



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Local Government and Communities Committee

Wednesday 3 October 2018

Session 5



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LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

27th Meeting 2018, Session 5

CONVENER

*James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)

*Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP)

*Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con)

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

*Andy Wightman (Lothian) (Green)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Moira Bayne (Housing Options Scotland)

Tony Cain (Association of Local Authority Chief Housing Officers)

Mark Farey (Hanover (Scotland) Housing Association)

Lisa Innes (Glasgow Centre for Inclusive Living)

Fiona King (Shelter Scotland)

Jenny Laing (Aberdeen City Health and Social Care Partnership)

Nora Uhrig (Equality and Human Rights Commission)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Peter McGrath

LOCATION

The James Clerk Maxwell Room (CR4)

Scottish Parliament
Local Government and
Communities Committee

Wednesday 3 October 2018

[The Convener opened the meeting at 10:00]

Decision on Taking Business in
Private

The Convener (James Dornan): I welcome everyone to the 27th meeting in 2018 of the Local Government and Communities Committee. I remind everyone present to turn off their mobile phones. As meeting papers are provided in digital format, members may use tablets during the meeting.

Agenda item 1 is to decide whether to take in private agenda item 3, under which the committee will consider the pre-budget scrutiny evidence that it has heard. Do members agree to take agenda item 3 in private?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Pre-budget Scrutiny (Housing
Adaptations)

10:00

The Convener: Agenda item 2 is pre-budget scrutiny of housing adaptations. The committee will hold a round-table evidence session with a number of stakeholders in preparation for the publication of the Scottish Government's budget towards the end of the year. We intend to write to the Scottish Government before the budget is published to set out some pre-budget recommendations. We cannot do that without expert input, which is why the presence of the witnesses is so important.

The focus today is on housing adaptations, wider consideration of the suitability of our housing for the disabled, veterans and an ageing population, and how that should be reflected in the Scottish budget.

I welcome you all. We will start by introducing ourselves around the table. I am the convener of the committee.

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): I am the deputy convener of the committee.

Jenny Laing (Aberdeen City Health and Social Care Partnership): I am representing the Aberdeen city health and social care partnership.

Tony Cain (Association of Local Authority Chief Housing Officers): I am policy manager for the Association of Local Authority Chief Housing Officers.

Andy Wightman (Lothian) (Green): I am an MSP for Lothian.

Nora Uhrig (Equality and Human Rights Commission): I am from the Equality and Human Rights Commission.

Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP): I am the MSP for the Cowdenbeath constituency.

Mark Farey (Hanover (Scotland) Housing Association): I am from the Hanover (Scotland) Housing Association, which is a specialist provider of elderly persons' housing.

Lisa Innes (Glasgow Centre for Inclusive Living): I am a housing adviser at the Glasgow Centre for Inclusive Living.

Moir Bayne (Housing Options Scotland): I am from Housing Options Scotland. I am sorry; Graham Simpson should have introduced himself before me.

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): It is all right. I usually do not matter.

I am an MSP for Central Scotland.

Moira Bayne: I apologise. I have said who I am.

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I am an MSP for Mid Scotland and Fife.

Fiona King (Shelter Scotland): I am from Shelter Scotland.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): I am the MSP for Cunninghame North.

The Convener: The clerks are to my left.

I will kick off with a general question. What are your views on the outcomes for people who need housing adaptations across all tenures? Is there evidence of the benefits of preventive spend in that field?

Mark Farey: One of our most common adaptations is replacement of bathrooms with level access showers. Previously, residents may have needed the help of a carer or two to come in and help them to bathe. Obviously, that is a resource from elsewhere in the public sector. Once bathrooms have been replaced by level access showers, residents are, in many cases, able to look after their own bathing needs and do not need extra assistance. Our residents tend to be single people, so they do not have the benefit of a partner or spouse with them. Therefore, they need assistance from outside prior to that adaptation, but afterwards, they do not.

Jenny Laing: There is also the impact of adaptations on unpaid carers. That needs to be considered in the wider context of the Carers (Scotland) Act 2016. If a person does not have an adaptation, there can be huge implications for the health and safety and the stress level of the carer, which can lead to breakdowns in the provision of the care. Ultimately, that will cause resources having to be spent in other areas. That is an important consideration for the individual and how they are supported in the community.

Nora Uhrig: In our housing inquiry, the EHRC looked at accessible housing for disabled people, and we found that disabled people in accessible or adequate housing that meets their needs are four times more likely to be in employment. That goes back to what has been said about saving or gaining money in other ways when money is spent on adaptations or accessible housing.

The Convener: That is an interesting statistic.

Moira Bayne: Housing Options Scotland echoes that in relation to our clients. We have evidence that having the right adaptation in the right house, particularly if there are disabled children in the family, keeps the family together and enables parents to continue working, if that is what they want to do. That has much wider societal benefits. We can see a relatively small

spend on an adaptation being cascaded throughout the local community and beyond.

Tony Cain: That is all true. When the appropriate adaptation is delivered at the right time, it can make an enormous difference to the experience and the life of the household that benefits from it. However, there is evidence that too many folk do not get the right adaptations as quickly as they need them, and that experience of the adaptations process is often not good. That was demonstrated in the EHRC's report.

The Convener: That is the reason why we are here. We are trying to thrash that out and see whether there is a way that we can improve matters.

Andy Wightman: Looking at the budgets that we have for spend in the area is interesting. Over the past three years, those budgets have been very flat. For example, the number of registered social landlord adaptations has been just above 3,000 for the past three years. Obviously, how much money we need to spend and how we should spend it are big questions. We will explore some of those issues, but are there any ways in which we could lever in other sources of funding through existing housing investment in the private sector—73 per cent of older people live in private housing—or through the tax system?

The Convener: If anybody wishes to comment, they should catch my eye. We would like to get a free-flowing discussion going, but you should let me know that you wish to comment so that we do not all talk over one another.

Moira Bayne: In our submission, we mentioned that we have an access ownership scheme in partnership with Link Group. That is a very flexible shared ownership scheme that can enable people to stay in their existing property or to move to a more suitable property. They can own a share of the property and rent a share of it from Link Group. That has been a way for Link Group to use its assets for wider community benefit. There is no reason why that scheme could not be extended to other RSLs that have the financial capacity for that. That would be one way of using the money in the existing system that is not being utilised at present.

Andy Wightman: On what scale does that scheme operate?

Moira Bayne: Over the past five years, we have done between 20 and 25 adaptations, so it is a niche scheme. Link Group has used £1.5 million of its own reserves, and other finance goes into the scheme. It would be able to take on more applicants, and we think that other RSLs might be in a similar position. Some of the bigger RSLs that have a substantial asset base could perhaps look at entry into a shared ownership arrangement.

Tony Cain: The difficulty with the numbers that members have in front of them is that they are less than half of the total expenditure on adaptations. We have tenure-based funding streams. For stage 3 adaptations and housing associations, money is provided directly by the Scottish Government's better homes division, and money is provided to Glasgow City Council and the City of Edinburgh Council through transfer of management of development funding. On top of that, some housing associations commit their own resources to fund adaptations, because the £10 million no longer covers the whole of the cost of adaptations in their stock. The money has been frozen for a number of years.

We do not know how much money some housing associations put in, but the figures are pretty inconsistent across the RSL sector. Whether they simply wait for a grant to be available, carry out works up front and then reclaim the grant, or carry the cost of the work themselves, we have not seen those figures. On top of that, there are owners who make a contribution to adaptations to their own homes, and there is a substantial sum from local government. At least £16 million a year in local government funds adaptations in the local authority stock.

