

National Assembly for Wales
Equality of Opportunity Committee

**Still Waiting: Home Maintenance and
Adaptations Services for Older People
in Wales**

July 2009



The National Assembly for Wales is the democratically elected body that represents the interests of Wales and its people, makes laws for Wales and holds the Welsh Government to account.

Committee Service

Bethan Webber – Committee Clerk
Rita Phillips – Deputy Committee Clerk
Linda Heard – Committee Support Officer

Members' Research Service

Denise Rogers – Committee Specialist

Legal Service

Helen Roberts – Legal Adviser

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Further hard copies of this document can be obtained from:

Equality of Opportunity Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1NA

Tel: 029 2089 8149

Email: Linda.heard@wales.gsi.gov.uk

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CONTENTS PAGE

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

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP



Ann Jones AM (Chair)
Labour
Vale of Clwyd



Eleanor Burnham AM
Welsh Liberal Democrats
North Wales



Jonathan Morgan AM
Welsh Conservative Party
Cardiff North



Janet Ryder AM
Plaid Cymru
North Wales



Joyce Watson AM
Labour
Mid and West Wales

CHAIR'S INTRODUCTION



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ann Jones
Chair, Equality of Opportunity Committee

INTRODUCTION

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

Terms of Reference

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

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

BACKGROUND AND POLICY CONTEXT

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

Roles and Responsibilities

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

The Welsh Assembly Government

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Local Authorities

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

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

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

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

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

Registered Social Landlords

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

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

Care and Repair Cymru

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

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

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

Reviews of Adaptations Services

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Home Maintenance and Repairs Services

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

LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

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

The main legislation covering Disabled Facilities Grants and adaptations is:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

EVIDENCE GATHERING

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

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

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

KEY ISSUES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Inequality in Relation to Waiting Times across Wales

Age Concern Cymru and Help the Aged in Wales

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

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

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

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

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

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

Inequality of Access to Services across Wales

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

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

Inequality of Services Available across Housing Tenure

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

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

⁷ Data source: the Local Government Data Unit - Wales

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

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

Inconsistent Access to Information

Royal British Legion

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THEME 2: WORKFORCE ISSUES, SKILLS MIX AND PARTNERSHIP WORKING

The Number and Role of Occupational Therapists

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Effective Skills Mix

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

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

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

Partnership Working across Sectors

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Contractor Issues

Care and Repair Cymru

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

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

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

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

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

THEME 3: PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT DATA

Value of Performance Indicators

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

Patchy Coverage of Performance Indicators

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

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

Limitations in Existing Performance Indicators

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THEME 4: RESOURCES

Funding of Adaptations and Planning for the Future

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

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

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

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

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

Funding of Home Maintenance Service

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

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

Individual Financing

If there is no equally responsive system for adaptations, people will be forced to live in unsuitable or unsafe accommodation, or may have no alternative other than entering a care setting. Alternatively those who have the means to do so may end up funding the adaptation themselves, which is not an option for the poorest and more vulnerable in society.

Equity release is one means by which older people are able to finance adaptation and maintenance work themselves. The impact of current economic conditions on house prices could make this more difficult.

Local authority "lifetime loans" provide another means for older people to finance work themselves, with the loan repayable upon sale of the property. Care and Repair Cymru advocated a subscription funded service which could bypass some of the issues around limited local authority funding and allow people to actively plan for their old age.

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

The wait for a stairlift could be about 1 - 2 years long and after it had been fitted, the older person became liable for maintenance because it was classed as a "whole adaptation" rather than "equipment" which would have been maintained. People often didn't want to wait that long (fearful they would not live to see the adaptation completed) so would go to a private company which charged about £2,000 to £2,500 for a stairlift. The company would buy it back but for a fraction of the cost and, in addition, charge for labour as well.

Ownership and Maintenance of Adaptations

The legal status of adaptations is complex and depends on a range of factors, including: the ownership of the property; the source of funding for the adaptation; the type of adaptation; and, what is stated in any tenancy, lease or other separate agreement entered into by relevant parties. The status of individual adaptations varies depending on each set of particular circumstances.

During the course of the inquiry it emerged that there is a great deal of confusion surrounding the ownership of adaptations. Liability for funding the maintenance of housing adaptations such as stair lifts varies across tenures and funding routes and is a concern for older people as costs of insurance and repairs can be high. The 2005 Review of Disabled Facilities Grants showed that many recipients of the grant stopped using stairlifts once the standard manufacturing warranty ran out as they could not afford to maintain them. Some local authority and housing association tenants incur extra financial burden where the maintenance costs are passed on, and in some cases it is claimed in the form of increased rents. Other local authorities and housing associations maintain the equipment themselves.

