



Cynulliad  
Cenedlaethol  
Cymru

National  
Assembly for  
Wales

# Cofnod y Trafodion The Record of Proceedings

[Y Pwyllgor Cyfrifon Cyhoeddus](#)

[The Public Accounts Committee](#)

28/11/2016

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

The proceedings are reported in the language in which they were spoken in the committee. In addition, a transcription of the simultaneous interpretation is included. Where contributors have supplied corrections to their evidence, these are noted in the transcript.

**Aelodau'r pwyllgor yn bresennol**  
**Committee members in attendance**

Mohammad Asghar      Ceidwadwyr Cymreig  
[Bywgraffiad](#) | [Biography](#)      Welsh Conservatives

Neil Hamilton              UKIP Cymru  
[Bywgraffiad](#) | [Biography](#)      UKIP Wales

Neil McEvoy                Plaid Cymru  
[Bywgraffiad](#) | [Biography](#)      The Party of Wales

Rhianon Passmore        Llafur  
[Bywgraffiad](#) | [Biography](#)      Labour

Nick Ramsay                Ceidwadwyr Cymreig (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor)  
[Bywgraffiad](#) | [Biography](#)      Welsh Conservatives (Committee Chair)

Lee Waters                 Llafur  
[Bywgraffiad](#) | [Biography](#)      Labour

**Eraill yn bresennol**  
**Others in attendance**

Jean-Francois Dulong      Swyddog Llifogydd a Dŵr, Cymdeithas Llywodraeth  
    Leol Cymru  
    Flood and Water Officer, Welsh Local Government  
    Association

Jeremy Parr                 Pennaeth Rheoli Peryglon Gweithredol a Llifogydd,  
    Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru  
    Head of Flood and Operational Risk Management,  
    Natural Resources Wales

Andy Phillips                Swyddfa Archwilio Cymru  
    Wales Audit Office

Huw Vaughan Thomas      Archwilydd Cyffredinol Cymru  
    Auditor General for Wales

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

Fay Buckle	Clerc Clerk
Richard Johnson	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk
Meriel Singleton	Ail Glerc Second Clerk

*Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 14:00.  
The meeting began at 14:00.*

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

[1] **Nick Ramsay:** Can I welcome members of the committee to this Public Accounts Committee meeting? Headsets are available for translation and sound amplification. Would Members please ensure that phones are on silent? In the event of an emergency, please follow the ushers.

[2] Apologies have been received from Mike Hedges and there is no substitute today. We will be inviting declarations of registrable interests at the beginning of the meeting, but also relevant interests should be declared during the items to which they relate.

**Papurau i'w Nodi  
Papers to Note**

[3] **Nick Ramsay:** Item 2, papers to note. First of all, the minutes from the meeting held on 21 November. Happy to agree the minutes? Then they are taken as accurate.

[4] Following the evidence sessions on health issues on 7 November, the Welsh Government was asked to provide further information about clinical conditions that fall within the red, amber and green response times for ambulance calls, and specifically amber response calls, and also to provide an update on GP out-of-hours coverage by health boards. You should have

the letter in the pack. Are we happy to note that letter on unscheduled care? Yes. It's noted.

[5] In terms of the NHS Wales health boards' governance and the additional information from the Welsh Government and Healthcare Inspectorate Wales, they've written to the committee with an update on progress achieved against the Marks review recommendations. That has been sent to us as a courtesy, for information only. Do Members have any comments on the letter?

[6] **Lee Waters:** I do, Chair. I have two concerns. A number of the recommendations of the Marks review have been rejected, and against the commentary for those, a number of them it is said will be dealt with by forthcoming legislation. But I'm not entirely clear whether that legislation has been timetabled or announced, so it would be useful to get clarification so that we can just keep a watching brief on them, and so that these recommendations are not simply parked.

[7] Secondly, there's a specific recommendation on page 5 of the report, page 14 of our pack, recommendation no. 6, which is about finding the resources to increase the number of inspections that the inspectorate makes of GP practices. It's noted as being 'accepted, subject to other priorities', and the commentary says that,

[8] 'HIW has a responsibility to operate within the budget allocated to it.... The volume of GP inspections undertaken needs to be considered by HIW when it prioritises the way in which this budget is used and the impact on inspection activity elsewhere.'

[9] In layman's terms, 'We'll do it if we can afford it, but it's not much of a priority.' Given that this was a recommendation of the Marks review, the inspection of GP practices is important, and even though it looks like they're accepting it, in practice, they're not really promising to do anything. So, I'm concerned about that position, and I wonder if it's worth us seeking clarification or putting pressure if we think it does merit a better response than that.

[10] **Nick Ramsay:** Would you like to comment, Huw?

[11] **Mr Thomas:** Perhaps one way might be simply to ask HIW to indicate the number of GP inspections they've taken over a period. Then you'd be

able to see exactly how many, and try and work out whether indeed the funding for that was adequate.

[12] **Nick Ramsay:** Are you happy with that course of action—to contact them and ask them for that?

[13] **Lee Waters:** If we think it's robust enough. Do you think that signals to them that we're concerned with the response they've given?

[14] **Mr Thomas:** Well, I assume that's in the context of expressing the wider concerns, but I think that, in terms of following up, that gives you a clue as to how many GP practices are looked at each year, and you can work out how many years it takes to look at Wales.

[15] **Lee Waters:** Okay. I'd be happy with that as an initial action, Chair. Perhaps we can write to the Minister about the intention to bring forward legislation as well, just to be clear what exactly they're planning.

[16] **Nick Ramsay:** Yes. Happy with that? You are quite right: there are a number of rejections in there and in other areas where if, on the face of it, it doesn't look like a rejection, it's not exactly what we thought. So, we can do that. We will write and also let the Minister know what we'll do and seek clarification.

[17] Turning to the scrutiny of accounts 2015–16, and following that scrutiny session of the consolidated accounts, the Permanent Secretary said he would advise the committee of the outcome of the management action relating to the fruitless payment. If you remember, that was for £1.25 million and that concerned the committee greatly. To assist with the drafting of the committee's report, the Permanent Secretary has written advising of the action taken to date, and stated that he'll write again once the outcome of the process has concluded. Are you happy to note that letter from the Permanent Secretary? Good.

14:05

**Cyflogau Uwch–reolwyr: Y Wybodaeth Ddiweddaraf gan Lywodraeth  
Cymru**

**Senior Management Pay: Welsh Government Update**

[18] **Nick Ramsay:** Item 3 is senior management pay and the Welsh

Government update. The previous committee undertook a committee-led inquiry into management pay and reported back in November 2014. The committee considered a progress report from the Welsh Government in November 2015, and recommended that its successor committee receive a further progress report in November 2016. The Welsh Government advise that 17 of the 23 recommendations have been completed; two recommendations are partially complete; work is under way on the three recommendations relating to the development of guidance and training material; and the final outstanding one relating to the higher education sector is forecast to be complete by the end of March 2017. Are we happy to note the update, as work is progressing well on the outstanding recommendations? Shall we leave it at that for now? Happy to do that?

[19] **Lee Waters:** I think there is one section in the letter that raises an alarm bell, towards the end of the second page. It says:

[20] 'Recommendation 23—which asks the Welsh Government to collate information on senior pay across the public sector and publish on its website'.

[21] Sir Derek says:

[22] 'my colleagues have also encountered some continued difficulties in finding the information they seek to collate.'

[23] Which is, I think, Mandarin for foot-dragging.

[24] **Mr Thomas:** I think it's also a reflection of the situation that we find—that it is difficult to do the comparison from one public body to the rest. So, I'm not surprised on that. I understand that the—. Well, Sir Derek talks about the staff commission coming up with a report. I think that probably we ought to, Chair, make sure that we do see that staff commission report at the Public Accounts Committee, because it's obviously looking at exactly the same areas that the PAC had previously made recommendations on.

[25] **Lee Waters:** Agreed.

[26] **Nick Thomas:** Happy if we take that course of action? Yes.

14:07

**Rheoli Perygl Llifogydd ac Erydu Arfordirol yng Nghymru: Sesiwn  
Dystiolaeth 1  
Coastal Flood and Erosion Risk Management in Wales: Evidence  
Session 1**

[27] **Nick Ramsay:** Okay. Item 4 is the coastal flood and erosion risk management in Wales evidence session. We're ahead of time. You've all been very efficient. Do we have our witnesses? They are coming in shortly, so talk amongst yourselves.

[28] Can I welcome our witnesses? Thanks for being with us today. Would you like to state your names and roles for the Record of Proceedings?

[29] **Mr Parr:** Certainly. Jeremy Parr. I'm the head of flood and operational risk management at Natural Resources Wales.