The key point is that tenants of council houses are the only group who pay the whole cost of their own adaptations, from their rent. Everybody else gets some subsidy. I think that Glasgow Housing Association does not access TMDF for stage 3 adaptations and pays for the adaptations itself.

The system is a very complicated, tenure-based and sometimes landlord-specific one, and it is not clear how much is being spent and the extent to which it meets demand.

The Convener: It is therefore very difficult to say whether the stage 3 budget is being used as efficiently as it was or whether RSLs should increase their spend on adaptations, because we do not know how much they are spending.

Tony Cain: That is absolutely true. However, the key difference is that the stage 3 budget is the only one that is managed outwith the integration joint boards. Where the Scottish Government required local authorities to transfer, they transferred statutory responsibility and the funding streams to the local IJB as part of that set-up. The grants for owners from local government and the housing revenue account adaptations are theoretically administered by the IJB, but for the most part they are not; they are simply delegated back to the local authority. Therefore, there has been no real change in what goes on. The £10 million stage 3 adaptations money is administered wholly outwith the rest of the process and is completely separate.

The Convener: Does anybody else want to come in on this?

Jenny Laing: Perhaps I can give some indication of the figures that we are talking about. I got in touch with some of our local RSLs in Aberdeen; my colleagues in Castlehill Housing Association estimated that they required £120,000 this year to serve their properties in Aberdeen city, Aberdeenshire and Moray, but they actually received £66,000. All of that money has already been committed, so they are now looking at alternative sources of funding. Breaking the figures down on a local authority area basis, we are actually talking about only £22,000, and a level access shower costs £5,000 or £6,000. As a result, it is not having the impact that we might expect it to have.

The Convener: Perhaps that brings us back to the question that Andy Wightman asked at the very beginning. Can you lever in money from elsewhere?

Jenny Laing: Yes, there might be alternatives. I was just giving you a real-life example of the types of funds that we are talking about.

Kenneth Gibson: Housing Options Scotland says in its submission:

"With regards to our veteran clients we feel the veterans charitable sector is a potential area of untapped funding."

Can you say a wee bit more about that?

Moir Bayne: As people will know, veterans charities are relatively well off and tend to have substantial asset bases. However, our experience is that they are not that active in housing in Scotland. There are big veterans charities that do very little in Scotland, not because they do not want to but because they do not know how to. Instead, they have concentrated on England. For example, the Haig Housing Trust, which helps ex-Royal Air Force personnel and has several million pounds worth of assets, has very little stock and only one part-time member of staff in Scotland, and there are opportunities for it to offer individual housing solutions to our clients. It could purchase properties and rent them to clients; it could lend clients the deposit to do something through, say, the low-cost initiative for first-time buyers' scheme; or, for clients in the private rented sector, it could pay their rent in advance or whatever. It is an area of potential growth. So far, we have been heartened by the response from the veterans sector. It wants to help people, but at the minute it is struggling to know how best to do that.

Alexander Stewart: If the supply and demand situation that Jenny Laing has highlighted an example of is universal—and it is probably reasonable to accept that it is the case across most local authorities and most locations in

Scotland—how can things be improved? If you cannot get the support and funding that you need initially, you have to delay things and put off progressing these issues for individuals, for whatever reason. How can the council, the health board and so on even manage such a crisis—which it will be if the supply and support mechanisms are not in place? It will create a massive national backlog for us to deal with.

Jenny Laing: We have certainly had examples of individuals in RSL properties who have had to apply for and move to local authority housing, because their adaptations have been held up. Undoubtedly, delays are happening. In Aberdeen, we have looked at different interim and stopgap housing options, but people out there are waiting for adaptations and that—just to pick up on Mark Farey's point—ends up putting pressure on services elsewhere. Tony Cain might want to add to that.

10:15

Tony Cain: With regard to timescales, the measure in the annual return on the charter—which is the statutory return from local authorities and housing associations—is the time from the occupational therapist's recommendation being received to the adaptation itself being completed. That varies quite dramatically across the piece. As I am sure I said when I gave evidence last year, it is the one indicator in the ARC where local authorities are reasonably consistently outperforming housing associations. I am not suggesting that we local authorities are doing as well as we should be doing, but it is the one area where we are doing better. The period varies from between four and five weeks in well-performing authorities to 50 to 60 weeks in poorly performing ones, and that variation is evident across Scotland.

The Convener: What is the reason for that? Is it that the local authorities have a system in place or that RSLs do not want to spend the money?

Tony Cain: It is partly linked to the funding arrangement. In 2012, the adapting for change working group made a clear set of recommendations on how to address these issues, which the Government accepted at that time. Typically, in a local authority, the budget will be fixed at the beginning of the year; however, it is seen as demand led, and the local authority will continue to spend the money on adaptations until they are all done. What you do not reach is a point in the year when the budget is spent and the work stops. I am not saying that that happens universally—it is what typically happens. In preparing for my appearance before the committee last year, I went round all the local authorities and asked about their processes and

their spend, and that was the typical response that came back.

In some housing associations, the situation is slightly different, because the expectation is that the adaptation will be funded largely from the statutory grant. If that grant is not available, the adaptation will, in many cases, not be done until it becomes available. The association might carry out the work and then claim the money at the start of the next year, which means that, in many areas the year can start with a big chunk of the grant already spent. That results in sometimes quite substantial delays for even quite minor adaptations.

Fiona King: With regard to Tony Cain's point about the waiting list, Shelter is, given what we do, almost a bit more tenure neutral than others around the table, because we tend to see this sort of thing only when systems and processes break down to the extent that third-party advocacy is required. National waiting times figures can hide huge local variation among housing associations and local councils, depending on need. Nevertheless, it can take years and years for people to get adaptations, depending on the extent of the adaptations; on whether the individual in question has a progressive condition, which means that the need changes; on whether there are children; or on whether we are talking about a large family with a disabled child or, perhaps, an adult with needs. People come to us only when their situation becomes unbearable. In the evidence that has been submitted, lots of people have highlighted poignant case studies that show how much people will put up with, simply because they have no choice, but there are times when the systems and processes themselves break down.

What we, the other people in the room and indeed other disability charities that we work with or that come to us for advice or legal advocacy are seeing is that, because of the pressure on the system, the lack of funding and the lack of availability of accessible or adaptable housing, it is the squeaky nail that is getting the oil. If you have an advocate who can push your case, you can, in some cases, get the adaptation that you need. However, there are needs all over the country that are not being met because of funding, processes and the complexity of the issue. The issue is not necessarily time quotas, but making sure that a house meets the household's needs—and not just in the very short term. It is quite a complex and difficult thing to meet current needs, given some disabilities, the ageing population and so on, but you also have to keep future needs in mind. After all, you do not want to do an expensive adaptation that is going to last only one, two or even three years.

Mark Farey: As someone who works for a housing association—Hanover—I can perhaps flesh out what Tony Cain and others have said and talk about the stage 3 claiming and bidding experience.

If you look at the exact figures and aggregate the last three years, you will find that housing association bids for adaptations in anticipation of the demands from their waiting lists and the extra applications or referrals that they expect to get over the ensuing year have probably been cut by about 40 per cent to square with the £10 million budget—which, as I understand it, comes from the greater housing investment budget that also funds new-build housing.