In their evidence to the Committee, Community Housing Cymru, the representative body for housing associations and community housing mutuels in Wales, claimed that adaptations such as stairlifts belong to the tenant and therefore the tenant is liable for maintenance costs. Subsequently they provided written evidence to correct this, stating that all adaptations funded through the Physical Adaptations Grant system actually belong to the housing association. They maintain that under current guidance it is still appropriate to pass on the maintenance charge to the tenant.

Caerphilly County Borough Council, in their written evidence, stated that:

“Equipment, such as stairlifts or vertical lifts, installed in council owned accommodation via the adaptations process are serviced and maintained by the Authority. Ceiling track hoists in both public and private sector accommodation are also covered by this service. Stairlifts and vertical lifts installed in private sector homes are guaranteed for 2 years and thereafter become the responsibility of the grant recipient”.

Newport City Council extends the warranty for lift machinery by 4 years on top of the manufacturers warranty “due to the vulnerable nature of the client...and the complexity of the lift machinery”.

Some witnesses report that home owners and tenants are not always aware of their responsibilities and so do not make appropriate arrangements for maintenance. Whether service contracts are in place or not can affect the response times when repairs are required.

It appears that there is an inequality facing older people in different housing tenures and across different geographical areas in relation to maintenance of equipment. It is imperative that the confusion surrounding the ownership of adaptations, and responsibilities for maintaining them, is cleared up and that guidance is produced to ensure that older people are treated fairly and equally regardless of where they live and/or who their landlord is.

Adapted Housing Registers and Recycling of Equipment

Adapted property registers have been developed in some local authorities. Where this information is available, it can be used to re-allocate adapted properties appropriately and allows for the recycling of equipment.

Employment of Occupational Therapists within housing departments is beneficial as they can develop and operate adapted property registers, as is the case in some areas. The College of Occupational Therapists is calling for the sharing of information across local authority boundaries to ensure matching of need to available properties.

Some work on the development of registers has also been undertaken in the social landlord sector. Private landlords are sceptical about adapting properties, perceiving this as limiting the future rental potential. It is also more complex in the private sales market due to data protection issues, the number of estate agents and people having complex reasons for moving. However, in the current economic climate, estate agents are using innovative

methods of matching up potential house buyers through part exchange schemes designed to give the housing market a boost. There could be potential to capitalise on this innovation. Cardiff Accessible Homes stated in their evidence that work is underway with private landlords to extend the register.

In its evidence to the Committee, the Welsh Local Government Association made reference to the fact that in some cases equipment ends up being removed from properties when new tenants do not require it. Better use of adapted property registers could help limit this and ensure that costly adaptations are reused. Newport City Council provides a service for the removal of unwanted stairlifts, and those in council owned properties are stored, serviced and recycled to other properties. There is a need to build relationships with the community to encourage them to notify the relevant body when they have equipment to be recycled, and there are calls for the establishment of a number that people can call.

Newbuild House Accessibility

Good quality design principles should be incorporated into all new developments. The Welsh Housing Quality Standard identified the need for downstairs toilets in new developments but there are reports that many of them are inaccessible for people using walking aids or wheelchairs. The College of Occupational Therapists suggests this highlights the need for training of architects.

There are no grants that apply when houses are being built. During the course of the inquiry evidence was heard that an older person had to have an ordinary toilet installed in a new home and then apply for it to be adapted and wait for the work to be completed.

THEME 5: BUREAUCRACY

Delays caused by Bureaucracy

Witnesses identified a number of ways in which bureaucratic arrangements can result in increased waiting times for adaptations to be delivered including:

- local authority policy of requiring housing grants officer to visit all properties to be adapted;
- local authority demand for original deeds rather than the online copy as legal proof of ownership;
- means testing for all Disabled Facilities Grant works; and
- contractor tendering and commissioning arrangements.

The Rapid Response Adaptations Programme is cited by witnesses as a good example of empowering people to make quick decisions by reducing bureaucracy and focusing on individual needs. However, some called for it to be further developed and enhanced, in particular to broaden its application in terms of tenure to meet growing demand and ensuring consistency in its use across Wales.

Use of the Disabled Facilities Grant Process when Quicker Processes could be Used

A range of powers enable local authorities to provide lower cost adaptation services through less bureaucratic routes than the Disabled Facilities Grant process and the Deputy Minister for Housing has encouraged this. However, while most local authorities have fast tracking schemes in place, some witnesses expressed concerns that some continue to process lower cost adaptations as Disabled Facilities Grants. Local authorities should be asked what use they are making of the Regulatory Reform Order 2002 which allows for fast track procedures to be put in place.

