



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Local Government and Communities Committee

Wednesday 20 June 2018

Session 5



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LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE
21st Meeting 2018, Session 5

CONVENER

*Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP)

*Jenny Gilruth (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)

*Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con)

*Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

*Andy Wightman (Lothian) (Green)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Sharon Dick (Society for Personnel and Development Scotland)

Rebecca Marek (Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights)

Sara Tennant (Public Sector Network)

Dave Watson (Unison Scotland)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Peter McGrath

LOCATION

The James Clerk Maxwell Room (CR4)

Scottish Parliament

Local Government and Communities Committee

Wednesday 20 June 2018

[The Convener opened the meeting at 10:01]

Pre-Budget Scrutiny (2019-20 Budget) (Workforce Planning)

The Convener (Bob Doris): Good morning and welcome to the 21st meeting of the Local Government and Communities Committee in 2018. I remind everyone to turn off their mobile phones. Tablets may be used by some members during the course of the meeting because meeting papers are available in digital format. I am delighted to see that we have a full house today—no apologies have been received.

Our first agenda item is pre-budget scrutiny of 2019-20 workforce planning. We are feeling our way a little bit in respect of budget scrutiny, because this is the first year that the committee has undertaken the new approach to budget scrutiny, as recommended by the Finance and Constitution Committee, following a review that was carried out by the budget process review group. The new approach involves parliamentary committees carrying out pre-budget scrutiny throughout the year—it is an all-year-round business.

Today the committee will take evidence on workforce planning to inform its pre-budget scrutiny. Workforce planning has been a recurring theme in the committee's work over the past year.

I welcome Dave Watson, who is the head of policy and public affairs at Unison Scotland; Rebecca Marek, who is the parliamentary and policy officer at the Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights; Sharon Dick, who is the president of the Society for Personnel and Development Scotland; and Sara Tennant, who is the talent and organisational development manager at North Lanarkshire Council, and is here representing the public sector network. Thank you all for coming along.

We are not looking for opening statements, but committee members are not familiar with some of your organisations. Perhaps you can take 30 seconds to explain what your organisation is. We know what Unison is, but I will give Dave Watson 30 seconds anyway, in the interests of equality.

Dave Watson (Unison Scotland): Unison Scotland is Scotland's largest trade union. We are

also the largest trade union in local government. We represent 155,000 workers—most of them work in the public sector, although some are in the private sector—across every profession and sector in local government.

Rebecca Marek (Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights): The Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights is a strategic anti-racism organisation. We do a lot of work on policy and public sector equality duties for various public bodies, the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament in order to advance race equality.

Sharon Dick (Society for Personnel and Development Scotland): Our society represents most local authorities—30 of the 32 councils. We look for best practice from a policy, personnel and workforce perspective covering a range of issues. We work closely with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities.

Sara Tennant (Public Sector Network): I am from North Lanarkshire Council, which is a member of the public sector network, which I am representing today. The network was set up in 2015 by Skills Development Scotland and the Scottish Government, and includes representation from about 63 public bodies including local authorities and is growing. The purpose of the network is to consider how we can improve young workforce development. We identify and address common areas and challenges. The benefit of the network is that we can collaborate, learn from each other, share practice and work more efficiently in addressing the challenges.

The Convener: That is helpful. I have just let you introduce yourselves, but I should have notified you that I thought that it would be helpful not just for the MSPs but for anyone who is following the meeting at home for you to introduce yourselves. We will go now to questions. Graham Simpson MSP is first.

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): Good morning. My question is for all the witnesses. Unison Scotland said in its written evidence that since 2009, 29,000 jobs have been lost in local government in Scotland and that that has led to increases in workload and stress, but that councils are to a large degree not doing workforce planning. In fact, Unison says that only three councils have produced good guides on it. I am not sure what is happening with the other 29 councils. Can you comment on the numbers, the stresses and the perceived lack of planning?

Dave Watson: The numbers are not in dispute: they are Audit Scotland's, COSLA's and everybody else's, as well as ours. The important statistic is that nine out of 10 austerity job cuts have been in local government, so it has taken the brunt of the job cuts.

The numbers speak for themselves, and there has been no real reduction in the amount of work that is to be done, which is the key point. I have outlined matters in our written evidence, but the committee can also see the evidence on our website. There have been 20-odd damage surveys in which we have asked front-line staff what the impact on them has been. As I say in our written evidence, a number of themes have come through from that. Some of the issues are about keeping the plates spinning—while people are trying to sort one problem out, a problem grows somewhere else and they have to deal with it, too. We have not really looked into what is happening in local government, but there has been a lot of salami slicing of services and trying to make do and to patch and mend. Obviously, that puts real pressure on staff.

On workforce planning, the problem is probably that councils and, to an extent, Unison have been focused on managing the decline in local government and trying to manage the workforce consequences of austerity. That means that we have probably not given workforce planning the amount of attention that it needs.

Another more cultural issue is that local government tends to work, as we would expect, at the local level, so there is not a great deal of co-ordination among councils. The national health service, for example, is a much more monolithic organisation, but at least it has workforce planning, albeit that it is limited to a few professions. Local government tends not to take that approach, although there are good examples out there. In fairness to local government, I note that there are more than the three examples that I picked out in the written evidence.

Certainly, most councils will have some form of workforce planning, although Audit Scotland said that only half of councils do. I have not done a survey on the precise numbers, so I accept Audit Scotland's numbers. However, Unison has found that there is a fair variety, and that there is some very basic workforce planning, which tends to be local and ad hoc. The essence of our written submission is that we can do better than that and that we need to pull that together and co-ordinate it.

The Convener: Okay. Who would like to answer next? Sharon Dick will. That is very helpful. I am very unobservant, so I ask witnesses to signal to me when they want to come in.

Sharon Dick: I, too, will talk about the councils overall. I agree with Dave Watson's point about the numbers. There has been a significant reduction in the number of jobs; we are all in agreement about the numbers that have been quoted.

I can maybe be a bit more positive about workforce planning. There has been a lot of workforce reporting for local authorities, and over the years we have tried to move towards workforce planning and to make it longer term. It is recognised that some of the planning has been quite short term, but we are pushing to make it much longer term. We want to work with our local partnerships on that. Many councils will have community plans and will look to work with their partnerships much more.

The problem is that there are a lot of conflicting priorities and it is hard to get the overall picture. The Scottish Government could perhaps help with that—we can look at that. There is a difficulty with the resource impact. There are a lot of challenges and we are trying to address a broad variety of issues, but not many councils have systems that they can use for workforce planning.

Some councils have very good examples of workforce plans. The plans are being audited by Audit Scotland, so the councils all have them at some level, and Audit Scotland is looking across the board for good practice. We are trying to share that and to help the councils that are not so advanced to move forward.

Absence continues to be a big issue for councils, and stress continues to be the number 1 reason for absence. We are seeing an increase in the number of absences due to stress—particularly work-related stress—in the majority of councils.

Rebecca Marek: CRER does not do much work on workforce planning, but I will highlight one issue. If the number of local authority staff is reducing and there is a rise in the black and minority ethnic population, it is worth wondering how we can eventually achieve parity between the size of the local BME population and how it is represented in councils. Some concerted work needs to be done to reach that position.

It is also worth questioning whether, when the number of jobs is reduced, an equality impact assessment is made to understand whether there will be a disparate effect on BME employees losing their jobs and whether that would further reduce their representation in councils. I do not have an answer for that, but it would be interesting to know. When we are speaking about such issues it is important to keep the equality implications in mind.

Sara Tennant: I back up Sharon Dick's point and acknowledge that there are, certainly within my council, pockets of good practice. We want to build on that and to take a more consistent approach. The point about working with support partners was important. It can be quite challenging to navigate the landscape. The public sector

network, in particular, is a good example of how we can collaborate and work together to address some of those things.

Graham Simpson: Let us look at this in a little more detail. One of the big issues—probably across the public sector, but certainly in councils—is that we have an ageing workforce. In fact, the average age of public sector workers in Scotland is 45, and 40 per cent of public sector staff are due to retire in the next 10 years. It strikes me that we have a ticking time bomb, so it is really important that councils plan for that and have strategies in place. However, it sounds to me as though not all of them have that.

My other point is that quite a lot of the work in councils is physical, if we think of things such as roads departments. If there is an ageing workforce and physical work, the situation becomes even more difficult, so planning ahead is really important. What are your thoughts on that? What can be done and why, because we have known about it for a long time, is more not being done?

Dave Watson: Those are very fair points. There is a neat little infographic in our written evidence that I hope helps to illustrate that point. I did some detailed research on the issue last year, which is where the infographic comes from. I was not really surprised about the numbers in local government. One of the ways that we manage reductions in the workforce is to have recruitment freezes. Self-evidently, people who are already in jobs get older, but we are not bringing in younger workers, so the workforce gets older.

Work has also been done on the fact that there are increasing numbers of people now working past the age of 65. Pension pay outs in local government are very low, so people increasingly want to work on past 65—especially women, who make up the bulk of the workforce and who do not have sufficient pensions in place. The numbers are still very small, but they have doubled from 1 per cent to 2 per cent. The real increase in numbers is in the 50 to 60 age group who are in work. By our calculation, those big numbers mean that about 40 per cent of the workforce will retire in the next 10 years, which creates additional issues.