With regard to other figures, I would first of all point out that we do fund some adaptations ourselves. Once we get the referral from the occupational therapist, we will go ahead with more minor adaptations such as the installation of grab rails, which cost up to £200 or £300. We do not wait to make a call on stage 3 funds for that.

In many cases, we fund ahead in anticipation of getting an allocation the next year, and to quite a large extent, we use our cash flow to cover these installations. Generally, the allocation that we get based on our bid is not announced until about June. I do not know whether it would be possible to bring that announcement forward a few months to the start of the year, but if that could happen, it would certainly help us by letting us know what we could programme for the year.

In the last full financial year for which we have figures—2017-18—the average waiting time between our receiving the referral from the OT to completing the work was 217 days. The previous year, the period was shorter at 193 days, and the year before that—2015-16—it was 134 days. I am not claiming that it is exactly the same in all housing associations, but in our case, the waiting time between the OT referral and our completing the work has increased by about 50 per cent in the past three years.

The Convener: What would you put that down to?

Mark Farey: There is probably no one reason. We certainly have to wait initially. If there are no funds to call on from the allocation and if we feel that we have already front-loaded enough of our own funds, we are not able to make any progress on the extra group of referrals that we will have received. I would say that that is the main influence on the figure.

The Convener: Are the numbers of referrals that you are getting going up?

Mark Farey: I would say that the figure is fairly consistent at, in our case, anywhere between 100 and 150 a year.

Annabelle Ewing: I want to pick up on some of the issues that have been raised in the last wee while about the OT part of the process. Obviously, issues arise if we look at this from the perspective of the individual who is seeking an adaptation, but there might be a period of time in which the OT has not been instructed. Tony Cain from ALACHO mentioned certain timeframes from the adaptation being triggered by the OT's report, but of course there might be a period during which the OT has not been instructed, for whatever reason; it might be part of the management process of the instructing organisation, be it an RSL or local authority via the IJB. Nevertheless, for the individual, there is a period of time in which nothing happens, because the OT has not actually been instructed to go and do anything. I do not think that the issue is the length of time it takes the OT to complete their report after carrying out their on-site investigation; it is about how the authority and the organisation manage the process.

It would be interesting to find out whether there might be a better way of managing the process, because I do not think that individuals feel that it is actually serving their needs. Certainly as far as adaptations undertaken by local authorities and the private sector are concerned, it all raises bigger questions with regard to the relatively recent changes that have put IJBs at the head of this activity. I just would be interested in hearing how people feel that is going.

Tony Cain: Please forgive me—I am happy to wait—but I wanted to make a comment on the previous point around the budget. A colleague of mine did a calculation on the current position with adaptations relative to bids from housing associations and the change in that respect, and she has suggested that, at the moment, bids amount to just shy of £17 million on a £10 million budget. That has gone up from a figure of about £13.5 million in 2015-16, so there is a mismatch with regard to the current demand for adaptations from housing associations.

I am happy to provide a copy of those figures to the committee if that would be useful. The issues have been getting worse, but the fact is that the demand from housing associations is substantially outstripping the £10 million that is currently available.

Jenny Laing: Annabelle Ewing has made some very interesting points, and I would agree with all of them. A couple of things are going on at the moment to address such issues. I was involved in the adapting for change demonstration sites, and one of the key issues that arose from that work was the need for training, which is now being

offered to wider health and social care staff as well as colleagues in housing. The issue is to identify at an early stage housing needs, whether they involve adaptation or rehousing, and we need to do quite a lot of work to make sure that housing is everyone's business.

There is also a document from the Royal College of Occupational Therapists, that is currently being updated—it should be released in February—and which focuses on the need for minor adaptations to be carried out without delay. Again, it is about facilitating non-OT staff in their assessments with regard to more basic bits of equipment—for example, the grab rails that were mentioned and other kinds of external handrails that do not require specialist assessment. That will cut out that delay.

As part of adapting for change, we also looked at tenure-neutral pathways into the service, whether people know how to navigate the system and so forth. In Aberdeen, we have a tenure-neutral pathway for communication between people, but where it falls down is the speed with which someone actually gets their adaptation, which depends on their tenure, the time of year and so on.

Annabelle Ewing: That is very interesting, but I wonder how we can find out about this very practical development in which OTs do not have to make the assessment for some adaptations and how that helps unblock the system. It seems to be a theme in the IJB approach, but we do not seem to have any hard information about each IJB's spend on adaptations across Scotland or information on how each IJB is going to respond. Jenny Laing mentioned the test pilot site evaluation, and the ball is now in the court of the IJBs to come back and tell us how they specifically are going to respond to the various points that have been raised. How do we get the picture across Scotland? After all, that is really what our constituents want us to find out.

Tony Cain: You would need to ask all 32 IJBs, but I would also say that IJBs have no additional resources allocated to them for adaptations other than money from council tenants, which is usually delegated straight back to the council.

Annabelle Ewing: But we would like to know as a starter for 10 what the IJBs spend before we can make any further assessments. It would be useful to have that information, but it is missing.

Tony Cain: I am not sure that most IJBs will be able to answer that question readily.

Annabelle Ewing: Which raises issues about process, then, does it not?

The Convener: We can find that out. I call Graham Simpson.

Graham Simpson: Kevin Stewart wrote to the committee on 3 April and covered that very point. He had written to the 31 IJBs and had received 23 replies. He said:

“As methods used to record expenditure differ across partnerships and some were unable to provide figures for 2015/16 it is not possible to provide the Committee with a detailed breakdown of spend.”

Therefore, the picture on IJBs is rather confused, and not just as regards adaptations; when we were looking at local authority budgets, we found the same—that the picture is a little bit confused. I certainly think that that needs to be sorted out.

In its report, the EHRC calls for changes to the funding arrangements for adaptations; it says that changes are “urgently required”.

Can people comment on, first, the confused picture as regards the IJBs; and, secondly, the need to change the funding arrangements?

10:30

Tony Cain: I have already talked about the variety of funding streams and how the money is managed. The IJBs are in a very difficult position because they are not in control of all the resources and are not necessarily responsible for reporting how those resources are spent. Local authorities still report their spend on the HRA independently of the IJB, although technically the IJB is responsible for the bit that is for adaptations.

To be fair, the picture of where money is spent and who is responsible for it is very confused, so I would not give the IJBs too much of a hard time on that one.

My apologies, there was a second part to your question and it has slipped my mind.

Graham Simpson: It was on the EHRC's report. You have mentioned in evidence and we have certainly covered before the point about there being little progress on the adaptations process. In its report, the EHRC calls for

“Changes to funding arrangements for adaptations”

together with

“implementation of common parts regulations”,

which it says are

“urgently required to ensure that disabled people are able to get the adaptations they need to live independently in their own homes.”

Tony Cain: Yes, in effect it is asking for implementation of recommendations that were made in 2012; they have been extant since the report of the adaptations working group, “Adapting for Change”, was published.

Graham Simpson: I presume that nothing has happened since 2012.

Tony Cain: We still do not have a single, tenure-neutral funding stream to support the adaptations process. The other thing that is interesting about the EHRC's report is that its description of clients' experience of going through the adaptations process precisely mirrors the description of that experience by the working group in 2012. There appears to have been very little change in how people feel about their experience of the adaptations process or in how key elements of it, particularly the finance, are organised. It has not moved on.