Newport Social Services have overhauled arrangements, creating a standardised, unified assessment procedure which seems to have been successful in reducing waiting times and allows flexibility.

Contributors to the inquiry were positive about the use of the Rapid Response Adaptations Programme and the speed with which cases were dealt with.

THEME 6: IDENTIFICATION AND SHARING OF GOOD PRACTICE

Evaluation and Sharing of Good Practice in the Delivery of Adaptations and Home Maintenance Services

Contributors to the inquiry have identified innovative practices being carried out in different parts of Wales. For example, Bridgend County Borough Council was cited as having streamlined the process for applying for a stairlift from 6-9 months to 3-4 weeks. However, the Committee has received little evidence to suggest that there are effective mechanisms in place for the evaluation of such practices and the dissemination of good practice on a cross organisation, all Wales basis.

There are also calls to make better use of the good practice examples within the voluntary sector.

Implementation of Existing Good Practice Guidance

Little information has been made available on arrangements in place to monitor the implementation of good practice guidance, such as the College of Occupational Therapist's Minor Adaptations Without Delay - a practical guide for housing associations which was published in 2006.

Welsh Government's Role in Evaluating, Monitoring and Promoting Good Practice

The Welsh Government has an important role in co-ordinating the dissemination of good practice and clear guidance about the interpretation of legislation in this area.

OTHER THEMES

These themes also emerged but not as strongly. More research is required to determine the extent to which these issues are causing difficulties.

Age Discrimination

Some witnesses claimed that disabled children are more likely to be granted adaptations of higher values and complexity than older disabled people and that provisions that are in place to fund garden work for children are not available to older people. The Older People's Commissioner for Wales alluded to a feeling that older people waiting for adaptations to be made before leaving hospital or a care setting are not prioritised because of their age. They are not always seen as individuals but as problems that need shifting.

Age Concern Cymru and Help the Aged in Wales stated that:

“over 70% of successful [Disabled Facilities Grant] applicants are aged 60 and above – however, the individual value of those adaptations is generally low in comparison with younger grant recipients”.

Means testing for Disabled Facilities Grants has been abolished for parents of disabled children but not for older people.

Limited information is available to verify these claims, and as far as the Committee is aware no work has been undertaken to investigate these concerns. The Welsh Local Government Association confirmed that until the performance indicator is reviewed to include a breakdown of adaptations for different age groups this is impossible to verify. They stated that information from local practitioner's points to adaptations for children being more complex, and hence being more costly and taking longer. However, there is no explanation as to why they should be more complex for children. The Older People's Commissioner for Wales emphasised that it is vitally important that older people are not discriminated against in favour of younger people and that their quality of life must be equally valued.

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

If you are a younger person, you are more likely to get an adaptation of greater value. If you are a disabled young person then you are more likely to be given a downstairs extension (for a bathroom) whereas if you're older, you're more likely to get equipment (stair lift) rather than a major adaptation.

Needs of Particular Groups of Older People

Limited information about the needs and experiences of particular groups of older people (for example, those from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds and communities, single older people, older people with particular impairments) has emerged during the inquiry. The Older People's Commissioner for Wales said there is anecdotal evidence about the difficulties people from the Black and Minority Ethnic communities face in accessing information about the services that are available. There is an issue

around the complexity of assessments for people with additional needs and the need for a wider range of agencies involvement in meeting those needs. Care and Repair Cymru also pointed to the difficulties facing some older people, for example, people with visual or hearing impairments or non-English speakers, in accessing services.

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

Someone knew an older person with physical and mental disabilities who had to have their bed downstairs because their stairlift didn't work. Their partner slept upstairs. They didn't know where to get help from and had given up. They needed an advocate but didn't have one.

The Adequacy of the Current Legal Framework

The 2005 Review of Disabled Facilities Grants concluded that the current legislative framework is adequate and that is a view shared in the evidence given by the Deputy Minister for Housing. However, the College of Occupational Therapists alluded to variable interpretation of the legislation and eligibility criteria.

The Royal British Legion argued that some local authorities frequently fail to meet the statutory duty on them to notify an applicant whether their application for Disabled Facilities Grant has been approved or not. The issue was raised by the Committee with the Welsh Local Government Association who contacted all local authorities. Within the time available only nine responded and of those, all but two confirmed that 100% of applications are responded to on time. The remaining two reported figures of 98% and 96% and advised that difficulties in meeting the 6 month deadline occur when contact cannot be made with the applicant, for example when there is a hospital admission or where needs change and require reassessment. However, it is worth noting that these nine respondents only account for around 40% of the total number of local authorities and therefore these figures cannot be taken as representative.