10:15

We were not great fans of the Cridland review of the state pension age, but I thought that the idea of a mid-life—or mid-working-life—MOT, whereby people would look at where they were and at whether they would be able to continue to do the job that they were doing, was a sensible recommendation. I do not know whether this is still the case, but a few years ago there was a statistic that showed that virtually no ambulance workers stayed until normal retirement age. I suspect that if

we looked at some of the physically demanding local government jobs, the position would be similar. Some thought needs to be given to that, because virtually nobody is doing any work on it. I get invited to speak at conferences on the ageing workforce because—if you google the subject, you will find this—there is work by me and little else. That is not because our research was fantastic—it was a fairly simple piece of research—but in it we suggested practical measures, on health and safety in particular. We should remember that there is still age discrimination against older workers in the workforce.

One of local government's challenges is that everyone tends to focus on the big groups, such as social work and education. I ask the committee not to forget that local government also has lots of small groups, including small professional groups. The problem about having local and rather ad hoc workforce planning is that it might be possible to do some credible work on, for example, social care in a local community, because it is largely a local workforce, but when it comes to areas such as trading standards, environmental health and planners, we are talking about relatively small numbers of staff. On that scale, local workforce planning has grave limitations. They are the sort of groups for which we need more Scotland-wide co-ordination.

Rebecca Marek: I apologise in advance—I feel as though I have only one note to play—but it is important to look at the race equality implications of an ageing workforce, because it presents a good opportunity for increasing representation of minority ethnic groups in local government. All minority ethnic groups are younger than white United Kingdom groups. According to the latest census figures, 29 per cent of white Scottish people are aged between 16 and 39, whereas 50 per cent of people with an Asian, African or other ethnic background are in that age group, so the BME community in Scotland is younger. Many members of those communities are getting to an age at which they will be able to take up the jobs that will be vacated through retirement.

We should also keep in mind the fact that many BME people in Scotland have been educated in the Scottish school system, where they outperform their white Scottish counterparts, and that they go on to further and higher education in higher percentages. Therefore, the ageing workforce represents a good opportunity, if we are willing to plan and take advantage of it.

Sara Tennant: I second Dave Watson's point. We have a great focus on modern apprenticeships and we acknowledge the expansion of early years provision, but there are regional pockets where local authorities struggle to find workers—I am thinking of construction workers, planners,

surveyors, occupational therapists and residential childcare workers. We need to look at how we fill those pipelines.

Sharon Dick: I echo that, but I have a follow-up comment. In areas including trading standards and roads we are struggling to find places where we can educate people. Many councils are looking to do modern apprenticeship programmes, but we should not forget that the apprenticeship levy has had an impact on councils by reducing the number of modern apprentices overall, who get only £10,000 in return for the amount that local authorities pay. We need to make sure that we continue to keep modern apprentices in the workforce. They must not be an easy target for budget cuts. That is not what we want—we want to increase the size of our young workforce. We also want to work better with schools to make local authorities more attractive places for pupils to come for a career.

In addition to that, pay restraint has had an impact on professional occupations. We need to consider how we can make it attractive for people to have careers in local government.

The Convener: Mr Simpson might have another question.

Graham Simpson: I see that Mr Stewart wants to come in.

The Convener: He certainly does.

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Some councils have started competing with one another to try to get the workforce that they require. What are your views on the golden hello that some councils have chosen to use to try to entice individuals to join them?

Dave Watson: If a council wants to give our members money, it would be strange for me as a trade union official to say no. However, a golden hello is really not the way ahead: robbing Peter to pay Paul is not a practical approach.

We have to recognise that there are some cyclical issues in local government. Some local government professions exist almost solely in local government whereas others have private sector equivalents, such as those in building control, planning, architecture, engineering and, to an extent, the legal profession, which is my profession. We tend to find that, when, for example, the construction industry is in a boom, the private sector poaches all the local government people because it pays better. However, when that industry is in decline, those professionals come into local government if there are jobs there.

We are seeing that cyclical change in building control in particular. I think that I provided you with our report on that. It is a very good example. Post-

Grenfell, we suddenly have 65 vacancies for building control officers throughout Scotland.

In fairness, that element of workforce planning is difficult—if we could guess the economic cycle, we would probably not be working in local government or wherever but making a lot of money in the City. There are challenges with reflecting that cycle, but the golden hello is a short-term measure and not helpful, if we consider the picture holistically. Therefore, I do not encourage it. I would prefer us to try to do our best to take a more Scotland-wide view of workforce planning across the public sector. That is better than the patch-and-mend approach with golden hellos or other incentives.

The Convener: I do not want to get into a discussion about head count and the amount of staff in local authorities. Finances and head count are challenging, but do the numbers for the reduction include workers in arm's-length external organisations? Are they taken into account?

Dave Watson: There is a certain irony in that our figures are the lowest of all the estimates because they take account of ALEOs and transfers. It is difficult. The numbers are not exact—the moment that you see any numbers that are rounded to thousands, you know that they are not exact.

One of the difficulties is that we have to make estimates about the number of staff who have transferred into ALEOs and elsewhere. I noticed that your covering paper talked about staff going to health and social care partnerships. People do not actually transfer into HSCPs. Sometimes, they change between local government and the health service, most notably in the Highland Council area, where a particular model was chosen. The difficulty is that we do not know precisely who has gone where. We have had less outsourcing in Scotland and, therefore, less of that drift.

In fairness to COSLA, its numbers are always higher than mine. It has come down to our numbers. I take a fairly conservative view of where the numbers have gone, but they are estimates, because the data is just not available—there is no getting around that. That is one of the points that we keep making. Data on workforce in Scotland—not just in local government but everywhere—is pretty poor.

The Convener: That is an important point. I am glad that the figures are adjusted. I find that helpful because, when we come to consider the revenue budget, we see that there are numbers, more numbers and even more numbers that all look at different angles.

Before I came into the meeting, I got a note from my office saying that there were changes in police and fire service classifications in April 2013. Do the figures take account of those?

Dave Watson: That is all taken into account in those numbers. We know the numbers of staff who went in that change, so it is the easiest adjustment to make.

The Convener: That is really helpful. I will move on to my substantive question.

Local authorities are mainly funded through the revenue grant from the Scottish Government. Money is transferred from the integration joint boards and there is the council tax, as well as fees and charges—I will not list all the various moneys that there are. The committee will scrutinise all of that, but there is a significant focus on the revenue grant transfer every year. I have no doubt that there will be political debate about whether that number is sufficient and whether it represents a good, bad or indifferent deal. Let us forget what that number shows. Irrespective of what the financial transfer is to local government, should conditions be placed on that in relation to workforce planning? Should that transfer be aligned more closely with the Scottish Government's national pay policy framework? That framework does not include local government, but the cabinet secretary said that it should be used as a benchmark for local government. What is the connectivity in relation to that settlement? Should there be any conditionality around how that money should be used to promote good workforce planning? This is a budget scrutiny session, after all.

Sharon Dick: I am fine with conditions being applied to that money. That is good practice from a scrutiny perspective. However, if we apply conditions, we need to work with local authorities on what they are and listen to the feedback. Some of the conditions that have been placed on councils previously caused difficulties and did not help workforce planning in the long term.

The Convener: I have no idea whether there should be conditions. However, if we are talking about workforce planning at a granular level, we need to know the connectivity between local authority grant settlements and the planning that takes place on the ground. Are there any more suggestions on that?

Dave Watson: When we analyse the budget, we always say to our local people that the Scottish Government grant plays a huge part and is a crucial starting point, but that the grant never looks quite the same. You have a grand debate about funding and grant allocation at the Scottish Parliament but, at local level, there is a range of other demands. There is demographic change. The apprentice levy has been mentioned, which resulted in the biggest increase in spending, and the fact that councils have to pay that levy was not taken into account anywhere. Our local people have an entirely different conversation at council

level from the political conversation that you are having at the Scottish Parliament.

We do not favour ring fencing in general. This is supposed to be about local government, not local administration. Councils are not supposed to be the local governors who just hand out money.

The Scottish Government rightly sets a public sector workforce pay policy, which I accept does not impact directly on local government. However, we do not want to rob Peter to pay Paul. We do not want people to jump from local government to health because people in health get a decent pay rise and people in local government do not, and vice versa. The Government needs to ensure that it funds its pay policy. The committee will know that we argue very strongly about that issue—I still argue with Derek Mackay to this day that the pay policy has not been funded.

The overall funding settlement should include pay policy. I am not in favour of trying to pick out workforce groups and set targets from the centre, because such decisions should be made locally.

Rebecca Marek: I do not know how feasible this would be, but CRER would be interested in having a conversation about how equality relates to this issue. We need to think about the conditions that might apply to the money, parity in workforce representation and moves to recruit more equally, evaluate policies more critically and produce action plans to increase BME representation in the workforce. The Scottish Government has committed to there being parity with its workforce and the population by 2025, and it would be great if the Government would encourage local authorities to do the same and hold them to account on that.

The Convener: I wonder whether we could ask the question in a different way. I expected to get a reaction when I used the word “conditionality”. Are there ways in which we can incentivise local authorities to do more robust workforce planning? If there were unexpected increases in cash to local authorities—if only it were so, Mr Watson—or if there were unexpected decreases in cash to local authorities, it cannot be outwith the realms of possibility for a robust workforce planning framework to be in place, so that local authorities know what they will do with that money, and how they will tighten the belt or how they will expand it through improved public services. If they are downscaling rather than upscaling, that will involve using reserves in a structured and planned way rather than in an emergency way.

It is not our job to scrutinise local authorities; we are scrutinising the budget. Is there any way in which the budget could be used to incentivise the good practice that is happening in a limited fashion

in local authorities but which needs to happen a lot more?

