



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Monday 15 April 2013

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

11th Meeting 2013, Session 4

CONVENER

*Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Stuart McMillan (West Scotland) (SNP)

*Anne McTaggart (Glasgow) (Lab)

*Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con)

*John Pentland (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)

*Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Lynn Anderson (Voluntary Action South Ayrshire)

Laura Friel (North Ayrshire Council)

Councillor Ivor Hyslop (Dumfries and Galloway Council)

Ross Johnston (Scottish Natural Heritage)

Bruce Kiloh (Strathclyde Partnership for Transport)

David Kiltie (Maybole Pathfinder Project)

Joe Lafferty (Wallacetoun and Newton Regeneration Forum)

Bill Logan (Girvan Youth Trust)

Professor Paul Martin (University of the West of Scotland)

Peter Mason (Carrick Community Councils Forum)

Councillor John McDowall (South Ayrshire Council)

Councillor Bill McIntosh (South Ayrshire Council)

Helena Menhinick (Carrick Activity Centre)

Claire Monaghan (South Ayrshire Council)

Allan Rattray (Girvan Town Centre Group)

Valerie Russell (Ayrshire Chamber of Commerce and Industry)

Andrew Sinclair (South Carrick Community Leisure)

Gavin Stevenson (Dumfries and Galloway Council)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

David Cullum

LOCATION

University of the West of Scotland, Ayr Campus, Craigie Road, Ayr

Scottish Parliament

Local Government and Regeneration Committee

Monday 15 April 2013

[The Convener *opened the meeting at 14:06*]

Public Services Reform and Local Government: Strand 3 (Developing New Ways of Delivering Services)

The Convener (Kevin Stewart): Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to the 11th meeting in 2013 of the Local Government and Regeneration Committee. As usual, I ask everyone to ensure that they have switched off mobile phones and other electronic devices.

First, I take the opportunity on behalf of all committee members to thank the University of the West of Scotland for hosting this afternoon's committee meeting and this morning's excellent community discussion event. I also thank South Ayrshire Council for helping to facilitate the committee's visit to South Ayrshire, which I am sure that all members will agree has been interesting and useful and will be a great help to our inquiry.

Our only agenda item is evidence taking for our inquiry into public services reform and local government: strand 3—developing new ways of delivering services. We will take oral evidence from two panels of witnesses, the first of which comprises local community representatives, some of whom are on the South Ayrshire community planning partnership. The second panel of witnesses are representatives of CPPs in South Ayrshire, North Ayrshire, East Ayrshire and Dumfries and Galloway.

I welcome to the meeting our first round table of witnesses and thank them for agreeing to give formal evidence to the committee. First of all, I ask you all to introduce yourselves. I should add that you do not have to touch the microphones or even go very close to them; everything works automatically.

I will begin with Mr Rattray.

Allan Rattray (Girvan Town Centre Group): I am headteacher of Girvan Academy, which is situated in Girvan in South Ayrshire.

Andrew Sinclair (South Carrick Community Leisure): I am chair of South Carrick Community Leisure.

Helena Menhinick (Carrick Activity Centre): I am one of the trustee directors of Dailly Community Activity Centre Association Ltd, which has the Carrick activity centre.

Lynn Anderson (Voluntary Action South Ayrshire): Good afternoon. I am actually representing Marie Oliver, the chief executive officer of Voluntary Action South Ayrshire, the third sector interface for South Ayrshire.

Bill Logan (Girvan Youth Trust): I am project manager of Girvan Youth Trust, a voluntary organisation in Girvan.

Peter Mason (Carrick Community Councils Forum): I am chair of Carrick community councils forum and the Association of South Ayrshire Community Councils.

David Kiltie (Maybole Pathfinder Project): I am chairman of May-Tag Ltd and chair of the Maybole pathfinder project.

Joe Lafferty (Wallacetoun and Newton Regeneration Forum): Like David Kiltie, I am one of the community representatives on the community planning board and am also involved in various community activities. I am an unpaid community activist and troublemaker.

The Convener: We like troublemakers sometimes, but we have security staff if you go over the score a wee bit. [*Laughter.*]

John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): I am a Central Scotland MSP.

The Convener: I am convener of the Local Government and Regeneration Committee.

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): I am a Central Scotland MSP.

John Pentland (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab): I am the MSP for Motherwell and Wishaw.

Anne McTaggart (Glasgow) (Lab): I am a Glasgow MSP.

Stuart McMillan (West Scotland) (SNP): I am a West Scotland MSP.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): I am the MSP for Banffshire and Buchan Coast.

The Convener: I will start the ball rolling by asking the troublemaker Mr Lafferty for his thoughts on public service delivery in the area. What could be improved?

Joe Lafferty: If you speak to me as a consumer rather than as a member of the community, we might get on the same path. As a consumer of goods, I can choose the quality of goods that I want at the price that I want with the delivery time that I want. However, as a consumer of public

services, I do not have the same privilege—in fact, I do not even have an alternative.

In South Ayrshire at least, public services are delivered by people with little understanding of best value. For me, best value is not the lowest price, but the community benefit that can be achieved by employing a certain social enterprise company or whatever. The Wise Group taught me a great lesson with regard to the failure to get Government funding. I am here to talk principally about community transport, and I have to say that I have a similar fear in that respect. My social enterprise company, which is involved in community transport, will sign contracts with local government departments, the health board or whatever, but when the procurement process comes into play the option that will be chosen will be the cheapest rather than the best for the community.

I am going to have a wee go at the Scottish Government now. Sometimes it places an unreasonable burden on local authorities by telling them, "Here's a tranche of money. In three months' time, we'll give you guidance on how to spend it and then you'll have three months to get it out to the successful projects." That leads to ill-thought-out projects and turns everything into a last-minute panic. I do not think that any member at the table would give their partner a car and tell them, "In three months' time, I'm going to give you the keys to that," but in many respects that is what we are doing with local authorities. They do not have enough information to deliver on what the Government seeks from them. If the guidance was issued timeously, it would make the process a lot easier and place less of a burden on communities and local authorities.

Stewart Stevenson: Mr Lafferty takes an interesting approach as a consumer of services. However, on the issue of Government funding, I should point out that when this Government came into power in 2007 we found that 25 per cent of the money going to local authorities was ring fenced into nearly 200 separate streams. That approach was very largely abolished, with only a couple of per cent remaining ring fenced. Am I hearing that an increasing proportion of the money that goes to or is spent by local government is by different means being entailed and directed by central Government? If so, I wonder whether Mr Lafferty can tell us the percentage of money involved so that we can make comparisons and contrasts.

Joe Lafferty: I do not know the exact figure. As a consumer, all I know is that I want my needs to be met rather than the needs of the local authority or central Government. We are lucky in South Ayrshire in that the money that was originally ring fenced for CPPs is still in place. David Kiltie and I

have worked closely with the local authority to ensure that a certain amount of that money is ring fenced for community projects and can be bid for by organisations that want to set up a social enterprise, carry out a feasibility study or put together a business plan. That is the way that things have to go, because it satisfies the local community's demand. Instead, what we get is, "Oh, Government says this or that." The whole thing is as tight as a drum and you cannot move from it, but communities do not think like that.

14:15

Stewart Stevenson: Forgive me if this is down to my ignorance, but I want to be clear about whether the local authority has preserved the ring fencing for community planning in its budget or whether the Scottish Government is directing that money.

Joe Lafferty: After a three-year period, the ring fencing was removed and the money came under the remit of the local authority to do with as it wished. Thankfully, South Ayrshire Council decided to carry on supporting the community projects currently in existence. I do not know if that happened all over Scotland or whether other local authorities decided that the money was part of the general fund and spent it on other things.

Stewart Stevenson: You see a place for a central body, in this case South Ayrshire Council, to set rigid boundaries on particular bits of expenditure, in this case for community planning partnerships, to be protected and not part of the general pool of money. Are you telling us that, in your view, there is in principle a case for directing money to specific objectives?

Joe Lafferty: Yes, that is my opinion, because otherwise we would have talking shops and everyone saying that they have no money to do anything. The empowerment of local communities to deal with what they see as priorities in their areas would be removed, and it would be left to somebody to fix potholes in the road with the money. That is not the way to engage with communities.

Margaret Mitchell: Mr Lafferty, is your point more generally that there is not enough consultation with communities to know what their priorities are and to ensure that the effort and money are directed in a way that the community is fully behind? That theme came through in our earlier discussions. Is that the case? Perhaps other panel members would like to comment on that.

Joe Lafferty: Believe me, I am no sycophant. I do not support South Ayrshire Council and I am not here to sing from its hymn sheet. However, I know that it made strenuous efforts to engage the

community over the past couple of months by holding public meetings everywhere and anywhere to ask folk what their thoughts were for the future. Maybe there are people who did not attend those sessions. The report has not been collated yet, so at the moment we do not know whether the aspirations of the community have been put in place. I am fairly confident that they will be, but that remains to be seen.

I will shut up now.

Margaret Mitchell: Do other panel members have views on that?

Peter Mason: The community planning partnership should work from the bottom up, not the top down, which is the way in which things appear to work at the moment. Communities should be consulted. The things that happen in Maybole, Girvan, Ayr or Prestwick are all completely different. We have to take the individual community into consideration and then move up the ladder until, eventually, we come across problems that are plain and simple and that everybody has. We then have to deal with those problems.

We should go further than that. Without any disrespect to South Ayrshire Council, we should all be working in true partnership. South Ayrshire Council and communities should always work in partnership. I mention South Ayrshire, but all local authorities should work in true partnership with communities. If we have the idea that the council sits up on one level and the community is away down on another level, things will not work. There must be a partnership.

Stewart Stevenson: I found the visit to Maybole and the May-Tag community interesting. From the discussions there, the contribution of the community planning partnership to fulfilling the community's desire to deal with its own problems was unclear. Can any of our witnesses give us examples of positive outcomes of the work of the community planning partnership for grassroots organisations and communities? We could start with Mr Mason, since he referred to the subject.

Peter Mason: Basically, what happens is that the community councils forum gets a monthly report from the community planning partnership, and we feed back. We are given the agenda, which says what is actually happening, and we feed into that through David Kiltie, who is the local member for the Carrick area on the community planning partnership. That is the kind of feed-in that we have. In terms of feedback, we are given a report on the questions that we have asked, but that is about as far as it goes.

Stewart Stevenson: Sorry for interrupting, but can you give me a specific example, however small, of benefit that the organisation that you are

part of derives from the existence of the community planning partnership?

Peter Mason: I can put in a request for a certain amount of money to spend on certain programmes, but that is as far as it goes. I am never asked to give a presentation to the community planning partnership on behalf of my programme. I make a request and the community planning partnership considers it. I am not given a chance to speak about my programme.

The Convener: If members will forgive me, I can see a flurry of hands raised, so I will allow our panel members to speak before I allow more questions.

Allan Rattray: I am in a rather unique position, I guess, as I am the headteacher of a school that takes in all the teenagers in the area. One of the key things that I do is to ensure that the voices of the young people are heard. Someone who is not in my position might find it harder to get a community voice. That is one of the main initial hurdles to overcome.

I have to work extremely hard to ensure that I listen to what my young people say, but I have a captive audience. For those who are out in the community trying to hear what the community is saying—people's views are extremely diverse—one of the first big hurdles that must be overcome is about ensuring that the mechanisms to capture that information are in place. In saying that, if a strong voice is coming through, that is an advantage in achieving the outcomes that are sought.

Mr Stevenson asked for a quick example of that. In the Girvan area, a local sports hub was developed. Prior to that kicking off, we asked our young people what they would like. Girvan does not have a lot of sporting facilities. For that matter, I would say that it does not have a lot of creative and arts facilities, which we might expect such an area to have. We said to our young people, "If you had an absolutely free choice of developments that you wanted funding to be directed towards, what would you ask for?" Once we received the replies, we published the results and brought them to the attention of the young people. We then picked up on some of the suggestions.

