



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

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

**Dydd Iau, 4 Rhagfyr, 2008
Thursday, 4 December 2008**

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

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

Aelodau'r pwyllgor yn bresennol
Committee members in attendance

Michael German	Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru (yn dirprwyo ar ran Eleanor Burnham) Welsh Liberal Democrats (substitute for Eleanor Burnham)
Bethan Jenkins	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales
Ann Jones	Llafur (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor) Labour (Committee Chair)
Nick Ramsay	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Joyce Watson	Llafur Labour

Eraill yn bresennol
Others in attendance

Lorraine Barrett	Aelod Cynulliad, Llafur Assembly Member, Labour
Jeff Childs	Pennaeth, Isadran Adnewyddu'r Sector Preifat, Y Gyfarwyddiaeth Dai, Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru Head, Private Sector Renewal Branch, Housing Directorate, Welsh Assembly Government
Jocelyn Davies	Aelod Cynulliad, Llafur (Y Dirprwy Weinidog dros Dai) Assembly Member, Labour (The Deputy Minister for Housing)
Brendon Hilbourne	Pennaeth yr Uned Sector Preifat, Y Gyfarwyddiaeth Dai, Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru Head, Private Sector Unit, Housing Directorate, Welsh Assembly Government

Swyddogion Gwasanaeth Seneddol y Cynulliad yn bresennol
Assembly Parliamentary Service officials in attendance

Steve Boyce	Gwasanaeth Ymchwil yr Aelodau Members' Research Service
Claire Clancy	Prif Weithredwr a Chlerc Chief Executive and Clerk
Julia Davies	Gwasanaeth Ymchwil yr Aelodau Members' Research Service
Tom Jackson	Clerc Clerk
Holly Pembridge	Rheolwr Cydraddoldebau Equalities Manager
Rita Phillips	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk
Denise Rogers	Gwasanaeth Ymchwil yr Aelodau Members' Research Service
Bethan Webber	Gwasanaeth Pwyllgorau Committee Service

Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 9.30 a.m.
The meeting began at 9.30 a.m.

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

[1] **Ann Jones:** Good morning, everybody, and welcome to the Committee for Equality of Opportunity meeting. I remind Members and those in the public gallery that contributions are welcome in Welsh and English. Translation is available via the headsets; channel 1 is for the translation while channel 0 will allow you to hear the contributions in the original language while amplifying the sound. I ask that everyone switches off their mobile phones, BlackBerrys, pagers and anything else that can interfere with the translation and broadcast equipment.

[2] We do not expect a fire drill this morning, so if the fire alarm sounds, we will take our instructions from the ushers—or, you can follow me, because, rest assured, I will be the first one out of the building.

[3] We have apologies from Eleanor Burnham who apparently is not very well today. Mike German should be joining us shortly in her place.

[4] Do Members have any declarations of interest to make? I see that you do not.

[5] Before we move on, Members will have a pen each in front of them. They are a gift to us from the Scottish Parliament's Equal Opportunities Committee. I note our thanks to them.

9.31 a.m.

Ymchwiliad i'r Gwasanaethau Cynnal a Chadw ac Addasu Cartrefi Pobl Hŷn
ying Nghymru
Inquiry into Home Maintenance and Adaptations Services for Older People in
Wales

[6] **Ann Jones:** It is my pleasure to welcome Jocelyn Davies, the Deputy Minister for Housing, to our committee. As you know, we are conducting an inquiry into home maintenance and adaptation services for older people in Wales.

[7] I see that Mike has now arrived. I welcomed you in your absence and I reiterate that you are most welcome as a substitute.

[8] Sorry, Jocelyn. We are glad that you can join us, along with Jeff Childs and Brendon Hilbourne. Thank you for your paper. The call for evidence for this inquiry is ongoing; it closes a fortnight tomorrow, on 19 December. Thank you for coming at such an early stage in our inquiry. Do you want to introduce your paper?

[9] **The Deputy Minister for Housing (Jocelyn Davies):** I just wish to say how pleased I am that you have asked me to come today. Members have had an opportunity to read the paper. I am pleased that the performance indicator shows a general decrease in the number of days that local authorities take to deliver disabled facilities grants. You probably know that, in a tiny number of cases, the waiting time has gone up, but I think that all would welcome the general trend. Also, I would just flag up the fact that, since my appointment, we have introduced a fast-track system for physical adaptation grants for housing association tenants. We managed to clear a large backlog, and we now have a streamlined system. We are also looking at a new system, which is currently with the work streams as part of the Essex review of housing associations. I would be happy to move to questions, Chair, if that suits you.

[10] **Ann Jones:** Thank you. I will start then. How do adaptations and help with repairs for people contribute to and complement the broader range of services that are designed to help older people to stay in their homes?

[11] **Jocelyn Davies:** For those who want to remain in their own home and their community, to enjoy the dignity that that can bring, it is important that we do whatever we can to facilitate that aspiration. It is not a suitable option for everybody, but where it is possible, we should help. It is a matter of giving people choices.

[12] **Ann Jones:** Thank you. Do Members have any questions?

[13] **Joyce Watson:** Good morning, Deputy Minister, and thanks for your paper. I would like to follow up Ann's question. Do you discuss the issue of adaptations with other Ministers? There are examples of people who have a disability caused by illness, and having gone into hospital, the only thing preventing their discharge is the fact that their home needs adapting, and there is a subsequent cost to the health authorities. Have you seen evidence of people being kept in care, which is most likely the case, or in hospital, because adaptations have not been made—a situation that costs authorities much more than the simple adaptation itself?

[14] **Jocelyn Davies:** You make a very good point, because sometimes people can be physically ready to return home but perhaps the property is not suitable for them. I am very aware of that, and it would be a real shame if someone had to remain in hospital just because their property had not been adapted, which can be very expensive for the public purse, and is not a suitable environment once you are well enough to leave. These are often matters for local authorities. We welcome the fact that there has been a reduction in the time that adaptations take, but unfortunately these things do not always happen as quickly as possible.

[15] In the housing directorate, we are keen to encourage the extra care schemes, which are purpose-built and, in many places, are replacing residential nursing homes, so that people have the opportunity to have their own apartment within a purpose-built setting. We sometimes find that you can adapt the internal fabric of the property but it can mean that people cannot get out. So, the property itself might lend itself to adaptation, but there may be many steps leading up to the property so that people may not be able to get out into the garden, and so on. These are things that must be taken in the round—I do not know if Brendon has anything to add to that.