[30] **Mr Dulong.** Good afternoon. Jean-Francois Dulong, flood and water officer for the Welsh Local Government Association.

[31] **Nick Ramsay:** Great. As I say, thank you for being with us. We've got a number of questions for you, so we'll try and be as succinct as possible. Some of the questions might be suitable for both of you, but feel free to answer individually if you think that's more appropriate. Can I start by asking you your view of the overall progress made by the Welsh Government and key stakeholders in delivering coastal flood and erosion priorities in response to the national strategy, and the shift towards more sustainability and a more sustainable risk approach?

[32] **Mr Parr:** Certainly. I'll start. I think it's clearly a big challenge—coastal flood risk and coastal flood risk management. A lot of properties are at risk around the coast. There is a lot of population around the coast of Wales at risk, as the Wales Audit Office report highlights. I think one of the significant things also in the report, and one of the significant things that happened recently was the coastal flooding in 2013–14 that I'm sure everybody remembers. As a result of that flooding, Natural Resources Wales, with all of the partners, looked into what could be done to try and improve the situation. So, there was a report there with 47 recommendations, which I know has been shared with the committee.

[33] As a result of those recommendations, a lot of work is going on to try and improve what can be done to help people. So, there are improvements in



forecasting, improvements in warnings, and a lot of investment is going into defences, but also into raising awareness and working with communities. I think that's one of the important things: it's not just about building and building defences, it's about working with communities to try and help them get prepared for flooding when it happens, because it probably will happen again. So, lots of examples where there has been progress, but clearly a lot of progress to be made as well, and a lot of challenges still into the future. It's a big issue, and it's a big issue that will be there for some time.

[34] **Nick Ramsay:** You mentioned the 2013–14 flooding, did your organisation find that a distraction, or actually do you think it was a necessary stimulus for change?

[35] **Mr Parr:** I think quite a lot of the things that were in the recommendations were areas where we knew there was room for improvement. So I think the flooding happened, the response to the flooding was broadly good—there's a lot of evidence of that in terms of the relatively small number of properties that flooded—but there were widespread impacts all the way across Wales and I wouldn't want to underplay that. I think what it did, Chair, as you said, it did act as a bit of a stimulus to try and focus in on some of the key issues that we need to address, and out of that came those 47 recommendations. But, the bit I would like to say is that those areas were already under continuous improvement, were already areas that we knew broadly, collectively, we needed to do something about.

[36] **Nick Ramsay:** But it gave it an extra urgency.

[37] **Mr Parr:** Yes.

[38] **Nick Ramsay:** The auditor general's report says that to sustain momentum and implement some of the solutions that have been proposed by the work undertaken as part of the—. Well, in terms of the key risks and opportunities to build on this coastal review, what do you see as being the main objectives?

[39] **Mr Parr:** I think the coastal review highlighted six areas, really, of prime focus. I think one of them is, inevitably, around sustained funding and a sustained level of resources, going into the future, because I think, as we've already touched on, it is a long-term issue, it is an issue that is going to be there. The shoreline management plans, for example, talk about the 100-year time frame. I think that's one of the challenges that we've had as

operating organisations: relatively short-term budgets and a relative focus on capital funding, rather than revenue funding, and we need both. And we need both over the medium and longer term. And I think, again, the Wales Audit Office report focuses on that.

[40] **Mr Dulong:** I think, if I may, as well, from a local authority perspective, flood-risk management isn't always seen as a—it has to compete against core services, like social and education. It's really difficult. I think the flood event of 2013–14 has put flood-risk management quite high up the agenda with all local authorities. So, we've seen progress as well from a local authority perspective. As Jeremy said, I think the way the funding is allocated, the revenue funding, doesn't allow for that long-term resilience that's needed to tackle flood-risk management.

[41] **Nick Ramsay:** In terms of flooding, the capital budget is of particular importance, isn't it? You mentioned the revenue funding, but—

[42] **Mr Parr:** Well, the capital budget funds the capital investment around defences, but it's important that those defences are maintained, for example, and the maintenance money typically comes from the revenue budget. And all of the other activities in terms of forecasting, warning and raising flood awareness, a lot of those—well, all of those—are revenue funded. So I think we're as concerned about revenue funding as capital funding.

[43] **Mr Dulong:** And I think also the revenue funding enables those officers on the ground to develop the schemes; if we haven't got the officers on the ground, then it's quite limited in terms of the amount of work that can be done in delivering the capital programme.

[44] **Mr Parr:** And just to add really quickly, I think quite a lot of the work on understanding flood risk and where it's going to flood, and the mapping and modelling and information that is available on our website, for example—all of those sorts of things are revenue-funded activities.

[45] **Nick Ramsay:** Okay. Turning to your 2017–18 national strategy, are there any key actions that need to be progressed that are not captured within the coastal review plan?

[46] **Mr Parr:** The national strategy is Welsh Government's national strategy, not ours. We clearly play a key part in it. It is going to be refreshed in 2017–18. We do work, clearly, closely with Welsh Government. I think the

areas in the coastal review, some of those areas are areas that we are working with Welsh Government on and want to continue working on

14:15

[47] So, I mentioned the funding, but not just funding—I think one of the other key recommendations was around having good information about assets, you know where they are and what condition they're in. We've done a lot of good work with the Welsh Local Government Association and local authorities, and Network Rail as well, to get standardised ways of looking at assets and the condition of assets and trying to work towards a common asset database. It's something that is easily said but quite hard to do, if you can imagine the different organisations that are involved, but we're making good progress in that regard. So, that's an example of one of the things that we would hope to see again in the Welsh Government's national strategy when it's republished in—

[48] **Nick Ramsay:** Are you happy with the strategy? What changes would you like to make to it? How closely have the Welsh Government consulted with you?

[49] **Mr Parr:** We work closely with them but, ultimately, it's the Welsh Government's strategy and it's their policy. I think there are some areas where there are particular challenges, talking about the coast and managed realignment. Some of the challenges, again in the audit office report, are in terms of policy there, which again is Welsh Government's lead, and the issues around the funding of that as well. So, I think the answer to that is: we work closely with the Welsh Government and I think there's always room for improvement. Those areas have been highlighted in the report that we co-ordinated with all our partners—47 recommendations of various things that still need looking at and will need looking at for some time.

[50] **Nick Ramsay:** Any particular changes that you would like to see?

[51] **Mr Parr:** I think there's a nice balance in the strategy between capital investment and the need for flood-awareness work and other work to manage risk. I think it's more rather than changes. I think it's more on developing a strategy and turning that into reality—you know, what's going to happen in some of these places across Wales?

[52] **Mr Dulong:** I think it's more about keeping the objectives realistic in

terms of what can be delivered at a local level. National strategy objectives are set out within local strategies and local flood-risk management plans, so I think Welsh Government needs to work closely with us to ensure that whatever objectives and policies it sets out in its strategies can be delivered. I think it would be for the benefit of us all in Wales.

[53] **Nick Ramsay:** Great, thanks.

[54] **Mr Dulong:** Sorry, just one last point on that. There is a key—I think one of the biggest one now is to ensure that communities are becoming more resilient. Over the last few years, we've suffered quite a lot of cuts and the amount of work that can be delivered on the ground is difficult, so there is a need for communities to become a bit more resilient. There is an objective in the strategy to have a stronger and more resilient Wales and to increase community awareness. I think that's something that we strongly encourage to be a key objective again in the review of the strategy.

[55] **Nick Ramsay:** Okay. The next question is from Mohammad Asghar.

[56] **Mohammad Asghar:** Thank you very much, Chair, and thank you very much, gentlemen. I was listening to you regarding a few points—you said about funding and 100 years' planning and all the rest of it. The Welsh Government has provided a broad description of the role and responsibilities of organisations responsible for managing the risk of coastal flooding and erosion. Looking at the auditor general's report, there's some areas where some partners are still unclear about some areas of responsibilities, including the distinction between responsibility for flooding and erosion. What do you say about that?

[57] **Mr Parr:** We're just sorting out who's going to answer the question first.

[58] **Mohammad Asghar:** Go on—throw a coin up.