One thing that they said was that they felt that cycling and mountain biking facilities were lacking in the area and should be developed. We used that information to apply to Cycling Scotland, which took that on board and gave us a grant, and we ended up with bikes. However, that is not the full story. Once you have the bikes, the question is what you do with them. People can cycle a bit around Girvan, but we want facilities so that people can make more use of the bikes.

I do not know whether the audience knows this but, through a Government charrette process, the people in Girvan were asked for their views about where Girvan as a town and its surrounding villages should be going. I have some of the outcomes of that with me today. Again, my young people spoke at and fed into that process. To cut a long story short, we have recently used the information from the Government charrette process, which endorsed the fact that we want to get sporting facilities off the ground and that there has to be regeneration in the area, but that it is not just about the school and it has to involve all members of the community.

Using that information, we have recently bid through the Commonwealth games legacy fund for the development of cycle tracks—a skills track and a fitness track—in the area. We are awaiting the outcome of that. I used the Girvan charrette process to add leverage and bring the different partners in the council together to deliver what is required and what the young people are asking for.

The Convener: Thank you, Mr Rattray.

I urge folk to check their mobile phones again. A mobile phone is still on and it is affecting the broadcasting equipment. This meeting is going out live, so please switch your mobile phones off.

Bill Logan: I am project manager at Girvan Youth Trust and I would like to give a positive example of local communities working in partnership with local authorities. Girvan has a public boating pond on the seafront. It has been run by the local council for several years, and of late it was a drain on local finances as it was running at a loss. Like Mr Rattray, we listen to the young people and to the community. Under a service level agreement with South Ayrshire Council, we employed 12 young people to act as lifeguards and to manage and operate the public boating pond for the first time last year. They ran it at a profit, and they ran it for more days than the council had previously done. We got a lot of positive feedback from the council and from the public and visitors to the town.

Within the budget that we were given by the council, we also reintroduced traditional children's entertainment. We had Punch and Judy back on Girvan's shorefront for the first time in many years. That in itself generated a lot of feedback. Thankfully, I can tell you that we have now entered a new service level agreement to continue operating the boating pond and the seafront attractions. In fact, as a result of feedback from the public, we are going to expand our programme this year to return deckchairs, music and dancing to the promenade at Girvan.

We are aware that many visitors and members of the public remember Girvan from the 1950s and 1960s. To be honest, it has not changed much, as we can see from the postcards. However, the young people are now being employed to deliver things. It is about empowering community groups and changing the model of service delivery. The council was running the boating pond and it was not working. In partnership, Girvan Youth Trust and the council are changing the manner in which services are delivered.

That is an example for Mr Stevenson. It is about being open to flexibility rather than taking a one-size-fits-all approach. As a youth worker for 20-odd years, I know that successful youth work is about flexibility, and that needs to transcend and move across when we are working with the council.

To give another example, we have received funding from Ayrshire LEADER that we use to actually employ young people. We are giving them ownership of what they are delivering in the community, and that in turn enhances their status in the community.

14:30

Lynn Anderson: I have brought a document entitled "Voluntary Action South Ayrshire—Third Sector Impact Measurement Report—South Ayrshire Single Outcome Agreement 2012", which contains 60 examples of good practice from organisations of different sizes, including community groups. The document looks at all the indicators and targets for the single outcome agreement. The 60 organisations demonstrate how they positively impact against the outcomes and indicators. The document is available to all, and certainly to our local community planning people. I think—or I hope—that they fully appreciate what is going on.

We have talked about various aspects, but somebody mentioned having a strong voice, which is what we hope to have. My role is to build the third sector relationship with community planning. One way in which to do that, which I hope is positive, is to show evidence of what we are doing. Under the bigger banner of public services reform, lots of stuff is already going on in the third sector in service delivery. We fully expect that area to continue to grow.

The 2012 document is quite new and is the second such document—the first one was produced in 2011. The size of the document increased by 36 per cent in a year. I hope that, if we get lots of support, the 2013 one will again increase, because of the evidence in it of what the third sector is delivering in South Ayrshire.

The Convener: Thank you. You might wish to submit that document in evidence.

John Pentland: I have a supplementary question for Lynn Anderson. Some people in the voluntary sector say that the third sector is actually a barrier to tapping into funding, because they have to go through you first. If their project or little plan, which they believe will be good for their community, does not meet your criteria, it seems to get a thumbs down from you. Does that happen? Have you any comment to make on that?

Lynn Anderson: First, I should make it clear that I am here in place of our chief executive officer. However, I probably would not accept that we are a barrier. We have four core strands of work to deliver, as directed by the Scottish Government, one of which is capacity building. In relation to funding, we should therefore be there to help folk. It is my understanding that VASA does not have the authority to block funding in any way. We want to be able to provide guidance to people.

Funding is a complicated business, and I hope that our role on the capacity building side of things is there to help folk. It is practical help. Rather than just saying, "There's the funding that's available", we sit down with folk, even on a one-to-one basis in some cases if that is what is required, and help them to fill in their funding application, as well as making them aware of what is available at the time.

I am not sure whether that answers your question.

John Pentland: You have answered my question. Thank you.

Helena Menhinick: The Carrick activity centre was previously a council-run building. We undertook a public consultation in our village and the outcome was that it wanted to keep the activity centre. However, while the centre was within South Ayrshire Council's remit, it did not function properly. The council fell down with the marketing, the location and the staffing.

In the consultation, we asked people what they wanted, and they said that they wanted a gym, and for more use to be made of the sports hall. That is what is happening now. We listened to what the people wanted, went out and got funding and got the lease from the council. One of the down sides for us was that it took such a long time to get the lease. I think that things have speeded up in that regard, but at the time the council was going through a reporting stage in which it had to sort out how it was going to pass over leases on land and property to communities and so on.

Anne McTaggart: It is great to hear that there are so many positive aspects of the process. Moving on from that, what do you reckon could be

done to make the process even better? From the Scottish Parliament point of view, we get to hear about all the things that go wrong, so it is nice to hear about all the things that are happening in Ayrshire that are fine. However, what could we do to make things even better?

The Convener: Does Andrew Sinclair wish to have a go at answering that?

Andrew Sinclair: You have to listen to what the people on the ground are saying and not what higher-up officials think, or whatever. You have to listen to what people like us, who are working in communities, know is happening and what we think is needed. We probably have a better idea of what is needed. You need to listen more to the people.

Joe Lafferty: I will tell you about another project that has won a Convention of Scottish Local Authorities gold award. It is a church-led organisation that is partially funded by the community planning partnership and it deals with homeless people who have alcohol and drug addictions. Currently, about 80 people a week turn up at its functions. It has all the services together under the one roof for people who have a fragmented lifestyle. It has housing and social work services, and it has benefits people. It has Uncle Tom Cobbleigh and all, and the people have the blessing of the pastor at the end of the day, which is probably more than they would ever get before. That is the positive side.

We are talking about the funding of organisations. I believe that, if the figure is more than £30,000, there has to be an open tender. That is where communities sometimes feel as if they are being led up the garden path. When procurement comes in and there are restrictions on procurement and a lack of understanding from procurement officers about what constitutes best value, projects end up at risk. All the projects here are at risk of some bean counter saying, "I can get it two bob cheaper somewhere else. By the way, my salary is £60,000, but I've got it two bob cheaper." That does not encourage groups; it makes them a little cynical about getting involved in the process. It is hard enough to encourage people to take ownership of things, but it is impossible when they do not believe that some sort of community benefit is taken into consideration in relation to these smaller projects.

The Convener: You have got members excited now. I ask Mr Kiltie to talk about procurement, as he talked this morning about some of the difficulties that his organisation in Maybole faced with procurement.

David Kiltie: The problem with procurement can be that it is complicated. Many of the organisations that are involved locally are small

and they do not have the experience or know where to do it all, although they can get advice. A couple of times, we came across particular problems with procurement because we did not find enough people to bid, which caused a wee bit of a problem.

John Pentland: Andrew Sinclair said that it is all about community empowerment and involvement, and Peter Mason spoke about true partnership. We have heard in evidence that true partnership is a figment of many people's imagination and it does not really exist. Would you like to comment on that?

Peter Mason: I reckon that there are five of us sitting on this side of the table who do not get paid for our voluntary work; we just do it because we love the communities that we live in. The biggest problem that we come across is that, as volunteers, we have certain skills, but we know our limitations. When we get to the stage where we need to look for help, where do we go for it? We are led round about the trees or bushes—whatever you want to call it—and it is all time consuming, as far as we are concerned.

For example, South Ayrshire Council employs a funding officer, but what actually happens is that one leaflet is sent out per month, which tells us where the funding opportunities are. I can find that information myself, on the web. I need someone who is actually going to come out.

I spent the weekend filling in a LEADER application for a trip to Finland. Carrick community councils forum gets LEADER funding for a tourism project. I spent a month filling in the application form. We got £100,000 from LEADER and £100,000 from the wind farm companies to do the project because nobody else was looking at tourism in Carrick. I and other people are doing that type of work and not getting paid for it.

Now we have got the funding, we have been invited to go to an international conference in Finland and we are then going to Estonia to talk about what we are going to do, but again I had to spend the weekend filling in a LEADER application to ask for £4,000. That is not right. We need help—we need someone to come along and say, "What can we do to help you?" There is too much running round about the houses for pure volunteers. I am not talking about someone who says that they are a volunteer but is working in the voluntary industry. I am talking about people on the ground who are true volunteers. That is where the need is. The wee guy who runs the bowling club and the wee guy that runs the Scouts and the Brownies do not have the experience or knowledge of how to go for some of the funding that is out there. That is where we need help.

I am a member of Ayrshire LEADER local action group, and I can tell you that, when I pick up an application form, it is clear that it has been filled in by X council under the name of whatever group—that a council employee has filled it in. We are not getting that assistance in South Ayrshire. You only have to look at the percentage of LEADER money that goes to other councils in comparison with South Ayrshire to find that out.

The Convener: Please forgive me—I have a flurry of hands on this side.

Peter Mason: I apologise.

The Convener: No—that is fine, Mr Mason. David Kiltie can go next.

David Kiltie: On what John Pentland said earlier about true partnership not really existing, I would say that, in the early days of the council, partnership involved being told, "You are signed up to be a partner, but you do what we tell you." I think that that ties in with what John said. That has changed dramatically in South Ayrshire in the past few years. Now, we can work together, although it depends who you get and when you get them.

A particular problem that we have had in the past five years or so is the lack of continuity in some of the contacts, which I alluded to earlier. We were in discussions with the head of community learning and development—or words to that effect—but that person left. We worked with the next one for a year or so, and then they left. In a sense, the particular project that we discussed earlier has lost out from that lack of continuity because, when we have gone back to discuss the project with the authority at the highest level, I am not sure that it has been taken on board. We are now at the stage at which we have produced the business cases and had some discussions. We have asked to meet again with the leader, deputy leader and local councillors to explain and discuss some of the options.

I am not sure that changing the chief executive so often necessarily helps either, because it seems to lead to other internal reorganisations, and we have to learn to get on with somebody else. The vast majority of people whom we speak to at any particular time could not be more helpful, but somewhere along the line there seems to be a malaise. Earlier, I alluded—to use that word again—to the fact that someone said to me, "I think we've dropped a stitch." In knitting the fabric together, a couple of stitches can get dropped.

As Peter Mason said, the way forward is to have true partnership between the council and local communities. That has to be encouraged. As he said, that is where we get true community planning. It should not be top-down planning for the community, but—as he said—planning from the bottom up. We need to find out what

communities want and discuss all the planning features. It is not just about planning in the sense of considering whether to put up wind farms, build houses or whatever. The fabric of a community is essential to the people who live in that particular area, and their needs, thoughts and input have to be encouraged. I am not saying that that is easy, but it has to be encouraged, and it must happen up the way.