10:30

Sharon Dick: The single-year budget settlements make it difficult for local authorities. It would be wrong to say that local authorities are not keen to support robust workforce planning, because that is not the case. They are struggling with the impact of the budget cuts and are trying to manage that as best they can. They are looking to embrace new ways of working with digital and to modernise, which can be difficult when they do not have the level of resource to enable them to invest in some of their systems. Some councils are more successful at that than others; it depends on the resources that they have had. Dave Watson mentioned demographics. It would be wrong not to look at the local picture because there are differences at the local level.

From a budget perspective, there could be better oversight of policy changes. I will use the example of early years. We had an early years workforce in which people were not qualified, and we have now taken strides to make them qualified. I am not saying that it is wrong to make that investment, but it costs money. It is difficult to train some of that workforce, but we work with it to make sure that we achieve that. We are now having to increase the numbers to get large volumes of early years staff. That is not the wrong thing to do, but we are competing with ourselves. You talked about competing with other local authorities, but we are actually competing with ourselves because the early years workforce tends to be the same people who we would target for social care.

When looked at in isolation, some policy changes might be the right thing to do, but we have to look at the holistic picture. We have to put the budgets in place to make it all happen and work in a joined-up way to deliver it. After all, it is all about the community; that is why we are here—we want to achieve the best outcome for our community and residents.

The Convener: We will look at the numbers in detail once they emerge. We have a debate about the numbers every year, and we will have a week or two to look at the numbers before we consider our report.

I used the word “incentivise”. Other than making as generous or significant an award to local authorities as possible through the revenue grant, which I am expecting you all to argue for—of course you will argue for that—what else can the Government do to assist workforce planning at a local level, whether that is incentivisation; having ring-fenced funds that you can bid for;

conditionality, whereby you have to spend some of the money in a certain way; or something else that we have not yet considered? That is kind of why we are having this evidence session.

Dave Watson: Incentivisation for workforce planning is probably further down the road. The starting point should be earlier in the process. The Scottish Government has started to develop a process for workforce planning in social care. We have had discussions on early years. We have a massive expansion of the early years sector, but there are huge differences of opinion about whether we need 12,000 or 20,000 extra early years workers. People are confused. Providers of training, local authorities and even the private or voluntary sector are asking how many we will need. Part of it is about how many will be full time and how many will be part time.

My argument is that we need to start earlier and be co-ordinated. I do not think that we are at the stage of incentivising yet. If people ignore co-ordinated workforce planning and do nothing about it, we will be bringing out the stick further down the road. At the moment, we are just not doing it. There is no proper liaison on a national basis in a range of areas. Universities start or cancel courses as and when. Some years ago, I was called in by Scottish Government officials who said, “We haven’t got any planners, Dave.” I replied that one of the two planning schools in Scotland had just closed, so they should not be surprised by that. The Scottish Government had no say in that decision. Similarly, last week, Queen Margaret University closed its master of public administration course. We have only two of those in Scotland. Where will the next public service leaders come from if universities take such unilateral decisions about closing courses? My plea would be for co-ordinated workforce planning that involves the education providers, the Government and local government to tackle that issue. If the different parts do not deliver, I would have no problem about incentivising people further down the track.

The Convener: We see workforce planning in the childcare sector, because that is getting a significant expansion. There is a debate about the appropriate levels and the skills base, but there is active workforce planning around that. Dave Watson said that in the care sector much more care and attention is being given to that. Given that there are statutory duties around education, there is workforce planning in relation to the education workforce and teacher training colleges and the like. As Mr Watson said, however, there was no such work around planning.

Are local authorities like jigsaws, where parts of the jigsaw have a workforce planning tool that might not be the same tool that every local

authority uses but is connected to the national picture, but other parts of the jigsaw do not have that? Is there a need for a holistic workforce planning tool for local authorities more generally? Does that exist? Is it in its genesis? How would we go about it? I will take you last on that, Mr Watson, because I suspect that that is what you think should happen. What do others think? Sharon Dick, you are on the ground trying to give advice to local authorities that want to do some of that stuff.

Sharon Dick: It is down to the issue of small groups again, because the big groups have a bigger voice and those from the Scottish Government probably have a bigger profile just now. For example, health and social care integration is a big agenda item, as is early years. It is easier for those areas to have influence and there are more avenues for people to get their voices heard on what is required in those areas.

On planning, I saw that Glasgow City Council has announced a big investment because it is looking to create more job roles in a specific area. However, as Dave Watson said, when university courses stop, local authorities sometimes might not realise that at the time. It can be a year before they realise the impact, and the impact might be on an area that we do not recruit in. A specific local authority might not recruit a lot for certain areas, so it might have to start looking at how it could fill gaps in specialist areas.

To go back to your question, convener, about whether we need one approach, there are differences between local areas. I do not know that we need one tool for everything. For its workforce plan, a council does not look at just the early years area, for example; a council does a workforce plan for its full council area. However, nationally, the areas of early years and health and social care integration probably have a higher profile.

The Convener: I am going to move on in a second because I am getting lost in my line of questioning. I will let Dave Watson finish off on where he thinks national workforce planning should go. However, I am conscious that every year—I say this every year as well—COSLA will identify pretty quickly the financial pressures and will present a bill to the Scottish Government in relation to how to meet the demands that the Scottish Government is placing on councils. The Scottish Government will come up with a completely different figure, but they will eventually reconcile that somehow.

I just wonder whether headcount and workforce numbers are part of that discussion, because staffing is the biggest cost to local authorities in service delivery. Is there support for a national workforce planning framework that can take into

account those local nuances? Is it just not possible? Do we just let local authorities get on with it? When local authorities, via COSLA, go to the Scottish Government to ask for cash—as they should do, of course—they have to be able to get robust, reliable and strategic statistics. If they cannot do that, it weakens their argument with the Scottish Government. Should there be some kind of nationally agreed framework?

Sharon Dick: Just to respond on data, local authorities can produce data on their workforce. We regularly give COSLA updates when they are requested. A number of councils use different human resources systems and the data might be in different formats, but we provide it in a standard format for COSLA. Maybe I am not answering the question appropriately, but the data on the workforce can be provided to COSLA.

The Convener: Maybe the question is just not focused enough and is unrealistic and naive, but I have to ask it to get clear in my head whether what I am asking about is possible. I will take Dave Watson in a second, but does anybody want to add anything first?

Sara Tennant: Maybe it is my simple mind, but I think that it is about the direction in which funding goes. We have to ensure that we are meeting our local needs as well as our regional needs. That is the challenge that we hear through the public sector network when different local authorities get together and look at our youth employment strategies. There are certainly lots of strategies in place. An example of that is the modern apprenticeships, where we have training agreements for a year and we have funding for that. A year is sometimes not long enough to get people ready for employability and employment, so we might look for more funding to extend that training. We need commitment and funding for the work that we are doing in our care experience programme—we see this in Aberdeen Council and in North Lanarkshire Council as well—for the length of time of the programme. I do not know whether that answers the question.

The Convener: That is helpful. The issue of multiyear budgets was ringing in my head while you were saying all that, because they would allow you to plan ahead. Dave Watson, do you want a final comment on that?

Dave Watson: There are tools—I referred to some of them in our written submission—but they tend to be employer based. We can aggregate those.

No one is a bigger champion of local determination than Unison but we accept that, in a country of 5 million people, there is a need for frameworks. It is not about central direction but we argue that there is a need to start with some

national frameworks. You might remember that the Christie commission talked about the one public sector worker approach and better co-ordination, particularly on training and education, so that there would be some common modules. To be frank, little of that has happened.

There is a case for national workforce planning. The Government's fair work approach helps enormously in that. If you do not value the workforce, no one will want to work in the public sector.

Data is a huge problem, as Sharon Dick rightly says. I am involved in a range of initiatives. We sit down with COSLA and ask everybody for the data. It comes back in all sorts of different ways and it is hugely difficult just to get the basic data together.

We should look at the whole workforce, not just the small roles. There is some silo-based national planning for care and early years, for example, but there are many generic jobs in local government, and there are also generic challenges. For example, there are groups of jobs in which there is gender segregation. I take the point that has been made about black and ethnic minorities but, on gender segregation, only 3 per cent of childcare workers are men, and the figure is 13 per cent to 14 per cent in social care. We need 65,000 workers. Those young women do not exist, I am afraid, folks, so we have to break down gender segregation. How we do that is a national issue.

We need to build public service reform into that process. The local authorities cannot do that. They are not in control of the big drives and big changes such as those in early years and education. We need to get the training providers around the table as well.

That is my six-point plan. It makes the case for a national approach that is not directive but is a framework approach that brings all the players together around the table and, I hope, then develops a longer-term plan for the workforce.

The Convener: That is very helpful. Thank you very much.

Andy Wightman (Lothian) (Green): Will Sara Tennant say a little bit about the practical day-to-day work that the public sector network is engaged in?

Sara Tennant: Yes. I will give a summary of the outcomes that the group hopes to achieve.

Traditionally, the group meets biannually, and there are steering groups and sub-working groups that identify challenges. Currently, we are considering recruitment practices. How do we attract people into roles, particularly in local authorities and the wider public sector? We are considering how the public sector can increase its brand or presence as an employer, and we are

also trying to identify the challenges that prevent people from applying for roles in the sector and how we can make them more attractive.

We are examining whether our graduate apprenticeships meet the needs in local authorities and across the public sector. There is an area within teaching in which we are struggling to recruit, so we are thinking about what we can do to influence the graduate apprenticeship programmes in that area.

