



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

**Y Pwyllgor Cyfle Cyfartal
The Committee on Equality of Opportunity**

**Dydd Mawrth, 12 Mai 2009
Tuesday, 12 May 2009**

Cynnwys
Contents

- 3 Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon
Introduction, Apologies a Substitutions
- 4 Ymchwiliad i Wasanaethau Cynnal a Chadw ac Addasu Cartrefi ar gyfer Pobl Hŷn
yng Nghymru
Inquiry into Home Maintenance and Adaptations Services for Older People in Wales
- 18 Cynnig Trefniadol
Procedural Motion

Cofnodir y trafodion hyn yn yr iaith y llefarwyd hwy ynnddi yn y pwyllgor. Yn ogystal,
cynhwysir cyfieithiad Saesneg o gyfraniadau yn y Gymraeg.

These proceedings are reported in the language in which they were spoken in the committee.
In addition, an English translation of Welsh speeches is included.

Aelodau'r pwyllgor yn bresennol
Committee members in attendance

Ann Jones	Llafur (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor) Labour (Committee Chair)
Jonathan Morgan	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Janet Ryder	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales
Joyce Watson	Llafur Labour

Eraill yn bresennol
Others in attendance

Rob Baker	Rheolwr Prosiect, Cartrefi Hygyrch Caerdydd Project Manager, Cardiff Accessible Homes
Andrew Connell	Cynghorwr Cefnogi Pobl, Tai Cymunedol Cymru Supporting People Adviser, Community Housing Cymru
Kathryn Edwards	Grŵp Seren Seren Group
Sioned Hughes	Prif Weithredwr Cynorthwyol, Tai Cymunedol Cymru Assistant Chief Executive, Community Housing Cymru
Matthew Thomas	Cyfarwyddwr Tai, Cartrefi Hygyrch Caerdydd Housing Director, Cardiff Accessible Homes

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

Rita Phillips	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk
Bethan Webber	Clerc Clerk

Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 9.31 a.m.
The meeting began at 9.31 a.m.

Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon
Introduction, Apologies a Substitutions

[1] **Ann Jones:** Good morning, and welcome to the Equality of Opportunity Committee. I remind all Members around the table that mobile phones and pagers should be turned off because they affect the broadcasting equipment. Translation is available on channel 1 via the headsets, and amplification of sound on channel 0. This is a bilingual Assembly, so if you want to speak Welsh, a translation will be made available for others. We are not expecting a fire alarm this morning, so if the alarm sounds, we will wait for the ushers to point us in the right direction or, as I always say, you can follow me, because I will be one of the first out of the building.

[2] We have had an apology from Eleanor Burnham, and unfortunately, there is no substitution. Would any Members like to declare an interest before we start? I see not.

9.32 a.m.

**Ymchwiliad i Wasanaethau Cynnal a Chadw ac Addasu Cartrefi ar gyfer Pobl
Hŷn yng Nghymru**
**Inquiry into Home Maintenance and Adaptations Services for Older People in
Wales**

[3] **Ann Jones:** We move on to item 2 and continue our inquiry into home maintenance and adaptations services for older people in Wales. I am pleased to welcome Rob Baker and Matthew Thomas from Cardiff Accessible Homes, and I thank them for the paper that they submitted to committee. Members have read the paper, so we will go straight into questions from Members.

[4] I will start by asking how social landlords and disabled people benefit from adapted housing registers.

[5] **Mr Baker:** The important thing in Cardiff, and for disabled housing registers in general, is the matching of the available properties to clients. Before the introduction of Cardiff Accessible Homes in 2003, there was a problem, which was the main reason for the organisation becoming operational—adapted properties were becoming available but there was no central list of disabled people to match their requirements. It was a case of phoning several housing organisations before a match could be made. Since the introduction of Cardiff Accessible Homes, we have held a centralised list of disabled people outlining their needs and requirements. When an adapted property becomes available, we are now able to match it to someone on the list in a matter of hours rather than weeks.

[6] **Ann Jones:** Thank you. Are Members happy with that? Jonathan, do you want to carry on?

[7] **Jonathan Morgan:** Before I move on to my question, can I ask a quick supplementary? Mr Baker, you say that prior to the creation of your organisation, Cardiff County Council, as the authority principally responsible for looking after the bulk of the social rented accommodation in Cardiff, had no central list of those who would qualify for or benefit from these houses?

[8] **Mr Baker:** The central list was incorporated into their general needs housing list. Now there are two separate lists—there is the general needs, or common waiting list as it is known now, and there is the accessible homes register. The latter is purely a list of people who are disabled, require adapted properties, and want to move.

[9] **Mr Thomas:** Each housing association in Cardiff will also have its own list of that kind, and it was hit and miss as to whether you could find a suitable applicant who would be matched up to the accommodation that you were offering. Quite often, the accommodation would have had quite a lot of adaptations and, historically, the first thing that would happen when the person moved in would be for them to be ripped out, because the person's needs were completely different.