The Convener: I have a list of people who want to speak. I will call Allan Rattray first, to be followed by Andrew Sinclair, Joe Lafferty, Bill Logan, Stuart McMillan, Stewart Stevenson and Margaret Mitchell.

14:45

Allan Rattray: I echo Peter Mason's point. I am funded by the council and I find that, when I try to work with legal services, planning, asset management and the dreaded procurement—when I eventually get to that stage—they start to talk to me in the language of their professions. It can be too high falutin' and sometimes I cannot even get a yes or no answer to the most basic questions. Is planning permission required? When I ask that question, I am looking for a yes or no answer, but what I tend to get is a huge long email with references to different parts of the legal system.

If the work takes Peter Mason a long time, it takes people who are employed by the council just as long. I know that we cannot make it totally simple, but there must be a mechanism for simplifying the language and getting it into layman's speak so that the guy in the street can engage with the process. If I find it difficult, it must be difficult for the guy in the street, who is not used to dealing at that kind of level.

The Convener: It would be useful for the committee to have sight of some of the documentation that you are talking about. If we could see how easy it would be for us to fill it in, it would give us a clue about what needs to be done. There is nothing wrong with simplification and a little bit of common sense.

Andrew Sinclair: Peter Mason talked about partnership working and getting help from the council. I am lucky in my position as chair of South Carrick Community Leisure. We are working in true partnership with the council. We aim to build a new leisure facility for Girvan—a new swimming pool, a big hall, a gymnasium and so on. The council has said that it will put up £4 million for the project. As a community, we have to match fund that.

I am getting a lot of support from within the council. I have a single point of contact, who helps me and finds what I am looking for. However, I

know that other organisations do not have that. We need more of that help, whereby people within the council know that they can aid other organisations. We have cross-party support within the council. The leader, deputy leader and chief executive are very supportive of our project. However, as Allan Rattray said, we need people within the council who, when we ask them something, will help rather than hinder us.

Joe Lafferty: I have been around for 25 years—I knew half the staff when they were in nappies. For people who have been around for a long time, the council is more accessible. For others, though, it is completely mystifying.

David Kiltie and I, and anyone sitting round the table who has ever had any dealings with the council, cannot understand why, when we know what we want, and we know the planning issues and this, that and the other, no one in the council knits their side of the pattern to join with our side of it. They are all departmentalised, compartmentalised and living in their ivory towers. That has to change. It is the same with other partners in the community planning partnership.

My solution to that is that the health board should be subcontracted to the local authority. It is quite simply stupid for those two bodies to lock horns over money all the time. It does not help the community at all.

I believe that the new single outcome agreement places more emphasis on all the partners putting resources on the table rather than just talking about it. I would love to count the pennies when they are put into the pot. I hope that the single outcome agreement leads to some joined-up thinking. Sometimes, I wonder whether there is even joined-up thinking within the council. Then I look at all the partners sitting round the table and I see that, because there is no real big dog, it disnae work that way.

We need quality control in everything. Quality control in the delivery of public services is imperative. We need people such as the clerk of works back again to ensure that the services that are currently delivered are not diluted because of the procurement process and that an element of customer satisfaction is built into any contract that a local authority awards.

Bill Logan: As project manager at Girvan Youth Trust, I want to highlight a concern that I have about partnerships, working with local communities and working with South Ayrshire Council and other local councils.

We are heavily funded by The Rank Foundation. Several years ago, I was at a national conference with youth workers and youth organisations. A lecturer from a college down south stated that one of the main threats that the voluntary sector and

youth work in Scotland was facing was that our work would be undermined and stolen by corporate national bodies and youth service providers that were waiting in the wings to chip in and chip away at it. To be honest, I and quite a number of youth workers from Scotland shook our heads and said that that would never happen, but unfortunately, over the past couple of years, that has come much more to the fore.

When councils look to cut back their spending, they consider cutting back their youth work budgets. Then national corporate bodies and service providers that, as we have said, have experience of procurement—they have men in suits working in London—come to the council and offer to provide youth services at a cheaper rate. Councils decide to sell the baby, the cot and everything with it. What usually happens is that national corporate bodies that do not have the feel of the community then move in. They do not know what the community needs.

I throw the issue back to the representatives of the Scottish Government who are present. The Big Lottery Fund third sector early intervention fund has recently been deferred so that the Scottish Government can consider entering into partnership agreements with service providers for children's and young people's services. If you look at the Big Lottery Fund blog on that, you will see that it lists national corporate youth service providers; it does not mention local community groups or voluntary groups. I stress that we must not lose sight of the worth and value of community groups. Big is not necessarily best and it does not necessarily provide the best value.

I thank the committee for allowing me to voice those concerns. I am sure that they are reflected in every local authority area. I am aware of and liaise with many youth groups, particularly voluntary groups, and we know that there are people standing in the shadows just waiting to come in, undercut our services and deliver them at a cheaper rate.

The Convener: I have a number of people who want to speak and I am sure that the list is about to be added to. We have very little time, so the briefer we are in our questions and answers, the more we will get through.

Stuart McMillan has a question. I thank him for his patience.

Stuart McMillan: Mr Lafferty, you spoke about communication and community involvement. How important are community councils in representing the views of their areas? That point was raised in one of the sessions this morning, and it follows on from the point that Andrew Sinclair made about listening to what people have to say.

Joe Lafferty: I have been on three community councils—I have not been kicked off any of them—and I have found a vast difference between what happens in the urban ones and the rural ones.

I say without fear that urban community councils do not represent their communities as well as rural community councils represent their communities. There is a greater buy-in from rural community councils. I am on an urban community council and find that there are different organisations that deal with issues in an urban area; people do not necessarily have to go through the community council.

Community councils are very effective, and I am a great admirer of what goes on in Maybole and Girvan. However, I live in a deprived area in the town—it is one of the worst in Scotland—and it is very difficult to stimulate community interest among people who do not feel that they have a stake in that community, who are only there under sufferance and whose prime motive is to get out of the place. I am talking about an area of multiple deprivation.

Stuart McMillan: You mentioned community involvement from South Ayrshire Council and the different events that take place. Are those well publicised and well attended, and are they advertised timeously so that people can attend?

Joe Lafferty: The council learned a tremendous amount from last year's failure, when events were advertised on a piece of A4 paper. This time the adverts were on big banners all over the town. Some events were very well attended, but others were not. It is easy to ask, "Why didn't people come along?" The reason is cynicism; there is a lot of cynicism about. People ask, "Why do they want to talk to us now? They never listened before so why would I go along to talk to them again?"

People such as myself, David Kiltie and Peter Mason struggle on, saying that we will get people to change some day, and sometimes—rarely, mind you—we see the light bulb go on and people understand what we are talking about. That is well worth the wait.

Stuart McMillan: I have one more question, convener.

The Convener: Very, very briefly, Mr McMillan.

Stuart McMillan: My question is for anyone on the panel. The issue of procurement has been raised. Does anyone have any examples of not being able to do something because of European Union procurement rules? Has that issue come up regularly?

The Convener: Can we have yes-or-no answers from the panel? Mr Rattray, have you been involved with EU procurement rules?

Allan Ratray: I am right in the middle of something just now so I do not have an answer for you. I will need to wait and see how that turns out.

Andrew Sinclair: Yes, and I am aware that there are problems. When we get to the £30,000 limit, everything has to change and we have to go through all of the process again or do it differently.

Helena Menhinick: No, we have not had that problem, sorry.

Lynn Anderson: I have heard indirectly though our membership that the process is not conducive to sustainability for smaller organisations.

Bill Logan: No, but I am aware of the problem.

Peter Mason: Yes.

David Kiltie: Yes, it has come up for a number of years. I mentioned at this morning's community event that the process seems to be quite lengthy and involved and at times is an almost unbearable strain. Unfortunately, last year, between the EU procurement process and some of the bureaucracy in the council, I felt like packing in a huge project at least twice. I also said earlier that at times I felt that I was in a financial hokey-cokey—we were in, we were out, we were all round about.

The session might over-run, convener, but there is another issue about which I would like clarification. It involves the Scottish Government. Locally, members of a regulatory panel have been accusing communities of acting selfishly and of being in bed with developers. They quoted planning advice note 47—I was a lot younger when it came out, which was in 1996 if I remember correctly—which says that we cannot discuss cases with developers. In fact, PAN 47 states that we are discouraged from doing that. However, a later advice note, PAN 3/2010, states that communities should be involved with developers to work things out for the good of the community.

The Convener: Mr Kiltie, I do not think that we can go into that in a huge amount of depth at the moment. However, if you were to submit that information to the committee clerks, it would be extremely useful.

I ask Mr Lafferty to make a brief comment about European procurement rules.

Joe Lafferty: A brief comment? Oh, goodness—

The Convener: Yes. I am afraid that you will have to be brief. I asked for yes-or-no answers to this question.

15:00

Joe Lafferty: I will be very quick, convener. After two years of developing the social enterprise,

I shook hands on a £451,000 deal with a head of service in the council. We had empowered a lot of people by training them on how to be directors, how to run a company and so on. We involved the Social Enterprise Academy in that work, which took up a lot of our time, only for the council to turn around and take the project in-house. When that happens to you, it destroys your motivation a wee bit and you are cynical the next time the council says, "Do you want to do something?"

Margaret Mitchell: On the so-called financial hokey-cokey, it has been said that problems can arise when personnel leave, and there was a suggestion that those who leave should leave behind documentation to ensure that whoever comes into post is well versed and does not have to start at the beginning. However, it was also suggested that dealing with different departments caused real difficulty. Should we advocate the creation of a sufficiently senior central contact for everyone—someone who would make decisions and liaise with other organisations? Could we say that, although the council is willing to work in partnership, the logistics of doing so have not really been fully thought out and that having a central person in place to liaise with organisations, make decisions, keep continuity and so on would get us over a lot of the hurdles?

I might also put the same question to the witnesses. Do you sufficiently share your own good practice and the successes that you have had with marketing, for example, which you have all said you do so much better than the local authority? Of course, that is probably because the authority has so many different overheads to meet and facilities and assets to look after. Do you have a forum that allows you to learn from one another and share best practice and things that might help?

David Kiltie: Even back in the days of Kyle and Carrick District Council, we had an association of community councils. When the district council disappeared in 1996 and the current council was introduced, 13 forums or groups were set up—it was a bit like the last supper. Some of them worked and still exist, while some of them did not work.

Instead of having a South Ayrshire Council community council forum, we have a few forums, two of which are chaired by Peter Mason. There is one for the Carrick area only, and over the whole of South Ayrshire there are forums or associations that allow community councils to get together and share good practice, learn from some of the mistakes that have been made or problems that have been created and tell others, "Well, here's how we got round this or that."

I would like the council to call at least an annual meeting, although it would not control that

meeting, which would have input from folk with lots of experience who would take others through those experiences. That would certainly be helpful, because I think that the bigger community councils and those that are successful can share good practice with and help the smaller ones—they could even help areas that do not have a community council. I have to wonder why some areas do not have any community councils, because I believe that they are the greatest thing since sliced bread and should be encouraged everywhere by all of you.

The Convener: I believe that Mrs Mitchell's question was also directed at Peter Mason. Do you want to have a crack at an answer, Mr Mason?

Peter Mason: As far as I am concerned, the more that communities can work together and the more communication that there is between them, the better it always is. As for Mrs Mitchell's comment about having a central contact in South Ayrshire Council, she is absolutely correct, but that person must be at a certain level. There is no sense in giving us a junior officer who will walk into the boss's office and say, "Eh, excuse me. I don't really want to bother you with this, but—"; they must have the authority to be able to walk in there and say, "We've got a problem with this or that. Sort it." I do not mean that in a nasty way.