The legal framework surrounding the ownership of adaptations is complex and confused, and guidance is needed to clearly outline the roles and responsibilities of individuals and organisations in relation to maintenance and repairs.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Older people deserve to have equal access to timely and appropriate home maintenance and adaptations services, according to need rather than where they live or their housing tenure, in order that they might live their lives independently and with a quality of life. Older people are still waiting too long for adaptations and this is unacceptable.

Following the positive and extensive Welsh Government review of Disabled Facilities Grants in 2005, it is disappointing that there appears to have been little progress in improving the situation for older people in Wales. These recommendations will help build on those in the 2005 Review and will drive forward improvements in the services available to older people across Wales.

Recommendation 1

The Welsh Assembly Government conducts a thorough, evidence based review of what has been done to implement the recommendations of the 2005 Review of Disabled Facilities Grants and what progress has been made.

Recommendation 2

The Welsh Assembly Government reports annually to the Equality of Opportunity Committee on progress made against the recommendations in the 2005 Review, and the recommendations in this report. The report should be underpinned by data collected via the performance indicator, and this should be a commitment in the Older People's Strategy.

Recommendation 3

The Welsh Assembly Government, in partnership with the Welsh Local Government Association, should develop and co-ordinate a programme of evaluation and research into what works well that will inform revised guidance to local authorities. This should be informed by the views of older people themselves.

Recommendation 4

The Welsh Assembly Government carries out research into areas where there is currently very little information available, making it difficult to assess performance and potentially hiding gaps in services. This should include:

- information across tenures;
- information on older people with additional needs; and
- information relating to people of different ages.

Recommendation 5

The Welsh Assembly Government, informed by the outcome of recommendations 3 and 4 and in development with key partners, takes a strategic approach to monitoring the performance of local authorities in delivering housing adaptations, providing assistance where poor practice is detected, and developing an ongoing mechanism for the sharing of good practice.

Recommendation 6

The Welsh Assembly Government refines the current Performance Indicator to ensure it provides a clearer picture of performance. Performance management information would be more meaningful if information was available by:

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

Recommendation 7

The Welsh Assembly Government develops guidance to clarify the complex and confusing legal framework surrounding the ownership of adaptations and the related responsibilities for maintaining them.

Recommendation 8

The Welsh Assembly Government investigates the feasibility of having one single, publicly available register of adapted housing across all tenures.

Recommendation 9

The Welsh Assembly Government, in consultation with older people, develops guidance on how information in relation to home maintenance and adaptations services is provided for older people. This should include guidance on:

- The content of information;
- The form/language it should take to make it most accessible; and,
- Dissemination of information to reach the maximum audience

Recommendation 10

The Welsh Assembly Government determines the local authority areas where partnership working could be improved and, with those local areas, investigates the potential for Local Service Boards to drive improved partnership working.

Recommendation 11

The Welsh Assembly Government uses the Strategic Capital Investment Fund to boost the building trade by engaging contractors in adaptations work.

Recommendation 12

The Welsh Assembly Government asks local authorities what investment they have made in Occupational Therapist services over the past 4 years to match the increased volumes of older people with a need for those services.

Recommendation 13

The Welsh Assembly Government takes steps to fill the current shortage of Occupational Therapists, including ensuring that future workforce planning for Occupational Therapists takes account of the needs of local authorities.

Recommendation 14

The Welsh Assembly Government employs an Occupational Therapist in their Housing Department to provide valuable advice about the needs of older and disabled people.

Recommendation 15

As part of the Older People's Strategy, the Welsh Assembly Government reviews the home maintenance services that are available and identify the minimum standards that people can consistently expect in relation to home maintenance services across Wales.

ANNEX 1 – WELSH ASSEMBLY GOVERNMENT PROGRESS AGAINST IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE 2005 REVIEW OF HOUSING ADAPTATIONS INCLUDING DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT – WALES

Review of Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) and other Housing Adaptations – Recommendations Progress Report (March 2009)