[10] Accessible Homes came about in 2003. Initially, it was an initiative on the part of three housing associations in Cardiff in partnership with the council, which recognised that that was an issue. They applied for a social housing management grant, first to carry out a pilot project to see whether the scheme was viable. A second grant was then applied for in 2002 to set the register up, which was a three-year programme. It began with those three housing associations and the council, and, since 2005, all of the registered social landlords have been part of it. When the three-year project finished, the organisations self-funded the project, so all the costs of managing the register as well as managing the properties are paid for by them. The second half of the register is a list of properties that have been adapted, so

there is now a knowledge base with regard to many of the home adaptations for disabled people in Cardiff. That has made the process much more effective, ensuring the best use of the accommodation.

[11] **Jonathan Morgan:** I can see how a central list would help you to ensure that you could match a person to a particular property. One of the issues you referred to in your report is the difficulty you have because you do not have sufficient properties in certain parts of Cardiff. You may have people who have a particular desire to live near a family member or closer to a particular facility, such as a school, so what have you done to try to overcome that problem? I admit that it is a very complex issue, but, bearing that in mind, what work has been done to address that?

[12] **Mr Thomas:** Through the list, we have been able to develop bespoke properties for individuals who have very high-level needs. However, again, that is in areas where there is a supply of accommodation coming through various housing schemes. Therefore, if a registered social landlord, such as Cardiff Community Housing Association, which I work for—I manage the project on behalf of the housing association and the council—were developing a property in Splott, it might carry out a project like the one we did in Sanquhar Street, where we developed accommodation units for disabled people. As you rightly say, it is more difficult where you have very high levels of need in individuals who need that accommodation and you are not able to meet their needs. The register enables you to identify that need very quickly. Historically, when we had a dispersed register, we were not able to achieve that because the information was not available in one place. We are now talking to the local authority about its future development plans, so that if there are issues coming out of those discussions about high levels of need for a particular type of adaptation that cannot be fulfilled from within the general stock, they can be identified very quickly and fitted into future development programmes. However, we are in a relatively early stage in that context.

[13] **Mr Baker:** Since April last year, we have also worked with the local authority and registered social landlord partners to identify properties that could be adapted. In years gone by, we have concentrated on properties with existing adaptations, but now, if there is a difficult case and we cannot house the person, we will see whether we can adapt a property in the area. We have two occupational therapists who work specifically for the project to carry out the assessments, so we can call upon their knowledge and experience and ask them to look at the properties to assess whether they could be adapted. If there is an opportunity there, we will contact the client and their family to discuss that as an option.

[14] **Janet Ryder:** You have touched a little on the interaction with the private market and whether the property is privately rented or privately owned. Does a similar register exist in the private sector should you need a property in a particular area? Are estate agents aware when they are selling a property, and to what extent do they interact with you?

9.40 a.m.

[15] **Mr Baker:** About 18 months ago, we did some work with regard to the private market, trying to expand the portfolio of adapted properties in Cardiff. The problem that we had with the private market was that the landlords were slightly sceptical about adapting these properties, purely because, without adaptations, if it was re-let, they could let it on the wider market rather than just through the accessible homes list. So, there are ongoing talks with landlords and estate agents in Cardiff, and it is certainly an aim and objective of ours to overcome that in the next year or two.

[16] **Janet Ryder:** Have you noted any trend for people having adaptations done and then applying for a right to buy? Are you losing properties through the right to buy, or does that not happen?

[17] **Mr Baker:** No.

[18] **Janet Ryder:** You have not had any experience of that?

[19] **Mr Baker:** No.

[20] **Joyce Watson:** How do Cardiff Accessible Homes and your partners raise awareness of adaptation schemes that might be available to disabled people, and how do you take into account the needs of specific groups, perhaps those who do not speak English or do not understand it very well?

[21] **Mr Baker:** Cardiff Accessible Homes has had a link to Cardiff Community Housing Association's website for about three months now—it is a recent thing. We have incorporated into the website the new centralised system of physical adaptation grants that we have taken over, and we emphasise the services that we offer on that website too. We send booklets and leaflets to several teams across Cardiff, such as occupational therapy teams, social services teams, and the RSL teams, so those leaflets are distributed quite widely across Cardiff.

[22] On people for whom English or Welsh is not their first language, we have a translation service that we can use through the local authority.

[23] **Joyce Watson:** Does that translation service cover just English and Welsh?

[24] **Mr Baker:** No, it is a line that you can use that covers an array of languages.

[25] **Joyce Watson:** I thought that that was what you meant; I just wanted to be sure.

[26] I note in your evidence that one of the objectives is to identify gaps in provision and recommend areas for development. Could you give us some examples of that?

[27] **Mr Baker:** One of the issues and gaps that we have identified is the need for adapted family housing in Cardiff, and that goes back to certain areas of Cardiff too. Matthew has mentioned that we are in talks with the local authority to secure units in each development that becomes available. At the moment, we are securing about two or three units per development, which has been great—it has improved—and the service has increased the amount of adapted stock in Cardiff. However, there is that gap, and we are speaking to the local authority about making us aware of developments so that we can see whether we can go in and make adaptations early on, with the occupational therapist, to suit families that we have highlighted from the list as being in urgent need.

[28] **Joyce Watson:** When most people think about adaptations, they tend to think about older people living on their own, but you are talking about families. Are you talking predominantly about the needs of the younger client, perhaps children?