As David Kiltie suggested, the problem with officers leaving blah blah blah is that it interferes with everything that we are trying to do. We need a central officer whom we could work with; indeed, we have spoken repeatedly to South Ayrshire Council about that. To be fair to South Ayrshire Council, it has certain officers who are excellent. I am not running them all down. Some of them bend over backwards to help—we get emails from them on a Saturday night—but there are others with whom we might as well just not bother.

It all boils down to communication between the council and the community, and the community and the council. If that worked, we would not have a problem. As Davie Kiltie says, we should all sit round a table once a year. Let us really go for that in a big way and have a real community conference at which we make our input and South Ayrshire Council takes notice—although I am not saying that it does not take notice.

There was a brand-new community council at the last association of South Ayrshire community councils meeting. Those community councillors said that South Ayrshire Council had given them all these blue books and that they did not have a clue what they were doing. They asked, "How can we spend the £600 that we've been given?" We suggested that they spend it on ink for their printers or travel expenses, but they said that they just pay for those things themselves. They were

talking about joining up with a school to run a gala day. They had not a clue how to go about getting lottery funding.

We will start our next meeting an hour earlier so that we can train up those community councillors in funding issues. We should not have to do that. South Ayrshire Council should have a funding officer who goes out and shows them how to do it.

The Convener: Thank you, Mr Mason. Ms Minhig—Menhinick.

Helena Menhinick: It is a difficult name.

The Convener: It is not the easiest one. I will have to put my false teeth in better next time.

You signalled a while ago that you wanted to speak. Do you want to comment?

Helena Menhinick: I will comment on having a point of contact. Especially for a project such as ours, it is nice to be able to go to one person and ask them questions so that they can go and get the answers. That is basically what Peter Mason said. I think that it is also what Margaret Mitchell said.

The Convener: Lots of others are nodding their heads.

Helena Menhinick: Such a point of contact is definitely needed. We are all volunteers, and the work takes up a lot of time. Things such as money for ink and travel expenses are important.

South Ayrshire Council has been good to us and helped us, but sometimes things fall between two stools and we have to pick everything up and go forward again trying to find the answer. It would help a lot if we had a point of contact.

John Wilson: My question brings us back to the basic issue that we are trying to examine. How do we determine the services that should be delivered in the witnesses' areas, and what would be the best organisation to deliver those services?

We have heard a lot about the issues with community engagement and the provision of facilities and other services. Bill Logan spoke about young people running the boating pond in Girvan. Should it always be the local authority that delivers services or should there be other methods of providing those services, and other ways of identifying what services communities really require as opposed to some of the services that are currently provided?

The Convener: I want to try to bring everyone in, but I ask everyone to be very brief.

Joe Lafferty: A variety is definitely required. I could not care less whether services are delivered by auld Nick, South Ayrshire Council, a private company or a social enterprise as long as they are

delivered at a cost that I can afford and to the timescale and the quality that I demand. The more people who come along with different ideas, the more the pool is opened up and the better chance we have of getting better-quality services.

David Kiltie: The council should be the facilitator or enabler. Like Joe Lafferty, I am not all that fussed about who delivers the goods, but it must also depend on local discussions about what services and what level of service should be provided and whether communities can do anything themselves.

Peter Mason: I would say exactly what Davie Kiltie said.

Bill Logan: I endorse what Joe Lafferty and David Kiltie said. There is room for independent local organisations and community organisations to deliver services. Likewise, there are services that the council can deliver. However, we should be flexible and open to the fact that there is room for partnerships between both.

Lynn Anderson: We need to keep the communication channels open as wide as possible and sit round the table for discussions. If we do not say what we want, we will get what we get.

Helena Menhinick: We have to have consultation in communities, and perhaps a link officer who takes that information to the council.

Andrew Sinclair: We have to look at where we get best value for money, and the best service for that money.

Allan Rattray: I honestly believe that people want to build their own communities, and I think that communities would welcome the facilitation of capacity building involving everybody in the community. We would then start to develop a degree of expertise among people in the community—the very people who would be talking to those they are working with and representing.

On the point about having somebody in the council who would be the fount of all knowledge—well, aye and no. If people get stuck at community level, they want to have a contact from whom they can get an answer so that they can move on and continue to build their own communities.

If we had more work like that, communities would feel more ownership, and people would be more willing to become active participants in developing the areas where they live.

John Wilson: What role do you think community planning partnerships should play in the delivery of services?

Joe Lafferty: There are certain services that only the designated partners—such as the health board—can deliver, as they are statutorily required to provide those services. However, where there is

an opportunity for diversity, the community planning partners should fill the gaps between the services by pooling resources to meet need. Everybody has a remit—if I had one wish in life, it would be to remove the word “remit” from the English language.

The Convener: Does anyone else want to come in on that?

Bill Logan: I have had experience of community planning partnerships. I was the chair of the local community safety mirror theme group, but I went along to two meetings with South Ayrshire Council and, to be honest, I never went back because I was put in at the wrong level.

As a spokesman for the mirror theme group, I went along at the final stage when things were getting rubber stamped, and it was obvious that council departments and officials had already done all the leg work and compiled the paperwork. I was just brought in at the last minute. It was tokenism, to show that South Ayrshire Council was making contact with the mirror theme groups and the voluntary groups. We were just there to nod our heads—everything had already been done.

If the mirror theme groups and community groups are going to work with community partnerships, that must happen at a meaningful level at which we can have an impact. If that means working at the grass roots and at the boiler-house level, that is where we should be involved.

The Convener: Does anyone else want to come in on that?

Lynn Anderson: I should probably say something about building the third sector's relationship with community planning. We have already picked up on that and, judging from our conversations today, it is clear that there is still work that we can do.

We need to continue to build while listening and feeding back. We have already started a mapping exercise to find out whether we are at the right level. We hear that community planning can sometimes be a tick-box exercise, and we want to move away from that, but we all have to keep the communication channels open if we are to be able to achieve that.

We are looking just now at what is sitting beneath, so that folks in the third and voluntary sector are involved at the right level and have an opportunity to pitch in at an earlier stage rather than after a decision has been made.

The Convener: Thank you. I will give Mr Kiltie the last word.

David Kiltie: Thank you very much. I was appointed to—or voted on to—the community

planning partnership, and I think that it has a vital role to play. A lot of work goes in to pulling things together—it is a huge task.

I was appointed for a year, but I went back to the planning board and said that it takes month after month to get a feel for it all, and that the length of service should be more than one year. Luckily, the board agreed, but I wonder whether there is some way of addressing that issue. The major partners are there for at least the length of the term of service. The council is appointed for four years—or perhaps it is five years nowadays; I do not know—and the police are there probably forever, and the health board is the same, whomever it decides to nominate.

If you are going to ask community groups to be on board, there is perhaps a strong case for having at least a three-year term of service—or possibly the same term as the council—so that the partnership can pick up on the thread and take it all on board, and get to know what the groups are talking about so that they can make a difference.

The Convener: I thank all the witnesses for their evidence today. The committee is adamant that it will listen to the voice of communities, and we have been doing that as we have been going around the country. I thank in particular those folks who volunteer, who do a huge amount of work for and give up a huge amount of time to their communities.

15:16

Meeting suspended.

15:22

On resuming—

The Convener: Before we start again, I should say that broadcasting is getting quite a bit of interference so folk should check their phones again and switch them off if they are on. I know that the tens of thousands of listeners at home will be wanting to hear what we say.

I welcome to the meeting our second panel of witnesses and ask them to introduce themselves briefly.

Valerie Russell (Ayrshire Chamber of Commerce and Industry): I am the chief executive of Ayrshire Chamber of Commerce and Industry. I feel a bit like the cuckoo in the nest—I am not sure whether anyone else in the room is from the private sector.

The Convener: You are more than welcome, Ms Russell.

Ross Johnston (Scottish Natural Heritage): I am area manager for Scottish Natural Heritage

and cover Strathclyde and Ayrshire. I also sit on the South Ayrshire community planning partnership board.

Professor Paul Martin (University of the West of Scotland): I am the interim deputy principal at the University of the West of Scotland and am responsible for strategy, performance, policy, internationalisation and planning in the university. I, too, welcome the committee to the university.

The Convener: Thank you for your hospitality.

Bruce Kiloh (Strathclyde Partnership for Transport): I am head of policy and planning at Strathclyde partnership for transport, the regional transport partnership for the west of Scotland.

Laura Friel (North Ayrshire Council): I am director of finance and corporate support at North Ayrshire Council and provide the standard package of corporate support services as well as the council's customer services.

Gavin Stevenson (Dumfries and Galloway Council): I am chief executive of Dumfries and Galloway Council and chair the executive group in our region.

Councillor Ivor Hyslop (Dumfries and Galloway Council): I am leader of Dumfries and Galloway Council and chairman of the community planning partnership.

Claire Monaghan (South Ayrshire Council): I am head of policy performance, community planning and public affairs at South Ayrshire Council.

Councillor John McDowall (South Ayrshire Council): I am deputy leader of South Ayrshire Council and a member of the community planning partnership board.

Councillor Bill McIntosh (South Ayrshire Council): I am leader of South Ayrshire Council and chairman of the community planning partnership board.

The Convener: Thank you. Perhaps I can start the ball rolling with a question that I think has perturbed a number of members over the last wee while. Some of the community groups that we have talked to—not only in this neck of the woods but in other parts of the country—have told us about having to jump through many hoops to get anywhere with procurement. Councillor McIntosh, would you like to comment?

Councillor McIntosh: I am not all that clear about procurement, but I think that it very much ties in with the contact difficulties that were highlighted in the previous evidence session. There needs to be an appropriate contact point either in the council or with whatever member of the community or partnership we are dealing with, and I am certainly happy to take that on board.

I know that today's discussion is as much about community planning as it is about councils, but I should note that our council has recently appointed Claire Monaghan to be responsible for community councils, which we see as fundamental to the structure as we move forward and ensure that community planning forms part of the day job instead of some well-intentioned thing that runs in tandem with the council's work.

Although Claire Monaghan is not a day-to-day contact, she is, as I see it, the facilitator and enabler to ensure that we break down the barriers that have been clearly indicated this afternoon. There is no point in my saying, "We're doing a grand job" when so many of the members and communities who gave evidence earlier are saying that there are barriers to working with us. We will certainly work on that issue; indeed, as I have said, we have already taken steps in that regard. Claire is now in place and might be able to talk about all that in more detail. We certainly need to do this because, as far as I am concerned, the community partnership that is now so vital cannot work properly unless we work in partnership with our partner colleagues in community planning and our partners in communities.

The Convener: Thank you. I am sure that that commitment will be appreciated by the folks who gave evidence earlier.

Of course, there is always an issue with communication, and I am sure that members will touch on that later. However, as far as procurement is concerned, the committee has in its evidence taking heard numerous references to many barriers but when we have asked people what those barriers are they have been unable to tell us. Perhaps Claire Monaghan can address that issue.

Claire Monaghan: I am happy to, if that will be helpful.

Procurement is a very difficult process; after all, we are spending public money so we need to put safeguards in place. Over the past year, the council has mapped out different procurement journeys according to their value. Those apply first and foremost to council procurement, and the application of those rules has been a learning process for the organisation. Because we run procurement exercises for voluntary and community groups, they often get caught up in those rules; however, if we are spending public money, we have to carry out the process as effectively as we can.

That perception of procurement is also reinforced by some of the complexities with the LEADER funding processes that were referred to earlier. If those two elements are added together, they result in a large amount of bureaucracy for a

community group to navigate for what, to them, seems to be very little added value. The responsibility on our organisation is to find better and more effective ways of supporting community groups through that process. Instead of saying, "We'll run your procurement for you, but you'll have to deal with all these complications and barriers", we have to play an active part.