[16] **Mr Hilbourne:** I have a few things to add. It is right that there should be links between social care and health, and one of the Assembly Government's health circulars last year, which dealt with health, social care and wellbeing, spoke specifically about housing and the contribution that adaptations can make. The rapid response adaptations programme is specifically designed to carry out very small works that are necessary for someone to come out of hospital sooner or to prevent them from going into hospitals, which can include grab rails, a ramp and so on. Some local authorities are also using other powers that they have in terms of providing assistance for regeneration and adaptations to homes in general, and they are not using disabled facilities grants, where they can have a streamlined quick arrangement. For example, one authority has introduced a stairlift grant, so it can fit a stairlift quickly without going through the process of disabled facilities grants to enable someone to come out of hospital very quickly. A rough estimate of the rapid response adaptations programme demonstrated that it has saved health authorities a very significant amount of money, because there are several benefits to it. One benefit is the cost to the health service and social care, and the second is the quality of life for the individual returning home.

[17] **Bethan Jenkins:** The paper outlines that there are different response times between local authorities. Can you expand on why the times vary so widely, and what plans the Welsh

Assembly Government has to address this? Do you believe that there is variation in experiences for older people who speak Welsh or those from ethnic minorities?

[18] **Jocelyn Davies:** You are quite right to say that there is a spread of experience depending on the local authority area in which you live. The funds that go to local authorities for housing are within their general funds, and are unhyponthecated, so it is a matter for the local authority to decide whether it is a priority or not. None of us would want to see a situation where it depended on where you lived as to whether or not you would receive that service at an adequate and appropriate time. Introducing it as a performance indicator has led to an improvement; that came from a recommendation taken up from a review by an Assembly committee in the past. There is only so much that the Assembly Government can do, because this is a matter for local authorities to decide for themselves. If they have unhyponthecated funds, it is a matter for them to decide whether it is a local priority or not. However, there is a growing acknowledgement that this is important, and the amount of resources expended on it is quite considerable.

9.40 a.m.

[19] **Mr Hilbourne:** There are obviously a variety of reasons for the differences in timescales. Following the review of the disabled facilities grant, we wrote to all authorities stressing the importance of allocating sufficient resources and looking at internal mechanisms. At the end of the day, a local authority has a corporate responsibility for social care and housing. Some of the delays may have been caused by getting assessments done with occupational therapists and so on, who are usually also employed by the local authority. The objective is to get the assessment process running as smoothly as possible, bringing together housing and social services. Some authorities have moved more quickly towards doing that than others.

[20] We also revised the Assembly Government's guidance after the review of DFG, again, emphasising the importance of this. The fact that the general trend is towards reduction is encouraging, but, as the Deputy Minister says, there are one or two authorities that do not seem to be following the general trend. There is obviously more concern about them.

[21] **Jocelyn Davies:** There is some good practice. Earlier this week, I met with an occupational therapist who is employed by the housing department of a local authority—I think that it is Caerphilly County Borough Council—and that has been the case for a number of years, which makes a considerable difference to the time that that process can take. Even though the local authority, as the welfare authority, has to satisfy itself that this is required, there is not always a need for an occupational therapist to carry out the assessment. We are seeing a move towards others carrying out the assessment, and these things can be carried out more quickly. Even though we are not accountable for each local authority, we are able, in some ways—the performance indicator has made a difference—to pressurise local authorities to ensure that this is done as quickly as possible.

[22] **Joyce Watson:** To follow on from that question, Pembrokeshire, my authority, was the worst on this, taking over 1,000 days, which is years—we are not talking about weeks or months. It was disgusting, and I said so. My obvious question is that if we agree that it is fundamentally wrong not to deliver this vital service to people, and if we hold the purse strings for local authorities, should this not be hyponthecated? That is my first question, because we are only rewarding failure. Secondly, I could not help but notice in the tables, and you may or may not know the answer to this, that there seems to be a quicker turnaround with private homes than for publicly owned or council-owned houses. Why does that disparity exist? Is it because, in privately owned homes, people are paying a proportion? If that is the case, what worries me is whether there is unequal access according to whether you can pay or not.

[23] **Jocelyn Davies:** It is unacceptable, especially when you see statistics such as the one that you mentioned. There may be all sorts of reasons why a particular adaptation can take a long time, such as that it requires planning permission and so on. There can be delays. I am not making excuses for any local authority, but it is a matter for the local authority. It is not the trend to ring-fence funding for local authorities, but they should be accountable for it locally.

[24] In terms of the difference between private and social tenants, as I said, since becoming Deputy Minister, we have introduced a fast-track procedure for physical adaptation grants for housing associations, so that they can carry out the work and claim after the work is completed; they do not have to have prior approval. That has cleared a backlog. As responsible landlords, councils and housing associations should be doing that anyway, because the Welsh housing quality standard contains a requirement that the landlord, whether it is a housing association or a local authority, ensures that the property is suitable for the person who is occupying it, including making adaptations. The tenant retains the statutory right to apply for a disabled facilities grant. Jeff, it looks as if you want to come in on that.

[25] **Mr Childs:** We are currently mounting a housing strategy for older people. This issue of differential, if it exists, will certainly be looked at in that context, as, indeed, will be the ethnic minority and Welsh issues. We do not have evidence to that effect but it will be looked at in the purview of this large-scale strategy, which is currently being mounted by a secondee from Care and Repair Cymru.

[26] **Mr Hilbourne:** Pembrokeshire still has the highest level. It has come down by almost 26 per cent over the year, which is a distinct improvement, but nevertheless it is still high. The fact that the resources are not hypothecated has some advantages in that it is notoriously difficult to predict levels of disability clearly for the future. The fact that it is not hypothecated means that local authorities can spend as much or as little as they feel is necessary to meet the demand. The fact, for the vast majority of authorities, that the waiting list has come down indicates that more are now putting more resources into this in order to try to clear backlogs. The difficulty sometimes is not so much the resources but the arrangements that they have for the approval of applications and the time that it takes to go through the system.

[27] **Jocelyn Davies:** I will just add, if I may, Chair, that the abolition of the means test for children with disabilities is very much to be welcomed, but it has been raised with me that if you look at the individual local authority websites that information is not always there or is sometimes incorrect. You might like to check that in your own areas and perhaps take the matter up with the authorities. We have written many times to the local authorities to point this out. The grant limit in Wales is £36,000, which is ahead of England, where, I think, the limit is £30,000. That is to be welcomed. Local authorities also have the discretion to top up over and above that.

[28] **Joyce Watson:** Thank you.

[29] **Jocelyn Davies:** It seems as if Joyce has some ammunition to take back with her. *[Laughter.]*

[30] **Ann Jones:** You can see what will come next. We will leave that to Joyce.

