



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Martin Whitfield MSP
Convener
Standards, Procedures and Public
Appointments Committee

By email only

**Net Zero, Energy and Transport
Committee**

c/o Clerk to the Committee
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28 June 2023

Dear Martin

Net zero: Strengthening the scrutiny process

Thank you for your letter of 6 February. I apologise for the delay in replying for reasons set out below, but I know that the Net Zero, Energy and Transport (NZET) Committee clerk had been keeping his counterpart on your committee informed that the matter remained under consideration.

The NZET Committee is pleased that the Conveners Group has made net zero scrutiny by Scottish Parliament committees a strategic priority for this session and a collective endeavour for all committees. Considering whether standing orders could play a role in strengthening net zero scrutiny is an important strand of this work.

The NZET Committee agrees that it seems sensible to reflect on the adequacy of information currently provided in accompanying documents to bills required under Standing Orders (such as the policy memorandum) about whether the bill would impact on statutory net zero targets or other important climate change policies. In our view, this approach would be complementary both to:

- the recent joint initiative between the Scottish Government and Scottish Parliament to improve the quality of information on the net zero impact of each annual draft Scottish Budget (the Joint Budget Review), and
- scrutiny of the next Climate Change Plan, a key element of which will be considering whether the Plan has clearly set out the impact that policies and spending have had on emissions.

We agree that it is also worth considering whether a new rule in Standing Orders expressly requiring such information to be provided in the policy

memorandum would improve net zero scrutiny, especially if it appears that this information is not normally being provided in accompanying documents.

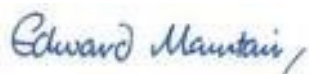
At the time your letter was sent, the NZET Committee had not yet considered any Scottish Parliament Bills in this session, making it difficult to provide a substantive answer to the points you raised. We did understand that a Bill on the circular economy was on the point of introduction, and it would have been my proposal to treat the Bill as a test case in relation to the matters you raise.

Following the change of First Ministers earlier this year, the introduction of that Bill was delayed. But, with the Bill just having been introduced, and now formally referred to the NZET Committee, there is an opportunity to make progress on this matter. Over the early part of Stage 1, the Committee will reflect on the quality of information the Scottish Government has provided on the likely impact of the Bill on net zero and, if this is found to be lacking, will reflect further on what sort of information we would have found helpful. We will also solicit views on this matter during our Stage 1 evidence-gathering.

I will therefore provide a more substantive reply later this year, and you may also expect to see the matter referred to in the Committee's Stage 1 report on the Bill.

To complement this work, and ensure a broader base of analysis, clerks and SPICe are undertaking desk-based research, considering the quality of information on net zero currently being provided in policy memorandums, by reference to five Scottish Government Bills introduced over the past 8 years. These have been deliberately chosen to represent a cross-section of policy areas, rather than only choosing Bills that very clearly concern climate change or other environmental matters. I will also share the results of this research, and the Committee's reflections on it, when I write back to you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Edward Mountain".

Edward Mountain MSP
Convener
Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee