



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

DRAFT

Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee

Tuesday 7 October 2025

Session 6



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LOCAL GOVERNMENT, HOUSING AND PLANNING COMMITTEE
26th Meeting 2025, Session 6

CONVENER

*Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green)

DEPUTY CONVENER

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con)

*Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab)

*Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)

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

*Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Matthew Elsby (Scottish Government)

Stephen Lea-Ross (Scottish Government)

Màiri McAllan (Cabinet Secretary for Housing)

Jess Niven (Scottish Government)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Jenny Mouncer

LOCATION

The David Livingstone Room (CR6)

Scottish Parliament

Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee

Tuesday 7 October 2025

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:31]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Ariane Burgess): Good morning, and welcome to the 26th meeting of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee in 2025. We have received apologies from Willie Coffey, and Fulton MacGregor will join us online. I remind everyone to make sure that their devices are set to silent.

The first item on our agenda is a decision on whether to take items 3, 4, 5 and 6 in private. Do we agree to do so?

Members indicated agreement.

Portfolio Priorities and Cladding Remediation Programme

09:31

The Convener: The next item on our agenda is an evidence-taking session from Màiri McAllan, the Cabinet Secretary for Housing, on the progress of the Scottish Government's cladding remediation programme and on her portfolio's priorities. I welcome her warmly to her role. It is good to have her in our committee room, and we look forward to our conversation today.

Ms McAllan is joined by three Scottish Government officials: Matthew Elsby, deputy director of the better homes division; Stephen Lea-Ross, director of cladding remediation; and Jess Niven, interim deputy director of heat in buildings policy and regulation. I welcome them all to the meeting.

We will go straight to questions, and I will start. Members have a number of questions and interests, but the initial set of questions will focus on the cladding remediation programme. The pilot phase of that programme was launched in 2021 and I would be interested to understand whether that has now ended, what the results of the pilot were and what lessons have been learned to inform future action.

The Cabinet Secretary for Housing (Màiri McAllan): Thank you, convener. Having not made an opening statement, I will try to integrate some of those points into my remarks during the meeting. When I come to talking about the pilot phase of the programme I will probably turn to my colleague Stephen Lea-Ross, who, as you have said, is the director in charge of cladding.

I will take the last part of your question first and will talk about the lessons learned from the pilot phase. There were two particularly important things for the Government to overcome in making progress on cladding. First, there was a requirement to bring together a single bespoke assessment that would be sufficient for the consideration of dangerous cladding and of what remediation work had to be done. The pilot programme was important in bringing together what is now the statutory single building assessment. The other issue that we had to overcome was that the tenure situation in Scotland is a little different from that elsewhere in the United Kingdom, which meant that we would ultimately need to have primary legislative powers to step in where action was not being taken in a multi-owner building. The pilot allowed us to do that. It has now ended, although you could also describe it as simply having become part of the wider single open call, which is now progressing.

I will leave my remarks there for now, convener, to allow you to come back with anything that you want to say. Those two lessons learned are the most important things, and the pilot has now been integrated into the larger single open call. If you wish, I can say more about some of the buildings that were part of the pilot.

The Convener: Certainly. That leads on to the next point that I wanted to raise. What prompted the Government to launch the open call at this stage in the process—I guess that that is part of the expansion that you talked about—and what information does the Government hold on buildings with potentially flammable cladding? We would be particularly interested in the data provided by the 2021 inventory of high-rise buildings and the subsequent evidence that was gathered.

Màiri McAllan: I probably inadvertently answered your second question in my opening remarks. I might ask Stephen Lea-Ross to comment, if there is anything that he would like to say about what we have learned from the pilot, and then we will be happy to give an update. I can come back, convener, on the high-rise inventory and some of the other points.

Stephen Lea-Ross (Scottish Government): The cabinet secretary has highlighted the two most significant lessons learned from the pilot. It is also important to reference that significant other learning came from the pilot on how we might then build up the programme to deliver at the scale and pace that the cabinet secretary set out in her recent plan of action. Learning from the pilot led to the adoption of the distributed delivery model that we now have for cladding remediation.

As the cabinet secretary pointed out, we have integrated the outcome of the pilot into the broader single open call. Prior to doing that, we undertook an independent assessment of all of the buildings in the pilot. That pilot phase, which ran from 2021 onwards, began with 30 buildings. Over subsequent rounds, that was expanded to 107 buildings. All those buildings were then independently assessed, alongside our taking forward development of the single building assessment methodology that we now have as part of the statutory framework.

Following the outcome of that independent assessment process, we were left with 56 buildings, 10 of which were taken on by a developer as part of its responsibilities under the accord. We had two that did not require any further assessment. Twelve buildings were taken forward for a Government-commissioned assessment in order for us to test the outcomes of the promulgated SBA process, and we had a variety of information about those buildings from various sources. Finally, 32 other buildings have

been identified as requiring an SBA. They have been integrated into the wider single open-call process, and we have made contact with the owners and pre-populated expressions of interest for them so that those buildings can be taken forward without hesitation.