Nora Uhrig: Just to reiterate what Tony Cain was saying, a lot of the issue comes back to things that we have mentioned, such as the fact that the funding available to RSLs—the £10 million—does not cover the actual need and the fact that there are different streams for different tenures. There are a variety of things.

On the common parts regulations, every six months, somebody in the legal team at the EHRC writes a letter to the Government to ask about the regulations. In a recent meeting, we were assured that it is working on them, but it is taking a long time. I think that we will see something at some point, but we have been talking about them for a long time—and not just us, a lot of other people as well.

Graham Simpson: Are you able to share that correspondence with the committee?

Nora Uhrig: I do not know; I will have to ask.

The Convener: It might be helpful if you could.

Does anybody else want to comment?

Lisa Innes: I have a general comment. Obviously I do advice work and I know that the process is bewildering for clients. They have got so much going on in their lives and they are a bit lost trying to go through the adaptations process themselves. I want to blow our own trumpet a bit, because I think that we—and other advice organisations—play an important part by holding people's hand and helping them through. They might get so far and then there is an obstacle—there is no money or an adaptation cannot be done at all and they need to move. Sometimes, even when adaptations are being done, there can be delays because of poor workmanship. We might go and see someone who tells us that they have had a wet room put in but the water is not draining and they have been told that they will have to wait six weeks to get it fixed. There is no one person in overall charge, so clients are sent here, there and everywhere.

The client group that we work with is vulnerable, and that has to be taken on board. If someone

accesses us for advice, that is all very well, but I think that there are probably an awful lot of people out there who kind of give up.

The Convener: May I clarify something? When you say that no one person oversees the work, are you saying that when the RSL, for example, or the council says that work is to get done and somebody comes in to do it, somebody else has to be responsible for making sure that—

Lisa Innes: There can be a lot of contractors involved and people are told that one person needs to come and then, actually, another person needs to come. People tell us that they have to make phone call after phone call and it is really frustrating, because they might have a wet room sitting there that they cannot use because they make the phone calls and people do not turn up and so on.

Annabelle Ewing: That is a really important point and is a source of incredible frustration among constituents in my Cowdenbeath constituency and, I am sure, across Scotland.

Let us look at the issue from the other side. What is the supply arrangement? We are talking about a lot of money and we want to ensure that it is being spent properly for the benefit of people who should be able to expect a service. What arrangements do IJBs and RSLs have for getting the work done? How do they approach it? How seriously do they take it? Is there a clerk of works? What happens when something does not happen that should have happened? How quickly are issues rectified? These are really important, practical questions, convener, and we should be trying to get to the bottom of them.

The Convener: Can I ask you to draw my attention if you want to come in? Somebody else was just about to speak.

Annabelle Ewing: I am terribly sorry; I thought that I had drawn your attention.

Monica Lennon: I just want to go back to a comment that Lisa Innes made a few seconds ago. Lisa, you said that people might get to the point of just giving up. What happens when someone gives up? What are the consequences for people?

Lisa Innes: They just kind of make do, I think. We have clients who, especially if they have a disabled child in the household, are lifting them and carrying them to the bath and so on. Some people who should be connected with social work fall through the loop. We get people phoning up who say, "What do I do? I do not even know where to start. How do I get someone to give me an assessment?" There is a kind of impasse because, even with the best will in the world, there is such pressure on all the statutory agencies. We

only see the clients who come to us, but there is such unmet need.

Monica Lennon: If there are people who give up or who do not continue to fight their case, I just wonder whether the waiting times fully reflect the level of need, convener.

I was struck by Shelter Scotland's written submission, which includes a case study about Linda. Some of us heard from Linda a few weeks ago at Shelter's reception in the Parliament's garden lobby. We are hearing about people who are trapped in their own homes, whether in temporary accommodation or otherwise. In some extreme cases, which, I think, the EHRC report talks about, people are waiting more than a decade and, in the most extreme case, up to 18 years.

We know about the current needs and the mismatch in resource but, sitting here, we need to think about the longer term as well, because we know that the need is only going to increase. Are there ideas beyond just funding, which we have talked about? Could we look at building standards or planning, to ensure that we are building homes for the future that will meet all of our needs? Any one of us could become disabled and need accessible housing. What ideas are there?

Fiona King: Thanks for mentioning the case studies. We included a couple of the many that we have—I am sure that other agencies could speak of similar levels of cases. They are important because they represent the people who come to us and who have advocacy, whose adaptation requirements can still take a number of years to resolve even with all of our resources. For people who do not have the ability to seek external advocacy, who knows how long the adaptations can take, if they happen at all? The case of disabled children comes up quite frequently for us, because parents are willing to put up with more than they ever should have to put up with, carrying children up and down flights of stairs and doing all sorts of things that are just not appropriate—they are not in the best interests of the child and are not appropriate for anyone involved.

The EHRC's report speaks to the fact that while we all want everyone to have good-quality, adequate housing that meets their needs, that is just not the case for lots of people, and the people with vulnerabilities and additional needs are on top of those on mainstream waiting lists and homelessness waiting lists. We put just a few statistics into our submission, but the overall picture that emerges is one of housing crisis, in which we are not meeting need in many different ways; and the issue that we are discussing is just an additional pressure on the system. That is what we are seeing. What everyone around the room is saying speaks to the fact that there is so much

pressure on housebuilding and on statutory services, that the system is struggling to respond to the need for support and adaptations in the way in which we would all want it to—that is by meeting those needs quickly and promptly.

The report that Shelter Scotland commissioned with the EHRC, which looked at all 32 local authorities' strategic housing plans, showed that essentially the 50,000 target for new houses most probably—according to the plans and what have you—will be met. That is really positive and represents a step change in affordable housing supply. However, chiming with what other people have said about data, I think that there are gaps and that although the headline from that report was very positive, the sub-heading was that the picture is quite murky. The report was quite a sophisticated bit of external research and pulls together all that its authors were able to pull together, but there are gaps in the data on what housing is being built, where, for whom and what the profile is. Without really improving the data on not only need but how we are meeting it, we will have a mismatch.

We know that roughly 12 per cent of the housing that will be built by 2021 will be specialist, but we do not know much more than that. "Specialist" covers quite a broad spectrum of need-based housing but does not mean that all of it will be accessible or have wheelchair access. Without a more detailed breakdown of the figures, it is quite hard to match need with the right housing stock.

Probably everyone has cases that show symptoms of the housing crisis.

Nora Uhrig: To follow up on what Fiona King has been saying, one of the smaller things that the report that we commissioned with Shelter mentioned was the impact of Brexit and the fall in the value of the pound, which has already had an impact. For example, we can look at the funding that is available to RSLs—the £10 million. Depending on how Brexit goes, in the coming years it is likely to have a huge impact on the value of that funding, not just because of the fall in the value of the pound, which means that materials get more expensive for the construction industry, but because of the impact on the number of workers in the construction industry.

If we look towards the future, we see that there is a large degree of uncertainty. Things are not looking very good and given that the system is already experiencing increasing problems, with waiting lists increasing year on year, as Mark Farey was saying earlier with his example, they are going to get a lot worse—or at least that is what it looks like at the moment.

We really need to have the funding available to meet the needs. On top of that, there is the

increase in demand that we are likely to see. In our inquiry report, we highlighted the fact that over the next five years there is likely to be an 80 per cent increase in demand for wheelchair-accessible housing—obviously that is a huge increase. That is part of the reason why we have called for a 10 per cent national target.