[59] **Mr Parr:** There are many different organisations involved, principally Natural Resources Wales and local authorities. Some of the roles and responsibilities are to do with the history of the legislation and when the legislation came in. One of the recent pieces of legislation, the Flood and Water Management Act 2010, actually gave powers to both organisations to allow other organisations to carry out work on their behalf. This was an issue that was picked up in the coastal review. I'm trying to make the distinction

between the coastal review after the 2013–14 floods and the Wales Audit Office report. It was picked up both in that coastal review work and in the Wales Audit Office report. We've had conversations, and, again, there was a recommendation to this end; we had discussions with all of the parties. I think, generally, the parties involved themselves understand the relative roles and responsibilities. Some of it, as I say, is a result of the legislation, and some of it is a result of asset ownership. And it's not just an issue on the coast, it's an issue for all defences, all assets and all the structures throughout Wales. So, NRW, for example: we have permissive powers to undertake certain works for flooding purposes, both coastal and inland, but they're permissive powers. We don't have a duty to do something everywhere. So, quite a lot of the responsibility is with the asset owner, which means, around the coast of Wales, where it's about a third of the assets owned by NRW, a third by local authorities, and a third generally by the private sector, they have responsibilities to maintain the assets, look at the assets and make sure that they are in good condition. The good bit of it, though, is that we work very closely together. We've already indicated how we work closely with local authorities, both on a national basis, with the WLGA, and on a local basis, with each individual local authority. We also work closely with other organisations that own quite a lot of the assets. Network Rail, as already mentioned, owns a lot of the assets around the whole of Wales.

[60] So, it's true that there are different roles and responsibilities, but, as I say, some of that is out of asset ownership, some of it is out of legislation. In practical terms, we know those issues and we work together collectively to try and address those issues. But it is important that everybody does what's required because if you take a stretch of coast, then you can have three or four different organisations that own assets along that coast. On the Dee estuary, for example, in north Wales, there are several different owners of assets along that bit of coastline. So, it is important that we work closely together, and we do.

[61] **Mr Dulong:** I think, as part of the coastal review, there was a report published by NRW, looking at roles and responsibility. I think, for the partners, local authorities and Natural Resources Wales, they didn't feel there was a need to review any of the current flood-risk responsibility or to add any more policies in this area. I think everybody agreed that the arrangement on the ground worked fine and, as Jeremy said, I think the roles and responsibilities issue lay around assets. But also there are some areas, for example if you take Newport, where you're going to have a coastal asset

going across three or four different land ownerships. Some of these assets are historic, with no record of who owned them, and I think that's where it becomes a bit unclear. This is sometimes where we perhaps could do with a bit more guidance on who should take ownership of these orphaned assets.

[62] **Mohammad Asghar:** The thing is, after listening to you just now I'm more concerned about flood defences in Wales, because two thirds of this nation is virtually covered by flood-risk areas, and there's climate change and all the rest of it. It's not helpful that the forecast is that we shouldn't be prudent and covering—. From listening to you, you're telling us that they're different organisations, a different area, different asset managers and different people. So, at the end of the day, if something happens, where is the blame going to go? Is there any understanding or responsibility between the Government and the organisation, you know, with that sort of thing? You've got to be clear on that. Whose responsibility is it when there's a flood, and who's going to be there to protect people from the flood?

[63] **Mr Parr:** In response, I think, partly, you're right to be concerned around flooding in Wales because it is a serious risk now and in the future. But to try and reassure you, I think we've tried to say that different organisations do work closely together. There is clear understanding of who owns which asset. Jean-Francois was talking about examples where, sometimes, the asset ownership in private hands might not be exactly clear, but I think that's the exception rather than the rule. The fact of the matter is there are different organisations involved, which is why it's important that we do exercise, for example, together in terms of responses to flooding. It's why it's important we work through the local resilience forum in terms of planning for flooding and responding to flooding. Because as well as ourselves, the emergency services, for example, are clearly involved—the police and fire and rescue services—during times of flooding. So, there are different organisations, and I think that's a reflection on the sort of totality of the impacts of flood. It's not just a technical holding back water issue. There are land ownership issues associated with it, asset ownership issues, communication issues—

[64] **Nick Ramsay:** That's the key to this area, isn't it? It's not just the Welsh Government saying, 'Whatever—bring forward the strategies', but those local organisations, if they're not co-ordinated, if they're not actually implementing any of this, then it's not going to happen. The auditor general's report picked up that there was a lack of targets from the Welsh Government in this area. So, are you confident? Are you happy with the

performance of those local organisations there at the cutting edge to make sure that they are actually working together, and along with the emergency services where necessary?

[65] **Mr Parr:** I think generally it happens and it happens well, but, again, I would say clearly there's room for improvement and clearly there's a lot more that needs to happen. One of the duties on Natural Resources Wales is to report on the progress of the national strategy—it's one of the legislative duties. The last report in 2014 I think highlighted some areas where progress perhaps hasn't been as rapid as desired, and I think, again, the Wales Audit Office report highlighted the same thing. But it also comes back to, in part, the capacity, and the capacity to advance all of these things at the pace that may be required, and then a link back into funding. If you look at the Wales Audit Office report, it talks about funding being relatively flatlined in real terms over the last few years, but we've got more assets and we've got more that needs to happen.

[66] The summary that I would give of it is that we are experienced professionals who work together and are used to working together. There is room for improvement. We recognise that—we recognise that, again, in the recommendations, and some of that, as you're saying, should be reflected in the national strategy and hopefully will be when it's refreshed next year.

[67] **Mr Dulong:** I think that's one of the areas Welsh Government was looking to review in the strategy next year—trying to clarify some of the roles and responsibilities. We're not sure yet how they're going to go about it, but I think there's going to be ongoing discussion. Just to reinforce Jeremy's message, on the ground we set up some regional groups, so we've got three regional groups working across Wales, where we've got local authorities, Natural Resources Wales and Network Rail and some of the water companies as part of that. We share good practice within these groups. If there are issues, local or regional issues, they are picked up through these groups and then we can implement on the ground after and make the necessary changes to have a more cohesive response.

[68] **Mohammad Asghar:** The thing is, finally, whether NRW is itself clear on how its role in monitoring the progress of the national strategy fits alongside the role and responsibility of Welsh Government's flood and erosion team.

[69] **Mr Parr:** Again, that was one of the recommendations in the Wales Audit Office report. I think it's partly borne out of the legislation. There is a

requirement for us, under the Flood and Water Management Act, to report on progress against the national strategy, and so, if that's going to change, then the legislation needs to be looked at.

[70] I think the point was in the context of, 'Is it right that Natural Resources Wales reports on its own activities?' I think the response that we give to that is that the report is a factual report. The report is statements of fact about what's happened, and that can be used against the objectives of the national strategy to come to judgments. So, we're not making judgments around our performance, we're reporting facts around the performance. But I do accept that, clearly, we are an operating authority and, clearly, we have our own roles and responsibilities. I think the response from Welsh Government to this point, when they gave some written evidence, was that perhaps there is a role for the new committee, the new flood and coastal erosion committee that is being formulated, in terms of that independent reporting of progress against the national strategy. But I go back to the original point: the reason why we do it is because we are required to because of the legislation.

[71] **Nick Ramsay:** Thanks. Lee Waters.

[72] **Lee Waters:** Thank you. I'd like to ask about those communities that face an existential threat from rising sea levels. Clearly, there's a consensus that, over time, many of those communities will become unsustainable. I just want to understand whether or not your organisations feel the Welsh Government is clear about what's expected of you in managing and dealing with those communities affected.

[73] **Mr Dulong:** It's a tricky question. I think the Wales Audit Office report recommended, perhaps, a review of the national policy, or something like that, to set out what we do with these communities at risk. We've got some examples—we've got little examples around the UK or around the world of what's happening to these communities. It's a lot off and on, because we're looking at 50 or 100 years down the line, so we've started working around—Gwynedd, I think, is a good example of where they started getting really involved with the Fairbourne community there. There are obviously some really big, challenges in place, not only looking at the flood-risk management, but it's all the socioeconomic factors that are associated with this community.

14:30



[74] In terms of responses of what we do with these communities and when will be the trigger to stop investment, for the moment, we could do with some guidance from Welsh Government, rather than prescriptive policies. I understand they're still not really sure of what they're doing. They're still investing, and NRW has received some funding to do some further work in Fairbourne. So, you know, we haven't made any decisions as of yet.

[75] **Lee Waters:** So, do you have any guidance you're working towards?

[76] **Mr Dulong:** We haven't got any guidance. I think Welsh Government has commissioned a piece of work with Gwynedd Council to write up a case study on that. Also, through the coastal risk management programme, they've funded a project in Newton in Bridgend; a case study, again, looking at particular communities and what will be the trigger or when that community's defences should stop to be repaired. I think there's some research also being funded in Newgale in Pembrokeshire, which is more of an infrastructure and highways issue. So, there is research being carried out, and I think obviously these three big case studies should help us and Welsh Government develop guidance in the future to help us ascertain the best way to deal with these communities.

[77] **Lee Waters:** Did you have anything to add?