| Recommendation | Progress |
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| <p>1. The current legislative framework should remain.</p> | <p>The current legislative framework remains, although the non-statutory guidance (NAW 20/02) has been revised (Annex D) to take account of the Report’s recommendations.</p> |
| <p>2. The production of clear publicity and information about DFG and adaptation services should be a core set requirement for the Assembly’s performance framework for local authorities.</p> | <p>In partnership with the Local Government Data Unit and individual local authorities, the Assembly Government has developed a Statutory Performance Indicator (PI) on targets and measurements for processing DFGs. This has been in place since April 2006 (PSR/002) and is regularly reviewed.</p> <p>The report of the Syniad Benchmarking Group on DFGs, published in January 2002 by the WLGA, contained several good practice guides and PIs which local authorities need to be mindful of in setting DFG policy.</p> |
| <p>3. A National Assembly information booklet should be produced for clients and service users, setting out the types of services available, the roles and responsibilities of Housing and Social Services, and desirable standards of performance.</p> | <p>In discussion with local authorities it was agreed that it would be more appropriate for the latter to produce their own publicity material in line with their local priorities. The way each local authority delivers its DFG policy must also be fully reflected in its private sector renewal policy/strategy document.</p> |
| <p>4. The method of providing adaptations up to the cost of £3000, which are currently provided through DFG, should be streamlined and made less bureaucratic.</p> | <p>The then Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration wrote to leaders of Welsh local authorities on 18 July 2005 on these and other points. Similarly, officials wrote to local authority chief executives and appropriate service directors on 22 July 2005 reminding them of the flexibilities available under</p> |

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| <p>The way of achieving this needs to be examined in detail. Options to be explored include the use of secondary legislation, developing a new scheme and funding stream in Wales, linked to the better provision for independent living and other Wanless report recommendations, and lobbying for a change to primary legislation on DFGs to facilitate this.</p> | <p>the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 (the RRO) to streamline grants for adaptations, including those up to £3,000 and other small grant schemes, as well as the scope to use the Major Repair Allowance (MRA) and Housing Revenue Account to fund minor adaptations for local authority stock. Advice was subsequently incorporated into non-statutory guidance. Paragraphs 42-43 of NAW 20/02 Annex D are also relevant.</p> <p>The officials' letter encouraged local authorities to consider approaches to reduce bureaucracy for such adaptation works costing up to £3,000 to ensure that there is a speedy delivery of assistance to those disabled people in greatest need.</p> <p>The Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration also wrote to the Minister for Housing and Planning at the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) on 18 July 2005 about the review and those recommendations necessitating a change to primary legislation.</p> |
| <p>5. The UK Government should be lobbied to add to primary legislation the ability to reclaim DFG on sale, within time limits. In the meantime, local authorities should be reminded of their ability to introduce local conditions by application to the Assembly.</p> | <p>Local authorities were reminded in the officials' letter of 22 July 2005 that they are already able to apply local grant conditions requiring repayment. These arrangements are set out in Section 52 of the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996. Moreover, under the Disabled Facilities Grant (Conditions relating to approval or payment of Grant) General Consent 2008, the Assembly Government issued a general consent to local authorities providing the latter with discretion to impose a limited charge on adapted properties of owner-occupiers if such properties were sold within ten years and where the cost of the DFG exceeds £5,000. In addition, if adaptations were carried out under the RRO powers, then local authorities could add their own grant conditions to any assistance that is provided. The Assembly Government encourages local authorities to make full use of the RRO arrangements.</p> |

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| <p>6. The ability to fast track DFG and major adaptations for disabled people through the planning system should be examined in detail.</p> | <p>This issue was examined via correspondence between the Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration and the Minister for Environment, Planning and Countryside in October 2005. One of the key points made by the latter was that many local authorities already have criteria for prioritising planning cases especially if a delay in decision making caused hardship for applicants. Local authorities were subsequently reminded to consider the needs of disabled people when handling planning applications. Planning Division also published guidance in 2007 relating to the use of Access Statements (which is to be subsumed into the forthcoming Technical Advice Note 12 on 'design'). Planning Division also supported and funded training in 2007 for local authority officers on disability awareness and access statements in planning, which was delivered through the Design Commission for Wales at three venues in Wales. In addition, the design Commission for Wales has issued guidance on design and Access Statements in 2008.</p> |
| <p>7. The mandatory nature of DFG and the need to properly resource the DFG programme should be reinforced to all local authorities.</p> | <p>The Minister and officials wrote to local authority leaders and chief executives in July 2005. This is a view that the Assembly Government fully endorses and has reinforced on numerous occasions. The resources in the General Capital Funding are not hypothecated and it is essential that authorities use that flexibility to ensure that adequate resources are allocated to meet their mandatory obligations to support DFGs. The Assembly Government would not expect authorities to limit the scope for eligible applicants for mandatory grants by restricting the resources they make available.</p> |
| <p>8. The calculation of the Housing formula for un-hypothecated General Capital Allocations (GCA) should be reviewed to ensure it reflects levels of disability locally and actual demand for DFGs.</p> | <p>Liaison with Local Government Finance colleagues was undertaken at the time of the review. Local authority funding in respect of DFGs is un-hypothecated and there is flexibility for authorities' to spend what they see fit on such grants. Expenditure on the latter forms part of authorities' General Capital Funding (GCF). The formulae that distribute the latter are kept under review by the Distribution Sub-Group (comprising officials from the Assembly Government and the WLGA). The distribution weightings that make up the Housing formula element of the GCF remain as follows:</p> |