[31] **Nick Ramsay:** I think that the Minister has touched on what I was going to ask, which was about the fast-tracking of adaptations. Perhaps you could elaborate some more, specifically on the fast-tracking of the smaller adaptations, which was recommended in the 2005 report. I suppose that the overall aim is to try to reduce bureaucracy as much as possible,

particularly in the case of those smaller adaptations up to £3,000. A number of authorities are already doing this, therefore I just wondered what guidance you are giving to them and to other authorities to see that—referring to some of the delays that Joyce mentioned—in the case of adaptations, where they do not need this delay, this can be bypassed.

[32] **Jocelyn Davies:** Yes. Of course, that was before I was Deputy Minister. Do you want to come in on this, Brendon?

[33] **Mr Hilbourne:** After the review in 2005, we wrote to all local authorities on a range of issues stemming from that. One of the things that we mentioned specifically was the recommendation about fast-tracking, particularly for works up to the value of £3,000. The review was held just a few years after a major change to the home renovation grant system, which gave local authorities a huge amount of flexibility on how they provided assistance. It basically meant that they were able to provide it in whatever form that they felt appropriate and at whatever cost was appropriate. We suggested that where there were relatively small adaptations, rather than going through a full disabled facilities grant system, they used the other powers that they had to provide assistance quickly and easily. There are many good examples of authorities that did that. I mentioned the stair lift grant in one authority. Another authority, for example, has grants for children suffering from asthma, which are available without going through the disabled facilities grant system. One or two other authorities have specific schemes whereby relatively small grants are dealt with through that system rather than going through a full disabled facilities grant system. Therefore, the practice varies, but there are quite a lot of good examples.

[34] **Mr Childs:** Most authorities now have fast-tracking in place. We have also updated our major guidance to local authorities and other providers so that they are aware of the need to fast track. More recently, in the light of the Essex review, the physical adaptation grants have now gone through a fast-track-type process in terms of the grants not needing approval from the Assembly.

[35] **Jocelyn Davies:** It is probably worth mentioning the rapid response adaptations programme. I do not think that it is in your paper, but it is well worth noting that, in 2007 and 2008, nearly 12,000 individuals were helped by that programme. Over 13,000 jobs were completed. Nearly 4,000 of those were in relation to hospital discharge, which you mentioned earlier, and over 9,000 were preventative cases. So, we can be very proud of the way that the rapid response adaptations programme, delivered by Care and Repair, is working in Wales.

9.50 a.m.

[36] **Ann Jones:** You say that one authority has a stair lift grant and that another has a grant for children with a specific illness. Does that not lead to inequalities across Wales? Should we not be setting standards for how we expect the disabled facilities grant to be set, because constituents often say, 'If I lived there, I could have X and Y, but this authority does not do that'. Should not a standard be set, within reason given the disability, so that everyone knows what they could ask for?

[37] **Mr Hilbourne:** It is important to identify the difference between some of the small grants that are being provided and DFG. The DFG system is encapsulated in legislation, with detailed guidance from the Assembly Government. I was mentioning systems that local authorities had developed outside the DFG system, and within the flexible home renovation grant system, to tackle particular local pressures and priorities. So, in a sense, what you have is a DFG system, which is a national system that is encapsulated in legislation, and then the flexibility for local authorities to develop local arrangements outside that system that are much more sensitive to local issues in order to tackle specific local pressures and priorities. That must be set out in the local housing renewal policy that each authority publishes, so the

public has access to that and can identify precisely how the authority is delivering help in that area, both through the DFG system and whatever other systems the authority decides to introduce locally.

[38] **Jocelyn Davies:** Local authorities have a number of powers that they can use in relation to this matter.

[39] **Joyce Watson:** I would like to follow up on that. Again, this is about equality across the board. I do not know whether you are aware, Deputy Minister, of one local authority, which reassesses a person who has a stair or a bath lift before fixing it, in order to see whether there is a need—

[40] **Jocelyn Davies:** Do you mean in terms of the maintenance of the equipment?

[41] **Joyce Watson:** Yes. So, if an appliance needed replacing because it was broken, the person would be reassessed. I had a case where someone was kept a year without a bath lift, because the authority was waiting for the occupational therapist to do a reassessment to see whether there was still a need for the bath lift, although it was flipping obvious that there was, because that person had lost a leg. It was obvious that that person could not hop in or out of the bath. I am concerned when I hear about cases such as that, and I know that that authority is doing reassessment in every case. So, not only is the authority not tackling the backlog, it is not even regularly maintaining what it has. That person would not appear on this list, and there will be many more people from that same authority in the same situation. So, is it possible for us to write down the minimum requirement that we would expect from an authority, and somehow say to the authority that that is bad practice?

[42] **Jocelyn Davies:** I am amazed by that case. That is completely unacceptable. Please write to me about that specific case, so that I can take it up. That obviously does not help everyone, but we will certainly take that back and look at it to see whether there is anything that we can do to address that problem, because that is completely unacceptable.

[43] **Ann Jones:** Joyce, perhaps you could supply the Deputy Minister with the details.

[44] **Jocelyn Davies:** We are happy to have a look at the suggestion that Joyce made as well.

[45] **Joyce Watson:** Yes, so that that does not happen. I only know about that authority, and I do not know whether any other authorities—I do not want to cast aspersions—are doing similar things. These are the things that we do not necessarily know about; we see the figures, but we do not realise that those people will not be in these figures, because they have their facilities. The trouble is that they cannot use them, because they are broken.

[46] **Jocelyn Davies:** Perhaps it is worth mentioning at this point that, if you are an owner-occupier, and you have a grant to install a piece of equipment, you then own it, and you are then responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of that equipment. In the case of tenants, it is the landlord who is responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of the equipment.

[47] **Joyce Watson:** It was the local authority.

[48] **Ann Jones:** Okay. Mike, you had a question.

[49] **Michael German:** One of Chris Jones's recommendations was about resource allocation. How far has that recommendation about the unhypothecated formula changes got? Has the DFG hit the DSG? These acronyms are wonderful. Has the demand for the disabled

facilities grant, as recommended in the Jones report, been reflected in the formula change? Has it hit the distribution subgroup, the people who would make the recommendation happen? What progress has been made on that?

[50] **Jocelyn Davies:** Again, that was before my appointment. Jeff, are you able to answer that?

[51] **Mr Childs:** DFGs are a mandatory requirement, and it is incumbent upon authorities to ensure that enough of the unhyphocated element is expended on them.

[52] **Jocelyn Davies:** It is fair to say, though, that the housing component of the general capital fund is quite considerable. Could you give an indication on that?