Councillor McIntosh said that community councils come to me. Until a reorganisation that took place a couple of months ago, there was a disconnect because community planning sat in one strand, community councils sat in a second, community engagement sat in a third and grants sat in a fourth. For the first time, we have brought together all those things to allow that synergy to happen. That said, I have no doubt that the responsibility on us is to help deal with those barriers.

However, we can crack only those barriers that arise as part of our own procurement journey and standing orders. The European thresholds and procurement journey still apply and the fact that there is no route around what are pretty stringent rules that add an awful lot of time is difficult for community groups to accept.

The Convener: I think that community groups understand that procurements are very costly and it seems to me that some of the folk to whom we have spoken informally today probably understand the European processes more than some folk I have come across in the public sector. Their main gripe can be illustrated by the situation in which, as someone said earlier, they are forced into getting three quotes for a wheelbarrow even though they already know where they can pick up the cheapest one. That seems nonsensical—it does not make any sense to me that that is happening, yet it seems to be happening on your doorstep.

15:30

Claire Monaghan: I would surmise that that is probably for a LEADER-funded project. At the moment, the LEADER rules require three quotes. We would not require that for one of our own community grants.

The Convener: One of the things that we are dealing with is public service reform, and not necessarily in councils.

Claire Monaghan: Absolutely.

The Convener: I understand that South Ayrshire Council is the lead partner in LEADER. What have you done to try to change the processes in LEADER?

Claire Monaghan: We are reviewing it with a view to the new programme coming on stream. As

part of grants moving across, LEADER has just come to me. I accept that the LEADER process looks difficult to navigate for all organisations; I say that as a LEADER fund holder for one of our big projects in South Ayrshire. It is complex, and we need to address that, but I do not have an instant answer for you.

The Convener: I think that, as the lead partner, you need to go back and examine the processes, which seem rather bizarre. If I was involved, I would be examining things very carefully indeed.

Before we get the perspective from Dumfries and Galloway, we have a supplementary question from Mr Stevenson.

Stewart Stevenson: I was delighted to hear Claire Monaghan say something that I have not heard anybody else say with regard to procurement—that it adds time. My question is whether it is the complexity that causes the greatest difficulty, or whether it is the length of time that it takes for decisions to be made.

To give context to my question, I ask it having worked and spent a couple of hundred million pounds a year procuring in the private sector. I never felt that there was any less accountability in that, but I could certainly make decisions by the time that I went home for my tea. To what extent is the complexity that we hear about a mask for the real problem, which is that the timetable for decisions is not only very long but uncertain? What can public authorities do to give certainty and to accelerate timescales?

Claire Monaghan: First and foremost, the time is the frustrating bit. Someone who is on a group and is keen to get a decision and to get a piece of work going—they have got everybody marched to the top of the hill—can find themselves put into pause mode. Time has been a frustration. With regard to the support that is required, it is partly to do with the complexity.

Stewart Stevenson: In fairness, the complexity can be taken away.

Claire Monaghan: Yes.

Stewart Stevenson: So, there is a solution to that, whereas I am not so clear as far as time is concerned.

Claire Monaghan: I do not know whether there is a solution as far as time is concerned. We have a portal that considerably speeds up the process for getting quotes for moderate-sized projects, but it still takes time.

One key point is often made. Taking the wheelbarrow example, a process is being followed, although the person knows what the answer is—they already know where to get the cheapest wheelbarrow. There are examples

involving responsibility for information and communications technology, in which the chaps might say that they used to keep phoning round until they reached the bottom price, and that is what they knew. Going through procurement is often more costly, but those are the rules in public sector funding.

The Convener: Where, if anywhere, is it stated that three quotes are needed to get a wheelbarrow? Is that in South Ayrshire Council's standing orders?

Claire Monaghan: No. Our standing orders say that three quotes are required only if the value concerned is more than £10,000. Three quotes would be needed only if it was a very expensive wheelbarrow.

The Convener: There are probably not many wheelbarrows that cost more than £10,000.

Claire Monaghan: So, for a wheelbarrow, three quotes would not be needed.

The Convener: Yet folk are being told that that is the case, so the communication of that was obviously very wrong.

John Wilson has a brief supplementary. After that, we will move on to Dumfries and Galloway. If you do not mind, Ms Russell, I would like a private sector take on public sector procurement next.

John Wilson: Ms Monaghan gave an example of people phoning round until they got the bottom price. Was that based on best value or on the cheapest delivery mechanism for the service concerned? There is a difference between the cheapest delivery price and best value. I seek clarification about the definition that is used by South Ayrshire Council in terms of best value. Too many local authorities define best value as the cheapest delivery of the service.

Claire Monaghan: In our procurement process, tenders for buying a standard item have purely financial criteria, but other tenders have a balance of monetary and quality criteria that give us the best value formulation. The category of criteria for a tender therefore depends on what is being procured.

Gavin Stevenson: I feel that we could be sucked into talking about wheelbarrows, when I am actually sitting on about £600 million of spend. I think that the answer for the future is the commissioning in communities by the community. If that is the answer and people in communities know best, how do we empower such teams? In Dumfries and Galloway, the administration took a bold decision to move from contracting to commissioning. The difficulty with that is that we must be clear about the outcomes for what we want to buy, then trust that the organisation that we commission will come up with a delivery

model. That process takes time, but we work with local providers in developing the commission because local communities know best what is needed.

A good example of the process would be the commission that we did with the Dumfries and Galloway Citizens Advice Service, which is our community citizens advice organisation. We decided that we would take the numerous contracts that we had and bring them into one commission, and ask the organisation—in effect, work with it—to bid in. Yes, we needed a procurement process, but the organisation had been involved in developing the commission and the outcomes, so it would have been miraculous if it had not ended up winning it.

Another point is that best price does not mean that it is not best value. If we get the tender right, we get best value and best price because we price for the quality that we want. The problem arises when it is done mechanistically. In Dumfries and Galloway, through working with our community planning partners, we are looking to build on our strengths, which lie in having more than 100 community councils and four empowered area committees, with us as key partners organised in the same localities. The empowered commissioning will be in those localities within the third sector. That is why Third Sector First in our area is a key partner, because it understands its sector best.

Basically, I cannot afford the model that I have. The answer therefore must be to empower communities to make the decisions and have accountability. That is why the accountability lies with the more than 100 community councils and the area committees, rather than at the top. There is, therefore, a difference between the strategy and the operation.

Moving to the commissioning process was difficult for the elected members, because we have to trust that the person whom we are going to engage in the commission will deliver the outcomes. We trust them to come up with the best model of delivery. In the two years in which we have been operating commissioning, we have found that in almost 100 per cent of cases they have delivered the commission. We have not been a barrier for how they do that.

The Convener: Can you give the private sector point of view, Ms Russell?

Valerie Russell: Yes. Problems with procurement are not peculiar to community groups. When we speak to businesses about barriers to growth, they normally tell us that they have issues with access to finance, procurement and planning. Our chamber of commerce delivers some local authority contracts within education.

We are a pan-Ayrshire organisation, so we have had difficulty through having three separate contracts that are run differently in, for example, procurement.

I agree that for tenders there should be a balance with regard to quality and the split between cost and value. However, for some of the contracts that we have applied for recently, we have had no idea what we are bidding into, because a value has not been put on the contract. We are told that if it is over £30,000, it must go to procurement and that it is below the level for the next European rules and regulations. An example that the private sector cites quite a lot is the interpretation of the European recommendations as opposed to the rules. Obviously, we need to follow the rules, but the recommendations are down to whoever interprets them, which has an effect on procurement. There are other regulations and red tape that are also barriers to business growth.

The Convener: You are saying that the three authorities that you cover all do it differently. Is there any local authority that local businesses prefer to deal with above others?

Valerie Russell: Out of the ones that I know?

The Convener: I am not asking you to name an authority, as I know that might be difficult for you.

Valerie Russell: Yes, there is.

The Convener: The commonsense scenario would be to use the best practice from that authority.

Valerie Russell: Yes. Again, it is all about interpretation. We had three different contracts that were basically for the same thing. The contract was up for renewal and one council was quite happy just to renew it without going through procurement, but the other two councils were strict about the renewal having to go through the procurement process. Out of the three, one was aware for at least six months that the contract was up for renewal but it was never posted in public contracts Scotland so it had to issue a letter for a six-month extension and then go through the procurement process. If a business knows that a contract is coming to an end within even three months, it is already on to the renewal so that there is no break in service delivery.

The Convener: Thank you. I ask Laura Friel to give the North Ayrshire Council perspective. If anybody else wants to come in on this issue, they should please signal.

Laura Friel: Local authorities are all assessed through the procurement capability assessment whereby an external assessment is carried out of how well councils are performing around procurement. North Ayrshire Council is

committed—as, I am sure, other colleagues around the table are—to delivering community benefits. We work hard to have a can-do attitude as we work with colleagues on procurement. We have been proactive in working with local suppliers to make it as straightforward and simple as it can be. We have also reconsidered the structure of the contracts that go out to tender, making them of sufficient size that there is a greater opportunity for local businesses or community groups to be successful. All of that is in the context of compliance with the relevant legislation.

Professor Martin: I come at this from the perspective of an organisation that procures and also responds to procurement opportunities, rather than from a local authority perspective.

The wheelbarrow scenario is the wheelbarrow scenario, but we need to remind ourselves that the rules governing procurement are generally there to protect the people who are looking for a service and the people who are seeking to deliver that service. They ensure that the process is transparent and fair in general terms, even for very complex projects. This campus is an £81 million example of complex procurement, and we are just embarking on the procurement process for our proposals for a £55 million replacement for the Hamilton campus. We can go for things such as non-competitive tenders. We can look at the guidance and use the rules as long as we apply robust governance processes and test our approaches, which must be legitimate. Procurement seeks to support and protect organisations and individuals from recourse at some point in the future, even though at times—including for us—it feels far too bureaucratic.

The committee might be interested in exploring some solutions. In Paisley, we have the Paisley law clinic where our lecturers and other academics provide access to legal advice in partnership with legal companies in and around Paisley. It might be interesting to explore—I am sure that I will regret the day—whether we can set up some kind of procurement clinic. We teach procurement and supply chain management and have students who are looking for work-based experience in supporting organisations. One of the benefits of having universities at the table in community planning is that we open the doors to a load of other opportunities and more creative solutions than those that have been explored up to now.

15:45

The Convener: That is a brilliant advert, Professor Martin. I have been trying to persuade my colleagues to take some procurement training, which I have done previously. They are not queueing up for it, but I think that we will get there

yet. Perhaps you can help us on your Paisley campus.

Next on my list is Councillor Hyslop.

Councillor Hyslop: One of the things that we found through the commissioning model is that we have a lot of small and medium-sized enterprises in our area and that it is difficult for them to bid in to big contracts. Through the commissioning model, we looked at how we could deliver in that regard. The council had £1 million to do up buildings and some of the roads, so we were able to go out through the commissioning process and bring in small chunks—it is about how we chunk up the work—which meant that we did not have to go to competitive tendering, which has a different procurement role.

I think that the issue is how the rules are interpreted. For example, I come from an agricultural background, so I know that when people filled in their integrated administration and control system form, they made sure that they were legal while maximising everything that they could. [*Laughter.*] People need to look at doing that kind of thing rather than ensuring that they stick to the letter of the law, because different interpretations make a difference.

The Convener: Perhaps I should warn the witnesses that all of this is on the record. [*Laughter.*]

Ross Johnston: The funding challenge is shared nationally. There are lots of bodies that face that challenge, including—in a small way—our organisation, because we run a community grants process. We are all trying to crack the problem of how we make the funding as accessible and easy as we can for people to obtain to deliver the projects that they want to deliver for the benefit of communities, while having the necessary safeguards in place.