Mark Farey: I have one thing to add. We have a small new-build programme each year of maybe 60 to 100 houses, which is funded partly by the Scottish Government and partly by us. For many—probably 15 to 20—years, one of the conditions on housing associations of Scottish Government funding for new-build housing has been to meet the standards in a document called “Housing for Varied Needs”. To give an example, new housing has to be designed to include a turning circle for wheelchairs—which requires just a bit more in the space standards; the doorways are wide enough—so that there is an element of future proofing, even if the first resident that goes in there is not using a wheelchair.

The other thing that we are able to do, which again is very much a success story from working hand in hand with the Government to fund new building, is that if we are building bungalows for clients who have particular adaptation needs or receive notification, before the die is cast on the design process, that someone needs, for instance, a ceiling strengthened for a track hoist to take them from a bedroom through to a shower room, we can get that built in. We have done that on a scheme up in Elgin in the past year. We were able to access a bit more funding from the local Scottish Government office in Inverness to put in the adaptation at the build stage, which is obviously an awful lot more economical and efficient than doing it retrospectively. That is about having advance notice of the perhaps quite unusual needs that someone might have. It is quite rare that we would do a track hoist retrospectively, and it is particularly helpful if the referral is made very early on in the process.

10:45

Tony Cain: I am conscious that we seem to be moving on to the new-build process, but I just want to go back to where we were with adaptations and say that I am not sure that I would characterise the whole system as failing. It is important to remember that many people are getting adaptations done well and done quickly that meet their need.

I think that, in general, the experience of the process is disempowering, and how disempowered someone feels will depend on what tenure they are in. Owners very often feel that the whole process is taken over by the council when they are nevertheless responsible for instructing

the work and for the liabilities associated with that work. Very often the roles become unclear and it becomes very difficult for owners to control work that is going on to their own home in the way that they would like to. There are lots of different issues and the process is quite inconsistent with the move towards self-directed support that we see in other social care services. We still tend to operate in a way that disempowers owners and tenants when we are delivering adaptations, which is part of the problem and part of the reason why dissatisfaction arises.

The other thing to bear in mind, particularly in relation to older people, is that most older people are owner occupiers—70 per cent or so of people over 65 in this country own their home. Therefore, the issues of housing for older people and adaptations to meet the needs of older people are predominantly issues in owner occupation, not the social rental sector, particularly bearing in mind the fact that in the local authority sector, the funding is effectively there and is drawn down on the rent.

That funding is quite substantial. Every council tenant in Scotland is currently paying between £1 and £1.50 every week towards the cost of adaptations that are being delivered to council tenants. A lot of money is being committed and the system is working for many people.

I am happy to turn to the issue of new supply if that is where we are now going, because there are some more fundamental issues there. The fact that 80 per cent of all the houses that will be standing in 2050 are currently standing is an important statistic in that respect.

Kenneth Gibson: My question follows on from what Mark Farey and Tony Cain have just said. I understand that 91 per cent of all houses provided by local authorities and housing associations meet the standards in “Housing for Varied Needs”, but what can we do to get the figures up in the owner-occupied and private rented sectors?

Tony Cain: The first thing to say is that “Housing for Varied Needs” is a 20-year-old document that unquestionably needs to be reviewed and reviewed comprehensively. The Scottish Government has a working group to look at that but the work has not started and work to rewrite the document has not been commissioned. For example, the document does not deal with issues around bariatric care particularly well, nor does it deal with issues around dementia, because it was written in 1999 before the issues that we face around dementia came to the fore. The need to rewrite “Housing for Varied Needs” is a real issue.

My personal view on future supply is that we should develop a single adaptability standard that

applies to every house in the new-build sector. To give an example, I think that every house should be capable of taking a ceiling track hoist at the appropriate location, but that means that we would have to change the way in which floors and roof trusses are engineered. At the moment, a private developer will put in a roof truss designed to do nothing other than hold up the roof and deal with the wind and the snow loads that might be expected over its lifetime—so do not be putting a trunk full of books up there because it is not designed to take that and you will damage the fabric of the property if you do that. Therefore, future proofing all new builds on the basis of adaptability is one thing.

Kenneth Gibson: Thanks for that, as I am just about to floor my loft to put my book collection up there.

Tony Cain: You will need an engineer to look at your trusses if you are in a new house because they will not take it.

Mark Farey: Many areas of Scotland are covered by care-and-repair schemes. I was involved with one for about 25 years between the early 1990s and a few years ago. Generally, they are funded by the local authority—the one that I am thinking of is in Perth and Kinross, as it happens. Over the years, the project's work gravitated towards adaptations in the private sector, providing a free service that guided clients through the adaptations process and, like at the housing association, most of the work was to provide level-access wet-floor showers.

Other people here today can perhaps fill in some of the gaps for you, but I believe that most of the country is covered by care-and-repair schemes, which provide a free professional service that is intended to guide elderly clients in the private sector—predominantly homeowners but some long-term private sector tenants as well—through the process of getting an adaptation fitted. I imagine that my experience of the project in Perth and Kinross would generally be replicated in other care-and-repair projects around the country.

Kenneth Gibson: I was a great fan of care-and-repair services in the 1990s—I was a Glasgow councillor and they did a lot of work in my area. However, in some areas of Scotland the grants available are so miniscule that people just do not see the point in applying for them. They can be less than £100 and a lot of people think that the rigmarole in going through the care-and-repair system is too much trouble for the likely grant available. Should care-and-repair services be looked at again? Should there be a consistent standard in terms of grant availability and the kind of things that people can apply for? It was a great

scheme, but in some areas it has been diluted by the reduction in the size of grants.

Mark Farey: I think that that is correct. In my experience, the majority of the cost of adaptation has been met by the client themselves. Where the care-and-repair project has provided an advantage is through the professional consultancy service, which has guided people so that they have avoided cowboys and post-completion defects that can hold everything up. There has been a mix of different funding ratios for clients.

Alexander Stewart: As a former councillor on Perth and Kinross Council, I am well aware of that scheme. It has been very successful and you identified some of the improvements that clients have seen. Clients have felt secure and safe in the process, because it has identified individuals and organisations who can support them. As my colleague Kenneth Gibson said, there is a difficult issue with the grant system. The precedent that has been set in Perth and Kinross is a good standard to have, and that should be replicated across other parts of the country, to see what can be achieved.

As we said, the biggest issues are financial resources, the implications of the process and ensuring that there is supply and demand. We know that individuals need that support, and the care-and-repair project gave us an opportunity to see the level of demand from clients. There is a huge opportunity to develop that. How do you think that that could be managed?

Mark Farey: Part of the funding mix has been applications for funding from charities, which have sometimes been successful, but, if the truth be told, care-and-repair services have relied more on people's personal resources to meet the cost than anything else.

Alexander Stewart: So there was a barrier to the process, in that some people needed to fund an adaptation themselves in order to make it happen.

Mark Farey: That was the experience, yes.

Tony Cain: There is a national organisation representing care-and-repair projects across Scotland—Care and Repair Scotland—and you could do worse than speak to it about its experience and how it is working. For the most part, all local authority areas have some form of care-and-repair scheme. That will be delivered in a variety of ways, and Care and Repair Scotland will have an overview of that.

To be fair to the Scottish Government, there has been quite a lot of work around alternative sources of funding, particularly for owners who need to move. Older owners who need to move can access the help-to-buy scheme and equity release

schemes. However, that work has been difficult, not least because a lot of older owners do not particularly want to burn their equity in their property to carry out repairs.