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| | <p>households with pensioner heads (20%); households with low income (20%); private sector housing stock (15%) and total repair costs (45%). The Minister for Social Justice and Local Government has recently written to the Chair of the Equality of Opportunity Committee assuring her that consideration will be given to a wider ranging review of all the elements of GCF distribution in the work programme agreed with the WLGAs for the Distribution Sub-Group next year.</p> |
| <p>9. The funding allocation as a result of the housing formula should keep pace with the anticipated increase in demand for DFGs in future years.</p> | <p>The amount of funding allocated for GCF is set through the Assembly Government's annual budget-setting exercise. As such there can be no guarantee that GCF will be increased in line with additional spending on particular items of expenditure by individual local authorities. Local authority funding is however unhypothecated and there is flexibility for authorities' to spend what they see fit on DFGs in the light of their local priorities.</p> |
| <p>10. To complement the recommendation to have a separate fast track route for DFG works costing up to £3000, consideration needs to be given to the funding source for such works, and the merits of using any finance available as a result of the Wanless report.</p> | <p>See comments for 4 above.</p> <p>The Wanless 'housing' resources were utilised for extra care purposes.</p> |
| <p>11. Major Repairs Allowance should be useable for Disabled Facilities Grants for council tenants. Local authorities should be informed of this change for the next financial year (2005/6).</p> | <p>Local authorities have been able to use the MRA to fund DFGs within their own stock from 22 July 2005. This is incorporated within NAW 20/02, paragraph 45 of Annex D.</p> |
| <p>12. The detailed comparative and benchmarking work undertaken under this review should be prepared as a separate report and issued to local</p> | <p>NAW 20/02, paragraphs 46-48 Annex D relate to 'Good Practice'. This makes reference to good practice guides produced by the Syniad Benchmarking Group published in 2002. The Phase 2 Benchmarking exercise is the responsibility of the WLGAs and remains on-going.</p> |

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| <p>authorities and RSLs in order to encourage the sharing of best practice in DFGs and adaptation services.</p> | |
| <p>13. A series of seminars should be organised in partnership with organisations such as CIH Cymru, WFHA and Care and Repair Cymru. presenting the outcomes of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Wales DFG review • the Phase 2 WLGA benchmarking and good practice report (when completed) • ODPMs "Delivering Adaptations, a Good Practice Guide". | <p>Seminars organised in November 2005 in north and south Wales for local authorities and other key players.</p> |
| <p>14. A separate fast track route for DFG works costing up to £3,000 should be introduced as detailed elsewhere.</p> | <p>See comments for 4 above. Paragraphs 42-43 of NAW 20/02, Annex D are also relevant.</p> |
| <p>15. A statutory PI should be introduced that sets a target and measures the process of undertaking DFG and major cost adaptations in all tenures, from the first point of contacting the local authority to the completion of work.</p> | <p>See comments for 2 above.</p> |
| <p>16. The means test for dependent children DFGs should be abolished, with additional costs funded by the Assembly.</p> | <p>Abolition of means test for parents of disabled children came into effect in Wales on 30 September 2005.</p> |
| <p>17. The conclusions of the wider review of DFG means testing being undertaken by ODPM in England should be considered in Wales when complete.</p> | <p>The ODPM review, <i>Reviewing the Disabled Facilities Grant Programme</i> (Frances Heywood et al), was completed in October 2005. The accompanying report considered and, as in England, various improvements to the means test were subsequently made. For example, DFG applicants claiming council tax benefit, housing benefit and tax credits for those on low incomes, would no longer be required to provide any further financial information in addition to those benefits. In addition, those in receipt of working tax credit and child tax credit would no longer have these</p> |