Earlier, I gave a good example of care experience work called place and train. In that scheme, Aberdeen City Council supported people through care experience into employment through six-week placements. In North Lanarkshire Council, we are learning from that example and offering 12-month placement opportunities.

It is about learning from one another, considering how to address the challenges and thinking about how we can improve our pipelines of youth employment.

Andy Wightman: That is helpful. So the network's work is mainly focused on the young workforce. Is that correct?

Sara Tennant: Yes, that is the main aim.

Andy Wightman: Rebecca Marek talked about the challenges of redressing the imbalance in representation of BME groups. In particular, those groups are more represented in younger people. What is the public sector network doing about that? Perhaps Rebecca Marek has a better question that she could ask Sara Tennant.

Rebecca Marek: Are there specific working groups within the network that consider representation by ethnicity or specific initiatives that target groups? I saw from evidence that local councils submitted to an inquiry on race and ethnicity that the Equal Opportunities Committee did a few years ago that a few councils had initiatives to advertise in specific newspapers or on certain radio stations. Have you heard about any work along those lines?

10:45

Sara Tennant: That is not an approach that I am aware of through our involvement with the public sector network, but I can certainly find out about that.

Andy Wightman: I encourage the two of you to have a conversation about that because it is an important issue.

I want to move on to points that Dave Watson made about national frameworks to encourage better workforce planning. I was particularly taken with the comments about that.

Local government seems to have some big workforces—in social care and education, for example—but also some that are very small but critically important. Are there any good examples from the rest of the United Kingdom or Europe of countries that do things better? Across Europe, there is lots more local government than we have here that delivers more services than we deliver here. How do those countries go about it?

Dave Watson: I am not aware of any such examples in the UK. In fairness, Wales has tried to do some work on that with the “One Wales” project, although it has not gone as quickly as some people hoped. It has certainly done more in the leadership area, for example. I refer to the point that I made earlier about the master of public administration course—Wales is developing a very good programme. I was there a few weeks ago and was impressed by the work that universities and others are doing there. There has been an effort to co-ordinate that. I am not aware that that is happening in England.

The German model is probably the most well known of the European models. The Germans build workforce planning into their sectoral bargaining arrangements. If you were a fly on the wall at the Scottish Government joint council with us and COSLA, you would hardly ever hear workforce planning being discussed. If you went to the German equivalent, you would find it being discussed. It is probably best known in the areas of manufacturing and engineering. Those people would be looking five and 10 years ahead at the developments in the sector. Disparate, and mostly private sector, employers, are involved, but they all come around the table with the unions to plan things. They do not always get it right. There is a big debate about whether workforce planning is a science or an art form. I probably fall more into the category of thinking of it as an art form, but there are people who disagree with me. There is certainly an effort in Europe.

Members should remember that, when we talk about local government in Europe, we are talking about a much larger number of local authorities. They are much smaller than our local authorities, but they manage to co-ordinate some of that work and do some planning. I suppose that my six-point national framework plan would not be unusual in Germany and other European countries, but that approach has not been the culture in Scotland or the UK more generally.

My argument is based on the work of the fair work convention, which talked about more sectoral approaches to workforce planning in Scotland. If we could develop that initiative, particularly in local government, we could do a lot better.

Andy Wightman: Since devolution in 1999, have there been times when we have done

workforce planning better? The convener talked about care work, which is an expanding area. Obviously, we have to do workforce planning if we want to get anywhere near recruiting that number of people. The budget was expanding in the first half of the devolution era. Have there been any changes in that area during the past 18 years?

Dave Watson: It is interesting that we have looked at social care only recently. To be honest, it has been put in the “too difficult” box. As I said in our submission, there are 14,000 care providers in Scotland. That is a hugely fragmented employer base, and that makes just pulling the data together a nightmare of a job, let alone anything else.

Historically, we have worked in silos. That was another of the Christie commission’s criticisms. In the early years of devolution, I spent 18 months working in the health department on workforce planning. Doctors, dentists and nurses all had their own workforce planners and nobody looked at anybody else. The minister asked me where the first pressure was. At a meeting, I said that I had looked at the issue and that the first pressure was on laundry managers. Nobody had looked at laundry managers, all of whom were over 55, and none of them had a deputy. A hospital cannot be run without a laundry, but nobody had bothered to look at that.

My point is that, if there is comprehensive workforce planning, specific groups will not be allowed to fall through the net of the big planning arrangements, and it will be somebody’s responsibility to join up those things. At the moment, no one in Government or elsewhere is doing that joined-up thinking.

Andy Wightman: I thank Rebecca Marek for her comprehensive paper, which is very useful. What is the problem? Is there institutional racism?

Rebecca Marek: That would be our line. The levels of applications to local authorities are nearly on a par with the national figures for what they should be, but there is a bit of a drop when it comes to shortlisting and a more severe drop when it comes to appointments. Our written submission says:

“While 31.3% of white British/Scottish and 51.0% of other white shortlisted applicants were appointed ... only 17.7% of BME applicants were. Overall, white applicants are almost three times more likely to be successful in securing a post than BME applicants”.

The excuse that is given in a lot of those incidents is on the supply side. If we look through the public sector equality duty reports from the 2017 reporting round, we see that local authorities are focusing on making BME groups more employable. There is a big focus on translation services and English for speakers of other languages provision. We argue that such services

are necessary for some newer migrants, regardless of race, but that that does not account for the figures that I have given.

From our analysis of the 2017 reporting figures, we found that, in 2013, about 1 per cent of local authority staff were from a BME background. In 2017—four years later—that figure was at only 1.5 per cent, after local authorities were tasked with gathering information on ethnicity in relation to recruitment and then using that information to lay out plans for improvement. We have not seen much work done at a strategic level.

A lot of work that relates to anti-racism is on unconscious bias training. The Equal Opportunities Committee's report that was published in 2015, which I referenced earlier, found that unconscious bias training was not a very helpful approach.

Andy Wightman: Increasing attention has been paid to the need to get people with disabilities into the workforce more effectively. I do not know anything about the topic. Does workforce planning normally include consideration of the need to support greater equality in the workforce for not only BME people but people with disabilities, or is that seen as an equalities issue and separate from workforce planning?

Dave Watson: That should be core to workforce planning. We have an ageing workforce, but large numbers of people aged 50 to 65 would like to be in a job but are not. That is partly because of disability and health, but others are not in a job because there is unconscious bias with the older workforce, too. We have groups of workers who could be employed to address workforce planning issues, but they are not being recruited—it is clear that they are not being recruited in the field that we have been talking about—so that needs to be built into workforce planning. We need to have specific plans for training.

If middle managers are not trained in issues such as recruiting people from black and ethnic minorities, we end up employing people who look like me. I have seen that in the private sector and the public sector. I have walked into places in areas in which there is clearly a workforce out there and said, "Why have we got so few BME employees?" In fairness, when human resources and managers have said, "That's a good point, Dave," and measures including training, awareness and monitoring have then been put in, we have got results. A very big private sector company in Glasgow, which I will not name, carried out a big programme in an area in which there is a high level of black and ethnic minorities. That company turned its recruitment around as a result of the right programme, but it took someone to say, "Hang on. That doesn't look right."

Workforce planning should tell us that from the numbers that we have heard today.

Rebecca Marek: On the 2017 reporting round on the public sector equality duty, people should be aware. Those duties have existed for a while. Pre-dating the equality acts, there has been an impetus to collect data on ethnicity. We have hardly seen any change in 10 years. Employers have been aware that there is a problem. I agree that action on that should happen as part of workforce planning, but we are not seeing much evidence that it does happen or that it is happening on a level that is high enough to be effective.

The Convener: I will let Graham Simpson in for a supplementary question, but I am conscious that Sharon Dick and Sara Tennant have not had the opportunity to talk about work that is happening on the ground. Maybe after the supplementary, they might be able to put some of that on the record before the next line of questioning begins.

Graham Simpson: I was struck by the figures on the teaching workforce. In the Glasgow City Council area, the BME population is 11.6 per cent of the total, but the proportion of BME teachers is 3.4 per cent. In Edinburgh, the BME population is 8.3 per cent of the total, but the proportion of BME teachers is 1.5 per cent. In Aberdeen, the respective figures are 8.1 per cent and 2.2 per cent. You could make the same argument on gender, particularly in primary schools, in which there are lots of female teachers and not many male teachers. Should councils have specific policies to rectify that so that the teaching population better reflects the actual population?

Rebecca Marek: I do not work for a local authority. Such plans might exist but, if they do, they are certainly not well highlighted in the public sector equality duty reports. The Equality Act 2010 has resulted in a move to generalise equality. You will see a lot of reports that say, "We don't have any problem with recruitment. We've looked and there is no discrimination. There is not a problem. We have generic equality working groups that look at these issues and it is fine." That more general approach overlooks issues that might pop up for gender, disability or race in particular.

Teacher numbers is one area in which there is a really clear problem. If BME students do not see BME teachers, teaching becomes a less appealing career to pursue, so fewer BME people will go into teacher training, which will result in lower numbers of BME teachers. There needs to be a much more concerted and focused approach to how we improve the workforce figures. Those figures are taken from a census that was carried out in 2011. We estimate that the BME population has at least doubled in some areas since then so, in reality,

the figures are much more disparate than they seem.

The Convener: I am hearing a lot of challenges. Sharon, you are involved in a lot of the planning across 30 local authorities.

Sharon Dick: I would not say that I know all the detail of those 30 local authorities.

The Convener: No, but you might have examples of things that are happening on the ground where this issue has been looked at.