[78] **Mr Parr:** I think there's a need for national policy and national direction, and also local decision making and local empowerment about what needs to happen. That's the point that Welsh Government make in some of their responses; that there needs to be that combination. So, I think, as Jean-Francois said, in places like Fairbourne, which are going through this right now, quite a lot of the spark for that was the community and the local authority. Fair credit to Gwynedd as a local authority; they haven't ducked the issue at all. They've been in there and they've been discussing it and they've been negotiating it.

[79] There is a strategic context around the shoreline management plans, which give that indication, but there are challenges with that. They're not statutory documents, so I think some people interpret, 'Well, what's their status then? What do they mean?' But what they are are a collective body of people who have looked at the issue—from local authority, from Welsh Government, from ourselves, and from various parties—to say this is the

direction of travel. I think part of the challenge with them is that, because they're set out in time frames, people think if it's 'hold the line'—to use the jargon—or if it's 'do nothing in the first epoch'—again, to use the jargon—people think, 'Well that's it for 20 years'. It isn't; this is all based on projections. It's not safe for 20 years and then on the first day of the twenty-first year it's going to change suddenly—it is a trajectory. That's why it's really important that all of us engage in that. If it's going to happen—and all the signs suggest that it is going to happen at some point—that we invest the time now working out what we need to do about it. Because some of these issues are really difficult and really complicated, clearly.

[80] Again, I would make the point that they're wider than flood-risk management. They're around communities; they're around house prices; they're around buy to let; they're around mortgage; they're around insurance; and they're around health and well-being, and all sorts of different issues. That, again, makes me think around Welsh Government's policy and legislation around well-being of future generations. Here's a really good example of something that is a real conundrum, and a real sustainability and well-being of future generations issue, and it needs all of the parties to get together and work out what needs to be done. We play our part, and technical people in local authorities play their part, but the point I want to make is it is much broader than that.

[81] **Lee Waters:** So, just so I'm clear, it was 2009 when the Wales Audit Office first recommended a national strategy on managed retreat. The Welsh Government accepted that, but from your evidence all that's been put in place since then are some case studies. There's been some research commissioned, I hear mention of a toolkit, but no actual guidance or clear direction for those on the ground to engage with communities.

[82] **Mr Dulong:** I think it's probably because since 2009 the SMPs have been reviewed, and they were only signed off last year by the Minister. We couldn't put anything in place until the new SMPs were signed off. So, I think since then they received the finances for the case studies, and they've been looking at developing that toolkit. Welsh Government, as part of the coastal review and the review of the coastal groups—which are the local authorities and NRW—they take forward the SMPs as part of the review. I've recommended that the coastal group should develop a toolkit to help with the managed realignment and to help the communities and organisations dealing with the managed realignment—

[83] **Lee Waters:** But toolkits and case studies do not amount to a strategy, do they?

[84] **Mr Dulong:** No, they don't.

[85] **Lee Waters:** Are we anywhere closer to getting a strategy, as far as you're aware?

[86] **Mr Dulong:** No.

[87] **Mr Parr:** I think it's difficult to use the term 'strategy', because each of the examples around the coast of Wales will be slightly different. But there is a need for guidance and, ultimately, a strategy around what the approaches will be. I think Welsh Government are putting quite a lot of emphasis on the example that is happening in Fairbourne and the research, which includes looking at buy-to-let and purchase of properties.

[88] **Lee Waters:** There is some international evidence cited in the audit report from America in the wake of Hurricane Sandy in 2012, where, if a house was damaged by more than 50 per cent of its value, then 100 per cent compensation would be given to the property owner. Is any work going on on anything similar for Wales?

[89] **Mr Parr:** I think that's largely a question for the officials at Welsh Government. I'm not aware of any work that's going on, but there is an element of research that is undertaken in the Fairbourne study around properties and potential buying of properties, as I understand it. But again, it's for Welsh Government.

[90] **Mr Dulong:** There is no statutory requirement, if you look around. There is no statutory requirement for the Welsh Government or local authorities to pay for these properties or to do compulsory purchase or any of these things. So, I think there's another problem there, and it's just how do we—. Jeremy mentioned the buy-to-let. I think this has been looked at locally between the local authorities and the community members, and then they invited some companies to see whether there were any options of financing for these properties, but there's no legal requirement for local authorities or Welsh Government—

[91] **Lee Waters:** It's quite clear from your evidence and from the report that this is a very difficult issue. There are no glib answers to this. But it does

seem from what you've described there's an air of paralysis in this area from the Welsh Government. You've described a number of times the absence of guidance. You don't want it to be too prescriptive, clearly, because communities differ, but some lead is necessary. You're not getting it, and this seems to have been put in the 'too difficult to deal with' box. Would that be a fair summary?

[92] **Mr Parr:** I'd agree that it's a difficult area, for various reasons. I think the number of parties that are involved, the nature of the issue—it would benefit from clearer guidance, but again, I think Welsh Government would say that I'm not here to speak for Welsh Government. I think they would say they're working on it through the Fairbourne project and through the research that they've commissioned there, for example.

[93] **Lee Waters:** My final question: do you think there's a sufficient degree of urgency on all the partners to deal with this?

[94] **Mr Parr:** I think in places like Fairbourne there's a degree of urgency, and I think there are other locations around Wales now, perhaps not so pointed as Fairbourne—but Jean-Francois mentioned Newgale in terms of another location; not such a big community at risk in terms of population, but a main road to the west of Wales. So, I think what's happening is that, through these particular examples, that degree of urgency is gathering pace.

[95] **Lee Waters:** That's a reactive response, isn't it?

[96] **Mr Parr:** It's a response to the shoreline management plans and what the shoreline management plans say will happen over a time period. Your question makes me think that all of it is a reaction to what is happening. It's the pace at which we react. I think a really key thing here is that we react before the event, so, before very serious things need to happen, we have a plan. In Fairbourne they're working hard to have a master plan of what those trigger points will be, and I think that's really important. If x happens, then y is the response.

[97] **Lee Waters:** Okay.

[98] **Nick Ramsay:** Okay, we've got lots of interest. I'm just going to bring some other people in and then you can answer at your leisure. We've got the Neils—so, Neil McEvoy first.

[99] **Neil McEvoy:** I'm actually hard of hearing, which people may not know. Can you just repeat what there's no strategy for? You said there's no strategy for—

[100] **Mr Dulong:** For the managed realignment policies within the shoreline management plans.

[101] **Neil McEvoy:** Okay. In terms of my questions: NRW, are you there to prevent flooding in a proactive way?

[102] **Mr Parr:** I think that to prevent flooding is impossible. You can never prevent all flooding. Our role is to minimise the risk as best we can, because—

[103] **Neil McEvoy:** In essence, then, I would say, if you try to minimise the risk, then I suppose in layman's terms, that is trying to prevent flooding. What input have you had inland, now, in local development plans?

[104] **Mr Parr:** We do a lot of work across all local authorities and all locations. So, I appreciate today is about the coastal flooding, but there are as many, if not, I think, slightly more properties in Wales that are at risk from inland flooding. So, we work with local authorities in a similar way to manage risk. We work with planning departments, we advise on local development plans, we advise on planning applications, we work hard to work with the planning community.

[105] **Neil McEvoy:** My questions are all about inland flooding, really, because in the area that I represent, if you look at the flood maps, what is going to happen is that the sponges between the rivers will be built upon, and I've not heard you guys raise any objection to that.

[106] **Mr Parr:** Well, to be fair, it's only now that you've asked questions around that issue. So, on that issue, we provide advice to local authorities. It's local authorities who make the decisions on planning; we don't make the decisions. So, we provide advice—we provide advice on flood consequence and when it's required; flood-consequence assessments are required from developers. We don't want to see development on floodplains. It's not a sensible thing to do. But there are things that you can do, given the pressures that local authorities are under for housing and for development—there are things that you can do to start to reduce the risk. You can hold water back—

[107] **Nick Ramsay:** Sorry to interrupt, Neil. I'm going to bring you back in on this later, if that's okay, because we've kind of gone off a bit on a tangent, because there was a line of supplementary questions there.

[108] **Neil McEvoy:** Yes; sorry.

[109] **Nick Ramsay:** That's okay. Neil.