[53] **Mr Hilbourne:** Almost 40 per cent of the general capital fund is for housing, although it is not hypothecated. Within that, there are various elements, although I do not have them to hand, such as the proportion that older people get—there are a whole range of elements. I do not have answer for you immediately, but I can certainly come back to you.

[54] **Michael German:** There were two recommendations in the Chris Jones report. One was that the formula should be altered to ensure that it reflects the levels of disability, and the other was that the subsequent formula changes and annual reviews should reflect the demand for DFGs in each local authority. The question is whether those recommendations been taken forward. How far have they got? Have they got to the distribution subgroup, where any formula changes would be progressed? Or are they still on the shelves of bureaucracy?

[55] **Jocelyn Davies:** For clarification, Chair, the budget that I control covers the physical adaptions grant and so on, and money for Care and Repair, but this is about the general capital fund of local authorities. I do not know whether you intend calling in the Minister for Social Justice and Local Government to discuss that.

[56] **Ann Jones:** Yes, in the light of the evidence, we will probably have to.

[57] **Jocelyn Davies:** That might be a more appropriate source of information for you. This is about the general capital fund for local authorities, and we are not the mainstream funders.

[58] **Ann Jones:** Perhaps the committee could write to the Minister and send copies to committee members, including you, Mike.

[59] **Michael German:** It is important to know if there is a change in the overall shape of the local government budget, reflecting the level of disability in the community—it seems an obvious recommendation that it should reflect the level of disability in the community. Also, the formula itself would then follow demand. The recommendations seem sensible, and obviously impact upon the committee's work.

[60] **Jocelyn Davies:** I am glad that I am not the Minister responsible for local government formulae. [*Laughter.*]

[61] **Ann Jones:** You have mentioned Care and Repair Cymru a couple of times in answering some of the questions. Could you expand on the role of Care and Repair Cymru in the provision of services and support for people who require adaptations? I would also like to hear a bit about the resources—you stated that you have provided £4.5 million for Care and Repair Cymru, so what does the Welsh Assembly Government envisage providing in 2009-10 and 2010-11?

[62] **Jocelyn Davies:** Care and Repair Cymru is a national body with 22 agencies, so it has all-Wales coverage. It provides direct bespoke assistance to older people to enable them to carry out improvements to their homes. It often prevents people going into supported care—it helps them to stay in their own homes.

[63] **Ann Jones:** Should it be the main body that people turn to, or would they find themselves being passed on to somewhere else? Should it be Care and Repair that does it all?

10.00 a.m.

[64] **Mr Hilbourne:** It is important to recognise that a great deal of what Care and Repair does may not ultimately lead to a grant. It is about the assistance that vulnerable people, older people in particular, and some disabled people need. It may be that they are not getting all the benefits that they are entitled to, or they may need help with getting building work done, even without a grant, in terms of finding reliable builders, for example. So, it deals with a whole range of issues that will ultimately lead to an adaptation to, or some work on, their homes. On the other hand, a great deal of its work is about giving the advice, guidance and help that these people desperately need.

[65] **Mr Childs:** In terms of the funding, you are right: it is £4.5 million and it is the same amount, indicatively, for the next two years. However, over the past three or four years, funding has shot up considerably in terms of all-Wales resources—particularly three or four years ago when the so-called enhanced funding came into play and we had all-Wales coverage of Care and Repair. Apart from that in Scotland, it is the only national example.

[66] **Jocelyn Davies:** Of course, there is the handyman service, which is a good service. That helps with little jobs that, perhaps in the past, neighbours and friends would have done, which is not the case any more. So, you may well want to look at that service.

[67] **Mr Childs:** Care and Repair also works in concert with other third sector organisations, notably Age Concern and the local groups, as well as Shelter Cymru to a degree. There is quite a big corporate approach in terms of services for older people, and Care and Repair is the fulcrum of that so to speak.

[68] **Ann Jones:** Elderly people and people who have had adaptations to their homes because of a disability often require more heating because they do not move around as much. How can we dovetail these things, so that there is one grant? There may be grants or facilities available under the home energy efficiency scheme, for example, but it is about streamlining these things so that the person stays in their own home and gets all the benefits and all the necessary help through one agency rather than having to go to six or seven places. How can we streamline this?

[69] **Mr Childs:** Care and Repair works in concert with Eaga, which carries out these adaptations. If, as part of its assessment of clients, Care and Repair feels that a client is in need of energy efficiency advice and, for example, Eaga has not been involved, it will signpost the client to Eaga. There is a very strong connectivity between the two organisations in that field. Part of the wider advice given that Brendon alluded to is on welfare benefits and other functions.

[70] **Mr Hilbourne:** What tends to happen is that, once a person has gone to Care and Repair and got some help and assistance—perhaps to get some work done on their home—they tend to go back to Care and Repair when they feel the need for advice or help again. Care and Repair acts as a conduit, pointing them in the right direction so that they do not have to go through what can sometimes be a minefield in trying to find out what is available. Care and Repair can act as a catalyst to bring all that together.

[71] **Bethan Jenkins:** You have said that you give £4.5 million to Care and Repair. If that is on a yearly basis, are there any performance indicators or guidance for that? Does Care and Repair have to provide x amount of support and support the older person throughout his or her experience with the organisation? When those people come back, as you said, is there an obligation on it to assist them?

[72] **Mr Childs:** Care and Repair Cymru is the national body. Part of its main role is to monitor the performance and the effectiveness of the various agencies, and it carries out a great deal of monitoring, as you will no doubt hear when you meet with Care and Repair officers. One of its main functions is to ensure that all the targets and objectives set by individual agencies at the start of the year are carried through. There is a lot of quantification but a lot of qualitative assessment too.

[73] **Ann Jones:** Nick, you have a question.

[74] **Michael German:** May I come in on this?

[75] **Ann Jones:** Is your question on the back of this, Nick?

[76] **Nick Ramsay:** Yes.

[77] **Ann Jones:** Okay, Nick can go first, and Mike can follow.

[78] **Nick Ramsay:** You said that you are giving £4.5 million this year and £4.5 million for 2009-10? How much are you giving in 2010-11?

[79] **Mr Childs:** I think that that is roughly £4.5 million too. It certainly is not less than that.

[80] **Michael German:** My question is along the same lines. Why is it a flat-line budget? The cost of things will increase, tax will increase, and there will be more older people. Is it simply the case that it suffered like everything else, or is it there a reason for keeping it flat-lined? There must be a reason for that over the three years.