[29] **Mr Baker:** No, certainly not. When you mention families, that is what people think, but we have several families who care for older persons, such as parents and so on, who require the same level of adaptation, and that is the gap in the market that we are looking into. So, it is about families, but the spectrum of families.

[30] **Jonathan Morgan:** One of the issues raised during the collecting of evidence was around data and performance management and the way in which local authorities, in particular, report on the length of time that somebody would wait for an adaptation to be completed. What type of performance monitoring data, if any, do you collect? For example, can you say how long, on average, people wait for particular adaptations, and if you do collect

data, is it done on an average?

[31] **Mr Baker:** First and foremost, our core service is to house people, and we have only recently got involved in the adaptation side of things. With regard to re-housing, there is on average a 13-month wait on the Cardiff Accessible Homes register from when someone applies to the date that he or she signs the tenancy agreement. We have been able to reduce the length of time that applicants have had to wait for OT assessments because of the newly introduced centralised PAGs system. Prior to April of this year they would have had to wait four to six months for an assessment for a stairlift, level-access shower, ramps and door-entry systems. At the moment, with the funding from the partners and through the occupational therapists, we are getting those assessments done within three to four weeks. We then send those assessments to the RSL, who then has the works installed.

[32] We ran a pilot scheme in October and November last year. We completed 30 physical adaptation grant assessments, and 25 of those adaptations had been completed by the end of March this year. So, those 25 have been completed within six months, as opposed to there being a four to six-month wait purely for the assessment.

[33] **Jonathan Morgan:** Before I ask my question, I know that Janet wanted to raise an issue.

[34] **Janet Ryder:** Is that reduction in waiting time purely down to the employment of OTs?

[35] **Mr Baker:** Yes. They would have had to incorporate that workload into their normal workload. We have taken that away from them, and the partners have agreed to fund those two occupational therapist posts. It is only for one day a week—it is a total of 15 hours a week—but within that time the occupational therapists are able to get around six or seven assessments done within three to four weeks. So, it has significantly reduced the waiting time for assessments for tenants.

[36] **Mr Thomas:** That links in to the new changes to the way that the PAGs now work. Housing associations are able to address those issues far more efficiently in relation to how they administer so that they can get the work done effectively. The project has taken the opportunity to develop this as an area of service. There is a natural link and a natural joining-up of the dots between those two areas of work, because part of the register is also responsible for creating a centralised list of adapted properties. You talked about identifying need in the longer term, and that makes achieving that over the longer term much more effective, because the information is in one place, as they are administering the process of assessment.

[37] **Ann Jones:** Go on, Jonathan, you were such a gentleman then, allowing Janet to jump in.

[38] **Jonathan Morgan:** I knew that she wanted to raise a question about occupational therapists, and I was interested in the response. Going back to the collection of data, you have talked about how quickly the work can be done on average. How easy would it be for you to publish data in order to tell us, or anyone else for that matter, how quickly certain types of adaptation are done? One problem with local authorities is that they do it on the basis of an average, so that anything from a minor extension to a handrail is grouped into the same category. Are you able to distinguish between the different types?

[39] **Mr Baker:** Yes. We can run reports purely for stairlifts, level-access showers, ramps—pretty much what we are able to cover within the PAG fast-track adaptations. With regard to publishing, because it is a new centralised system that has only been operational for six weeks or so, we will be meeting the partners in June and for the first three months to

discuss figures. That is perhaps when we will be in a position to publish figures to highlight the benefits of such a scheme.

[40] **Mr Thomas:** Your question is valid. I can see that there are ways in which we would be able to do that, bearing in mind that this service with regard to the PAG adaptations only applies to RSLs and not to the local authority. Given that it is in such an early stage of development, we have not yet got to that point. Your question is valid and we do not anticipate that it will be a problem. That is perhaps one of the benefits of having a centralised clearing house, because it enables you to manage data more effectively.

[41] **Janet Ryder:** I am interested to hear what you said about the employment of occupational therapists. Is there anything else? Would you say that the ability to release those OTs to concentrate on doing the assessments for that limited amount of time a week is the only thing that has reduced those waiting times, or are there other contributing factors, other things that you have done differently, that have also helped to reduce it?

9.50 a.m.

[42] **Mr Baker:** We have also changed the referral system. Previously, RSLs would refer the tenant or the requirement for an adaptation to the occupational therapy team and it would then be incorporated into their workload. I think that there is currently a backlog of a few thousand. With us, people can self-refer and RSLs come to us directly. We can take that referral, book them in straight away and they will see the benefit quickly as we can get those visits done within three to four weeks. Having that occupational therapist working specifically for the project to do those assessments is great. We have also tinkered with the referral system.

[43] **Mr Thomas:** It is important to say that the occupational therapist employment was purely around the housing assessment in the first place, to get that better match. We think that the system has been improved by having someone in-house who works as part of the team. Nevertheless, there is a natural link again between a PAG assessment and a housing assessment. The OT might go out to a property and say that the person living there does not need to move and that by having an adaptation done, that person could stay in their accommodation. Alternatively, the OT could find that the property is not suitable for that person even if work was done, and that alternative housing solutions should be considered.