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| | <p>payments counted as income in the DFG means test. Further changes in respect of armed forces compensation and other payments being disregarded in the means test are currently the subject of secondary legislation changes.</p> |
| <p>18. A framework should be set in place that requires a greater level of uniformity for the delivery of council tenant adaptations. This should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A clear definition of what are considered minor adaptations (those costing less than £1000), and a common un-bureaucratic route for delivering these, outside of the DFG system. • A NAWPI covering the time-scale for delivering council tenant major adaptations. | <p>See comments for 2 above where the Assembly Government has agreed that local authorities should be encouraged to consider delivering assistance for relatively minor adaptations costing less than £3,000 to council tenants using the flexibilities described under the RRO. However, local authorities were made aware that tenants would continue to be entitled to a mandatory DFG until such time as changes were made to the primary legislation. Paragraphs 42-43 of NAW 20/02, Annex D are also relevant.</p> |
| <p>19. That good practice in delivering adaptation services for tenants be shared through the dissemination routes described in recommendations to Part C.</p> | <p>See 'Good Practice' section of NAW 20/02 (paragraphs 46-48). Paragraphs 42-43 of NAW 20/02, Annex D relating to 'Minor Adaptations' are also relevant.</p> |
| <p>20. That a clear policy lead and guidance is given to local authorities that requires them to build into business plans and transfer agreements, all major and minor adaptation costs for bringing their stock up to the WHQS.</p> | <p>Officials wrote to local authorities on 22 July 2005 stressing the importance of authorities taking full account of the arrangements, including the cost of adaptations post-stock transfer, into their business plans and transfer agreements and for bringing their stock up to the Welsh Housing Quality Standard by 2012. This advice was reinforced in NAW 20/02, Annex D, paragraph 60.</p> |
| <p>21. All RSL major cost adaptations should be undertaken using PAG funding, from SHG.</p> | <p>Recommendations 21-27 relate to adaptations for Registered Social Landlord (RSL) tenants. New arrangements for streamlining Physical Adaptation Grants (PAG) were introduced in May 2008 and new guidance issued at the same time. An 'Adaptations for Housing Association</p> |

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| | Consultation' paper had previously been issued in September 2007. Further PAG policy is currently being taken forward as part of the 'Essex Report' implementation. |
| 22. Minor adaptations costing less than £1000 should be made the responsibility of the RSL, and not eligible for PAG or DFG. | See comments for 21 above. |
| 23. The PAG scheme should be overhauled and clarified in terms of eligibility, minimum and maximum costs, eligible work, and paperwork required to be submitted. As far as possible PAG should match provision under the DFG system. | See comments for 21 above. |
| 24. The PAG scheme should be clearly publicised amongst all RSLs. | See comments for 21 above. |
| 25. To speed up adaptation works, retrospective claims for PAG should be allowable, subject to clear checks and balances to ensure such claims fully comply with PAG requirements. | See comments for 21 above. |
| 26. Consideration should be given to the operation of a central schedule of rates for PAG works. | See comments for 21 above. |
| 27. Information about available routes to adaptations for RSL tenants should be published, as part of the general information/ publicity material proposed elsewhere in this report. | See comments for 21 above. |
| 28. The best schemes and systems should be replicated across Wales. This could be facilitated by the sharing of information | Seminars in north and south Wales were held in November 2005 (see comment for 13 above). 'Good Practice' section incorporated into NAW 20/02 (Annex D, paragraphs 46-48). |

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| <p>collected as part of this review and/or a series of best practice seminars for L.A.s and RSLs, facilitated by the Assembly and organisations such as WFHA and CIH Cymru.</p> | |
| <p>29. Local Authorities should be reminded of the benefits of adapted housing registers and matching schemes in relation to their own housing stock, and should be required to include their plans for such schemes within their local housing strategy and private sector renewal strategy.</p> | <p>Officials wrote to local authorities on 22 July 2005 emphasising the importance for local authorities to have accurate up-to-date records of adapted houses within their own stock. Moreover, they were encouraged to develop and maintain adapted housing registers and matching schemes for their public sector stock; the plans for such schemes to be included in authorities' local housing strategies and their renewal policies.</p> <p>NAW 20/02 was revised to take account of adapted housing registers (Annex D, paragraphs 79-80).</p> |
| <p>30. Minor adaptations should be clearly defined. It is suggested that the definition should relate to cost, and that all adaptations costing under £1,000 be classed as minor.</p> | <p>See comments for 4, 10 and 14 above. Paragraphs 42-43 of Annex D of NAW 20/02 also cover minor adaptations of this order. The RRO also affords much flexibility in this regard.</p> |
| <p>31. Delivery of minor adaptations (under £1,000) through less bureaucratic mechanisms should be promoted.</p> | <p>See comments for 30 above.</p> |
| <p>32. The funding of minor adaptations costing £1,000 or less should be made the responsibility of Social Services for owner occupiers and private tenants, RSLs for RSL tenants, and Housing Departments for Council House tenants, and the mechanism for the best way of achieving this examined in detail.</p> | <p>Discussed with health and social care colleagues. NAW 20/02 was revised to clarify the position relating to help with adaptations through social services departments (paragraphs 34-37 of Annex D). The RRO also offers flexibilities in this area. The primary legislation however states that owner-occupiers and/or social tenants can apply for DFGs.</p> |