[81] **Mr Childs:** Again, we are in a wider universe with regard to who sets the overall budget. You are quite right to say that there is no reason why the budget should not increase given the inexorable increase in the number of older people and, no doubt, the call on services. At the moment, the line is a flat one; it is an indicative figure. Between now and the time when those indicative figures come into play, there will be an opportunity to increase that budget. We liaise with Care and Repair Cymru and ask it what it sees as being the demands and needs. The figure that it gave us is a little higher than the £4.5 million, shall we say. *[Laughter.]*

[82] **Ann Jones:** You would expect that.

[83] **Bethan Jenkins:** Was it much bigger?

[84] **Mr Childs:** No, it was not much bigger. It is realistic.

[85] **Jocelyn Davies:** However, it has not indicated to us that it would not be able to continue its service on this budget.

[86] **Michael German:** Perhaps that is a suitable question to ask it.

[87] **Ann Jones:** It may well be. Do Members have any other questions? I see that you do not. Can you expand a little on the proposed housing strategy for older people that you mentioned, particularly the area that we have just been discussing, namely adaptations and repairs for older people? What will be the terms of reference?

[88] **Jocelyn Davies:** Wendy Bourton, the chief executive of Care and Repair Cymru, has been seconded to the housing directorate for two days per week. She has just started and will be working on this strategy. I would not want to say what we expect it to contain, but I think that we have the perfect individual to help us to put this together.

[89] **Ann Jones:** Okay. We shall look at the terms of reference with interest to see how we can add to it.

[90] **Mr Childs:** It is a wide-ranging brief, of which adaptations and maintenance form a core element.

[91] **Jocelyn Davies:** Yes, but as Wendy Bourton comes from Care and Repair, that is something that she will certainly be keen to promote within the strategy.

[92] **Ann Jones:** Okay, thank you. As Members have no further questions, I thank you, Minister, for joining us, particularly as it is so early in our review. It has been helpful to discuss those issues around funding and the resources.

[93] **Jocelyn Davies:** If you find, during your evidence-taking, that you require me to come back, I would be happy to do so.

[94] **Ann Jones:** Thank you very much; we appreciate that.

10.08 a.m.

Trafod y Flaenraglen Waith, Gwanwyn 2009 Consideration of Forward Work Programme, Spring 2009

[95] **Ann Jones:** The committee will meet on Tuesday mornings in the spring term, when we come back in July.

[96] **Bethan Jenkins:** In July?

[97] **Ann Jones:** I have the winter over already. That would be quite nice, would it not? I meant the spring term, when we return in January. It is proposed that we meet between 9.30 a.m. and 11 a.m.. There are other committees going on as well, but we have plumped for that slot.

[98] In the paper, there is a proposal that the committee devotes one meeting per term to the issue of equal pay. There is a paper to note. I met with members of the TUC and Sue Dye, who now works for the Equality and Human Rights Commission. They felt that coming to the committee once a quarter to update the committee and for the committee to be involved in the campaign would be beneficial. So, if you are happy to do that, we will agree that one of those meetings will be on equal pay. This meeting will possibly be held on 24 March, if that is agreeable.

[99] Members can add to the forward work programme or take away from it if they wish. Are there any comments on it?

[100] **Michael German:** I am loath to make an addition to a programme for which I have no responsibility.

[101] **Ann Jones:** Well, go on.

[102] **Michael German:** Yesterday, Brian Gibbons told us that it is likely that the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities will be ratified by the UK Government around March.

10.10 a.m.

[103] Therefore, it might be useful around that time—towards the end of the session perhaps—to look at the implications of the ratification for the Welsh Assembly Government's policies.

[104] **Ann Jones:** That is a fair comment.

[105] **Michael German:** It could roll over perhaps. If what he said was correct, this could fall within that timescale.

[106] **Ann Jones:** That is a good suggestion; I think that we would want to look at that, would we not?

[107] **Bethan Jenkins:** I agree. I have another suggestion. I met with representatives of AIDS Trust Cymru in Swansea recently; they told me about the discrimination that still exists towards people who suffer from HIV and AIDS, particularly in the health service when they seek treatment. Could we do something on that, because what I heard was appalling, and I believe that there is some work to be done on that in Wales?

[108] **Ann Jones:** Okay; it might be worth having a quick look at that too. Is there anything else on there? I remind you that we have only an hour and a half for our meetings, so we need to be conscious of that. Are you happy with the forward work programme as it is, with the additions that Mike and Bethan suggested?

[109] **Nick Ramsay:** Those are two important additions, particularly given the timescale, as Mike mentioned.

[110] **Ann Jones:** Are you happy to accept that we would meet once a term with the Wales TUC and the Equality and Human Rights Commission with regard to equal pay? I see that you are happy with that as a forward work programme. Thank you.

10.11 a.m.

Cynnig Trefniadol Procedural Motion

[111] **Ann Jones:** For our next item, on the Assembly Commission's annual equality report, we are to be joined by Lorraine Barrett, the Commissioner for the Sustainable Assembly. However, Lorraine is in another committee until 11 a.m.. There is no other business that we need to look at before then. Therefore, I propose that

the committee resolves to suspend the meeting in accordance with Standing Order No. 10.25.

[112] I see that the committee is in agreement. I ask you to be back at around 10.55 a.m..

*Derbyniwyd y cynnig.
Motion carried.*

*Ataliwyd y cyfarfod am 10.12 a.m.
The meeting was suspended at 10.12 a.m.*

*Ailymgynullodd y pwyllgor am 10.58 a.m.
The committee reconvened at 10.58 a.m.*

Adroddiad Blynyddol Cydraddoldeb Comisiwn y Cynulliad 2007-08 Assembly Commission Annual Equality Report 2007-08

[113] **Ann Jones:** I welcome everyone back to the Committee on Equality of Opportunity. We will move on with our agenda. It is nice to invite Lorraine Barrett back to committee, who is joined by Claire Clancy and Holly Pembridge. It is nice to see Holly again. I believe, Lorraine, that you have some personal business to attend to after you have made your introduction, and we hope that things will work out for your daughter. So, Lorraine, do you want to introduce the report, and then you can go?

[114] **The Commissioner for the Sustainable Assembly (Lorraine Barrett):** Thank you, Chair. I feel like I should be rejoining this committee.

[115] **Ann Jones:** You would be more than welcome.

[116] **Lorraine Barrett:** We enjoy coming here to share good practice with you, but also to take back some of the issues that you raise. It is good that we are accountable to you. You have had a copy of the annual equality report for 2007-08. I will go through some of the progress that we have made and Claire Clancy, the chief executive and clerk, will update the committee on progress made since last year. Holly Pembridge, who heads up our equalities unit, will also touch on some of our priorities. If there is anything that you think we should do or if there is a piece of work that you want us to do, we will willingly do it.

11.00 a.m.