[44] **Mr Baker:** I think that Matt has just touched on a really good point. Previously, the tenants of the RSL properties might have been put off by the length of the wait for the assessment, so they felt that another option was to move, even though they were happy with the property and perhaps a basic adaptation would have been fine. Now they have that opportunity, we can revisit the list. There are 294 people on the accessible housing list. We are trying to revisit each case to see whether our offering an OT assessment very quickly and trying to get that adaptation done quickly would mean that the tenants would be happy to stay in the property. So, it is no longer a case of Cardiff Accessible Homes existing to re-house; it is also able to keep people in the home to live safely, securely and more independently.

[45] **Ann Jones:** Thank you. Do you want to move on, Janet?

[46] **Janet Ryder:** You have touched on the ability to fast-track the physical adaptations grant system, and some of the delays seem from the evidence to be due to the delay in confirming the grant and processing the grant. What was your assessment of the physical adaptations grant with regard to its ability to deliver timely solutions to cases?

[47] **Mr Baker:** I certainly feel that the fast-track system has benefited clients. Obviously, there is no longer a need for the Welsh Assembly Government to approve every single

assessment. That has an impact on tenant waiting times and so on. We now have the opportunity for the OTs to do the assessment; the RSLs do the work and then send it off for the approval of the Welsh Assembly Government.

[48] **Janet Ryder:** From your experience, is there anything that you would suggest needs to be changed?

[49] **Mr Baker:** Perhaps the process for minor adaptations could be changed slightly. I know that there was a proposal that minor adaptations under £1,000 would not have to go through the Welsh Assembly Government or the PAG system. Several partners that we deal with have taken that on board. The problem that we have is that they still insist on an OT assessment for these minor adaptations. There is a paper in circulation in England, which is being used by the RSLs, called 'Minor Adaptations Without Delay'. That would be a beneficial paper to introduce in Wales. It gives RSLs the opportunity to get minor adaptations work done and it gives them guidance on how to do it. Rather than an OT going out for a grab-rail or a mopstick rail or lighting, it gives the guidance to fit the adaptations. Again, that would impact on assessment times.

[50] **Janet Ryder:** We have taken evidence that suggested that there should be a system for minor adaptations—perhaps even a self-referral system. Your work supports the argument that it would clear the system even further if that was introduced.

[51] **Mr Baker:** Definitely. Anything that frees up the time of the occupational therapists would benefit the bigger picture: the major adaptations and the fast-track adaptations.

[52] **Jonathan Morgan:** In your evidence, you refer to the adapted exchange programme, which certainly caught my attention. How successful has the scheme been at matching tenants' needs to suitable accommodation and how many people have been helped through this?

[53] **Mr Baker:** The exchange register came about around 18 months to two years ago. It gives tenants another housing option. It is no different from any other exchange register that housing organisations operate, but it is purely for adapted properties. So, someone who agrees to be on that exchange register can contact anyone on it and view properties and so on. So, rather than having to wait on the accessible homes register, if, for example, Mrs Jones wants to swap with Mrs Smith and both properties are matchable and are ideal, the occupational therapists get involved and visit each property. We then get the okay from the OTs because, obviously, that is the benefit of employing them—that they are on call.

[54] On our successes, we have had around 16 cases where we have been successful in exchanging properties. That is not a huge number over two years, but they are 16 cases that would otherwise have remained on the accessible homes register.

[55] **Jonathan Morgan:** Do you think that this scheme could be easily rolled out in other parts of Wales? I suspect that it would be more useful in the more built-up areas of north and south Wales.

[56] **Mr Baker:** Yes, we certainly think that this should be replicated throughout Wales. I will be meeting with other project managers of disabled housing registers in Swansea, Newport and Rhondda Cynon Taf on Thursday to discuss that option.

[57] **Ann Jones:** That is good. Janet has the final question.

[58] **Janet Ryder:** Finally, the inevitable issue with things such as this is funding. You noted in your paper that you might need to address future sustainable funding for Cardiff

Accessible Homes. What are you currently doing to address that?

[59] **Mr Thomas:** It is a self-funded scheme. The housing associations and local authorities make a financial contribution to help make it work. The funding formula was set up five or six years ago, and, in some ways, it is an issue for discussion now because Cardiff has just introduced a common housing register for its general needs stock. We need to look at the contributions that each partner makes to ensure that this scheme works.

[60] As far as Cardiff Accessible Homes is concerned as a project, it costs around £117,000 a year to run. However, the added value that the co-ordination of partnerships and the joining the dots that Rob, as a co-ordinator, provides has demonstrated over many years that this service, in our view, should be continued and that it works. We need to have a discussion on funding with our partners to ensure that the costs are met and that our service delivery is achieved in terms of how it is currently set up.

[61] **Jonathan Morgan:** As a Member who represents a Cardiff constituency, I take a huge degree of interest in this. You mentioned Cardiff County Council coming up with the idea of a common housing register. Have you had any indication from it that it may not wish to continue contributing towards your set-up beyond 2010?

[62] **Mr Thomas:** Not at all. Cardiff council has always said that it is committed to this register and has had recent discussions with us on how it can be better utilised to identify need. I suspect that the issue relates to apportionment of cost because you have different partners who have historically paid a flat rate, but there is only a small number of units. So, this is a matter of us discussing the appropriate contribution to be made. The principle is there and has been supported over many years; we hope that we would continue.