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| <p>33. The use of non-OT qualified staff should be encouraged and promoted for minor adaptations.</p> | <p>Discussed with OT representatives who were receptive to this recommendation. Advice and encouragement included in officials' letter to local authorities of 22 July 2005. Full revised advice was also incorporated in NAW 20/02 Annex D, paragraphs 38-41.</p> |
| <p>34. That the RRAP programme is confirmed as continuing beyond the initial 3 year pilot proposal.</p> | <p>Confirmed and announced by the then Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration in April 2005.</p> |
| <p>35. That money allocated to the programme is increased to reflect actual demand for RRAP, within the clearly defined parameters of the programme aims and eligibility.</p> | <p>Annual funding of the Rapid Response Adaptations Programme (RRAP) has increased from £1.0 million in 2003/04 to £2.1 million in 2008/09. The grant for 2009/10 remains at £2.1 million.</p> |
| <p>36. That consideration is given to the source of funding for the programme in future years, so that this reflects what the programme delivers in terms of health and social care objectives.</p> | <p>Assembly Government funding for RRAP in 2007/08 totalled £2.0 million. Estimated additional funding for 2007/08 totalled £1,525,917. This comprised £1,302,686 from local authorities' social services and housing departments and £205,231 from health sector organisations. These signify an increasing trend in additional sources of funding.</p> <p>A Care and Repair Cymru report, published in 2006, assessing the first three years of RRAP, stated that the Programme had resulted in a crude, indicative saving of over £41 million for the health service in Wales. This was based on the estimated cost of keeping older people at home as opposed to remaining in hospital or residential care.</p> |
| <p>37. That consideration be given to a RRAP type programme covering social housing tenures, with due regard to delivery through the networks and partnerships already developed.</p> | <p>This was considered in conjunction with Care and Repair Cymru. A briefing and discussion paper was prepared by Care and Repair Cymru in January 2007 which indicated the potential for the remit of RRAP to be widened for older social rented housing tenants and proposed two pilots to be undertaken. However, with no consequential increases in the Care and Repair budget to accommodate such costs, together with the question of Care and Repair having the capacity to mount an expanded national, cross-tenure scheme without a substantial injection of resources, this is currently</p> |

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| | on hold. Local authorities and registered social landlords as 'good landlords' are also expected to fulfil their statutory duties in respect of their tenants as regards repairs, assessments, health and wellbeing . |
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ANNEX 2 – LIST OF WRITTEN RESPONSES AND A SCHEDULE OF WITNESSES

Written Responses

Rhondda Cynon Taff Local Health Board
Newport City Council
Crossroads Caring for Wales
College of Occupational Therapists
Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council
Age Concern Cymru and Help the Aged in Wales
Wrexham Over 50s Forum
Caerphilly County Borough Council
Coastal Housing Group
Royal British Legion
Cardiff and Vale NHS Trust
Powys County Council
Disability Wales
Royal College of Nursing Wales

Schedule of Witnesses

4 December 2008

Jocelyn Davies AM, Deputy Minister for Housing
Brendon Hilbourne, Head of the Private Sector Unit, Welsh Assembly
Government
Jeff Childs, Head of the Private Sector Renewal Branch, Welsh Assembly
Government

20 January 2009

Ruth Marks, The Older People's Commissioner for Wales
Wendy Bourton, Chief Executive, Care and Repair Cymru

3 February 2009

Ruth Crowder, Policy Officer for Wales, College of Occupational Therapists
Helene Mars, Occupational Therapist (Housing), Caerphilly County Borough
Council
Christine Synan, Occupational Therapy Service Manager, Cardiff Social Services
Department

10 March 2009

Kenyon Williams, Head of Private Sector Housing, Caerphilly and WLGA Housing
Adviser
Jonathan Willis, Head of Private Sector Housing, Carmarthenshire County
Council and Chair of Chartered Institute of Environmental Health Housing
Technical Panel
Angela Watwood, Head of Community Care Commissioning, Pembrokeshire
County Council and Association of Directors for Social Services Cymru
Steve Thomas, Chief Executive, Welsh Local Government Association

28 April 2009

Jocelyn Davies AM, Deputy Minister for Housing

Brendon Hilbourne, Head of the Private Sector Unit, Welsh Assembly
Government

Jeff Childs, Head of the Private Sector Renewal Branch, Welsh Assembly
Government

12 May 2009

Rob Baker, Project Manager, Cardiff Accessible Homes

Matthew Thomas, Housing Director, Cardiff Accessible Homes

Sioned Hughes, Assistant Chief Executive, Community Housing Cymru

Kathryn Edwards, Seren Group

Andrew Connell, Supporting People Advisor, Community Housing Cymru