With regard to the issues that were raised about LEADER funding in Ayrshire, we have had similar discussions in LEADER partnerships that we are involved with. Bodies such as the Heritage Lottery Fund are trying to address such issues through the awards for all scheme and others. There must be some body of expertise that we can draw on—perhaps the committee can refer us to one—that can consider how all the bodies that face the funding challenge have addressed it and assess whether there are solutions that have worked better than others.

In this discussion we have identified individual grants or awards and apparent incongruities or absurdities in individual grant decisions locally, but funding challenges are widespread. Certainly, in the patch that I cover I am aware that everyone has faced the same issues. However, there are lots of other bodies out there that we could draw

on that might have good practice that could show how we settle the procurement question while also providing sensible access to funding for communities.

Stewart Stevenson: In talking about commissioning, Councillor Hyslop quite properly emphasised that it is moving to look to outcomes rather than to manage inputs. To what extent has it been useful that the Government has brokered the single outcome agreement, which is a change led by Government that ought to support looking to outcomes? Does that agreement help or hinder? How could it be fine tuned? This is perhaps a cheeky question: does Councillor Hyslop share my view that single outcome agreements are actually not an agreement between Government and councils but a shared commitment to the customers of each of our organisations?

Councillor Hyslop: The single outcome agreement gives us the ability, as community planning areas, to come together and ensure that we are all going in the same direction. At a strategic level, it is a good idea to ensure that everybody has that in place. Going below that level, the two or three, four or five—however many it is—organisations will have their own way of getting there, so it is about whether they can do that better. Having two or three bosses is sometimes not the easiest thing, because if we are looking to please somebody in one sector, that might not tie in with the delivery in another area. For example, health improvement, efficiency, access to services and treatment—HEAT—targets do not always tie in with our single outcome agreement, but some of them work towards it. When we go for a council priority, it might not tie in completely with our single outcome agreement, but we have to try.

Stewart Stevenson: When you were talking about the number of bodies delivering an outcome together, you mentioned concern about the diversity of processes. Why are you worrying about that if the outcome is the only thing that you are interested in? There may be five legitimate different processes that lead to a shared outcome.

Councillor Hyslop: It comes down to the fact that, if the outcome is specific to an area, the governing bodies in the other areas sometimes put on pressure. They can say, “Yes, we can understand why you want to get that outcome, but we want to ensure that you deliver this instead.” It is a matter of marrying up the two and ensuring that the outcome is achieved without putting too much emphasis on something that does not contribute to that outcome and is not part of the single outcome agreement. If something contributes to the outcome, that is fine, but if it is additional and not part of the outcome, that might mean that people cannot do everything that they

want to on an issue, because they have to fund another one as well. That is where slight problems come in.

Stewart Stevenson: Are you suggesting that the way in which outcomes currently work is restricting our ability to deliver at the granular level of communities, which may require different outcomes?

Councillor Hyslop: I think that that is the case. At a high level, we might want a single outcome, but its local delivery may not be what we believe we want to take forward. The delivery of the single outcome against how we get there can sometimes be the problem. If someone sees a clear and straightforward line, the person on the street might not understand why they are taking that line, so their view of how the outcome is delivered should be different. The question is how we get the communication between the two.

The Convener: Ivor Hyslop mentioned HEAT targets: it is not the first time that somebody has said that HEAT targets sometimes cause a little bit of difficulty in delivering single outcome agreements. Can you give us an example of a HEAT target in your area that impedes your delivering something else health-wise that you think is probably more of a priority?

Councillor Hyslop: It is difficult to answer that off the top of my head, but I suppose that one example is delivering the best outcome for our elderly people. It might be better to have someone in hospital for two days longer in order to be able to make their house into the accommodation that they need to return to, rather than putting them out to accommodation that is not ready. Something like that may be what is best for the person, but it could have a significant effect on a HEAT target.

The Convener: Is there an opportunity in the forthcoming health and social care integration bill to sort out some of those wee anomalies?

Councillor Hyslop: There are definitely opportunities.

Margaret Mitchell: I want to go back to how we assess outcomes. It seems that a lot of effort goes into the front end of the process. Today, for example, we heard from the community groups that a clerk of works would be on top of the service that was being delivered locally—for example, on how well or badly a pothole had been filled in, how many times it had been worked on to fill it in, and how much that had cost the council. Where are such things fed into councils’ or any public service provider’s assessments of how they provide services? How does that affect the community planning partnerships, which are, as we have already said, looking at single outcome agreements way up, and not really with their feet on the ground?

Councillor Hyslop: One of the things that we do is encourage people to feed in. We have a yearly conference with our third sector providers, and we consult our public to see what they require. Community councils are good bodies to get information back from. They feed into the council at various levels—community planning partnership officers or the relevant committees. On how we ensure that potholes are given more importance and whether that is a road safety outcome, one feeds into the other. It is about how you deliver the pothole information to the road safety part of the community safety partnership.

Margaret Mitchell: Are potholes more important? When a pothole is made a priority, it is not repaired properly. Nobody seems to be checking that. A huge amount of money is squandered because the outcome has not been examined properly to determine whether the repair was value for money, was done properly or could have been done better.

Councillor Hyslop: In Dumfries and Galloway, we used to ensure that potholes were filled. It was what we called the “patch and whack” approach. Coal tar was put in to ensure that the pothole was no longer there, but it would come out within a week. We have now moved to first-time patching, which involves hot tar going in. We cut out the hole. People said that it was an issue so we are moving towards delivering better value for the customer, I would say. We are seeing improvements in that we do not have to go to the same hole three or four times because we did not fill it properly the first time. That movement has come through public perception.

Margaret Mitchell: Much as I love potholes and could talk about them all day, is there a need for a clerk of works—someone who has an overview and who looks closely at how things are maintained, services are delivered and outcomes are addressed?

Councillor Hyslop: Somebody needs to make sure that the work is done, whether it is a clerk of works, our service managers or somebody who can go round. We need to ensure that the right person assesses the work and that we have proper quality controls in place.

Margaret Mitchell: Is the community aware of who that person is so that it can go and feed in the information directly? We heard a lot about the website. I could not help feeling that, if you trawled through that, you would get a lot of information that would help with delivery of services. However, rather than a website, is there a person to whom people can go and who will take cognisance of their legitimate comments?

Councillor Hyslop: In Dumfries and Galloway, we do that through a telephone system. People

can phone in and are given a telephone number so that, if nobody gets back to them, they can phone in and ask what has happened. That provides quality assurance.

We do not have named individuals. We cover quite a big area, so there is a question about who such a person would be. In the past, we have had an issue with officers moving on or being promoted to other jobs. That was brought up earlier. Keeping the local people up to date can be an issue. They ring someone and find that they are no longer there so they do not know who the named individual is. DG direct, as we call it, has the facility for people to put their issue straight to the relevant officers and then, if they want to follow it up, they can.

The Convener: I will throw something into the mix to follow on from Margaret Mitchell's question on inspection. One of my big bugbears is the public and private utilities digging up a road or a pavement and not restoring it to the condition that it was in previously, and local authorities then having to pick up the bill because inspection has not been carried out properly and there was no due diligence. How do we tackle that?

Councillor Hyslop: We need to work at that. We have a range of officers who are in charge of ensuring that what goes back in is done properly. We keep an eye on the situation. In the past, it has sometimes been cheaper to fill the hole in and then send somebody out to repair it rather than doing the job correctly the first time. The job should be done correctly the first time, but private contractors have a different pay rota, or something. We have a team that tries to ensure that such work is all done and dealt with at the appropriate time.

Laura Friel: I had intended to come in earlier, so I will start by responding to the earlier question about delivery of outcomes. We have structured our single outcome agreement so that it includes high-level and intermediate outcomes, and we track the key performance indicators that contribute to it. We expect to see KPIs in partners' plans—when a number of partners are to contribute to delivering an outcome, we would expect those to trail through into their plans. Regular reports are made to the community planning board, so that we see whether we are on track or there are other things that we should be doing.

16:00

My second point relates to the website and customer services. The approach in North Ayrshire, which is similar to that which has been described for Dumfries and Galloway, is to make it as easy as possible for the customer to make

complaints. I will stick to the example of potholes in the roads. We are using technology that allows the customer to take a picture with their camera and send that in to us. We use a workflow process to request a work order to deal with the issue. The service will update the system to specify whether the work has been done. Therefore, should the customer call, we can at any point in time give them a position statement on what is happening with the issue that they have raised.

The Convener: Can the service user take a photo and send it to you via Twitter?

Laura Friel: We certainly use Twitter, but I do not know whether we can receive a photo through Twitter.

The Convener: I think that I have seen that in one of my Twitter feeds, so that is an interesting possibility. If you were to do that, it would be ground breaking, so it would be useful if we could get the detail on that.

Laura Friel: Sure. It is about making it as easy as possible for the customer to raise an issue and, if the matter has not been dealt with, the system allows us to tell them at what stage in the process the matter is. It is similar to how Royal Mail and others track parcels or whatever.

Councillor McDowall: There are a number of issues around community planning. It is a difficult concept for the ordinary person in the street to grasp. I am not sure that they consider that community planning is entirely relevant to lives. Of course it is, but I accept the comments that have been made by some of the community representatives about the need for it to be bottom up rather than top down.

The number of community representatives in community planning should be increased and the work should be taken more into the community than it has been to date. The group tends to meet in the council's headquarters, which is very official. I want to deformatise the process, if you like, and take it out into the community.

To answer the specific questions on procurement, there are difficulties, particularly in regard to community groups accessing, for example, LEADER funding. In effect, that requires community groups to spend money—that they do not have—up front, and to somehow claim that back in due course from LEADER. To be fair to South Ayrshire Council, it has recognised the problem and we have assisted community groups with up-front funding, rather than asking them to commit funding.

The Convener: It would be fair to say—colleagues can correct me if they think that I have gone off track—that although funding after the event has caused difficulties, folk were not

pointing that out as the main difficulty; rather, it was the huge amount of bureaucracy needed to get anywhere. As we have heard, most folk are giving up their time for free—some give up a huge amount of time—to fill in applications. As the lead partner, there are things that the council cannot do because of the rules. However, you need seriously to examine the bureaucracy and consider how you can help folk to get over what seems to be a huge number of hurdles in making applications. Do colleagues agree that that was what was said?

Councillor McDowall: I accept that the system is far too bureaucratic. However, my understanding is that we are bound by European legislation. It is difficult to see what local authorities can do to simplify the process, unless a way can be found through those rules and the situation be simplified.

I accept the earlier point about our having a dedicated funding officer who could provide assistance to communities. However, I have to say that, unless I have got it terribly wrong, my council—like every other local authority—is required to comply with European legislation.

The Convener: Can you give us examples of the impediments that exist because of European legislation? We ask that question all the time because folk say that it is one of the things that is stopping them from doing this, that or the other. Which aspects of European legislation are stopping you from making some of the requested changes with regard to bureaucracy?

Councillor McDowall: it is quite difficult to secure community benefit within procurement. I accept the earlier point about best value not always being the cheapest option—of course it is not, it never should be—but it is very difficult. Another example is that, although it is something that we would wish to do, it is legally almost impossible to impose a requirement on suppliers and contractors to pay the living wage.

The Convener: I understand that, Councillor McDowall. Unfortunately, the committee is all too aware of the case of Dirk Rüffert v Land Niedersachsen, which stops you from doing that. However, you did not really answer the question. It was about the bureaucracy that folk feel exists. I would be most interested in getting in writing from Ayrshire LEADER exactly what the difficulties are in cutting bureaucracy.

Mr Stevenson is desperate to come in with a supplementary.