[63] **Janet Ryder:** You obviously have proved that you can cut into the waiting lists and that you can match people to the register. That would seem to be a good way forward, but have you had any signs of interest from counties outside Cardiff, which may look to you as an example of good practice?

[64] **Mr Thomas:** Yes. Rob has acted as an informal consultant on setting up at least one or two other registers. The fact is that the help that the Welsh Assembly Government gave our organisation in the first place, by providing it with the social housing management grant to set it up, was important. It gave it that stability and that opportunity to develop those things. I think that if you are to set up a project of this kind, that is often what is needed. However, after you have the model right and you have done all the bits and pieces and put the partnership together, which is where that sort of funding helps, you can then make it a self-sustaining project.

10.00 a.m.

[65] **Janet Ryder:** So, if the Minister were to look at this, she would not need to run a pilot scheme. I am sure that you would say that the pilot has already been run and proven, yes?

[66] **Mr Thomas:** Yes, in part, but I think that each individual area has its own issues and needs to address as well. I think that you have to bear that in mind. Different relationships need to be formulated and different arrangements need to be sorted out. It could be very different in Cardiff compared with a semi-rural community, for example. That just needs to be borne in mind.

[67] **Ann Jones:** We thank you for the evidence that you have given today, gentlemen. The issues that we have discussed will form a part of our recommendations. We will send you

a copy of the transcript of today's proceedings for you to check for accuracy. You cannot really add anything or take anything out; you can just check it for accuracy. However, if there is anything that you feel that you may want to add, following our lines of questioning, you may write to us on that and we would receive the information gratefully.

[68] We now welcome our next set of witnesses. Thank you for coming in. It is my pleasure to welcome Sioned Hughes, the assistant chief executive of Community Housing Cymru, Kathryn Edwards who is representing the Seren Group, and Andrew Connell who is the Supporting People adviser for Community Housing Cymru. I extend a warm welcome to you all and thank you for your paper, which Members have read. There is a set of questions that we would like to explore with you. Let us move straight to questions, and I will start. In the experience of your members, how satisfactory is the current system of providing home adaptations for tenants?

[69] **Ms Hughes:** From the point of view of our members, there have been changes recently to the physical adaptations grant system, which were much needed and have been well accepted by all members. There is a fast-tracking system for the vast majority of the adaptations needed, which is more streamlined. It seems that our members are very keen and positive about the changes that have been adopted by the Welsh Assembly Government.

[70] **Ann Jones:** So, that is a positive response to the changes that have been made.

[71] **Ms Hughes:** Yes, and positive in that it provides a better service for the tenants, because it is a much faster system. The adaptations are implemented much more quickly, and so we are grasping back the timescales. We were getting a bit longer and then longer again in implementing adaptations with the other system, but now we are back to moving things along quickly.

[72] **Janet Ryder:** On the fast-track system, we have had quite a lot of evidence that a super fast track should be introduced for very minor adaptations, which could be done through self-referral. I am talking about very basic adaptations such as grab rails. What evidence have you had from your members that that might speed the system up even further?

[73] **Ms Hughes:** I will ask Kathryn to answer that question.

[74] **Ms Edwards:** The way in which we deal with those very small adaptations varies between associations. My association does not use physical adaptations grants for the smaller adaptations; we fund them ourselves. Anything below £1,000, we fund directly from our own budgets and install the grab rail or whatever it is. That is because we want to make the adaptation as quickly as possible for the person who is asking for it. It is only when an adaptation costs £1,000 and over that we access PAGs, and that tends to be for level-access showers and stairlifts.

[75] **Janet Ryder:** If that is how you do it, how do you transmit that information to tenants? How do your member associations get across to tenants the various options that they have to get physical adaptations carried out?

[76] **Ms Edwards:** We send a regular newsletter to our tenants, in which we include articles encouraging people to ask us if they need help with adaptations. We have regular contact with many of our tenants through our surveyors and housing officers. In conversations with people, we tell them that if they need help with something, we can help them. It happens through a variety of means. We positively try to advertise the availability of adaptations, and the PAG route as well. We encourage people to ask us if they need help.

[77] **Janet Ryder:** So, all your staff who deal with tenants are aware of the—

[78] **Ms Edwards:** Yes, they are aware of the availability of either a direct route for smaller adaptations or the PAG route for the larger adaptations.

[79] **Jonathan Morgan:** You have mentioned how minor adaptations are dealt with, such as grab rails. For those adaptations that cost below £1,000, how quickly do they take to complete on average?

[80] **Ms Edwards:** Based purely on our own experience, we would do that work in a matter of weeks.

[81] **Jonathan Morgan:** What about those that cost above £1,000 on average?

[82] **Ms Edwards:** That would mean using the PAG route. Initially, we ask for the occupational therapist's assessment. The time varies across local authorities, but a fairly urgent adaptation takes about six to eight weeks. Other associations experience longer waiting periods in other local authority areas, and I think that we are quite lucky to be able to get an assessment in six to eight weeks. However, something that is not given such a high priority can take longer. However, six to eight weeks would be for the assessment, and, as soon as we get the results of that assessment, we will seek quotes for the work, which usually takes four to six weeks, after which we can get the work under way. Usually, within two weeks, we can get the work done. So, it is fairly quick.

