaps in the information available, for example in relation to people with

additional needs or services provided across tenure, which makes it difficult to see a complete picture.

In their evidence to the Committee, the Welsh Local Government Association referred to performance indicator guidance for local authorities which stipulates that they should be able to break down the information between the start and finish points - from the first point of contact, to the occupational therapy visit, to the recommendation, to the contracts being let, to the job being finished - and therefore should be able to provide that level of detail. Evidence received from one local authority confirmed that this information is collected and reported on quarterly. However, other evidence suggested that there are discrepancies in what is deemed the start and end points of the process, making consistent collection of data difficult.

Steve Thomas, Chief Executive of the Welsh Local Government Association, said that the current performance indicator could be revised to make it more meaningful, and pointed out that:

“it is a massive performance indicator – we are talking about an indicator that charts grab rails and two storey extensions”.

Long delays relating to a few complex applications can therefore distort the average waiting time for all adaptations.

It appears that there is variation in the data collected by local authorities, housing associations and other organisations in relation to adaptation and housing services. A number of witnesses referred to a recent report focusing on Disabled Facilities Grants for disabled children published by Shelter Cymru⁸. The report highlights the fact that not all local authorities in Wales collect separate data on Disabled Facilities Grant funded adaptations for children. It is not clear whether local authorities are able to isolate data relating to older people.

While care must be taken not to place a burden on data collectors, the current performance indicator would be more meaningful if clear definitions were agreed with service providers and it was refined to include information that is broken down by:

- waiting times for agreed different types of adaptation;
- the time taken for each different stage of the process of an adaptation;
- the proportion of adaptations that were completed within a certain number of days; and
- different age groups where relevant.

⁸ Shelter Cymru, Family Experiences of Accessing Disabled Facilities Grants: a collaborative research study in Wales and Northern Ireland (2008)

THEME 4: RESOURCES

Funding of Adaptations and Planning for the Future

Disabled Facilities Grants are currently funded via the General Capital Fund, the block of unhypothecated funding allocated to local authorities. A large number of witnesses have called for the hypothecation of funding for the delivery of Disabled Facilities Grants because there is some concern that a lack of allocated funds can result in delays or failed applications. The Deputy Minister for Housing stated that unhypothecated funding allows flexibility to take account of changing demand for these services that is difficult to predict. She emphasised that it is:

“essential that authorities use that flexibility to ensure that adequate resources are allocated to meet their mandatory obligations to support Disabled Facilities Grants”.

However, a number of witnesses expressed concern about the level of investment and how well it reflects the changing demographic which will increase demand in the future. Mapping of future demand is required and this must be taken account of in future projections.

Care and Repair Cymru stated that it is not always the case that more money is required, but often about how money is used (see earlier section on partnership working). However, the organisation alluded to capacity issues and the fact that it is looking at trying to work in partnership with other organisations to avoid a situation where they have to limit the services they offer. The Welsh Local Government Association have also emphasised their concerns around the future funding of Care and Repair against a backdrop of increasing demand and economic uncertainty.

The Rapid Response Adaptations Programme is seen as a cost effective mechanism for delivering lower cost adaptations and Care and Repair Cymru has called for it to be rolled out across all tenures. However, the Deputy Minister for Housing stated that there is no funding available to enable the Rapid Response Adaptations Programme to be extended at this time.

Funding of Home Maintenance Service

There is an important preventative role for home maintenance services in addressing immediate and minor problems before they become a major issue. There is significant variation in the funding of home maintenance and repair services across Wales with funding provided by a range of sources including local authorities, the Welsh Government, charitable bodies and private individuals. A pilot scheme in Bridgend found that there is far less need for this kind of service in more affluent areas.

When refurbishment schemes or block maintenance are being planned, account needs to be taken of lifetime homes standards for older people so as to avoid extra costs in making properties accessible following refurbishment.