Sharon Dick: In response to what Rebecca Marek said, the figures are the figures, so there is an issue. It would be wrong to sit here and say that we have equality across the board, because we do not. We know that this is an area that we have to work on. Even looking around this room, we can see that it is an issue. There are protected characteristics in a number of areas. They cover not just black and ethnic minorities; we have issues with age and disability.

I agree that equality and mainstreaming reports should just be part of workforce planning, rather than something separate; we should be integrating work on that and making sure that we do it. We are trying to encourage people to declare. Local authorities have an issue with that, too, as was highlighted in Rebecca Marek's report. Quite a lot of employees will not declare their ethnicity and so on; we need to get that more known.

There is data for recruitment, which some local authorities are starting to look at. On the points that Rebecca Marek raised, I am not saying that we have a lot of completed actions, but a lot of work is now starting to look at bias at shortlisting. Given the systems that they now use, more councils cannot actually tell who the person is at that stage. We need to work on how we ensure that we do not have unconscious bias happening more at interview stage. A number of actions are being taken on recruitment.

11:00

We know that there are difficulties with recruitment locally. Our equality managers do a lot of work with local authorities and, from feedback, we know that lots of black and ethnic minority people do not want to work in local government, because they do not see it as a career. That is another issue. I will catch up with Rebecca Marek after the meeting, because if she has ideas on how we tackle such issues, I am keen to hear them.

A number of paths are on-going. We are not looking only at ethnicity; we are also looking at disability and trying to make our workplaces more accessible. As a lot of councils now have a more agile workforce, there is more flexibility and that

has helped to break down barriers and support people with different needs in the workplace.

Sara Tennant: On supported employment, the network has identified a lot of work that is going on on the ground to help people with disabilities get into work, whether they are young or not. It is difficult for individuals to navigate through all the support partners and everything that is out there, so our work involves thinking about how we can work together and collaborate in these times of increasing financial pressure to optimise the resources that are provided by the different support partners. We need to put frameworks in place so that progress is made on supported employment.

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): Earlier, Sharon Dick got to the heart of the issue when she said that discussion matters, because this is about communities and outcomes.

Notwithstanding the legal duties that Rebecca Marek has touched on, I think that we would all agree that the local government workforce should reflect the communities that it serves. There is not really a good picture of the diversity of the workforce. Sharon Dick has answered, in part, the question that I had on people not declaring their ethnic background.

In the written submission from the Coalition for Racial Equalities and Rights, which we have from Rebecca Marek, there is huge variation in the data that is available. For example, the ethnic background of almost 60 per cent of East Dunbartonshire Council's employees is unknown, whereas the figure for East Renfrewshire Council is much lower, at just above 17 per cent. Can Rebecca Marek say something about data collection and about underreporting or people not declaring their ethnicity?

Rebecca Marek: It is important to distinguish between people who, on their forms, have ticked that they would prefer not to declare their ethnicity and people whose ethnicity is unknown. Some people who prefer not to say might be uncertain about how the data might be used, so we need to emphasise what the data is for and the protections that are in place. From the local authority figures, the percentage of people saying that they prefer not to declare their ethnicity went from 8.6 per cent in 2013 to 10.4 per cent in 2017, so there was only a slight increase.

The much bigger problem is with unknown figures. The percentage of employees whose ethnicity was unknown went from 20.8 per cent in 2013 to 23.8 per cent in 2017. The public sector equality duties are in place, and there is the requirement to gather that information. People ticking that they prefer not to say is one thing, but

the much larger issue is about why so many of the figures are still unknown.

I caution that there is no evidence to indicate that the figures are low because we do not know about all the BME people. Even in local authorities and other public bodies in which declaration rates are high and unknown rates are low, there is a consistent picture that is in line with national figures on underemployment and unemployment. There is a question about why so much is unknown and why filling in those gaps has not been more of a priority.

Monica Lennon: That is helpful. It seems like there are unresolved issues around data.

Do you have a view on the UK race disparity audit that was commissioned? The Scottish Government elected not to be part of that. Are there other lessons that we can learn? Was not being part of that audit an opportunity missed or are enough systems embedded in Scotland?

Rebecca Marek: We would have been in favour of participation in the audit. Bringing data to light is always a good thing. For a variety of reasons, that was not the path that the Scottish Government chose. Its emphasis is perhaps more on revising its equality evidence strategy. That is more to do with bringing data that exists to a central place where people can find it, use it and analyse it. The problem is still that some of that data is just not known and some public bodies are just not making the efforts that need to be made to fill in those gaps and answer those questions. Through reading some PSED reports, we find that people do not see an issue with discrimination because the figures are so low. I guess that we question whether, if the figures were a bit higher, it would be a bit easier to identify the issues. Some groups might just rather not know.

Monica Lennon: Thank you—that is helpful. I am thinking about outcomes and why a lot of this matters, and about whether there is a Scottish Government national strategy and outcomes or regional and local strategies. The committee has been looking at city region deals and the concept of inclusive growth. If workforces are not inclusive, there can be a disconnect there.

That brings me to some of the specialist roles that Dave Watson, Sharon Dick and others have touched on, such as planners. I declare again my interest as a member of the Royal Town Planning Institute.

The Convener: I had no idea, Monica.

Monica Lennon: That is a wee bit of a surprise to the convener, but I can completely relate to the story that Dave Watson relayed about the planning school in Glasgow shutting down, which I hope is no reflection on my time there.

Jobs in trading standards, building standards or environmental health are jobs where, if people do not turn up for their work and buildings or restaurants are not inspected, people could die. Like other colleagues, I have been a councillor and have worked in local government, so, when it comes to workforce reporting and planning, I find the serious consequences of not enough having people in those roles troubling. I know that there has already been a discussion about national co-ordination, but surely that is critical, particularly when we see what happens with fires in city centres or cases in North Lanarkshire where people have died because of poor hygiene in local butchers or bakers in the high street. What will it take to get that higher up the political agenda?

Dave Watson: Sadly, it tends to happen when something hits us between the eyes too late in the day. What I said earlier about planning was an example of that. Building control suddenly gets a focus because of Grenfell. We had a big look at environmental health a number of years ago because of the Wishaw outbreak. What tends to happen is that some big event happens and people ask, “Why did this happen?” and then everyone says, “Building control is carrying 65 vacancies and staff are spending all their time filling in bits of paper to report to the Scottish Government and are not doing inspections on the ground.” Those things come up later.

We simply cannot do workforce planning on the back of crises. We have to have the structured thing that I was talking about earlier. There are challenges. In response to Alexander Stewart’s point, I talked about private sector leakage, which is difficult to manage.

We have to consider things such as career pathways. On the train this morning over from Ayrshire, I tested the system to see what it would tell someone who wanted to be a trading standards officer—I know that it is a bit late in the day for that. I googled it and went through the My World of Work website. It was pretty difficult to see where I would get a training course. Should I do a degree or get a trainee job? There were bits of information there; I am not saying that there was nothing there, but you would have to be pretty determined to find it. A friend of mine happens to be a trading standards officer, and his son is going to be one, but we cannot rely on family connections. I suspect that most young people would have given up the ghost on being a trading standards officer by the time they ploughed through that system.

Workforce planning, I hope, would not just be about producing lots of numbers; it would be about delivering actions to improve approaches. Government can help, because it has levers in this regard. We talked about the city region deals, and

procurement is another lever—we have argued with the fair work convention about that. There are funding streams that can be used to incentivise people, which brings us back to a point that Bob Doris made. There are ways of doing it, but my key message is this: start early and do not wait for a crisis to happen.

Monica Lennon: Rebecca Marek talked about equality impact assessments. When workforce reporting and planning is going on, and when budget decisions on efficiencies are being taken and posts are disappearing, are we getting robust equality impact assessments? Sharon Dick and Sara Tennant might say something about that. It still often feels as though a box is ticked and committees and councils are told, “Oh, yeah, there’s been an equality impact assessment,” but no one pores over the detail of the assessment, because it is buried in 500 pages of committee papers.

This committee has been scrutinising the Planning (Scotland) Bill recently. Engender said that the bill’s equality impact assessment is so poor that the bill could constrain how we plan the built environment in an inclusive way, respecting the diversity of our population. Do we have the right skill set to be able to do good equality impact assessment? How does that inform workforce planning?

Sharon Dick: I cannot speak for all 32 councils, but I know that an equality impact assessment is done for any change, whether it is a change to the budget, a change to terms and conditions or a major policy change. An equality impact assessment should always be carried out in such circumstances.

An issue with equality impact assessments is that they are not always in the same format. An online tool is being sought, which I think will help, because people will then find it easier to see the content, instead of having to work out what the structure of the report is. Equality impact assessments should be structured and focused. They should be clear about what they are highlighting, and they should contain good data.

Dave Watson will tell you that the unions always challenge us on equality impact assessments—if we do not do one, we soon get asked about it, so there is a focus on the issue. We take appropriate action as a result of equality impact assessments, too.

Rebecca Marek: Much depends on when an equality impact assessment is done. If it is done at the beginning of a process, people can be proactive and build equality into their planning. If it is done at the end, and people say, “Oh, this will have the same outcomes for everybody,” I question whether that is true—and anyway, if

something results in the same outcome for everyone, the same problems will perpetuate.

Monica Lennon talked about the skill of people who do the assessments. The Equality and Human Rights Commission produces a lot of guidance and I am sure that it can assist. However, if a BME-underrepresented workforce is assessing the impact of something on BME communities, there is the potential for significant oversights. That is why it is important to have a diverse workforce, which is cognisant of diverse issues.