Stewart Stevenson: I simply want to pick up on a point that I think came from Valerie Russell—certainly it was from that end of the table—on the difference between guidance and rules in relation to European governance of procurement. I wonder, since we are talking to an elected

representative, whether John McDowall has a clear understanding of what part of the advice that he and other elected representatives—including me—receive is to do with the rules and what part is guidance. Certainly, in my previous business life, guidance was fine—I would read it and then I would do what I wanted. I wonder whether the elected representatives who oversee the professionals' processes have any understanding of the distinction between the different things. I have a suspicion—I am not certain—that a lot of what we think are rules actually stem from guidance.

Councillor McDowall: You may be right. I always defer to professional advice that is given by officers. I am certainly not an expert on procurement or on European legislation. There may well be some scope to take exactly that course of action and to say to officers and officials, "That's not what we want—let's try something else." I would readily accept that. However, I confess to limited knowledge in terms of legal application.

Stuart McMillan: Is there any regular training or guidance coming from COSLA to ensure that those who provide information on that procurement element at local authority level or at CPP level are as up to date as possible?

Claire Monaghan: I am not sure whether there is guidance from COSLA but there are forums within the Scottish Government where the LEADER representatives meet to talk about current issues, so collective learning goes on. I have only had responsibility for LEADER for six weeks, but my understanding of where we are is that we have what is required by European regulation at the front end of our LEADER process. Other LEADER programmes have played a clever game by putting in front of that a cleaner process for the community groups to engage in.

You heard an example from one of the community representatives from South Ayrshire about a form coming in that they knew had been filled out by the council rather than by the community group, because the community workers there gather in all the information and help the group fill out the form. However, I think that the information that is collected by the form is, by and large, the same in any case.

Our organisation needs to look at how we can get those tricks in place in order to provide the maximum help to our community groups. I understand that EU regulations are involved; I know that they are very complex and that the Scottish Government has recently undertaken an audit that indicates that there is no general agreement about how to apply them. We have been asked to look at a number of our programmes because it is thought that the

guidance that has been given to us—it is only guidance—is not necessarily compliant in a few areas. That shows the level of complexity that is involved.

The Convener: I am aware that we are drifting away from Mrs Mitchell's line of questioning, and I want to come back to it. Ms Friel was signalling quite a lot there. Is your comment on this issue?

Laura Friel: My comment is about training of procurement officers. There is a commitment across the board to having professional qualifications in procurement. One of the areas that Scotland Excel will look at as part of the procurement capability assessment that I mentioned earlier is development plans for professional procurement officers in councils. They are allied to legal services colleagues; clearly those groups work closely together in terms of interpretation of legislation and guidance around it.

John Pentland: What I am hearing from what has been said is that it is down to somebody's interpretation whether rules or guidelines are followed for procurement. Probably one of the few procurement professionals we have here is Professor Martin, who seems to do procurement for a living. John McDowall raised the issue, which I have heard on a number of occasions, of trying to build in community benefits for contracts through the procurement process. Does Professor Martin know of anything that would help local authorities that are having difficulties around procurement?

Professor Martin: I have to state that I am not an expert on procurement. My views are based on my experience of running complex procurement projects. If we consider the living wage issue as an example, there is a difficulty around stating what would be an aspiration as a procurement requirement as opposed to what would be a procurement need or absolute—it is down to negotiation with whomever a service is being procured from.

Colleagues earlier talked a lot about communication and relationships, and about people who are involved in the procurement process getting to know each other. All that comes back to the point about time. It can sometimes be good, however, to spend the time to get to know the people from whom you are buying a service or to whom you seek to deliver a service. In that case, you are more likely to appreciate whether you want to be in that relationship—you might not want to be, which is reasonable—and be clear at the end of the day that you will deliver and/or get the service for which you have entered the procurement relationship in the first place. That is when people begin to realise that if they are going to win a contract or tender, they will have to sign

up voluntarily, rather than it being prescribed, to particular requirements in the procurement process.

I agree that the process is about rules, but they are there for a purpose and there are governance needs about protecting ourselves. For example, a council could buy a wheelbarrow in B&Q but receive a letter the next day from Homebase asking why it bought the wheelbarrow from B&Q when Homebase has one that is equally good. We have therefore got to be able to protect ourselves from that kind of process, but I appreciate that it should be done with a minimum level of bureaucracy and a bit of common sense.

Ultimately, it is the people aspects of procurement and their interpretation of the rules and/or the guidance that make procurement horrendous or reasonably comfortable.

The Convener: I want to try to move back on to Mrs Mitchell's line of questioning. Bill McIntosh is next on my list.

16:15

Councillor McIntosh: Thank you convener—that is why I put my hand up.

The rules and guidance point is very well made. As Ivor Hyslop indicated, Dumfries and Galloway Council has taken that and made it work with commissioning. It is a sensible way to go.

On Margaret Mitchell's question on outcomes, the first part is community consultation. We heard earlier that it should be from the bottom up. I can assume that you have X potholes on your road, but you know exactly how many you have, so I should talk to you in order to find out. It then comes down to the equivalent of preventative spend: fix the pothole, as you would fix the health of a young person early on, so that you do not have to go back to undo damage or repair the damage that you did not address in the first instance.

There needs to be consultation—we need to listen to what the issues are and, to the extent that resources permit, prioritise and, I hope, spend money to deal with them. With that simple pothole example, it might be that there is benefit in paying more to the clerk of works, or whatever, to go out and deal with it, rather than going back every six or 12 months to fix the pothole because it was not fixed properly in the first time.

Margaret Mitchell: The issue is not just the fact that something has been fixed but the sometimes tortuous route that has been taken to fix it—for example, if the person who fixed it came from Kilmarnock as opposed to being more local.

Councillor McIntosh: The person who wants something fixed does not really care where the person who fixes it comes from, as long as it is fixed properly. The important thing is the proper fixing; let us do a good job on day 1 rather than a patchy job that needs to be addressed later on.

Margaret Mitchell: We are looking at overall costs, and I think that you maybe underestimate just how vigilant some of the community groups are and how able—

Councillor McIntosh: I do not underestimate that at all—I can assure you.

Margaret Mitchell: I was certainly impressed that they took all the factors into account and knew, at the end of the day, whether something was value for money and had been done in the most efficient way possible. Perhaps a continuous assessment of that is the way forward.

Councillor McIntosh: I agree with that, because I do not think that any of the work is ever a one-off job. We have to keep going: we can get to a certain level but, if we do not maintain it, we will just fall by the wayside again.

The Convener: Claire Monaghan, do you want to have a crack at the original question? We have drifted, but I know that you had your hand up previously.

Claire Monaghan: The question is around the transition to an outcomes-based world, but those outcomes are still achieved by virtue of input. That is a very difficult balance for community planning boards to achieve.

I was encouraged by the line in the Christie commission report and in the statement of ambition on the strand of work that needs to happen in performance management. I do not think that it is there yet in the community planning world. We have become quite good at working out how to move outcomes into something more manageable and at using intermediate outcomes and measures and so on, but the feedback loops that we need around improvement—the sorts of examples about roads that have been given—are not yet part and parcel of the daily world of community planning. We need performance management systems that support that. There is still a challenge.

I can speak only from experience in South Ayrshire, but it is a strand that we need to build on. We need to build on that with the communities, because the quality element is critical. A couple of examples of that have come up today.

The Convener: Anne McTaggart, did you want to come in on that point?

Anne McTaggart: No, I have a different question.

The Convener: In that case I will continue on this point and take your question in a wee while.

Paul Martin wanted to deal with this point, too.

Professor Martin: I will deal with two points together. I suggest that the move towards single outcome agreements is a very positive step forward. The revised guidance that was issued on the development and publication of single outcome agreements has proved very positive.

As part of that process, the regional colleges and universities have been identified as key players. Through the community planning vehicles, we engage in far more conversations than we were ever involved in before. That causes some problems for us, because—excluding Glasgow City Council—we are involved in the development, and possibly the delivery, of nine single outcome agreements with the local authorities that sit around the geographical spread of our campuses.

That creates a problem for us, and what we can or cannot commit to at different stages becomes an issue. However, it has allowed us to introduce an idea that we have phrased as “realising the benefit of having a university on your doorstep”. We are a huge resource to communities. We contribute economically to communities, as I mentioned earlier, but we are also a huge resource in terms of capability and capacity to the public sector, the private sector and the third sector. I do not think that we have played that card strongly enough or that partners understand the contribution that we can make.

That brings me to how we know that the outcome that has been delivered is the outcome that we wanted. One of my frustrations with public policy is with the ability to evidence the impact of things. When we grow or develop policy, we tend to put a heck of a lot of work into testing whether it is the right policy. We perhaps think that something is the right thing to do, we evidence it internationally and we feel in our gut that it is right. In many ways, there is nothing wrong with that, but when we implement the policy we think that that is it. When we come back in two or three years’ time to look at whether the policy change or service has had the required impact and delivered the anticipated outcomes, we cannot measure it. Instead, we tend to seek to retrofit the end results into some kind of impact evaluation framework.

From a researcher’s perspective, I have to say that that is not the right way to do things. That creates a very tense environment between those who are looking for the outcome and those who are seeking to gather the evidence. I just ask that, as part of the community planning process, when people are at the point of thinking about change they also think about how they will actively

measure its impact. What are the indicators of success? How will we measure those in an objective, transparent and robust way?

For example, the convener referred to the integration of health and social care, and now is the time that we should be developing the indices by which we will measure the success of that change. That should not be done 10 years down the road when people might be scrambling to put the evidence together into some kind of coherent picture. You will appreciate that I spent 30 years of my life working in the public sector before I moved to the university, and I have that frustration.

One of the benefits of moving towards single outcome agreements is that we can all play a part in constructing frameworks that gather evidence robustly. Universities have the expertise to be able to take that forward in a process that engages communities and without having any political colours. We can engage and work with communities and present the evidence in a robust, transparent and objective way. The evidence is to be challenged, but it should be presented in a robust, transparent and objective way.

Bruce Kiloh: Paul Martin comes at the issue from the education point of view, but we in the transport world have a similar difficulty. How do we demonstrate that fixing a particular pothole works towards the massive strategic outcomes that may be contained in the single outcome agreements? As an enabler and as a derived demand, transport really sits below—or perhaps I should say above—many of the different outcomes that come out of the community planning partnership.

Over the past few years, we in SPT have wrestled with how we demonstrate meaningfully to each of our 12 council partners what we are doing in the bus industry, such as on ticketing and bus policy. Each year, we produce a transport outcome report that tries to demonstrate how we are working towards our regional transport strategy targets in a way that is meaningful to the councils.

We try to demonstrate the benefits for local residents. For example, for South Ayrshire, what savings do local residents get from an integrated ticketing product such as the zone card? What is the actual benefit to people on the ground? Those things can be measured in monetary terms, but it is important for us to try to work out how we demonstrate those outcomes.

I also want to take up the point that one of the committee members made about community benefits. It is absolutely right that we need to ensure that our procurement is robust and subject to proper governance rules, but that should not prevent us from innovating when we feel that that is necessary.

Community transport was mentioned by the previous panel. One recent piece of work we have been doing involves the community transport network. In the public sector and for us in the SPT as the public transport authority, we are challenged all the time to get more buses and on where those buses will come from when cuts are made.

The community transport network in the west of Scotland is a huge asset with something in the region of 1,200 vehicles. We would be daft not to try to make better use of that asset, to work with the community transport sector to help it to be better co-ordinated, and to drive up the quality and to work that through to deliver the services that councillors, MSPs and local residents come to us and ask for.

That is why we recently set up the west of Scotland community transport network, which puts that approach on a formal basis. We want community transport providers to sign up with us and get to a standard of quality. They will have support from us and we will look at funding to take things forward. We already do great stuff with Coalfield Community Transport in Ayrshire and in Glasgow as well. The procurement process did not prevent us from doing that, but we had to think innovatively and find a new way to do something while being hugely cognisant of the rules and regulations that are in place.