[83] **Jonathan Morgan:** You note in your evidence that your members' experience of the disabled facilities grant is generally less positive than their experience of the physical adaptation grant. What is your members' experience of DFGs, and why have you reached that particular conclusion?

[84] **Ms Hughes:** The original consultation on the DFG took place in 2005. Until that point, quite a few of our members were using the DFG and, for some reason, were not aware of the existence of the PAG. There is disparity between the use of the PAG and the DFG. The process requires means testing, the specifications need to be allowed by the local authority, and everything seems to take a lot longer. I accept that some local authorities are very good, but there have been some terrible cases that have been waiting for more than two years for large adaptations.

[85] **Ms Edwards:** In Seren, we host a care and repair agency, and that has experienced waits of around 400 days for a DFG to be processed for one of its clients.

[86] **Ms Hughes:** More recently, and for good reason, possibly, housing associations and some local authorities have been discouraging housing association tenants from accessing the DFG. From a tenant's point of view, we would advocate that as well, because the PAG would give you your adaptation that much quicker.

[87] **Jonathan Morgan:** That is very interesting. In its submission, Cardiff Accessible Homes said that, before it was set up, there were some cases in which adapted properties were let to able-bodied persons, and, in some cases, the adaptations had been removed. What are your members' experiences of that type of situation, and have they had to deal with it regularly?

10.10 a.m.

[88] **Ms Edwards:** We try very hard to match a property that has adaptations to a person who will need them. We set aside our usual prioritisation processes, and we will always look for the person who most needs the property. We very rarely take out adaptations, although we

have occasionally. We are trying to replicate the register in Cardiff in the areas in which we operate, in Newport, so that the system of matching is improved. The timing is often quite difficult, because you might get a property with certain types of adaptations that someone needs, but the timing for moving into the property does not quite suit. However, we could do more work around matching.

[89] **Ms Hughes:** We would certainly advocate that across the sector. There are examples of a more general register working, but a specific register of adapted homes is required, because a lot of effort goes into making adaptations, and taking them out goes against the grain. It is a waste of time.

[90] **Mr Connell:** Having said that, there is a concern in that if a register were to become the only register from which people with disabilities could apply, it would go against all sorts of policies.

[91] **Janet Ryder:** On the new social registered landlords that are being created following stock transfer and the requirement for them to make provisions for the cost of adaptations in their business plans, does that present them with a particular challenge?

[92] **Ms Hughes:** It does present them with challenges, because they have to build it into their business plan and they do not have access to the funding. However, they are made aware of it at the outset when they put the business plan together. The bigger challenge would be where the funding would come from were they not to build it into their business plan. Physical adaptation grants have tripled over the last four years from £2.5 million in 2005-06 to £7.5 million. Stock transfer organisations are probably not very happy that they cannot access WAG funding, but they have been given the remit to put it into their business plans. As I understand, it is a challenge, but it is not the biggest challenge that stock transfer organisations face.

[93] **Ann Jones:** [*Inaudible.*]

[94] **Ms Edwards:** I do not know is the honest answer. However, trying to predict demand would be quite difficult. In our organisation, we accessed more than £400,000-worth of PAGs during last year alone, for 93 adaptations. We also have very large adaptations involving large-scale extensions to properties, which can cost anything from £50,000 to £60,000 and upwards. So, I cannot imagine how they will predict the demand to calculate that.

[95] **Janet Ryder:** They should have taken that into consideration when drawing up the business plan. However, what arrangements are in place within the stock transfer system to ensure that adaptations of all complexity levels are being carried out?

[96] **Ms Hughes:** We would have to come back to you on the detailed processes that individual stock transfer organisations have in place. They would have had to try to foresee it based on the levels that they had when they were local authorities, which would probably be inaccurate given the speed at which DFGs are now coming through, and would not give them the investment needed. So, stock transfer organisations would have had to foresee a higher level of investment than was the case when the stock was local authority owned. However, as for what they are doing to ensure that all levels of adaptations can be made, we would have to go back to get the detail of what they have carried out.

[97] **Janet Ryder:** Have you picked up any evidence from tenants of requests being made that are not being fulfilled purely because of the cost?

[98] **Ms Hughes:** Not in our experience, no.

[99] **Ms Edwards:** The only stock transfer organisation that we have in our area is Monmouthshire Housing Association Ltd, which we work closely with. I know that it has an active programme of adaptation work, as a significant amount of work seems to be going on.

[100] **Mr Connell:** We could look for further information on that and send it to the committee, if that would be helpful.

[101] **Janet Ryder:** May I change the subject slightly, and ask you about occupational therapists and the role that they play in the provision of adaptations in the RSL sector? Are you satisfied that enough use is made of occupational therapists and that they are being employed at a high enough level to enable them to influence how the adaptation grants and the whole system is working within the RSL sector?

[102] **Ms Hughes:** Generally, there are issues. Kathryn, you have a good experience at a local level, do you not?

[103] **Ms Edwards:** Our experience with OTs is quite positive. We have fairly ready access to them and quite a good relationship with them, in which we have invested by getting to know one another. We see in the assessments that they come up with that they are planning for the future for our tenants. When they look at what our tenants will need, they take a long-term view for people. So, the adaptations that go into a property will last that person for a significant period of time. The timescales, in our experience, are quite reasonable, but I am aware that, for associations elsewhere, they are less reasonable, access to OTs is more difficult and there appears to be quite a backlog in some areas.