Sharon Dick: I concur with that. An equality impact assessment is a live document, which should be done at the start of a process and revisited throughout the process. In addition, if it is to encourage us all, it needs to be a group exercise and not a tick-box exercise that is done by one person sitting in a room.

Monica Lennon: Dave Watson talked about the impact of austerity on local government and the 29,000 job losses since 2009. That is an awful lot of people with experience of local government who have gone out of the door. What are local government and Scotland learning from the feedback and exit interviews that those people have given? How is that informing and influencing decisions for the future?

11:15

Dave Watson: It is a simple fact that we are losing lots of people who have lots of experience. We tend to pick on the big groups and some of the groups that we have mentioned today, including planners, but there are quite a lot of generic administrative jobs in local government. There can be leakage from them to other parts of the economy. They are important jobs although they are often forgotten. We have done surveys that show that social workers, planners, architects, engineers and so on bemoan the fact that they have no administrative support and spend all their time filling in bits of paper that used to be filled in by other people at half the cost. We should not forget the generality of that when attracting people to local government.

We keep saying that the data is poor, but it is interesting to look at how the 29,000 job losses have been managed. The 60 to 65-year-olds were obviously natural wastage, but a lot of people under 50 have gone. They have not gone with their pensions because, generally, you cannot get your pension until you are at least 55, or 50 in some cases. Generally speaking, councils are reluctant to let 50 to 60-year-olds go, because it is expensive to do so because of their pensions. There are what are called strain costs, which are also quite expensive.

When we look at the numbers, we find lots of people under 50 going voluntarily with a basic redundancy package, but they have other jobs. They are not going into retirement and picking up their slippers; they are going to work in other sectors. If we looked at some of the reasons why they have decided not to stay in local government, that would tell us more than somebody of my age who says, "Give us a pile of money; I'm going to retire." You want to look at the under-50s who are leaving local government and see what is happening there.

The other consequence of workforce planning that is not well understood is the huge level of layering that is being done in local government. That is being done to save money but what we tend to find is that departments are now multidisciplinary. The head of protective services might therefore be an environmental health officer but not a trading standards officer. That means that trading standards in that department is quite a junior member of staff. A number of well-publicised problems have arisen as a result of such situations.

What is lost along with experience is collective knowledge. It is not just about skills and training; it is also about knowledge—"I know what happened in the past, I know what works, and I know the area"—and we lose that collective knowledge at our peril. We are now seeing quite junior staff at senior levels struggling because they do not have the experience to make the big strategic decisions.

Sharon Dick: Local authorities are trying to do a lot of succession planning to alleviate some of those problems. Dave Watson's points are valid and we are losing a lot of knowledge. Local authorities are trying to identify risk areas where there might be a single point of failure, because there is only one person doing the job, which is happening because of budget cuts. Councils are looking at that to try to ensure that there is better resilience and they are doing succession planning over a number of years, based on when people have indicated that they want to retire. It is more for people who are choosing to retire or saying that they will take voluntary redundancy in a year. We are putting better plans in place now, but there are issues with knowledge and with multiple roles.

A lot of councils are having to restructure because of budget limitations, and that means restructuring with the people they have internally, so people are being spread thin over multiple roles. That has come out of exit interviews. Some people choose to leave because they want to stay a planner, for example, and they do not want to be a planner who manages environmental health and trading standards. People are making choices.

The Convener: We must move on. I will let in Jenny Gilruth first and then, if there is plenty time, I will take Kenneth Gibson.

Jenny Gilruth (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP): I want to revisit workforce planning for early learning and childcare. I recently had representation from the Scottish Childminding Association, which is concerned about local authorities that do not use childminders to provide the entitlement. Last year, it published a report that showed that only 15 local authorities across the country were using childminders to deliver the entitlement. Fife Council is one of the local authorities that is not using them. Are some councils better than others at working with partners on workforce planning?

The Convener: That might be another question for Sharon Dick.

Sharon Dick: I probably cannot comment on that, because I do not have enough knowledge of each local authority. I am sure that there is variation from council to council, but I probably do not have a wide enough picture to comment on that. I am sorry.

Dave Watson: Obviously, we represent that group of workers. That is a good example of public service reform. With a big expansion of provision, we need lots of extra people. We have had a look at that matter and spoken to the Scottish Government about it. For example, we think that the reason why there is a difference in the numbers is because the Government assumes that too many full-time staff will be working in the area, whereas our experience is that a lot of childcare workers deliberately choose to be part time. That is part of the reason why 97 per cent of those workers are women, which in itself is a challenge that needs to be broken down.

There are three levels of childcare provision. There is the local authority provision, which largely has the best-qualified staff. Generally speaking, those staff have higher national certificates or higher national diplomas, and managers must now be qualified to degree level. Therefore, those staff are better paid. It is inevitable that, when there needs to be quick expansion of provision, people go to the better-paid areas in which they will get proper training.

With partnership nurseries, which are a new area, the Government has to pay the living wage. The trouble is that the living wage is totally inadequate for somebody who should be qualified to HNC or HND level. That level of pay would not be acceptable in any male-dominated job. If the job was in construction, for example, the living wage would not even be considered to be appropriate for the level of qualification that is needed.

Then there is the basic level of provision, which does not get that element of Government funding. The economic model in that area—although not everywhere—is pretty poor. It tends to be 16 and 17-year-olds who are involved, and people are encouraged out because the national minimum wage has to be paid for the higher age group. Surveys have shown that even supervisory staff in those nurseries do not get the living wage and there is reluctance to pay the higher age rates even with the national minimum wage. Therefore, there are major problems in that area.

What is the purpose of education and childcare? Is it to help mothers and fathers to have better access to the workforce, or is it about intervention with the very youngest people? I am sorry to go back to the Christie commission, but I was a Christie commission adviser, and it pointed out that the interventions that can be made at that stage are crucial to tackling inequality. The purpose is probably a bit of both.

The workforce planning in that area has not taken certain things into account. I have just given off the top of my head four or five factors that have not been properly factored into the expansion of early years provision. If we had proper workforce planning, we would talk about those sorts of things right at the outset of the policy and not when we have to deliver some pretty big numbers next year.

Jenny Gilruth: The Scottish Childminding Association's concern is that, in some local authorities, childminders' services are just not used at all. I take your point about the purpose of childcare. From my experience of childminders, they have a role to play. It is not just about being babysitters; it is about much more than that.

Sharon Dick spoke about local authorities restructuring. In Fife, we have an issue relating to administrative staff where the council is restructuring. Admin staff in schools are predominantly females and are often not very well paid. In April this year, it was reported that Fife Council has five executives on salaries of more than £100,000, and it has been reported that the chief executive earns more than the First Minister or the Prime Minister. My question is perhaps another one for Dave Watson. Do you have a view on capping council executives' salaries?

The Convener: I see Mr Watson scribbling furiously about that. It is worth putting on the record that the committee was unanimous that chief executives should not be paid additional moneys to be returning officers at elections. A theme has emerged from the committee over a period of time.

Dave Watson: We welcomed that at the time. We agree that we should pay the rate for the job and should not start splitting things up into bits and

pieces. Therefore, it was absolutely right. I suppose that I am not always fair to chief officers in local government—they might say that—but if we look at equivalent responsibilities in terms of the scale of the workforce, budget size and so on, chief officers in local government do not look overpaid. There is no doubt about that.

I deal with, and have dealt with, some of the biggest private sector companies in Scotland, and I know people who have come into the public sector and said, "Hang on, I'm having to take a very big pay cut to do a job that is actually bigger than the one that I was doing in the private sector." Some of the comparisons are not entirely fair on chief officers. Having said that, there is always a "but", and in this case it is that we are in favour of pay ratios.

As the high pay commission highlighted in its reports, there is a strong argument for pay ratios in the workforce. They should not be able to be manipulated, as they often are in the private sector, by outsourcing low-paid jobs and thus tweaking the numbers. There should be pay ratios, but in the private as well as the public sector. That is only fair and reasonable.

The Convener: Do others have any additional comments on that? I appreciate the reluctance that there may be to answer that question, but Ms Gilruth has put her concerns on the record. Does she want to add anything else?

Jenny Gilruth: I have a final question. Public procurement was mentioned in response to a line of questioning from Monica Lennon. Public procurement is one of the 24 powers that the British Government is currently proposing to retain following Brexit, which will directly impact on the powers of this Parliament. How well are local authorities preparing for the effect of Brexit with regard to workforce planning?

Dave Watson: I knew that we would get to Brexit.

The Convener: I hope that you are all well briefed on that. It was inevitable that it would be asked about at some point. We might give Mr Watson a bit of a rest and ask whether anyone else wants to comment on that question.

Sharon Dick: Brexit is obviously an issue for the workforce, and we are looking at it. Each council is looking to see how much of its workforce will be affected. The City of Edinburgh Council has the biggest issue. We are concerned about our diversity and that people will choose not to stay in roles but to go back home. We are also concerned that people will not come to study in Scotland and that those who have been here longer will choose to return to their home countries.

We are assessing the level of impact on the workforce. COSLA is pulling together the metrics so that we can see the overall impact in Scotland. We are also putting appropriate support in place to help employees who are affected by Brexit through the citizenship process, which is cumbersome. I cannot remember how many pages the form has, but it is not easy to complete. We are trying to ensure that we have appropriate support in place for people across the country, and to get them citizenship now, ahead of Brexit. We will continue to provide whatever support is needed as the situation progresses. It is a big concern.