The Convener: Earlier, there was quite a lot of talk about funding adaptations to RSL properties. Does anybody have any suggestions about how the Scottish Government could change the process to make it easier or more efficient? There was quite a bit of complaining about it, but no solutions were suggested.

Moira Bayne: We do not get very many clients from RSLs or local authorities, because by and large their adaptations get sorted. When there have been issues, one suggestion that we have made to RSLs has been to carry out the adaptation and put a charge on the person's rent. That not an ideal solution, but it means that the work gets done and the person pays a limited rent charge for the time that it takes to pay off that adaptation.

We have also tried to bring in charitable funding. If an RSL or a local authority—although it has not happened in the local authority sector—just cannot afford an adaptation, we can help the client to either apply for charitable funding or do a self-funding campaign. Something else that we have done recently is to have a partnership with the RSL in which, if we can find some funding, it can provide the materials.

There are ways of being creative. I am not talking about the big process, but there are ways of looking at individual solutions for clients.

Annabelle Ewing: I was struck by comments that Moira Bayne made earlier about veterans. The Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association is one charity that works in that area, and its help was obtained for a constituent of mine.

This point applies to RSLs as much as it does to local authorities: it seems as though when there is a situation in which someone needs an adaptation, the local authority treats it as though it is a new thing. It is not quite sure how it should proceed. Why is there not greater communication between local authorities, RSLs and organisations such as the SSAFA, which can be extremely helpful? Why can local authorities and RSLs not get their act together and have conversations with those organisations, to help the people that need the adaptation?

Moira Bayne: That is the age-old question, is it not? Even people like us, who know a lot about what we know about, find new things happening every day. It is very difficult to keep on top of everything that happens. Our experience generally is that there is not any kind of ill will. Once people know that there is an issue that they can help to

solve, they are very willing to do that. We see a lot of good will across Scotland.

In our evidence we suggested that each local authority should have the equivalent of a veterans champion. It should not be a disability champion necessarily, because that tends to suggest wheelchair users. We have lots of clients who have children on the autistic spectrum and real housing issues. There should be a person with a wee bit of clout in a local authority who can act as a one-stop shop and say, "I am the accessibility or inclusivity champion and I can put you in touch with SSAFA, Housing Options Scotland, the help-to-buy scheme," or whomever. For a relatively small investment, you could have one person per local authority, and that would certainly make a difference to the bigger picture by bringing people together.

Annabelle Ewing: That is an interesting suggestion.

Tony Cain: The funding issue is not straightforward. A tenure-neutral approach, through which the Government pays for everything, would mean that costs of £15 million or £20 million would be shifted on to the Scottish Government. If landlords had to pay for everything, that would mean a similar shift of costs on to tenants, which would result in a rent increase of £1 or £1.50 a week for housing association tenants. It is not easy to advocate either of those options.

It would be helpful if we were clear how we expect adaptations to be paid for: what would be an appropriate cost burden for the individual receiving the adaptation and how the balance is to be funded. The recommendations of the adaptations working group in 2012 were clear that a tenure-neutral approach to funding would make it obvious to the client how the process works. That is central to easing complications in the process, making it more transparent and putting clients more in control.

The Convener: Lisa, you spoke about the breakdown that can occur when there is a problem with an adaptation and you said that there can be delays of up to three months. Would it be worthwhile if local authorities and RSLs had somebody who, when an adaptation is asked for, was responsible for ensuring that the whole thing was done, and not just passed on to the subcontractors or the contractors and left in their hands? I do not mean someone who would be on site, but someone to make sure that an adaptation is done to the completion of the client's requirements.

Lisa Innes: It could be a kind of project manager, if you like. Such delays create pressures elsewhere. People from other agencies—maybe

OTs or social workers—might be pushing for work to be completed, because they are not able to use the adaptation. That uses up our time and other agencies' staff time. I do not think that it would be too difficult to have someone overseeing the work, but I do not quite know how that would be provided.

The Convener: Somebody has to be responsible for agreeing the adaptation and its funding in the first place, so you would think that there must be some mechanism through which somebody could make sure that the job is carried out from start to adequate completion. I would not have thought that that would have been difficult to achieve.

Annabelle Ewing: Can we not seek information from local authorities on how they go about that?

The Convener: I think that we will be seeking quite a lot of information from local authorities as a result of this discussion.

Annabelle Ewing: It would be really helpful to know what the process is from start to finish.

The Convener: Absolutely.

11:00

Tony Cain: I think that you will find that in many cases a single-point-of-contact approach is taken. How well that works is another matter.

On the point about asking local authorities for information, I make the point again that the IJB has the statutory responsibility for delivering the services. You should ask the IJB.

The Convener: We will be asking the IJB.

Tony Cain: The IJB will ask the local council, though, because it will not have the information.

Annabelle Ewing: Okay, but somebody has the information.

Tony Cain: I get that, but we have confusion about where the responsibility for these things sits.

Annabelle Ewing: We do not. As you said, the IJB is technically in charge, so—

The Convener: Let us not have a debate around that.

Annabelle Ewing: Those responsible should get their act together.

The Convener: Once we have that information, we will be able to take action.

Graham Simpson: Tony, you mentioned a figure of £15 million to £20 million for taking a tenure-neutral approach. Where do you get that figure from?

Tony Cain: At the moment, the Scottish Government is committing something in the order of £13 million through TMDF and stage 3 adaptations. Housing associations are spending a sum on top of that—probably £3 million to £5 million. In addition to that, local authority expenditure—the rent money—is about £15 million to £16 million. There Government is spending £13 million, and another £18 million from elsewhere is being spent. If you wanted to replace that with a single pot from the Scottish Government, it is about £30 million to £34 million, of which about £15 million would be additional to what the Scottish Government is currently spending. That is back of the fag packet stuff.

The Convener: Smoking is bad for your health.

Andy Wightman: I want to follow up the quoted commissioner's report. Back in May, we had the minister here in the week when the report was published, and he suggested that the 10 per cent target is not something with which he is comfortable. He said:

"I do not necessarily want an arbitrary figure for what is required to be plucked from the air."—[*Official Report, Local Government and Communities Committee*, 16 May 2018; c 8.]

The Government has a statutory duty to respond to the commission's report. Has it done so and what discussions have taken place about that target?

Nora Uhrig: The Government has not given us a formal response yet, but we will get one; we have been in touch with the civil servants who are working on the response. There are various reasons why we have not had one yet—it is partly because of the shift in ministers and because the Government wants several ministers to be involved in the response. We know that the minister will not agree to our call for a target, but that does not mean that we will not keep on asking for it.

We want the Government to look at the other recommendations from the report; at the end of the report is a list of recommendations of which the national target is but one. We will keep pushing for that, but we would like the Government also to respond to other recommendations.

Andy Wightman: Why do you think that the 10 per cent target will not be agreed to, given the work that we have heard housing associations do in order to future proof their homes? It seems to be reasonable that all new homes should be future proofed with regard to people's changing needs for their homes.

Nora Uhrig: I completely agree, which is why we will keep pushing for the target. It is important to note that the target is supposed to be a

minimum; it would not prevent local authorities from setting much higher targets, which we would love to see.

My comment about the minister not agreeing to the target was more based on what the minister has said and what the civil servants have said.