[117] We have been developing the Assembly Commission's strategic equality statement, which outlines its commitment to promoting equality, and that gives us a three-year strategy to develop our equality agenda. That statement is available on the commission's web pages. The equality scheme for 2008-11 was published last week on the web page, which sets out our approach to promoting equality across the different strands, covering, as you know, age, disability, gender and gender identity, race, religion and belief, and sexual orientation. That plan captures the actions that we need to take over the next three years to promote equality.

[118] Next December—although I do not really want to think that far ahead—we hope to be providing a report on progress with the implementation of the scheme in its first year. We have a really good equalities and access team, and yesterday's excellent celebration for the International Day of Persons with Disabilities shows just what we can do. It was an awful lot of work for a relatively small group of people and, once again, I want to put on record my thanks for the work that was done by staff in the equalities and access team. We have built the capacity up in 2008 and we have reached our full complement.

[119] Operation Black Vote, which some Members were involved with, was successful, and, at the end of it, we felt that we wanted to expand it to cover all the equality strands. We will be scoping that scheme for next year and Members will be kept informed. Holly can give a bit more information on that, if you want her to. The aim will be to raise awareness of the

work of the Assembly among the under-represented groups and increase civic and political participation among those groups.

[120] I have mentioned yesterday, which was a big day for us. The team is still recovering today, but, generally, it was very well accepted by everyone who took part. I would now like to hand over to Claire Clancy, our chief executive. Thank you for allowing me to give that introduction. I will be happy to come back next year to update you as we move through the year and through our work. Thank you very much.

[121] **Ann Jones:** That would be good. Claire, do you have anything to add to Lorraine's opening remarks?

[122] **Mrs Clancy:** I just wanted to pick out some highlights from the last year in more detail. Before I do that, I also pay tribute to Holly, Christine and Ross who make up our equalities team, as well as to Craig in the corporate unit. The passion and commitment that they put into their work and the courage that they show make a real difference to what we can achieve in the Assembly Commission, such as events like yesterday's, which was a very ambitious day. They are supported in that by the commission, which has, from the outset, been adamant that we should give equalities a real and meaningful priority, not just in publishing statements and policies, but in doing things and getting outcomes that make a difference.

[123] On what we have done this year, in March, we did a piece of research on the workforce to take a look across the equality strands. We got a response rate of 76 per cent, which is incredibly high for a staff survey of that sort. The results of that are in our annual equality report for you to take a look at. We also did a fairly substantial piece of work, an access audit of the Senedd, and we made various other access enhancements to different parts of the Assembly estate. There was an awful lot in the access audit, and we now have a rolling programme of changes to introduce improvements. Some of those have been carried out, such as the additions on the glass and the railings outside the building, particularly for people with impaired sight, but others remain to be done, and we have a programme of action for that. In Siambr Hywel, we have a mobile ramp and we can use that in other parts of the building for accessibility. We now have automated doors that have really improved access throughout Tŷ Hywel, not just for equality reasons, but also for all the staff who have had to struggle with them in the past. Other examples include our effective staff networks. We have a disabled staff network and a lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender staff network, and they are run by staff for staff. We recognise them both and we give time and budgets to both. They provide a useful support network for staff, and they mean that people are looking for opportunities to do things differently and better.

[124] Finally, the team has worked hard trying to raise awareness among staff and Assembly Members of equality issues using a variety of means. We have some internal communications media: a weekly staff bulletin; a magazine called *The Slate*; the intranet site and its homepage; as well as various other means of communications, including going out to the summer shows and working here in the Senedd. All that is to ensure that we raise the profile of equality issues and ensure that people are aware of what is being done and of what we need to do. That is all that I wanted to say. Holly will now take a look at the future and at our priorities for next year.

[125] **Ms Pembridge:** On our priorities for 2009, we have just published our equalities scheme, and I understand that the clerking team sent a link to Members. It sets out our approach to equality and the actions that we need to take over the next three years to realise our objectives. Coupled with that, I need to work with the team to develop and implement an equality training and awareness-raising programme for staff, Members and Members' support staff. We will probably do that by working with service areas to identify their training

requirements for business needs and equality. For Assembly Members, we will work with party groups to identify their requirements. Members have time constraints and busy diaries, so we may consider asking party groups to look at hot topics and deal with a diverse range of constituency issues. If Members have any feedback on what they would find helpful, we can use it to work on developing that. I mentioned the British Sign Language taster session in committee a couple of weeks ago, and Members and their support staff are more than welcome to participate.

[126] Lorraine Barrett mentioned Operation Black Vote. We are currently engaged in a scoping exercise, and we hope to take forward an all-Wales mentoring scheme for people from underrepresented groups across the equality strands. The idea is that we will work with local government to implement it at that level, where representation across the different strands is particularly low. There will be more on that, and I know that the Assembly Commission is considering that scoping paper today.

[127] The other issue that we need to look at is that of developing our impact assessment tool to assess our policies in-house. That is listed as an action in the equality scheme action plan. The other issue that we brought to committee's attention a couple of weeks ago is the accessible information policy. Lorraine mentioned that it would be helpful if we rolled out any guidance and advice to Members and support staff, so that we can produce the most accessible information. Another priority is that of assisting colleagues across the organisation to undertake an equal pay review to inform our pay strategy. So, those points give you a flavour of what work we have to do across the equality strands. Further details can be found in the equality scheme action plan.

[128] **Ann Jones:** Thanks for that. As an equality committee, we ought to put on record the committee's thanks for organising yesterday's event. It is a highlight of the Assembly year that we celebrate the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. I know that it is a lot of hard work to organise, but if we get things right for people who have different needs, and we get them right for people who have special needs, we get it right for everybody, because everybody benefits from that approach. If we turn things on their head, so that everything is seen from the perspective of a person who has a different need, we will, hopefully, get it right all the way through. I was pleased to see the change to the doors, because one of my things was that the doors should have some sort of automatic opening mechanism. I cannot understand why they were never put in place in the first place. However, they are there now, so let us move on and just celebrate the fact that they are.

[129] I will start by asking you about staff recruitment. How do you ensure that job advertisements are worded, designed and advertised to reach the widest possible audience, rather than just the usual suspects?

11.10 a.m.

[130] **Ms Pembridge:** The equality team worked with the recruitment team on this issue recently to look at the recruitment literature that we have, the language that is used in it and also to consider whether the imagery is diverse and reflective of society. We are looking at that at the moment. The human resources recruitment team has done a lot of outreach work with Cardiff South Enterprise Centre—it has organised open days for people to come into the Assembly to raise awareness of what we do and who is employed here. Members of the team have accompanied Lorraine to Fitzalan High School, where there is a high level of black minority ethnic pupils, and we have encouraged people to come in for work placements.