[110] **Neil Hamilton:** I represent quite a large proportion of the coastline of Wales, including Fairbourne, and this is a very serious problem for a lot of people. Lee, I think, used the correct word in one of his questions earlier on in relation to the strategy for the future to help these people—that we seem to be in a state of paralysis. People's homes are unsaleable and therefore they're imprisoned in the dwellings that they're in, and it's wrecked people's plans for their future. And I appreciate there are massive potential resource implications in any compensation scheme that might be brought in, but we can't forever keep pushing this into the 'too difficult' box and leave it for a new generation to solve. So, I'm trying to get some idea as to, in Fairbourne's case in particular, although there are other smaller areas that are at risk as well, for different reasons—I'm thinking of Tremadog, for example, which is a problem because of flooding from a river, rather than inundation from the sea—but there doesn't seem to be any time frame that has presently been adopted or even thought about within broad parameters. What is the timescale that we might reasonably expect some long-term solution or decision to be taken? I appreciate you've been talking about 100-year time frames for the whole issue, and I fully understand that, but for the problems that are afflicting people in their daily lives now, we need to have a much more urgent response than that.

[111] **Mr Parr:** I agree on the need for an urgent response, and I agree on the need for strategy. I think what we've spelled out is that places like Fairbourne are trying to get to grips with these things, and they are quite complicated, multi-faceted issues. I think that therefore means that there is no zero-cost option here; there is no obvious thing to do. These are complicated issues. But, I am not saying that's the same as a 'too difficult' box and parking it. I think, again, credit to the people—everybody involved in Fairbourne. There's a lot of time and effort going into trying to resolve these issues in Fairbourne. And we talk about Fairbourne a lot because it's the most active example, if you like. But, as well as that effort in Fairbourne, day in, day out, things are happening to try to manage this risk. We provide advice to local

planning authorities around where to develop and where not to develop. We try to develop flood-risk management schemes that create space for water—that allow space for water in appropriate circumstances.

14:45

[112] We work hard on raising forecasting ability and warning ability, should the worst happen, and we work hard trying to work with communities around raising flood awareness. I think the very fact that this hasn't happened yet shows how difficult it is and, again, that's not an excuse for putting it in the 'too difficult' box. If anything, that should be a sort of prod to everybody to say, 'Right, we've got to progress this'. I think in Fairbourne they're doing that, and I think we have to, to a degree, allow that to play through and allow the master plan to be published and allow the research to come out. But I think there's an important point there—you know, as several Members have said, it's not just Fairbourne, it's not just one location; there are many locations across the whole of Wales. We, as Natural Resources Wales, spend a lot of time and effort in places like Fairbourne, in the meetings and talking about these very issues alongside all parties.

[113] **Mr Dulong:** And I think the other issue—sorry, if I may—is the—. None of us as practitioners perhaps have the skills to deal with these kinds of socioeconomic issues. Most of the practitioners on the ground are civil engineers, and they don't have the social skill; they don't know how to deal with the policy. So, it's bringing in—. We've got to train up people to be able to speak to the community. I think the big lesson learned—and we mentioned again Fairbourne—is around communication, and communication on the risk and to the public. That's perhaps something that wasn't done very well with the first round of shoreline management plans, and I think Fairbourne was a backlash of that. But I think we've learned a lot about that now, and local authorities and NRW staff are discussing with communities a lot earlier in some of these issues. The thing for us that's important as well is that we need to carry on investing in monitoring and understanding how the coastal processes are working on the coast for the moment. I think that we would encourage the Welsh Government to invest in some long-term monitoring around the coast to be able to challenge these policies.

[114] **Nick Ramsay:** A number of Members have now described this as paralysis. You haven't refuted that or dismissed that. Is it too strong a word or are we really facing that level of problem in dealing with this?

[115] **Mr Parr:** I don't think it's paralysis, and we've given you some examples of why it's not paralysis because of the things that are happening in Fairbourne and in other locations. That's not the same as to say it's difficult, and a lot of effort needs to go into this and we need to move it forward. But I wouldn't describe it as paralysis.

[116] **Nick Ramsay:** Rhianon Passmore has got a question that she urgently needs to ask.

[117] **Rhianon Passmore:** Very briefly. I'm struggling to grasp this nuance between paralysis and the fact that we're waiting for guidance. Now, we have a national strategy, and there's a review. We also have the coastal delivery plan, and we also have—and let me get it right—the new flood and coastal erosion committee. So, there seems to be a plethora of different delivery plans and strategies and reviews of strategies. What is it that you're actually looking for in terms of your guidance? There's been an underscoring of a need for separations of roles and responsibilities. So, what is the magic bullet that's going to enable you now to be able to plan better and disseminate the work that you do differently but jointly together—more optimally.

[118] **Mr Dulong:** I think, for us it would be, again, a Welsh Government commitment to perhaps fund this kind of research that we are doing in some of the areas in the long term. For the moment, I think, we go back to the funding again, but we don't seem to get the long-term commitment from the Welsh Government to our local authorities and perhaps to NRW to provide the resources necessary to—

[119] **Rhianon Passmore:** So, it's not about roles and responsibilities then.

[120] **Mr Dulong:** No, the roles and responsibilities are clear.

[121] **Rhianon Passmore:** They're clear. You both have very good joint, clear—in my view—roles and responsibilities around this, and I know there's an argument that that can be strengthened, but NRW, as a majorly funded body, has a clear responsibility around this, as does the WLGA. So, to my mind, there shouldn't be any issue around that. So, what you're saying is that you're looking for a long-term commitment to funding. Okay? Yes? Is that right?

[122] **Mr Dulong:** And a priority from the Welsh Government.



[123] **Rhianon Passmore:** Yes, okay. Thank you. That leads me nicely on to my next question.

[124] **Mr Parr:** Are we stopping there now?

[125] **Nick Ramsay:** Oscar.

[126] **Mohammad Asghar:** Thank you very much, Chair. I know that flood is creating—

[127] **Nick Ramsay:** Hang on; we're still on this point.

[128] **Mohammad Asghar:** I know that flood is creating misery for many of my constituents in south-east Wales—that's for sure. A lot of agencies are blaming each other, whether that is a local council, Welsh Water or NRW. The Welsh Government policy on a centralised approach on flooding has failed. There are no two ways about it. We need to be looking more broadly at solutions from other jurisdictions, such as that from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, recently announced in England, which provides a new approach to flood management, for the Welsh Government to consider, through empowering local communities to be a part of a broader multi-agency approach to a co-ordinated national flood management strategy. What do you think about that?

[129] **Mr Dulong:** I think for us it's key. The wording of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 puts a duty on public sector organisations to integrate and collaborate better with the communities, so I think it's part of day-to-day working from local authorities and Natural Resources Wales. If we take the example of developing capital schemes, local authorities will consult locally with communities and offer options, so the community is getting a stronger voice. Again, I come back to the case of Fairbourne, where it's been a hard lesson learnt for us of not engaging and communicating with communities early enough. I think we've learnt a lot from that and we've seen some really good progress in this area.

[130] **Nick Ramsay:** And on that point, Rhianon Passmore.

[131] **Rhianon Passmore:** Thank you. There are political voices, as you're very well aware—I'm not asking you to comment—that deny that we have climate change and deny that we have flooding issues, and I think you've put

that to bed again here today. In terms of the commitment from Welsh Government to maintain investment around flood and coastal erosion risk management, that has clearly been met, as it states in here, and also around the council schemes in terms of meeting all of those coastal protection grants so far, to date, that councils have applied for, and that's no mean feat. My question is centred really around the prioritisation framework as we move forward and as coastal erosion continues to bite and continues to get worse across Wales and the UK. What sort of prioritisation programme is there around the allocation of coastal protection grants, bearing in mind that this is going to be an endemic theme moving forward?

[132] **Mr Parr:** As risk-management authorities we all work on a risk basis, so, within Natural Resources Wales for example, we have an understanding of risk across the whole of Wales and we prioritise that. There is something that is referred to in the reports as the communities at risk register, which is a prioritisation of flood risk, and it's prioritised on the basis of risk to life because that's what Welsh Government requires us to do. We use that as a tool to target where the investment goes. It doesn't mean all the investment goes to No. 1. It means that we look at what the risk is there and what interventions can take place to manage it. So, it's not all about building defences, as we've talked about; there are other things that can happen at the same time.

[133] **Rhianon Passmore:** So, you would say you do have a prioritisation framework and that's fit for purpose.

[134] **Mr Parr:** We do within Natural Resources Wales. I think what's being worked on at the moment is using that same sort of methodology on a Wales-wide basis for all of the risk-management authorities, which means really ourselves and local authorities, because it's Welsh Government who control the budget and allocate the budgets between ourselves and local authorities. So, what we're working towards is having one risk register and using that as the main tool for prioritisation of where the investment goes. But I stress again: it doesn't mean 100 per cent of the investment goes to No. 1 on the list—it may be not right to do that, it might not be the right timing. So, it acts as a tool to say, 'Those are where the risks are, and what do we do to manage them?'