Andy Wightman: I will go back to the point that Tony Cain made about pooling funding. On finding out about energy efficiency, for example, I think that broadly speaking the public now have a reasonable idea about where to go for that, although there is still a little bit of uncertainty. The Government does a reasonable job of promoting energy efficiency and of signposting where people should go, what funds are available and so on. Is the approach that we need in the medium term that of pooling funds and clear signposting so that we get a tenure-neutral approach and a system that is based on the needs of individual occupiers?

Tony Cain: I think that that could be the approach that we need. The difficulty, however, is that it would be inappropriate to take rent from tenants to spend on somebody else's home. A ring fence such as that around the HRA, and which should sit around housing association tenants' rents, means that money needs to be redirected to the appropriate properties, so there is a balance to be struck around that. A single pot of money would be useful, but how that pot would be managed behind the scenes would need to be properly fair to owners and to tenants.

Andy Wightman: There are some parallels, are there not, with energy efficiency measures because some tenants' money in council housing is used for—

Tony Cain: I think that the parallel is that tenants pay more for energy efficiency measures than owners do. They get less support. Most of what has been done on energy efficiency in the past 10 years has come directly from rents and very little of it has come from elsewhere, whereas owners have received a substantial subsidy when work has been done to their homes. However, yes—there are parallels.

A point that is well articulated in the 2012 report and well supported by the report from the EHRC, is that the process needs to be transparent so that people can negotiate and control their way through it, so that they know what they have to pay, know where the balance is coming from and are in control of how the work is planned, how the programme is specified and the quality of the work, at the end of the day. That is often missing.

Nora Uhrig: I will go back to the EHRC recommendation on the 10 per cent target, although I am probably wandering into my personal views, and I would always defer to Tony Cain and others on housing association and

council finances. Given the needs profile and the projections on the ageing population, wheelchair use and so on, there seems to be a huge disparity between current and future need and what is being provided. I do not know whether there should be a 10 per cent or 20 per cent target, but there does need to be a drive to build houses that are accessible or adaptable in the medium to long term.

Work should be done on the return on investment of doing that. I appreciate that for house builders—which are already under a lot of pressure from the upscaling of the house-building programme—such houses are very expensive and there are already a lot of issues with delivery of the 50,000 homes in what is quite a short timescale. Work must be done to show that there will in the longer term be savings across not just housing, but in other parts of the public sector picture—health and social care, most notably—through keeping people in their homes for longer and, as Mark Farey said, reducing the care and support packages in people's homes.

We need to look at how we future proof houses more widely than just in the individual pockets of good practice. All the reports show that practice is very inconsistent. There are a lot of good developments that are going far beyond the 10 per cent, but in others barely any accessible housing is being built.

Lisa Innes: We support Nora Uhrig's point. The Glasgow Centre for Inclusive Living is very much in favour of at least 10 per cent of new builds being wheelchair accessible or adaptable.

We are bit concerned about setting local targets because a lot of local authorities do not know the demand in their areas for accessible housing, which is why we are saying that there should be a 10 per cent target. Practice varies a lot. Glasgow City Council has committed to 10 per cent for—I think—developments of more than 30 units. As we say, in some local authorities the level is really low, but it is based on the information that they have. Information in reports can be quite sparse, so if they do not understand what the demand is in their areas, it is difficult for them to set local targets.

The Convener: Why do they not know what the demand is?

Lisa Innes: A lot of what they know is based on who they have on housing waiting lists and so on, but there are hidden needs; for example, they need to know about households that need to be moved.

The Convener: Tony—do you want to come in on that question?

Tony Cain: I will, if I may. Local authorities work very hard to understand demand in their areas and to use the information that is available to them in planning to meet the needs of people who have particular housing needs. It is just not easy.

Bear it in mind that building something for an individual might be the solution—it happens fairly frequently—but you have to be able to build in the right place. Sites are where they are, but that might not be where particular individuals with disabilities, or who use wheelchairs, want to live. It is not as straightforward as saying that developers have to build on those sites, and 10 per cent in that development will meet the needs of wheelchair users. A development in Stirling is no use at all to someone who lives in Aberfoyle. Geography makes the situation complicated.

Not everybody who needs accessible or adaptable housing comes forward to identify themselves. There is a lot of work around that. Typically, highly adapted houses are built bespoke because, very often, need is identified at stage 2, during the design process, or was known about before building started. I was head of housing in Stirling Council for eight years. I think that in those eight years we built five houses specifically for identified individuals. That goes on, but it is very difficult.

There is a debate about whether a target on wheelchair accessibility is helpful. The minister has been clear about where he sits on that and I understand his position. My preference is that everything be built to an appropriate adaptable standard in every tenure. Going forward, that would provide a solution.

Monica Lennon: I will go back to what Nora Uhrig was saying. The correspondence between the EHRC and the Government sounds quite positive, especially if there is a cross-portfolio approach, because housing is not just a matter for the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning. If we have bad housing, the Government will not meet its objectives on improving health, closing the attainment gap in education and so on.

I notice that one of the EHRC's recommendations is that local authorities meet their duty to publish their equality impact assessments alongside their strategic housing investment plans. It was quite disappointing to read—this was back in May this year, so there may have been progress—that in the EHRC survey, when local authorities were asked how they had discharged their equalities duties, only 41 per cent had carried out an equalities impact assessment on their local development plans. The committee is looking at the Planning (Scotland) Bill at the moment; we have raised similar issues.

I would like Nora Uhrig to speak to that, and to say whether there is an update on that situation. I would also like to hear from Tony Cain on the importance of mainstreaming equalities, because it sounds as though there are real barriers to doing that work early in the process.

Nora Uhrig: We are following up on the inquiry at the moment; we are considering what we can do in the future to make progress.

On equalities impact assessments, it is not just about which local authorities have done them; it is also about the quality of the assessments and what they have looked at, because they relate to areas other than housing, as well. In the city region deals we are engaging with local authorities to look at what they are doing. Obviously, housing is a huge part of that. We are making progress, but it takes time. Unfortunately, we see cases where they could do a lot better, but we also see good practice.

Monica Lennon: Do you have particular examples to hand? Of the 41 per cent that are doing equalities impact assessments, are there some authorities that are doing them to a high standard?

Nora Uhrig: I am not sure; I can get back to you on that. I expect that some are good and others are not.

Monica Lennon: I wonder why there is such a mixed picture. The assessments are a legal duty of local authorities. Can Tony Cain elaborate?

Tony Cain: The expectation is that local authorities and all public agencies—local authorities are not the only public bodies that are sometimes a bit tardy in producing or publishing assessments—prepare equalities impact assessments during the policy development process. They should be published at the point when the policy is accepted.

I would go a little bit further. Assessing equalities impacts is one thing, but a full equalities-proofing exercise ought to go around some of our more substantial programmes and policies—development plans and SHIPs, for example. My colleagues get a bit tired of me reminding them of statutory obligations and the importance of producing such things.

Monica Lennon: Why is that? I do not want to keep pressing the point, because we have discussed it during our Planning (Scotland) Bill scrutiny, but equalities proofing should not be an add-on. It has surely to be integral. Why does it feel like a burden to people?

Tony Cain: Equalities proofing does not feel like a burden to me, but it is not an area that everybody is entirely comfortable with. Data on equalities impacts is often difficult to source and is

not always clear. Not everybody is comfortable with the conversations that they need to have as part of the process. Measuring, for example, housing impacts and housing issues in relation to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community is not easy, and the conversations are sometimes difficult. Even asking basic questions is difficult because some quite telling questions must be asked in order to discover whether that community is suffering housing disadvantage. We need to get better at that.