Sometimes the issue is the attitude that we take into such projects. We must ask how we can make a project work for us, for our organisation and, more importantly, for the people on the ground.

The Convener: Could you comment briefly on the utilities companies not dealing with the mess that they make?

Bruce Kiloh: In relation to the co-ordination of roadworks across the network, from our point of view it is all about the bus network. We want to ensure that we have enough information ahead of roadworks so that we can put up information panels. SPT has a new system to put hoods over bus stops that say, "Bus stop not in use." That makes it clear to people not to wait there, and we always have a sign explaining why it is out of use and directing people to their nearest bus stop. It is important that, when we work with the councils, Scottish Power or whoever it may be, the information we get is clear and concise and that things are co-ordinated.

That leads me to another point. There has been a lot of talk about access to health and social care. That is another area in which we are very keen to ensure that the work of the councils, the Scottish Ambulance Service and its non-emergency patient transport, and us and our demand responsive transport is as co-ordinated as possible to get the

biggest bang for our buck and the best delivery on the ground for people. When things are co-ordinated, it makes the situation a lot better.

The Convener: We are quite pushed for time now. I think that the committee would be interested to hear how councils follow up on roadworks after the utilities have been working, because it costs the public purse quite a lot of money to put back to the way it should be something that somebody else should have put right.

Ross Johnston: I want to comment on the impact of the single outcome agreement and the challenge that it gives to community planning partners in delivering better services to local people. We regard the agreement as a welcome development and the six priorities identified provide a focus challenge.

What has not been mentioned and what we must keep in mind is that we should work in partnership where that adds value and delivers better services. There are many services provided by organisations. In the preceding discussion there was a lot of talk about local authorities and a brief mention of the national health service but very little about other service providers. The community planning partnership is about bringing all of us together and identifying those areas in which we deliver a better service by working in partnership.

That is a challenge for an organisation such as Scottish Natural Heritage, which may be representative of the bodies that have a role to play but does not form one of the main service providers. There are elements of the single outcome agreement that we can contribute to, such as improving physical activity; providing better spaces for people to be physically active in the outdoors; tourism and wildlife tourism; and rural development. The challenge is to have a process that allows us and many others like us to contribute to something when we add value, rather than to be present only as part of the administration or bureaucracy that oversees it.

16:30

On the particular issue with potholes, I wonder whether that is a community planning partnership focus. Does a partnership need to be brought together, or do potholes lie squarely within local authority or road service responsibility? The issue is high profile and very relevant to local communities, but we come back to the point about community planning partnerships adding value to services that are already delivered by individual bodies. Where can we come together and add value by our partnership effort?

A real challenge for those of us who lie outwith the main service providers is to articulate better how we can support service delivery, but there is also a challenge for local authorities and others to engage with us in a way that is efficient rather than have us merely cluttering the landscape. I see that as one of the main challenges: how we can all better articulate the value that we can add to the process in light of the sharper focus that is now in the single outcome agreement guidance.

Anne McTaggart: I have a question on community transport. One innovation that you looked at was working with the health boards and social work. If you were not a partner within CPP, would that work still go ahead? How would it benefit the innovation you are hoping—pardon the pun—to drive through?

Bruce Kiloh: SPT is a committed community planning partner. We resource 12 community planning partnerships, including the South Ayrshire partnership. That is a challenge because, as Paul Martin suggested earlier, with such a number of partnerships it is difficult to ensure that we are being as meaningful as possible. However, we try to ensure that we exploit partnership opportunities within CPP. Our achievement on community transport has been particularly good. We are also a member of the North Lanarkshire partnership, and we have taken forward significant opportunities in community transport in Shotts through the NLP. There are opportunities, and the partnerships are willing to discuss which ones are particular priorities in different areas.

It should be acknowledged—this has come out in the more recent community planning guidance—that organisations will want to fulfil their own statutory duties. There are things that we have to do outwith the community planning process, and it is acknowledged that we have our own targets. For example, we have our own statutory network for providing the socially necessary bus services. That is why we would look to work with the Scottish Ambulance Service. As far as I am aware, the service is not on any of the community planning boards, although some of the health boards will try to work with it.

Perhaps that is where we would step outside the CPP agenda and find our own opportunities, knowing that, while our work to improve and integrate transport access to health and social care might be operating outside the community planning agenda, it meets the needs of our community planning partners. We know that we would be able to do the work more cheaply, to deliver more for less and to provide a better service, and so we would explore all such opportunities.

Therefore, the answer is “a bit of both”. We want to ensure both that we are working with partners in

community planning and that we identify opportunities that could help us work with councils and other bodies in driving forward our agenda.

The Convener: I have a couple of names still on my list. I hope to get through everything, so I would be grateful if we could have brief questions and answers now.

John Wilson: I will follow on from the last line of questioning on transport.

What we have heard outlines the problem that we face. It is fine to establish processes and policies for urban areas or large areas—indeed, I am aware of the community transport issue because the local village where I live benefits from North Lanarkshire community transport initiatives. However, we also have situations such as the one we heard about earlier in the community of Pinwherry and Pinmore, in which there are very few bus services from Pinwherry to the main conurbations or through other villages.

How do we make sure that the policies that are being followed by community planning partnerships, local authorities, health boards and Strathclyde partnership for transport address the issues for local communities, particularly rural communities, and for those who are elderly or infirm and require public services to be delivered at the local level? We are talking not just about transport but about health, social care, and housing. How do we make sure that local authorities and the community planning partnership process are getting services to the people who need them?

The Convener: Bruce, would you like to go for that one first?

Bruce Kiloh: It is important to think about structures and how the information is fed through them. There was a bit of talk about communication earlier on. I represent transport and I will always try to identify the opportunities within the community planning partnership to make the case for transport and to show how meaningful it can be to education, employment, healthcare, social care, elderly people and so on. The committee will be familiar with the MyBus service.

I suppose that I am talking about ensuring that the lines of communication are clear and that people like me who are on community planning boards go back up the road to SPT's offices and say that a big issue is coming up in South Ayrshire, East Ayrshire, Argyll and Bute or wherever it might be, and that it needs to be dealt with.

If an isolated community does not have a bus service and people are not getting opportunities for social engagement or employment, that is exactly the type of issue that I would expect to

take back to our colleagues in bus operations so that we could look for a common community transport solution. Is there a socially necessary service that we need to support financially? Is there another way of working? Could we use the MyBus service or voluntary transport?

We need to take care of the lines of communication and ensure that the information from community planning partners is fed back to base. People at the senior levels of organisations, particularly elected members, need to hear those things so that we can try to do something about them.

Gavin Stevenson: We have to be careful that we do not pretend that we have endless amounts of money or that we want 1,000 people involved on our community planning partnership decision-making board. There is a difference between consultation and engagement, and decision making and how we ensure that decisions are implemented.

John Wilson cut right to the heart of the problem with his issue. The real issue is that we need greater clarity about what is being provided. I always use my mum as an example. My mum is 80 and she lives in Ayr while I live in Dumfries. What is being provided in her community by her community, and what is being provided in her district that she would recognise? What can only be provided at the regional level? We are a part of Strathclyde partnership for transport.

In many ways, our services are organised to fit ourselves. My region has 4,800km of roads and only 10 miles of dual carriageway. Potholes are a big issue for me. The hospital is in Dumfries, so I expect residents to travel for three, three-and-a-half or four hours—you will recognise this situation from the Highlands—to please the consultant who wants to see them at 9 o'clock. All my transport resources are tied up with taking the kids to school. Without the community planning partnership, I cannot get the health service to move its timetable to when I have buses available, which will probably be between 10 and 2 o'clock.

The second question is: are we really maximising the capacity in the community to provide the services that we drag people to Dumfries for? Telehealth is a really good example; it would save us a fortune. We are also a pilot for self-directed support. What people who have long-term conditions want is access back to their life, not a stranger looking after them in their house for 20 hours a day. It is really difficult for us, as a public body, to think about how we get that person to the bowling club, for example. How do we contract with a local taxi firm to get that one individual to the bowling club?

Those are the challenges that we have been dealing with under self-directed support. They fit what I call the bull's-eye model: what is in the community, what is in the district, and what is in the region? How do we commission at each of those levels?

When we start talking to third sector organisations about these things, it really excites them because we recognise the fact that the answer to my mum's problems lies not with me, living 150 miles away, but within the organisations that surround her. We do not have so much of a problem with procurement but with how we go about commissioning small-scale services when we are used to commissioning £50,000 to £100,000 or, in the case of the health service, millions of pounds of services. That is where we are in that journey. We are struggling to find a model that is safe, secure and robust, and which can deliver and get my mum to the bowling club.

Stuart McMillan: I have a question for Councillor McIntosh. In the previous evidence session, we heard about the lack of continuity of staff. That point was made in relation to chief executives of South Ayrshire Council. Has that been an impediment? It is not just the chief executive who changes. New people who come in might want to bring in other staff or to tackle different issues.

Councillor McIntosh: My understanding was that the issue that was raised did not relate to a particular level; it was just about ensuring that the member of staff that someone is referred to knows what they are talking about. The quality of staff can vary. If a member of staff in planning knows someone's issue inside out, there will not be a problem, but if a member of staff in roads does not quite relate to it there will be a difficulty.

The point was made that when personnel change—it is right and proper that that happens—we need to ensure that there is continuity by having some sort of document or record that means that if someone is replaced the new member of staff can pick up where the previous person left off. It might take them a while to settle in, but they should still be able to provide the same quality of service that people were used to. Change is inevitable—it is just part of what happens.

The Convener: I will ask both the council leaders a follow-on question from Mr McMillan's question.

A change in chief executive is a huge thing, but changes in officers who work at community level are even more significant for local communities. We have heard about protocols for a range of things, including procurement. As far as protocols for knowledge transfer are concerned, what

measures do you have in place, as councils, to ensure that knowledge transfer happens?

Councillor McIntosh: To be honest, I do not know that I am qualified to answer that. Continuity should be based on staff training, whereby someone who replaces a member of staff who has left is trained up, but there must be some sort of recording system that the new person can take forward.

The Convener: God forbid, but it is not always about folk leaving—people can develop serious illnesses, which might make them incapable of telling folk what they have been doing, and they can die, to give two examples. How do we ensure that knowledge is transferred in such circumstances?

Councillor McIntosh: I am not able to answer that question so I will not try to do so.

The Convener: Okay.

Councillor Hyslop: We must ensure that we have a breadth of knowledge across all subjects in our local teams. We try to do that, although I am not sure whether we achieve it. It is a question of ensuring that, if the unfortunate happens, someone else knows exactly what has been happening in an area so that they can step into the breach. It is about the person who is brought in being informed.

If we look at what we set out to do and how we performance manage that to ensure that the performance is satisfactory, we can say, "This is where you are going and these are the areas that we are looking into in your community." It is about having the evidence laid out that says what is partly in place and what still needs to happen. That is how we would try to ensure that the next person who comes in knows where to pick up the barrow—as the old saying goes—once it has been set down, so that they can deliver at local level.

The issue can also be to do with how people interact and how they record what they do. If we can put processes in place to ensure that what is done is recorded, that helps the next person who comes in.

The Convener: John Pentland has a tiny final question.

John Pentland: It is a very quick one.

Earlier, we heard about the transfer of assets to the community. Are councils willing to participate in that, or is it something that you do not want to get involved in?

The Convener: Can we get yes or no answers from the councils, please?

We have a yes from North Ayrshire Council, a yes from South Ayrshire Council and a yes from

Dumfries and Galloway Council. I think we're in there, folks. We will look at that issue very carefully when the proposed community empowerment and renewal bill is introduced, which is to happen very soon. We will see whether those yeses become a reality.

I thank the people of Ayrshire and Dumfries and Galloway for their participation. It has been a longer day than we envisaged, and I thank everyone for their patience.

Meeting closed at 16:45.

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