[104] **Janet Ryder:** Do all RSLs employ OTs?

[105] **Ms Edwards:** We do not employ OTs; we access local authority OTs.

[106] **Ms Hughes:** Newport Housing Trust employed OTs, but I am not sure whether it still does. I think that that was because a high percentage of Newport Housing Trust tenants are older people, so it found that the investment in having an OT, specific to their needs, was a viable business decision. The issue in relation to physical adaptation grant adaptations would be how that cost would be recouped by associations. However, in terms of the relationship with OTs, as part of the initial consultation work in 2006, as housing associations, we sat around a table with the Royal College of Nursing and developed a form that was agreed between OTs and housing association officers. The form was agreed by both parties, so there was no disparity in terms of the information that was gathered, which reduced the inconsistencies across the spectrum, and that was taken on board. There has been positive work with OTs, in which we are in control or able to make some changes, but the whole issue of not having enough OTs on the ground to meet the high demand for their services is one that we must tackle as much as local authorities.

[107] **Joyce Watson:** To move on, I am interested in whether you are aware that tenants are more likely to be charged higher rents as a consequence of having an adaptation to their property?

[108] **Ms Edwards:** I can answer from our experience. We have had issues in the past with the maintenance of adaptations, because the adaptation belongs to the individual. It has been quite expensive for us in that people come to us asking for help when something goes wrong or if it breaks. Strictly speaking, it is not our responsibility, but we have done it. However, that is expensive; we calculated that we spent about £25,000 on repairs to adaptations in one year. Now, with new adaptations, we offer a service contract to the individual—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry; do you want to come in?

[109] **Janet Ryder:** No, please finish.

[110] **Ms Edwards:** We offer a service contract to the individual, which costs £85 a year. The person can opt for that, but they do not have to have that service contract if they do not want it. If they opt for that, we will charge for it as a service charge on top of their rent. If a repair was required, at some point, which cost £90, for example, we would recoup that, over time, on top of the service charge.

[111] **Joyce Watson:** Can we clarify what you are talking about—I think that that is what Janet wanted to know? You are not talking about the physical nature of the adaptation—the bricks and mortar—but about the equipment, such as a stair lift.

[112] **Ms Edwards:** Yes.

[113] **Joyce Watson:** We wanted to be clear about that, because that was a separate—

[114] **Ms Edwards:** I am sorry. In terms of rent, no.

[115] **Ann Jones:** I will bring Janet in first, and then Jonathan.

10.20 a.m.

[116] **Janet Ryder:** May I clarify what we are talking about? Are you talking about equipment that is not attached to the building at all? In other words, a ramp, a grab rail, a stairlift or an accessible shower or bath is, I would say, part of the property, and therefore part of the building that you own.

[117] **Ms Edwards:** I am talking about mechanical equipment, such as a stairlift, which needs regular maintenance to ensure that it is safe to use.

[118] **Janet Ryder:** Do you class that as being the personal property of the tenant?

[119] **Ms Edwards:** Yes.

[120] **Ms Hughes:** That is because the grant is given to the tenant, not to the property.

[121] **Ann Jones:** Jonathan, do you want to come in on this?

[122] **Jonathan Morgan:** Yes, on a point of clarification about the costs. There is obviously a service charge, and you said that, if the cost incurred by yourselves goes above a certain level, then you recoup the money. How do you do that? Is that by billing the individual, or is it put on top of their rent?

[123] **Ms Edwards:** We would phase it over time to make it affordable, and it would be added to the service charge. They would already have a service charge in place for the maintenance contract.

[124] **Jonathan Morgan:** Chair, this is an interesting point. In your experience, Ms Edwards, when a person is given a disabled facilities grant, and—hypothetically—they put a stairlift into a house that they are renting through one of your members, are they made aware that it is their property? Or are they labouring under an assumption that what they have been given belongs to you? Do the authorities tell individuals that these things become their personal property, and therefore that they are responsible for it?

[125] **Ann Jones:** I want to tease that out a bit more. We have heard a lot of evidence that,

before Cardiff Accessible Homes was set up, able-bodied people were moving into adapted houses and that they often removed the adaptations; you referred to that in one of your questions, Jonathan. However, if I have a stair lift in my house, and I decide that I will move somewhere more disabled-friendly, then surely I can take that stair lift out, because it is mine. I could then sell it on the open market. Is that what you are advocating?

[126] **Ms Edwards:** No. Strictly speaking, if someone wanted to take it, they could do so.

[127] **Ms Hughes:** I am not sure that they could sell it.

[128] **Ann Jones:** No—I just thought of that because, where I come from, we have very good car boot sales. [*Laughter.*]

[129] I am interested that we have heard of people waiting to be matched with adapted properties that are suitable for them, but you say that equipment such as stairlifts are not part of the building, but are separate. No wonder there is confusion; perhaps people think that it is theirs, but that they do not want to take a maintenance contract out on it, and therefore it goes unused. That is not the right way, is it?