However, it is not just local authorities that struggle with equalities impact assessments. I can point to other public agencies that have been tardy in completion of assessments.

11:15

The Convener: We are the Local Government and Communities Committee and it is our responsibility.

Tony Cain: I get that. I do not defend that tardiness—the assessments need to be done, and to be done properly to standard. I absolutely agree that people need to understand the policy implications and the choices that they are making.

Graham Simpson: I will go back to the previous point. When Kevin Stewart was here I asked him, following up on the Shelter report, whether we are building the right homes in the right places. I am not misquoting him—he said that he did not know. He asked me to write to him with a more detailed question, which I did. He responded to me; he still does not know. I am none the wiser, nor is he.

It seems to me that that is information that we should have. If we have a target, we should know what is being built and where it is being built—whether the right homes are being built in the right places. I accept that there are the difficulties that Tony Cain outlined, but to say “It’s difficult” is not a good enough excuse. We need to make more effort. If, as the minister says, it is down to councils, we should be telling or advising councils how they should be getting the information.

The Convener: I accept that, but I am not sure how straightforward it would be for the minister to decide on the right places for the housing to be built.

Tony Cain: It is a fairly wide-ranging question. My view is that the affordable housing investment programme is not directing investment to the right places. The evidence that was produced by the homelessness and rough sleeping action group about the pressure around homelessness demonstrates that very clearly. The recommendation has been made to three of the Edinburgh and two of the Lothian associations that they need to allocate more than 100 per cent of all

social lets in their areas to meet the needs of homeless people. If that is not an absurd recommendation, it is certainly an unachievable one. The equivalent figure for Glasgow is below 50 per cent.

It is pretty clear that delivering half the programme in the west of Scotland, as we are, is not focusing new supply and affordable housing where shortages are greatest. Part of the problem is that we have not come to a clear view about what we are trying to achieve through the affordable housing investment programme. I will give a simple example. In East Renfrewshire, about 12 per cent of homes are in social renting, in West Dunbartonshire about 37 per cent are in social renting and in Edinburgh about 19 per cent are in social renting. Which of those three figures is appropriate for a well-functioning housing market? We do not have an answer to that question, so it is difficult to measure what impact we are having.

Annabelle Ewing: We are now on to the important issue of the number of homes that are available versus the number of people who need homes—be they homes that can be adapted or otherwise. I was struck by the statistic that some 1,000 service family homes are empty in Scotland. If the Ministry of Defence released that housing, could it be a resource for veterans? Has anybody—such as Shelter or ALACHO—taken that up with the MOD? All that housing is sitting there, and there are homeless veterans. Why are the two things not meeting such that the MOD releases that housing for veterans? Has that issue been explored?

Fiona King: I will respond, but I will defer to Moira Bayne on the specifics of MOD housing. There are a lot of empty homes—in the region of 35,000—across Scotland. The Scottish Government funds Shelter Scotland to deliver the empty homes partnership, which brings privately owned empty homes across Scotland back into use by working with local authorities to find owners and incentivise bringing homes back into use or selling them. That is painstaking work, but we have brought thousands of homes back into use.

Such an approach will never be the magic bullet for the housing crisis, but it brings back a valuable resource to provide a usable form of housing stock. It is a valuable and great programme. Many local authorities now have in place a permanent empty homes officer, which is positive. That work has just been re-funded for the next five years. However, it is not MOD specific; it is just about privately owned properties.

Annabelle Ewing: Has Shelter taken up the issue with the MOD?

Fiona King: We have not taken it up at all; I will let Moira Bayne speak to that.

To come back to SHIPs and local housing need and demand assessments, the picture is quite complicated, but it has to be locally led—we cannot have anything national. The approach must be informed by local authorities and partners; otherwise, there will be a blanket solution that does not work in, for example, rural, urban or high-density settings. However, the SHIPs report that we produced earlier in the year with the EHRC told the story clearly that there is no consistent methodology, no consistent reporting and no consistent data set.

I say to Graham Simpson that I appreciate that it is insufficient to say that the issue is tricky, but it is tricky. It is hard to identify, correlate and work out what the national picture is. We all need to be alive to the idea that the 50,000 target might be numerically met, but the need might not be met.

The next level of analysis that Shelter Scotland needs to think about involves working out where the identified need is and whether new houses are meeting that in the most cost-effective way. The reason why the minister and others have been unable to give a clear answer is that that is not yet proven. No piece of work or data set shows that the investment in the programme to provide 50,000 affordable homes is reducing housing need where it is most acute. We need to improve the data sets and the analysis before we can project what the next house-building programme should look like.

The Convener: I remind people that we are talking about adaptations; we have veered off the subject a bit.

Moira Bayne: The MOD plays its cards pretty close to its chest. Its houses are not part of the civilian housing landscape, so we do not get the same information as we have about other housing stock. The MOD is moving to a new model in which it does not provide accommodation; instead, people will be given an uplift on their salary in order to source their accommodation locally. That will be another huge problem—particularly if people who are based at Leuchars are trying to find affordable housing.

I can take up the issue outwith the meeting and report back to the committee. The proposal is a good idea.

The Convener: Will the new system that is to be put in place make it easier for the MOD to get rid of existing premises, as they will not be used?

Moira Bayne: I understand from our clients that the stock is in pretty bad condition—

Kenneth Gibson: It is shocking.

Moira Bayne: People might not want such housing, or they might have to pay an awful lot of money to bring it up to what we would consider to be a good standard. That is part of a much bigger and broader discussion, but there is the potential to add substantially to housing stock, if that is done properly.

The Convener: Would anybody else like to raise any other issues?

Moira Bayne: We see a lot of the fact that Scotland has lots of different housing markets. Glasgow has 60 RSLs, so someone who is looking for a house there might have to make 60 applications. In Edinburgh, housing is in short supply, but in other bits of Scotland, someone who wanted a house this afternoon could have one.

One of our frustrations is that people do not know the whole Scottish picture. We have a client who moved recently from a third-floor flat in Inverness to a wheelchair-adapted property in Greenock. He was happy to move to Greenock, and nobody in Greenock or the local area wanted that house for whatever reason.

We need to look at adaptations, but money is spent on some adaptations when we could have considered another solution, such as leaving the house for somebody else who needs it but does not need it to be adapted or adapting the house for somebody else. If there was a way of encouraging people to look beyond their existing local authority area or to look at the adjacent local authority area, we might find that adaptation spending became more effective, because we would spend when we needed to, rather than just because we needed to spend to deal with a current crisis. We have found that powerfully with our clients.

The Convener: We have finished with the questions. Would anybody like to make a final comment before we close the session?

Lisa Innes: We work with a lot of hospital occupational therapists. In effect, there is bed blocking, which affects costs. Someone might have a life-changing injury and be unable to go back to their property. We have clients who have been put in interim care homes—a lad of 23 has been in a care home for a year because he cannot find accessible housing and he cannot go back to the family home. That creates pressures on the health service, so it is swings and roundabouts. If there was more accessible housing, people could be discharged from hospital more quickly and they would not have to go into a care home, which can be pretty grim.

The Convener: Thank you for putting that on the record.

I thank everyone for attending. The committee will discuss the evidence in private later in the

meeting, and the evidence will help to inform the committee's budget recommendations later this autumn. All the witnesses will be notified of those recommendations when they are published. Thank you for a very useful session.

11:25

Meeting continued in private until 11:52.

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