Sara Tennant: I concur with that, from my knowledge through the network about what is going on.

The Convener: Because of the time constraints, before I ask Mr Watson to answer, and because the meeting is about budget scrutiny, it is relevant to ask whether there will be emerging cost pressures in relation to the fallout from Brexit. That is in the context of the UK Government talking about a “Brexit dividend”—which is not language that I would ever use—and all the additional cash that there will be. Personally, I do not see where that will come from, but it is not the committee’s job to analyse that. However, it is our job to look at additional cost pressures on local authorities. If those are emerging because of Brexit, we have to look at where the finance to support that will come from. It might be helpful to include that in your response, Mr Watson.

Dave Watson: I well remember waking up on the day after the referendum and going into my office to say that we needed to find out how many European Union nationals were working in the public sector in Scotland, and how many were Unison members. There was no data, for the reasons that have been indicated. Even in areas for which we have relatively good workforce data, such as the national health service, there is self-declaration of ethnicity and we have a huge number of people who do not declare. We have to ask why people of particular ethnic backgrounds do not declare their ethnicity. I do not mean in relation to interviews; I mean that, when they get to work, they are still not filling in annual surveys. I am a bit uncomfortable with and slightly worried about that.

11:30

We have done quite a lot of work on the pressures, particularly in the social care sector. We have worked with the Scottish Government on an interviewing project. We have about 6,000 Unison members in Scotland who are EU nationals. My team has been doing face-to-face and telephone interviews as part of that project.

The Scottish Government is gradually releasing some of the information on people’s views. Much of it is what one would expect. There is a sense of being let down and not wanted in Scotland—not just in Scotland but in the UK too, although we are interviewing Scottish members—and a sense of rejection. We know that, in the care sector, that is adding to the turnover issues, which have a cost and which affect workforce planning, so any workforce planning has to include Brexit. However, let us remember that we had problems in the care sector before Brexit. Brexit has just added to those problems.

Jenny Gilruth made a fair point about procurement. In the debate about powers, a lot of people focused on new stuff coming from the EU, but one of the problems with the UK Government’s approach is that the headings do not just include powers coming from the EU; they include powers that we already have in Scotland. Procurement is the one that worries me more than anything else, because the UK now has the powers to start laying down regulations. We have separate legislation in Scotland and separate regulations relating to procurement. They do not include everything that I asked for, and in my view the Scottish Government did not go anywhere near far enough in some key procurement areas, but the regulations are still more progressive and interventionist than those in most other parts of the UK, so I think that they are better.

I am concerned, because the last thing on earth that I want is a UK Government that does not understand Scotland or the tighter areas in our sectors. It is starting to put one-size-fits-all policies and regulations in place in relation to procurement, which is a big worry for us, because procurement is one of the areas where we need to make interventions to get it right, particularly in social care, where 60 per cent of provision is already outsourced. I hope that workforce planning will take Brexit into account in a big way.

The Convener: Kenneth Gibson is next. You have been very patient, Mr Gibson.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): It has been a fascinating discussion, and there are lots of things that I want to ask about. One thing that has not come up so far is the Scottish Government’s policy of no compulsory redundancies. How has that impacted on workforce planning?

Dave Watson: That is a good question. The first thing to point out is that the policy of no compulsory redundancies largely does not apply in local government. We have had compulsory redundancies in local government although, in fairness, there have not been many, and there is always a debate about whether a redundancy is

compulsory or voluntary, or whether it is Hobson's choice in some cases.

A lot of authorities that have made restructuring changes to try to save money find themselves with a pool of spare people who they then reallocate or retrain, and they may spend some time doing that. That is a form of workforce planning and, sadly, local authorities have become experienced at doing it, and they generally do it fairly well. That happens not only in local government but in the public sector more broadly. Despite losing 29,000 staff, we have avoided significant numbers of compulsory redundancies and we have been able to re-accommodate that workforce through retraining and, in many cases, upskilling.

An HR director might say that it is an additional challenge and that in other industries, you would just sack everybody and it would be nice and easy, but in local government and in most of the public sector there is a degree of challenge. In my experience, unions and HR people in the public sector are probably better at doing that than those in the private sector, because we have constraints. There are also cost factors: it is expensive to let people go, so you do not want to do it unless you absolutely have to. We have developed some pretty good techniques—it is not perfect, but that is an element of workforce planning that we do rather well.

Kenneth Gibson: How does it impact on efficiency if, for example, there is a surge of people in one department who want voluntary redundancy, which can have an impact on the morale of people who want voluntary redundancy but cannot get it, and there are other departments in which, frankly, the local authority would like to reduce the headcount but people are not too keen to leave?

Dave Watson: That is a problem. If a local authority offers voluntary redundancy and too many people want to go, that is pretty demoralising, because those people have essentially put it out there that they want to go. To be honest, that was probably more of an issue in the early years of austerity and it is less of an issue today. Equally, we tend not to have clusters of people wanting to take voluntary redundancy, although that will happen in individual authorities from time to time.

Local authorities have a tendency to consume their own smoke in some of these areas. The one-worker approach might enable us to do a bit of cross-work. The other day, I had a meeting with social care workers and I was impressed with the number of former steel workers and men of my sort of age who previously worked in manufacturing and who now work in the social care sector. It is possible to retrain people so that they can work in those areas, but you have to

make those jobs attractive, and you have to do some early work with those people to convince them to think about retraining and to make them understand that those new careers are more attractive than they might think. That is a challenge, but it is not a massive one and it should not be beyond HR and trade unions, working together, to deal with it.

Kenneth Gibson: I was interested in your exchange with Jenny Gilruth on the early years. North Ayrshire Council is rolling out a pilot of 1,140 hours of childcare in the three towns, but it is rolling it out only to local authority nurseries. That means that partnership nurseries are losing staff and parents hand over fist as the staff take up local authority jobs and the parents try to enrol in the council nurseries, because they can get full-time care for free there. That is impacting on the viability of partner nurseries.

If councils are going to do that, what are the implications for workforce planning, given that we are trying to get somewhere between 12,000 and 20,000 additional staff in the next three years?

Dave Watson: I do not know about that particular example. If we want to get into an argument about the best type of childcare, there are plenty of international studies that say that public sector delivery of education and childcare is the gold standard and is where we need to be going.

Kenneth Gibson: We need both.

Dave Watson: At the moment, we need both, for funding and other reasons. Given that we have both types of provision, my view is that the workforce planning has to encompass both—we talk about public service workforce planning, not public sector workforce planning.

Obviously, workforce planning is challenging in this area. We have 14,000 care providers, and a lot of them are small and have a limited capacity to engage in such dialogue. In social care, there is a bit of a difficulty in relation to the integration joint boards when some of the providers get around the table but, in fairness, I do not think that that is an issue in the childcare sector. I think that there is a case for a sectoral bargaining approach—a public service one—as recommended by the fair work convention, which would get at least some of those organisations around the table so that they can make the points that they are obviously making to you, and those points can be built into workforce planning.

We are not simply saying that we will exclude everybody other than those in the public sector. We represent care providers in the private sector and the voluntary sector, too, and our view is that it is necessary to bring all those people around the table and have a public service solution, as the

Christie commission recommended more than five years ago.

Kenneth Gibson: Does anyone else have any points to make on that issue?

The Convener: I was trying to get some eye contact there, Mr Gibson, but nobody was keen.

Kenneth Gibson: Earlier, there was a discussion about why people might not want to declare their ethnicity. I would say that people might not want to be defined according to their ethnicity—I say that as someone who is of Scottish, Irish, Scandinavian, Jewish, east European and south Indian ancestry. Many people are a mixture and do not think that they should be defined in one box or another.

Rebecca Marek, in your submission, you suggest that one measure that would help to improve BME employment rates would involve

“Setting public BME employment targets to which organisations are held to account”.

How would that be done, practically, given that the proportion of BME people across Scotland varies enormously? Would the quota, if we can call it that, be set according to the population in a local authority, and would it be set at the level of a council department? For example, as your submission notes, the BME population in the East Dunbartonshire Council area is 4.2 per cent, so would 4.2 per cent of each department—planning, museums, cleansing and so on—have to be BME, or would it be a more general target? Graham Simpson raised the issue of teachers but, of course, it is individual schools that recruit teachers, not local authorities per se. Would the same requirement apply to schools, with each department—English, maths and so on—having to meet the proportional target? How would the policy be delivered, in practical terms?

Rebecca Marek: That is a great question. I think that there will be variation across different jobs and in individual schools. If we are talking about targets, there would probably be a council target, a local authority target and perhaps something that was disaggregated into some of the bigger job areas within that. The place to do that is within the public sector equality duty reports that are produced by national health service bodies, councils, education authorities, large and small non-departmental public bodies and so on. People in those bodies are probably the ones who are best placed to understand what their workforce looks like, what a reasonable target would be and what steps would have to be taken to meet the target.

As you say, if there is a 4 per cent BME figure across the country, the level will differ between, say, Glasgow and Orkney, so a one-size-fits-all

approach will not work. However, we would welcome and encourage any target setting by the bodies that are listed in relation to the public sector equality duties.

Kenneth Gibson: Would that percentage be a target or a minimum? In some areas of the public sector—not local government, but medicine, for example—it has been well exceeded.