[135] **Rhianon Passmore:** So, the WLGA's position on that would be that you're part of that and that would be the optimum model.

[136] **Mr Dulong:** We support that. It's work in progress. I think we raised again the point that local priorities sometimes don't compare to national priorities in terms of the communities-at-risk register. We stressed the need for all local politicians to be part of the decision making. On top of that we set up a consortium of public and academia bodies to develop over the next two years a mapping exercise of the highest risk areas around the coast in terms of coastal erosion. Again, that's some kind of recommendation that will be input into the capital programme to help with having a more risk-based approach to the programme. We do see that progress has been made to date.

[137] **Rhianon Passmore:** In terms of long-term funding and the holy grail, looking forward—as we know, we can predict a £60 billion black hole now around Brexit moving forward and bearing in mind some of the moneys that we've got from European funding—your long-term funding, moving forward is a key theme from your evidence to date. Have you a comment—and it's a difficult question in terms of how Welsh Government can better prepare and plan for these 100-year cycles, especially in this field—have you any comment on how they can better prepare organisations dealing with this mandate?

[138] **Mr Parr:** We have talked about it a few times because, clearly, it's a key issue. I think what we would like is longer term funding, and longer term funding doesn't mean two or three years; longer term funding means a picture for the next five, 10 years and potentially beyond that. Clearly, in the realms of political terms of office, that's quite difficult, but it is possible to a degree. In England, there was an agreement between DEFRA and the Environment Agency for a seven-year time period, I think it was, for a period of investment over that time period. So, you know, it is possible.

[139] We're not asking for this because of some sort of desire or whim. It's there is every report—the efficiencies that you can get by having longer term investment and the need for long-term investment. Again, the Wales Audit Office report talks about a figure of £20 million to £30 million required year on year around the coast. The Flood Risk Management Wales Committee, which was an advisory committee, came up with a figure of £60 million capital money which is required year on year. The numbers are fairly substantial. Why do we need that longer term? Because it is a long-term issue and because projects take a long time to develop from initiation all the way through to construction. These are not things that you can pull off the shelf and just deliver. The shovel needs to be ready to be shovel ready. It

needs working up over a period of time.

[140] **Rhianon Passmore:** Okay. And finally for me then, in terms of the emphasis now placed on the 25 per cent proportionality from local authorities in terms of access to grants, how well placed do you feel local authorities are at being able to utilise their budgets at this time and move forward, in a time of so-called austerity, to be able to effectively use that programme, using that 25 per cent additionality?

[141] **Mr Dulong:** It is challenging and, again, as I said earlier, flood-risk management has got to compete against core services as well. So, it's up to local priorities again, and we come back to the risk-based approach, depending on higher risk locally. I think, if I take, for example, the coastal risk management programme, where local authorities have replied, I think that about 42 schemes that have been put forward, so ensuring the commitment from local authorities to invest and to bring that 25 per cent capital. But it is challenging, and I think, again, I come back to the long-term investment. For us, 12 months is not sufficient to be able to find that 25 per cent, and we don't have the capacity, when a local authority is working with two officers to develop the scheme within a 12-month period. So, the longer—

[142] **Nick Ramsay:** It seems to me that you've got enough trouble with the short term and the medium term. When you start talking about 100 years down the line, I don't think I'm alone in feeling a bit concerned that that really is going to be a challenge.

[143] **Mr Dulong:** I think, again, it needs stressing here that the policies within the SMPs are not set in stone, and I think that's where we need to invest a bit more again in modelling and monitoring and gather some strong evidence to be able to change these policies and revise the position in the future.

[144] **Rhianon Passmore:** Can I just add then, in terms of the 25 per cent allocation moving forward, that is going to be reviewed on a systemic basis in terms of affordability? I know they're being met at the moment. My concern would be local authorities' budgets moving forward.

[145] **Mr Dulong:** There is no indication from Welsh Government.

[146] **Rhianon Passmore:** There isn't at the moment.

[147] **Mr Dulong:** No.

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

[149] **Nick Ramsay:** Neil Hamilton.

[150] **Neil Hamilton:** I'd like to move on to resource constraints in a different way. The auditor general's report refers to capacity constraints in the risk management team and in local authorities, which delays progress and threatens to undermine long-term risk management, strategic thinking and delivery. You employ about 280 full-time equivalent officers in Natural Resources Wales, but half the flooding officers of local authorities think that their council has an inadequate capacity to cope with developing a strategy and delivering on it. Maybe you'd say, 'They would say that, wouldn't they?' because they could always do with more resources and more staff. But, nevertheless, it's, I think, a significant statistic. And so I'm wondering whether, given this background of wide staffing and resource constraints, Natural Resources Wales and local authorities have sufficient resilience to respond to any crisis that might occur during this coming winter.

[151] **Mr Parr:** I think it's becoming more challenging with the budgets that we've had and the resources that we've got. I think we have professional, experienced, trained staff, who do a fantastic job. I'm sure everybody would agree. As to the floods that we had last winter in Wales, whilst not as severe as some of those in England, people in north Wales in particular will remember an extremely wet December and an extremely wet January, throughout the whole of Wales. Our resources do start to get stretched when there are a number of events across the whole of Wales and widespread flooding. It is something that is an area of concern.

15:00

[152] You mentioned the number of—280—FTEs across the whole of Wales. That's to do a range of activities. I think one of the bits I would highlight is that, quite a lot of the time, the emphasis is on the immediate, is on the here and now. So, the very thing that we spent time earlier talking about, that strategic look, that strategic planning, and getting into a picture where we are really dealing with the issues into the future, I think again is an area that comes under strain. But, on the specifics, incidents is an area that is highly important, and we do have resources to cover it, but it is starting to be

stretched, I think that's true to say.

[153] **Neil Hamilton:** The skills audit that was undertaken as part of the flooding review delivery plan highlighted concerns about councils not replacing people who leave their employment in these capacities. And the age profile, apparently, of specialist staff is that 20 per cent of the relevant workforce potentially might retire within the next 10 years. So, if we're not replacing significant numbers of people who've got these vitally important responsibilities, then I can't see how we can make any real progress in coping with the problems we know about now, and which might become more severe or significant in the years ahead. So, do you not think that—I mean, if you look at the specific problem, how concerned are you about that?

[154] **Mr Parr:** I think that's one of the reasons why we say we are concerned around the revenue budgets as well, if not more so than the capital. Quite a lot of the time, I think the attention tends to be on the capital in terms of building things—building projects—but we need the revenue funding for those very basics of understanding flood risk, where it's going to happen, prioritisation, strategic thinking and incident response. And, again, as the head of flood risk at Natural Resources Wales, I think the capacity increasingly gets stretched. I think, sometimes, that then leads to a situation where you are responding rather than being in a position where you can really truly plan for the long term.

[155] I would say it's at a point now where it's coping, it's coping well. Again, there are professionals there, but I do share the concern around the people who are coming in as the older staff leave. I think it's 35 per cent of our staff that are over 50 in terms of Natural Resources Wales, and I think there is a strong need for that succession planning and bringing people through, which, again, is challenging when budgets are squeezed. But I would emphasise we're not unique there—it's across all public sector bodies.

[156] **Mr Dulong:** I think it is the same issue from a local authority perspective. I think currently we've got about 77 practitioners working around the 22 local authorities, but the picture is not going—. Because of their role, we've got some local authorities where the risk is higher. They have invested in flood-risk management, so we've got local authorities with a team of eight or 10 people in there. The way we've been working with the WLGA to try to solve the issue is creating some kind of regional collaboration approach. We're in the process of putting an agreement in place in north Wales as to how the local authorities can work together using each other's

resources. So, while they cannot employ, perhaps, individually, as a group they can employ more staff or they can actually share the task between several local authorities. I think that's one of the models that I know is being promoted by the Minister, and that's one of the models that we're strongly encouraging in working closely with the local authorities and NRW as well.

[157] **Neil Hamilton:** That neatly fits in with what my next question was going to be. We've already referred to the split of responsibility and skills capacity between Welsh Government, Natural Resources Wales and local authorities. There is potentially there, of course, the makings of delay, procrastination, making it more difficult to have decision taking in a reasonable time frame. It's inevitable, I suppose, because of the land ownership issues that you referred to at the beginning of your evidence, and also the statutory responsibilities of the different bodies. But to what extent do you think it would be helpful to bring everything together under a single umbrella, or is that too grand a design and too difficult to achieve, or perhaps not even worth achieving because, in your opinion, things are as good as they could be at the moment in terms of co-operation and collaboration?