[130] **Ms Edwards:** That has, historically, been a problem. People were not aware that the equipment was theirs, so when something went wrong with it, they came to us and asked whether we could fix it. We would tell them that it was theirs, but it would turn out that no-one had ever explained that to them. We would do the job then, because it seemed unfair not to, but we are now clear with people—when something like a stairlift goes in, we talk to them about the fact that it belongs to them, but explain that we can help them with a maintenance contract, and we will set that contract up if they want. In fact, 100 per cent of people want that contract—everyone who has been offered that contract has taken it up.

[131] **Ann Jones:** Sorry to keep you waiting, Janet—I just have one more follow-up question.

[132] If that person moves on into residential accommodation, do you pay that person back for the stairlift if you keep it in your property?

[133] **Ms Edwards:** No.

[134] **Ann Jones:** So, if someone gets the benefit of my physical adaptation grant, it does not have go through—

[135] **Ms Edwards:** That is right. Otherwise, if that person needed an adaptation, they would have to go through the grant process themselves and get another grant to do the same thing. We try to make use of the adaptation that is there for the next person that comes along, so that there is no need for a further grant.

[136] **Ms Hughes:** This is a grey area, because some associations recover the cost of maintenance through their own maintenance budgets. It varies hugely across the sector, and it is a grey area. It is as if no-one wants to accept responsibility for that piece of equipment. So, it is a grey area in terms of who owns that equipment, and who has the responsibility for the service and maintenance of it.

[137] **Joyce Watson:** I want to explore further two aspects with regard to the transfer of properties. First, would people on very low incomes who are in receipt of housing benefit be exempt from paying these charges, particularly given that these are charges that many people would not be aware they are likely to incur? Secondly, on housing stock transfers, how would that work out in terms of affecting the tenant? The existing landlord, the council, might have

carried the bill, as you say you have, but the new landlord to whom the stock has been transferred might say that they will not pay it and that it is down to the tenant. How are those issues resolved?

[138] **Ms Edwards:** I can answer the first part of the question about housing benefit. People receive housing benefit for that charge, so they do not have to find it themselves if they are eligible for benefit. With regard to the transfers, we have set up the system that we have—I would hope that all social landlords would think in much the same way—to ensure that the equipment is regularly maintained, to protect the person who has that in their home. We were very worried about the fact that people had these large pieces of mechanical equipment that they use to take them up and down the stairs but that no-one was looking after them, which is quite dangerous. I would hope that all landlords would see it as their responsibility to ensure that that equipment is maintained properly and that they have processes in place to enable that.

[139] **Janet Ryder:** If it is the case that the tenant owns the adaptation, how can you form a common register without written agreement from every tenant that they will pass on ownership of that piece of equipment?

[140] **Mr Connell:** It is fair to say that adaptations are not only things such as stairlifts and so on. They include things such as level access, walk-in showers, adapted kitchens and so on. Those things stay with the property, rather than belonging to the tenant.

[141] **Janet Ryder:** Following your argument, although I accept that those adaptations stay with the property—I would have thought that, in many cases, the stairlift would stay with the property—things such as movable-level benches, as part of kitchen adaptations, would require as much maintenance as a stair lift, so is that the responsibility of the tenant? If the seal on the side door to a bath needs to be replaced, is that the responsibility of the tenant or the landlord?

[142] **Ms Edwards:** We really only set up these contracts for the mechanical equipment. A level-access shower or a bath is just bathroom equipment and, as a landlord, we are responsible for the bathroom equipment, so we would look after it. There are some very clear costs associated with some of the mechanical equipment, which requires annual servicing. There is not an annual service of a bath or a shower, but there is a need for an annual service on equipment such as lifts.

[143] **Janet Ryder:** That being the case, if the nature of the grant was changed to be one that was vested in the property rather than the tenant, how would that affect you as registered social landlords? Would it affect you in any way?

[144] **Ms Edwards:** It would affect us with regard to the responsibility for the maintenance. When you have significant numbers of adaptations, there are significant costs associated with their maintenance, so it would affect us from that perspective. That was the position we were in when we were maintaining the equipment in a very ad hoc way. We were spending around £25,000 a year to do that.

[145] **Janet Ryder:** If the grant changed in that way, would it mean that the landlord, rather than the tenant, would have to apply for the grant?

[146] **Ms Edwards:** Yes.

[147] **Ms Hughes:** That is quite technical. The landlord would have to apply on behalf of the tenant, I assume, because it is for the tenant's needs. It is very specific.

[148] **Ann Jones:** I think that we have come to the end of our questions. That is an area that

I think we will look at in depth. I thank you all for coming this morning to give evidence; you have certainly given us something to think about. We will send you a draft record of these proceedings so that you can check it for accuracy. You offered some advice, so perhaps you could let the clerks have that separately. Thank you.

10.30 a.m.

Cynnig Trefniadol
Procedural Motion

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

the committee resolves to exclude the public from the remainder of the meeting in accordance with Standing Order No. 10.37(vi) to look at the emerging themes of the inquiry and to decide how the committee will consider the Equality Bill.

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

Derbyniwyd y cynnig.
Motion agreed.

Daeth rhan gyhoeddus y cyfarfod i ben am 10.30 a.m.
The public part of the meeting ended at 10.30 a.m.