I have some concerns about what you said about the figures on applications and interviews for posts. You said that the success rates were 17.7 per cent for BME applicants and 31.3 per cent for white British/Scottish applicants. However, you also said that the figure for other white shortlisted applicants was 51 per cent. That means that the gap between white British and other white is greater, at 19.7 per cent, than the gap between white British and BME, at 13.6 per cent. Do you think that there should be a balance overall—not just in terms of BME people, but in terms of white Scottish/British people relative to other white people?

Rebecca Marek: I am not the person who did that particular bit of research but, from what I understand, the figures might be skewed by the fact that there were only a small number of people in the research who were white but not British or Scottish. The research was done through a freedom of information request and it was limited by the information that we were able to get from the bodies that responded. Those are local authority figures, so I am not sure whether it is an issue across all employers. I would be happy to look into the issue a bit more for you.

Kenneth Gibson: Could you respond to the question of whether the figure should be a target or a minimum?

Rebecca Marek: I do not think that, legally, we can set minimums and quotas. I think that targets are what we are able to set at the moment. Making them public and highlighting them in the public sector equality duty reports is a good way to increase accountability.

We were talking about the problem of BME groups perhaps not wanting to go into local authority jobs. That is to do with visibility, careers advice and, to an extent, the lack of equalities rhetoric that surrounds some public bodies. The more we can emphasise that there is a desire to reach parity, the better it will be. Whether that is done through groups setting their own targets or minimums is less important than the fact that it should be done in a public way that involves the communities themselves.

Kenneth Gibson: Can I ask a question of Sharon Dick and Sara Tennant?

The Convener: You can, but we are using up the time that we had set aside for deliberation after the session. We should finish this session in around 10 minutes' time. Alexander Stewart has a question that he would like to ask, and that will wrap things up.

11:45

Kenneth Gibson: I am interested in hearing the views of Sharon Dick and Sara Tennant on an issue that Dave Watson talked about. How do we bridge the gap relating to the 65,000 health and care workers that we need by 2022? We know that there is already a chronic shortage and a high turnover in that area. How do we interact with young people on the issue? I have participated in some quite successful Prince's Trust courses that have been targeted at getting young people on the edges of the employment market into work. How can we scale that up? How can we get young people interested in what is a crucial area of the public sector from the point of view of workforce planning?

Sara Tennant: The public sector network is looking at ways of increasing employer presence in schools in the interests of attracting people to work for those employers. Fife Council has been working closely with employers on some foundation apprenticeships and, recently, one individual was in the news after having secured a role. There is an issue about getting to people earlier by increasing our presence and building relationships.

Kenneth Gibson: That might involve taking people from schools to visit care homes to see what that sort of work is like on the front line and so on.

Sara Tennant: Yes. In North Lanarkshire, we are doing that through supported employment, which we offer off the back of placements. We can also bring people into schools and think about what sort of work we can do in that regard, while bearing in mind the health and safety issues.

Kenneth Gibson: Sharon Dick, do you have any points to raise, perhaps with regard to gender balance in the sector? As Dave Watson said, there are just not enough women available to supply the numbers that we need in the workforce, and Brexit will reduce that significantly. What can we do to get more males interested in working in the care sector?

Sharon Dick: One of the issues involves talking about the career pathway with people. In the past, we have not been very good about signposting that pathway or talking about the possibilities that it could open up. Local authorities are working on ways of showing people that they can have a career in health and social care. We want to make

it attractive for people coming out of school and also for people who are retraining.

For some people who are retraining—people who have taken redundancy, for example—the issue is about the flexibility that that role can provide, because it is not typically a 9-to-5 role. That can work for people who perhaps want to take a different approach to life. Making people aware of the possibility of having a career in that area, and of the fact that it can provide flexibility to suit their lifestyles, will make those jobs more attractive to people.

Alexander Stewart: This morning's discussion has been informative and interesting. We have touched on managing decline and on the pressures that councils are facing. We know that councils are being asked to do more with less. What pressures are being added by the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament when we talk about affordable housing or the care sector becoming priorities? Jenny Gilruth talked about involvement in the childcare sector, and the issue of empowering communities has been raised. Councils are being given that added pressure and there is an added intensity in relation to what they are being expected to deliver, but they are not necessarily being given the resources and funds to make that happen. How does that impact on workforce planning?

Sharon Dick: I will start—

The Convener: You always make the mistake of making eye contact first.

Sharon Dick: If we had an answer to your question, Mr Stewart, we would set up a consultancy—it is like what Dave Watson said earlier about getting a job in the City. We could simply give the answer to you on a bit of paper and you could sort it out.

You have outlined the day-to-day reality of working in a council. There is a huge number of priorities, and every one of them is the right thing to do. A lot is happening on community empowerment, and that takes a different skill set, so a lot of councils are looking at how they can train employees to engage better with communities. We need to approach issues from the point of view of communities and not just implement policies that we come up with. Our approach is now more about what the community needs. That is an issue even with regard to job names. For example, following health and social care integration, one of our residents might be visited by someone from the local authority who is called a support worker and then by someone from the health service who is called a care worker. That can confuse people, especially if they have dementia. We need to be better at thinking about issues from the customer's perspective, and

we must consider the priorities and try to balance the resource as best we can.

The challenges for us are not the big priority items, which are fine, but what sits behind those: all the statutory and audit requirements. As a local authority and an employer, we want to have best practice for a lot of things. There are equality challenges; we are trying to deliver on a range of different aspects. The difficulty, though, is acknowledging that we cannot be at gold standard level for everything. Local authorities have to decide what can be gold standard and what needs to drop to silver or bronze. Some of those decisions can be very difficult and there can be difficult messages to discuss.

How can MSPs help? We need to try to agree what the best approach is in order to have the best outcome for our residents. Agreement can be difficult to achieve, because there are always different views.

The Convener: Are there any other comments on that?

Dave Watson: I think that the Scottish Government is perfectly entitled to set broad priorities. We agree that priorities such as childcare are largely the right ones because we know what a difference childcare and education—not just childminding—at an early stage can make. Education interventions before birth and shortly afterwards have a massive effect on inequality. Therefore, that is the right priority.

Prioritising putting money into social care is also right, because the demographics are undeniable and the costs of delayed discharges in NHS hospitals are enormous and clearly crazy. The Christie commission looked at two chunks of money—one was for prisons and the other was for acute hospitals—where resources could be freed up if things were done differently. I entirely accept that that is hugely difficult for you lot, as politicians, because closing hospitals and prisons is not an easy political sell on the doorstep. Nonetheless, from a public policy point of view, I have to tell you that that is where the money is.

We therefore agree with the Scottish Government's priorities, but we would obviously argue that the funding has not always followed them. We made the argument this year that local government needed a 2.5 per cent increase for those priorities just to stand still. That was before we talked about the 3 per cent that was needed for inflation, for which we ended up getting only 1.5 per cent. Those are the sort of funding arrangements that we are talking about.

The point was made earlier that leadership is important but that different skills are required. I might sound irritated, but I am not picking on Queen Margaret University. Frankly, however,

closing down the sort of courses that the next generation of leaders is going to come from is very irritating, given that we need to move to a more collaborative model, to pick up the point that Sharon Dick made about communities. Different leadership skills are required, because it is not about command and control; it is about getting people to work together in different ways.

My last point is on preventative spending. This committee, along with every committee in the Parliament, agrees that preventative spending is the way forward. However, I can tell the committee that, in every survey that we have done of local government staff, they say that the one thing that they are abandoning is preventative work. If you ask environmental health officers about preventative work, they will tell you that they do not do education in the kitchens any more; and trading standards officers do not go into factories to talk about how changes can be made. It is that type of work that is easy to abandon. What happens is that the local government staff just do the enforcement and the statutory basics. If we are serious about preventative spending, we need to build in some resource to do such preventative work.

Alexander Stewart: As you identify, local government is losing the resource and the staff numbers, but each local authority will be judged by the Care Commission or Audit Scotland on how it performs. The fact that local authorities are also judged against the benchmarking review to see which authority is the best at managing that process makes it even more difficult for them to square the circle of ensuring that they provide the services that people require when they need them.

Dave Watson: To be blunt, it is just a case of ticking boxes. In the area of building control, which the committee looked at, we made the point in our survey that building control officers said that they spent two days a week filling in Scottish Government forms for a monitoring arrangement that was, frankly, over the top. Regulation is an issue in social care, too. The Government and others need to focus on what we need to do to free up staff to go out there and do the job that they are paid to do.

The Convener: Okay. We have put in a good shift this morning. I should say that this was a budget scrutiny evidence session. Understandably, we discussed the theme of workforce planning, but I remind the witnesses that the session was about budget scrutiny. As I said during my line of questioning, there will be debate about the level of input into the local government settlement when the budget appears later this year and we have the final part of the process early next year. There will be political debate about that, as there always is. However,

we have to do our best to get beneath those numbers and assess not just whether they are sufficient but how the money is used at a local level, and we want to do that in relation to workforce planning. That is not an easy task, because if we were to look only at the raw data, we would be measuring only inputs, whereas we want to measure outcomes at a local authority level.

Therefore, to an extent, we are lurching around in the dark. If, when you go back home, you think, "Here's a really good thing that could be tracked and looked at in terms of outcomes at a local authority level," please give us that information, as it would be extremely helpful. For example, it would be helpful to get information about where a substantial input gives a poor outcome or where a reduced input gives a better outcome so that we can track where that money is being best used in the public sector. However, the financial challenges at a local authority level obviously cannot be shirked.

Having made that appeal to the witnesses, I thank all four of them for giving what is approaching two hours of evidence, which I think is above and beyond the call of duty.

We now move into private for agenda item 2.

11:55

Meeting continued in private until 12:08.

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