[131] When our new HR recruitment manager is in place, we hope to pilot workplace assignments aimed at people from BME communities. We want them to have meaningful work experience and we want to raise awareness of our employee workforce. One of the

issues that emerged from the equality scheme consultation process was that there were many perceptual barriers about who worked in the Assembly, in that you had to be a Welsh speaker or educated to degree level. That is not necessarily the reality—we have minimum criteria for our recruitment processes, but it is a challenge for us to address those misperceptions. We are working with HR to look at that.

[132] We tried to use photos aimed at women in the recruitment of security officers last year, to try to encourage women to make an application, but the result was that we had more women calling on behalf of their partners, but we will keep trying things like that.

[133] **Mrs Clancy:** There is a particular issue on which we are still working, and that is whether or not we should move to a policy of open recruitment for all posts, and have open advertising for all posts. There are issues in this regard because of the protocol that we have with the Welsh Assembly Government following the transfer of staff, and our staff would be anxious that we did not do anything to compromise that protocol. We are having discussions with them, but, on the basis of equality, it would be preferable for all jobs to go immediately to internal and external advertisement. We are working on that.

[134] **Ann Jones:** The overall grade distribution according to gender among the staff of the Assembly Commission is different to that found in the Assembly Government. In public sector organisations, there tends to be a weighting towards women in lower grades and towards men in higher grades. What is the view of the commission on the reasons for this, and is there scope for sharing good practice with other organisations?

[135] **Mrs Clancy:** I do not think that the commission has discussed that point explicitly, so I could not express a view on behalf of the commission. It could be about the pattern of working for the particular types of jobs that we have, because there is a high proportion of women at higher executive officer level. I do not have the Welsh Assembly Government statistics with me, but my guess is that there is a higher proportion at that level, and it may be because the work patterns or the type of work are attractive to women. We could do some work to look into that more specifically.

[136] **Ann Jones:** We would be happy to receive a note on that at a later date—we do not expect you to answer the question today.

[137] **Joyce Watson:** At the higher executive officer grade, there are 54 women and 22 men, and for the team support grade there are 33 women and 86 men. So, there are imbalances. If those imbalances are caused by working practices, we need to look at doing something about them. I would welcome further information on what we are doing and how we intend to address this situation.

[138] The other statistic in which I am interested in terms of recruitment and retention of staff is not included, and it is not focused on at all. While we retain people over the age of 50, there is nothing that can tell me that we are recruiting people over that age. I do not know whether you are minded to, but I ask that you keep that information. We are a massive employer in this area, and I am concerned that we might be losing a skills base. I do not know the answer, because the information is not available.

[139] **Ms Pembridge:** Under the regulations for age and employment, we cannot ask about age on application forms. The data that we have in our annual equality report is the breakdown by age of staff, and that is all that we have to work with. The survey was voluntary. I can go back to our HR team and ask how we can look into figures like that.

[140] **Joyce Watson:** May I make some suggestions, because I do not think that it is rocket science? Once we have recruited someone, we will know their age. I know that we cannot ask

people—I do not expect us to do that—at the point of recruitment or pre-recruitment, but once we recruit someone, they will give their national insurance number and we will know their age. I would know when someone walked through the door whether they were 20, 30, 50 or 60 years old. This is about post-recruitment information, and knowing at what age we have recruited people, because I think that it is critical. A huge amount of evidence suggests that there is discrimination against people who are aged over 50, and I want to ensure that we are not a part of that.

[141] **Mrs Clancy:** We can get the data on the ages of the people we have recruited since the commission was set up. That is no problem, but that will not tell us who was in the field and was not selected. Anecdotally, I have sessions with all new staff, and I have not noticed—it will be interesting to see the data—the predominance of one age compared with another. There tends to be a good mix.

[142] On your first question, we will take a look at whether we can drill down into the data on the gender mix at different levels and the reasons for that. We said that we have a high proportion of part-time workers at higher executive officer level, and that may well be attractive to women who have caring roles. A high proportion of the people at team support level are our security staff, and Holly has already mentioned that we have been trying hard to get more women in as security officers, but we have not yet succeeded. That would affect those figures. However, we will certainly do the work of drilling down, and let you have the figures.

[143] **Bethan Jenkins:** I have a question about mentoring for staff in the current system. I attended the launch of the mentoring women at universities scheme on Tuesday, and I know that that was specifically for women, but it made me wonder whether something similar could be tailored for staff here. I know that, especially in constituencies, some people feel that they are left out of what is happening in the Assembly. Perhaps there could be some sort of scheme, especially for the new staff of new Assembly Members, where they could share experiences of equality issues on a much more strategic level. Such a scheme could, perhaps, be set up for women specifically or for other groups. Learning from the success in that regard in the university sector, I thought that that could be replicated here.

[144] The other question that I wanted to ask was on the all-Wales Assembly Member mentoring scheme. I know that you are now holding a scoping exercise, but I request that you involve Assembly Members in that. Although I saw the benefit of Operation Black Vote, it was somewhat directionless as to where it was taking us. I could see the merits and the long-term gain for the individuals, but I did not know where we were hoping to go with it. So, it would be great if you could include Assembly Members in that discussion.

[145] **Mrs Clancy:** A paper will be discussed at the commission meeting today on the new scheme, and a briefing sheet is available for Members. I am sure that Holly and the team would be happy to talk to any Member who wanted to influence the shape of it and to know more.

11.20 a.m.

[146] **Ms Pembridge:** With regard to the scheme, we will be developing more prescriptive guidance, so perhaps Assembly Members could get involved in how prescriptive it could be and where it would be more helpful for Members, and build on from the lessons learned last time.

[147] **Nick Ramsay:** On that point about Operation Black Vote, I thought that that was an excellent scheme. To my shame, I have to say that I was not part of it. Due to my failure to send the right e-mail at the right time I missed the boat on that, but I hope to be involved in it

at the next stage. However, I did poach a fellow Assembly Member's intern for a day or so, so I had first-hand experience of the programme's tremendously positive effect. The direction of the programme was clearly well suited to the individuals involved. Moving forward, in the next stage of that, it would be helpful for us as an Assembly to have some more guidance on where it is going. The work done on that programme was very beneficial, certainly to the individuals involved. You said that the next stage will be expanded so that it will cover more than one section.