[158] **Mr Parr:** I think there are pros and cons to any operational models. I think the pros of having all organisations aligning—clear alignment, maybe potentially together, clearly has some pros there. I think it adds some cons, or, perhaps, to phrase that a different way, the reason why we've got what we've got is because Natural Resources Wales takes the overview for the whole of Wales and for the big issues, and that then is married up by a local understanding through local authorities of the locality and local flood-risk management. So, if we were to change that, for example, and give all the responsibility to one national organisation, if you like, I think the disadvantage of that would be a danger of potentially losing that local ability to respond to what's required locally. So, there are pros and cons to everything. I think what's needed, though, and what's happening, is closer working together, because it's not just us in terms of local authorities and Natural Resources Wales. As we've said, there are local planning officers involved from local authorities, there are the emergency services, there are the police, there's a whole host of different organisations. To an extent, what we're able to do better, I think, in Wales than perhaps in England is that we're able to get around a table. You know, 22 local authorities and Natural Resources Wales with one single tier of government, generally—we are able to get together. We are able to work out what the solutions are. I think some of those things are more challenging in bigger administrations.

[159] **Nick Ramsay:** I've just got a couple of supplementaries to bring in, Neil. We thought Natural Resources Wales was a big enough organisation when that was created—you roll everything else into it, it becomes enormous. Right, first of all, Neil McEvoy, then Rhianon. Back to Neil.

[160] **Neil McEvoy:** Yes, just to go back, really, to the point that I was raising earlier about—. I'm looking for an explanation, really, for a lack of futureproofing, a lack of strategic thinking, because I'm, in my mind, thinking of different planning applications that have been given the go-ahead, especially in the north-west of Cardiff—outline planning. Where are you guys, really? Why are you not raising the red flags? Why isn't the local WLGA objecting to these things? Because what will happen, once that land is built on, the sponges will have gone. There's already flooding in that area, which you should be aware of. Why are you not objecting to these applications?

[161] **Mr Parr:** I don't know the details of the particular ones, but—

[162] **Neil McEvoy:** Would you undertake to look at the details in the north-west of Cardiff?

[163] **Mr Parr:** We certainly could do, if there's something there to look at. I think it's—

[164] **Neil McEvoy:** Well, there is, actually. There's a live planning application.

[165] **Mr Parr:** I'm not denying that. Sorry, perhaps I'll rephrase that—

[166] **Nick Ramsay:** We don't want to get in with everybody around this table starting to say, 'Look at our own constituency', or we'll be here all day.

[167] **Neil McEvoy:** No, but it's—*[Inaudible.]*

[168] **Mr Parr:** Can I just—

[169] **Nick Ramsay:** If you make it a broader issue about why you take the decisions you do in local areas.

[170] **Mr Parr:** Yes, on the broad issue, I've already stated that our role is



understanding the flood risk and providing advice around that flood risk. So, we're statutory consultees on the planning applications. We provide that advice to local planning authorities. It's up to local planning authorities what they do. There can be examples, and I know of examples in various places across Wales, where the advice that we give isn't popular and is quite difficult for the local planning authorities. I can think of examples in Newport, for example, where that's been the case. So, we do step up to the plate, and we do give that advice, and we do say, 'In these circumstances, it isn't something that we support'. Local planning authorities can take that advice or not, as things stand.

[171] **Nick Ramsay:** Okay. Rhianon Passmore.

[172] **Rhianon Passmore:** Very briefly—. Oh, did you want to—?

[173] **Mr Dulong:** Sorry, I was just going to add that I know we've been having discussions with the Welsh Government lobbying on that case. They've agreed to review technical advice note 15 next year, which is something we were looking for because, obviously, we want to avoid development in risk areas for the future. So, there will be a review of it. We're looking to involve the planning, the emergency planning and the flood services within that review.

[174] **Neil McEvoy:** To the WLGA, Chair—but what to me occurs to me is, you know: why are you there, almost, why are authorities funding you, and yet these things are simply going through on the nod?

[175] **Nick Ramsay:** We're not getting into the issue of why the WLGA exists or not; I think we've had enough of those discussions over the years. Rhianon Passmore, briefly.

[176] **Rhianon Passmore:** Thank you. In terms of the movement forward around regional collaboration, mandatory collaboration, you mentioned that it is possible to get 22 local authorities around the table with NRW. So, would it be possible for you to just update me on the thinking from yourselves around what is occurring on a regional collaborative basis at this moment, and where you see it in the future?

[177] **Mr Dulong:** We currently, as I said earlier, have got three flood risk groups—one in the south-east, one in the south-west and one in the north-west. So, these groups were set up in 2010 when the Flood and Water

Management Act was enacted. So, we've been, through these groups, looking at sharing good practice. We've been developing work programmes for these groups. We've got a meeting with the 22 local authorities next week looking at developing regional collaboration across the environment sector, so they'll be looking at waste, looking at flood-risk management, and looking at what you need to have stronger and more resilient local authorities. So, we'll be looking at sharing services, delivery of statutory functions under the Flood and Water Management Act, looking for opportunities to develop some regional flood awareness campaigns, these kinds of areas.

[178] **Mr Parr:** I'd give three examples. One example is the work that we did together on flood-risk management plans, which was required by the floods directive, the European directive. There's one example. We worked very closely together there. I think another example is how we're working closely together now on the common assets database. A third, very specific example is in St Asaph, and working closely with Denbighshire County Council—it's just one example—on some of the interventions that are taking place in St Asaph, and some of the structures that are being built there. So, we do work closely together, both on a very practical individual basis, and on a strategic planning basis as well.

[179] **Mr Dulong:** And we've been developing and undertaking some training programmes between local authorities and Natural Resources Wales officers as well, just making sure that we offer the same schemes, to add to our own duties.

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

[181] **Nick Ramsay:** Lee Waters.

[182] **Lee Waters:** You said you were working together on the joint active asset database, but the auditor general's report showed that there were some significant issues in co-operation. Some councils are using spreadsheets to manage information; others have invested in asset management software, although the type differs across Wales. NRW has recommended—has said—that some councils are reluctant to use the software that's been developed. So, I hear what you said about declining resources and capacity under strain, but the fact that you're not smartly using the systems in place doesn't speak particularly well in terms of your willingness and ability to co-ordinate. Can I direct that to the WLGA, please?

[183] **Mr Dulong:** I think the issue was based around expertise at this time. The flood-risk management function has been based on existing services in highways or land drainage since 2010, so there are systems in place to deal with these assets within that. Obviously, since then they had to start developing the local asset register, which they have done, but I think the expertise, or the lack of expertise in certain areas, and the resources, have made it really difficult to use specific software, getting the training to do so. But it's not only about getting the software, it's having the resources to go on the ground to identify where the assets are to produce studies on these assets and then be able to mark them all on that—these officials are going to deal with statutory duty on a daily basis. What we've done, we've provided them with some training. So, the first one, all the 22 local authorities have undertaken T98 training, so they all train using the same asset inspection system. There's funding available from Welsh Government now. There is—*[Inaudible.]*—where they can all invest; if they want to purchase some software they can do so, and that will be aligned with the AMX software that is being used by NRW at the moment. So, we're looking to have a cohesive and co-ordinated use of a single software, and using the same methodology across Wales.

[184] **Lee Waters:** So could I ask NRW, then, since this report was published in July, when you had concerns that councils weren't using the software as developed, given what Mr Dulong has just said, have your concerns abated?

[185] **Mr Parr:** It's a current issue and we're working on it at the moment. So, what we've done is we've had a series of workshops with local authorities. Some of them have indicated that they want to use the same software that we're using directly, others have other software that they're using. It varies from local authority to local authority exactly where they're at, but what there is, I think, is a common desire to have that information in the same format, whatever system it's in, so that it can be used by all organisations. That's what we're working towards, and it's not just the data. As Jean-Francois has said, it's the way in which the asset inspections themselves are undertaken, and we've trained staff in a common asset inspection methodology, so I think, although the report, clearly, is a recent report, things are moving along.

[186] **Lee Waters:** Are you satisfied with the progress that's being made, then?

[187] **Mr Parr:** I am, but I'm not denying what needs to happen from here on

as well.

[188] **Lee Waters:** Okay. It seems that the reasons set out by the WLGA sound reasonable, but are you clear that they can be resolved quickly enough?

[189] **Mr Parr:** I think it depends what you mean by 'quickly enough'. I think they can be resolved. I think some of the issues vary from local authority to local authority. Some of them are to do with skills and capacity. I think the issues can be resolved, and I think, with the impetus of all of the organisations and Welsh Government's backing to it, we can get to that role of a common understanding of the asset condition.

15:15

[190] **Lee Waters:** Right, but there's still some ambiguity about what 'quickly enough' means.