[148] **Ms Pembridge:** We hope to cover the other under-represented groups, such as disabled people, young people, older people and women. Obviously, we do not have a representational issue with women in the Assembly, but at local government level, colleagues from the Welsh Local Government Association feel that it is an issue. We do not want to preclude anyone from participating in the scheme. Again, guidance from Members or any feedback on how we could promote the scheme is important. In terms of how we advertise, and how and where we promote it, we want to engage people who have not been civically or politically active. One objective of the scheme next time will be to raise awareness among communities about the work of the Assembly and its Members. I will definitely take that on board, Nick.

[149] **Mrs Clancy:** It is very useful for me to hear this in advance of the commission discussion this afternoon; thank you.

[150] **Ann Jones:** I will ask you about the benefits of staff networks. You talked about the staff networks that you have set up for disabled staff and for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual staff, and what you feel the benefits are. Perhaps you could tell the committee some more about Stonewall's workplace equality index. What does it aim to achieve? What work has the Assembly Commission done to improve its rating on that?

[151] **Ms Pembridge:** We have involved the networks in looking at policy development. I know that the disabled staff network and the LGBT staff network have been involved with the travel and subsistence policy and how that might have an impact on them. In terms of Bethan's point about mentoring, I know that some of the staff in both networks have been happy to informally mentor other staff members. I see no reason why we cannot include Members and support staff, should they need any such support. The other issue with networks is to give the equality team some feedback on direction. The equality team wants to raise awareness around domestic abuse. The Communities and Culture Committee released its report yesterday and we would like to raise some awareness among Members and staff about the issues and how people can find support or help. We have tested that with the LGBT network and have had some very good feedback on issues that might affect same-sex relationships.

[152] On the Stonewall workplace equality index, it is to show that organisations have met certain criteria in being a gay-friendly employer and have systems in place, such as support networks and mentoring schemes, and that their procurement policies engage with supplier diversity. We want to be part of that. We made a submission last year and we have been able to say this year that we have more things in place; we have our equality scheme, we have our network, and we are awaiting the results, which should be available in early January. Hopefully, we might be included in that 100 index.

[153] **Ann Jones:** That would be good.

[154] **Mrs Clancy:** One thing that is done—it is a simple thing but, again, it comes back to effective communication—is to put messages and raise awareness through our internal bulletins and magazine. It is partly about specifics—that we can get the policies or procedures right—but it is also partly about the culture of the organisation, raising awareness and getting people to think differently. The group also does a very effective job on that.

11.25 a.m.

[155] **Michael German:** You mentioned procurement, Holly. Can you tell us more about what you require in the services that the Assembly Commission procures, particularly with regard to services that we buy in, such as catering, cleaning and other services? Do we specify anything in our contracts with these people, and what does that cover?

[156] **Ms Pembridge:** We have worked with the procurement manager to build an equality questionnaire into the tendering pre-qualification process, but we would like to refine that. We had a conference here in August with Stonewall about supplier diversity, and we would like to build on that. We also now have our equality scheme, which we share with contractors and instruct them to comply with. With third-party suppliers, we would like to get to the point where we can monitor contracts on a regular basis. That is in our action plan as a third-year action, because we need to build up resources to do that. We also need to build into our relationships with contractors a message about what we expect from them as suppliers. That work is pretty new, but I am working with the procurement team to do that.

[157] **Michael German:** Would it be fair to say that in our existing contracts with our cleaners and caterers, we have very little apart from a questionnaire that we have given them? So, we have very little in the way of control, in the contract itself, over equality issues.

[158] **Ms Pembridge:** I will have to check that with the procurement manager, because I do not know the detail of the contracts. I just look at the equality questions that we could ask across the equalities strands. I can bring that information back to the committee.

[159] **Ann Jones:** A note to the committee will be fine, and we will ensure that you get a copy, Mike.

[160] **Joyce Watson:** Following on the same theme, as a publicly funded body, and under the Equality Act 2006 and gender duties—although I know that we do not have those in Wales—we are duty-bound when we procure or buy in services to look at the conditions of those people whose services we are buying. I would be more than interested, like Mike, to know where we are going with that, because it would be an almost ridiculous situation if we were outside the regulations, as a Government organisation. I know that no-one wants to be in that situation. I know that that is not what you are saying, and I am not suggesting that it is, but we have an especial duty to be mindful of the regulations. So, it would be a good idea for us to get that report fairly soon.

[161] **Bethan Jenkins:** Has there been any progress on the ongoing review of allowances, particularly regarding staff? Have staff been consulted with regards to that review? I do not know whose responsibility that would be. I know that there are significant inequalities sometimes within the existing tier system.

[162] **Mrs Clancy:** Which allowances do you mean? Is it for our staff within the Assembly Commission?

[163] **Bethan Jenkins:** Would we be accountable for the staff of Assembly Members?

[164] **Ann Jones:** Another committee is looking at that at the moment. A committee was

set up to look at Members' allowances.

[165] **Mrs Clancy:** We are reviewing the allowances paid to our staff. Our human resources team are in discussions with the trade unions and the staff about that. So, that is a piece of work that is being done in relation to allowances for our staff. The independent review panel is currently looking at all financial support for Assembly Members, which includes support for staff.

[166] **Ann Jones:** A separate body has been set up, but the Assembly Government is providing a clerking team. I think that Dafydd Wigley is the chair—

[167] **Michael German:** Roger Jones is the chair.

[168] **Ann Jones:** Sorry, Roger Jones is chair and Dafydd Wigley is a member of the panel. The panel is meeting in Llandudno tomorrow—there is my plug—so, if anyone wants to go up to give evidence, please do so.

[169] I see that no-one else has a question for the commission. Are we fairly satisfied that we can let our commission witnesses go this year and ask them back again next year to build on the progress that they have made? I see that we are. Thank you very much for coming. I appreciate your taking the time. This is an important issue, and we need to be ahead of the game rather than playing catch-up. We have done some good work on that.

11.30 a.m.

[170] It is just left for me to say that this is the last meeting in 2008 of the Committee on Equality of Opportunity. The next is on the morning of 20 January 2009, which is a Tuesday.

[171] **Bethan Jenkins:** Not July?

[172] **Ann Jones:** No—January. I got it right that time. I got it wrong before because it is cold in here; I am sure that the cold affects me.

[173] Just to inform Members, this is Tom's last committee with us as clerk. He is moving on to pastures new, but Bethan Webber is joining us as the new clerk from January. So, thanks, Tom, for everything that you have done to keep committee running smoothly. We look forward to working with Bethan in the future.

[174] Finally, Merry Christmas everyone—including anyone watching out there—we will come back refreshed in January to carry on our work. Thanks also to Mike for substituting today. You are always welcome on this committee, Mike.

*Daeth y cyfarfod i ben am 11.31 a.m.
The meeting ended at 11.31 a.m.*