[191] **Mr Parr:** Yes, I think—I'm trying to recall the stages in the plan. I think that we're at fairly early stages within that plan in terms of sharing what type of information is required and how that information can be brought together. We've shared with the local authorities the format that we use. We've had training, as I say. I can't remember the detail of exactly the timelines for the delivery against it.

[192] **Mr Dulong:** If I may, we've been putting the systems in place, of course through the local authorities, in line with Welsh Government requirements, which are to provide local data in the new year to help inform the capital programme in April. So, we can—*[Inaudible.]* We've been working closely with NRW to develop a spreadsheet, a data collection spreadsheet, which is going to be sent out to all local authorities, either before Christmas or in January. We're piloting that spreadsheet with three local authorities that are using different systems to see how easy it is going to be to feed in the data. Where there are local authorities, we'll be feeding into the national data set before the end of the financial year.

[193] **Lee Waters:** So, it's on track.

[194] **Mr Dulong:** It's on track and it's going to be a live tool, that's going to be updated on—well, you have to decide.

[195] **Lee Waters:** Very briefly, I just wanted to ask about the Wales Coastal Monitoring Centre, which was set up in 2010, which seems to have paused as funding is sourced. One of the suggestions is that the WLGA and NRW, along with a consortium of others, take over the running of that. Can you update us on the status of that?

[196] **Mr Dulong:** We set up a consortium: we have four local authorities sitting around the table; we have two universities, Bangor and Aberystwyth; and we have NRW sitting around the table. We met last week, actually, and we came up with a proposal and a work programme for the next two years. We intend to secure funding for an additional two years after that. So, we'll be looking at four years of funding. We're developing a proposal that should be given to Welsh Government before Christmas, and an indication was favourable from Welsh Government in terms of what was proposed.

[197] **Lee Waters:** Okay, thank you.

[198] **Nick Ramsay:** Do you think it would it be helpful if there was greater consistency between local authorities? You've mentioned about greater collaboration between them. I would have thought that the people affected in the areas affected by flooding would have expected that to happen anyway.

[199] **Mr Dulong:** The issue again—we're looking to have a more co-ordinated approach to flood-risk management. It's been picked up. If you look at flood awareness, for example, there are lots of different messages coming from different organisations. So, we're looking to standardise the way that we communicate this to the public. We've been encouraging Welsh Government to develop a microsite or a website where all risk management authorities could put their information, and then that could be accessed by all the residents of Wales in a single format, just to make roles and responsibilities clearer from the communities' point of view. In terms of the practitioner, I think there is a need to standardise some areas, but there is a need to keep, you know, local, depending on the local need and the local risk. It's important that we've got to be able to draw the line at where we can standardise, and I think that we've been working on some of the areas that can be standardised across Wales.

[200] **Nick Ramsay:** So, I'm just looking through recommendation 5 of the auditor general's report:

[201] 'The Welsh Government should work with Natural Resources Wales to

share and promote the good practice’—

[202] you mentioned that earlier—and develop a ‘Development Programme with councils’.

[203] I think that we’d all agree with that. I think that what we’re struggling to get our heads around is the mechanisms by which that is going to happen, any more than it has happened to date. So, in five or 10 years’ time will we, or our successors, be sitting here asking the same questions to your successors, or will the organisations be able to say, ‘Actually, we did do that and everything’s looking a lot more hopeful’?

[204] **Mr Parr:** I think some of recommendation 5 is around sharing research and development, and the latest developments and best practice. And we do, again, work hard to work with Welsh Local Government Association and Welsh Government to have that information available on our website. I think that we’re interested in the idea of doing more, and the idea of having webinars and shared training courses between us and between all parties, I think that’s the direction of travel. And I think that if it’s a good idea, it’s a good idea for all of us.

[205] **Nick Ramsay:** Were there any further questions? Very briefly, Oscar.

[206] **Mohammad Asghar:** A couple of them anyway are very brief.

[207] **Nick Ramsay:** Very brief.

[208] **Mohammad Asghar:** You just mentioned the skill and capacity among the people who work in your departments. I think that only one council flooding officer responded to the Wales Audit Office’s survey, the one they asked for on the revenue funding to maintain the effectiveness of the coastal flood risk assets and savings. So, why are they so complacent and not doing things? This is something serious. In my area, Chair, there are so many old-age pensioners losing sleep over this flood business, and the thing is that you definitely haven’t got a national plan to protect this nation in the long term.

[209] **Nick Ramsay:** So, one question you mentioned is: why isn’t there greater consistency?

[210] **Mohammad Asghar:** Yes. And the second question is: how much

funding do you need? Just tell the Government, 'This is what we need', and then try to maximise safety for the nation from all of this flooding, internally—as Neil mentioned—and externally. We can't fight nature, but at least we can protect our internal flooding.

[211] **Mr Dulong:** I think the difficulty here with local government having 22 local authorities is that one size doesn't fit all, unfortunately. Depending on the issues, really, we work on them on a case-by-case basis. To those local authorities that need support, we provide support, either through training or we can guide them where they need some extra expertise. So, we look at it that way, but we wouldn't encourage a one-size-fits-all solution for local government.

[212] **Mohammad Asghar:** You need a national plan rather than—. Flooding, we know what happened in the south of England, and they're now trying to recover continuously in two years, so I'm sure they'll do something with the long term.

[213] **Nick Ramsay:** I'm sure you like the idea of being able to ask for whatever money you want, and getting it. [*Laughter.*]

[214] **Neil Hamilton:** Christmas will soon be here.

[215] **Nick Ramsay:** With you in your Santa outfit.

[216] **Mr Parr:** I think there's a need for national plans and local plans, and the two need to marry.

[217] **Mohammad Asghar:** That's right.

[218] **Mr Dulong:** It seems to be working well at the moment with the national strategy. The national strategy objectives are the link between the local flood-risk management plan and the local strategy, so we've got regard to local and national strategy at the moment.

[219] **Nick Ramsay:** And Rhianon Passmore. Briefly.

[220] **Rhianon Passmore:** So, in terms of what will be different moving forward, I looked to, for instance, the Welsh Government's new erosion coastal committee in terms of regional collaboration. I will presume that that is going to be strengthening the position of local authorities whilst keeping

that local identity. So, would you add anything further to that in terms of what's going to be different moving forward, bearing in mind the deficits that you've outlined?

[221] **Mr Parr:** I think there's a range of things that are under continuous improvement and continuously will be developed. So, I think there'll be changes in forecasting, there'll be changes in warnings. I think there'll be more emphasis on raising flood awareness, working with communities and community resilience, and the well-being of future generations Act as a vehicle to do that. I wouldn't underplay each of those things; there may not be one thing that will be completely different, but I think there will be improvements on what we've got at the moment.

[222] **Rhianon Passmore:** Continuous improvement. Okay, thank you.

[223] **Nick Ramsay:** Any further questions to our witnesses? No. Great. Well, thank you for being with us today. I hope you, I wouldn't say 'enjoyed that', but thanks for being frank with your answers. We will be compiling a draft transcript and the clerks will send that to you for you to peruse before it's finalised. Thank you for being with us today.

[224] **Mr Parr:** Thank you.

[225] **Mr Dulong:** Thank you very much.

[226] **Nick Ramsay:** The next public meeting looking at coastal flood risk management will be with Welsh Government on 12 December. I would remind Members that, next week, we have a stakeholder event as part of the inquiry into our housing associations, and that's in Future Inns. Of course it is. Okay.

[227] **Neil McEvoy:** What time is that?

[228] **Nick Ramsay:** Usual time.

15:24



**Cynnig o dan Reol Sefydlog 17.42 i Benderfynu Gwahardd y Cyhoedd  
o'r Cyfarfod**

**Motion under Standing Order 17.42 to Resolve to Exclude the Public  
from the Meeting**

*Cynnig:*

*Motion:*

*bod y pwyllgor yn penderfynu that the committee resolves to  
gwahardd y cyhoedd o'r cyfarfod ar exclude the public from the meeting  
gyfer eitemau 6, 7 ac 8, yn unol â for items 6, 7 and 8, in accordance  
Rheol Sefydlog 17.42(vi). with Standing Order 17.42(vi).*

*Cynigiwyd y cynnig.*

*Motion moved.*

[229] **Nick Ramsay:** Okay. I propose, in accordance with Standing Order 17.42, that the committee resolves to meet in private for items 6, 7 and 8 of today's meeting. Happy? Yes.

*Derbyniwyd y cynnig.*

*Motion agreed.*

*Daeth rhan gyhoeddus y cyfarfod i ben am 15:24.*

*The public part of the meeting ended at 15:24.*