Màiri McAllan: I will just add a general point. We have both top-down and bottom-up approaches to the programme. The single open call, which has gone live following the passage of the Housing (Cladding Remediation) (Scotland) Act 2024 and its coming into force at the start of this year, creates a programme into which any building owner can now bid for a statutory bespoke single building assessment of their property. We have made available funding for single building assessments, which funding was doubled over the summer. We made more money available for immediate mitigation measures where those are required. The call is broad and open; it says, “Come forward and have your building assessed to this bespoke standard.”

Alongside that, we are doing a massive sweep-up exercise, which is not only about asking people to come forward and take advantage of the offer but about proactively asking building owners about the status of their building, what work might already have been done, and whether it is planned for demolition or has been demolished. In that regard, we are working with the high-rise inventory and starting, in particular, with those buildings within the HRI that have high-pressure laminate or aluminium composite material cladding and are above 18 metres. That is about prioritising risk.

The Convener: It is very useful to get a sense of where you are at. Alexander Stewart has a number of questions.

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Good morning, cabinet secretary. You touched on the single building assessment and indicated that you want to see progress in that regard. As of the end of June, 15 single building assessments had been started but only three completed. How disappointed are you by that? I suggest that progress to date is not good. Are there barriers to those assessments taking place for individuals and organisations? Is it that we do not have enough qualified surveyors? Are there issues when it comes to professional indemnity insurance or are there still some issues within the Scottish Government? It would be good to get a flavour of that, cabinet secretary.

Màiri McAllan: I understand that, looking at those figures alone, you could readily come to the conclusion that you have reached.

I have a very brief update for the committee that I would have mentioned in opening, but I will do so now. The updated position in respect of completed

SBA is that, as of 30 September 2025, 16 have been completed. That is an increase from what Mr Stewart—understandably—mentioned.

SBA takes about three to four months. They will differ depending on the complexity of the buildings and what is found. Some SBAs will be for more than one building; we would be talking about one assessment, but it could be for a variety of buildings.

Another contextual point is that the SBAs have arisen from the 2024 act, which came into force at the start of this year so, naturally, the number of SBAs will start to build. However, as I said, that does not reflect the work that has already been done by building owners across Scotland to carry out assessments that are short of an SBA, any works that might have flowed from those, and any demolition or planned demolition. That is what our information-gathering exercise speaks to.

It might also be worth letting the committee know that we now have 1,062 expressions of interest through the single open call for single building assessments. As of 30 September, 478 expressions of interest have received their grant support, so you can expect to see a significant ramping up of the number of SBA completions in the coming months.

However, the process is complex, so questions about capacity are understandable. We have been keen to discuss that with the stakeholders that we work with, and I understand that the question was put to the Institution of Fire Engineers. Stephen, will you let the committee know what it said about capacity for undertaking the work?

Stephen Lea-Ross: We continue to engage with the Institution of Fire Engineers and other providers through our cladding stakeholder group. We last met in September, and the institution's representatives indicated that, to their understanding and knowledge, there is capacity in Scotland to undertake more SBAs. In addition, following the provision of grants, local authorities and others are taking forward their own procurement processes for numbers of SBAs, in batches, per our award offer.

We are, of course, not complacent. We have held sessions with people in industry to familiarise them with the SBA process and outputs. To support capacity—albeit that people must comply with the competency requirements that are set out in the SBA framework—the SBA can be undertaken by any suitably qualified person from across the UK or, indeed, abroad, provided that they are suitably competent and qualified in the field of fire engineering.

We have undertaken lessons-learned exercises in relation to SBAs that we have commissioned, and we have identified issues. Complexities have

included, for example, buildings requiring rope access to certain floors, and a requirement for road closures. We proactively put that out in advice alongside our grant support for people who commission SBA assessments; we are working with local authorities to advise of the need and urgency to turn around permit applications quickly; and we continue to engage with local authorities in that respect.

Alexander Stewart: It is also vital that developers sign up to the cladding remediation contract that you have set out. However, again, the length of time that that has taken seems to be problematic. It would be good to get a flavour of some of the issues that arise from their not doing that as quickly as we would have hoped. The numbers that are still wanting must cause some concern, cabinet secretary, as to progress.

Màiri McAllan: I am certainly concerned to make sure that developers who were responsible for the construction of a building with potentially dangerous cladding are contracted to deal with that.

We are talking about a significant programme of substantial costs, much of which the public purse will meet.

Developers signed the 2023 accord, and the developer remediation contract, which we are now negotiating for signature, is on largely similar terms. We have had agreement for a number of years that this was the direction of travel. It is now about turning that accord into the contract and having it signed.

09:45

I am of a similar mind to you, because during the summer update on cladding, I was keen to make sure that a deadline was set for the signature of the contract, and I have set 31 October. That is not really a reflection of any concern on my part that developers will not sign it. We are on very good terms and are exchanging drafts. Ultimately, it is just about bookending it and saying that there will be a point after which the contract will be signed and we will move on. I think that it will line up quite well with the rest of the single open call taking off.

Alexander Stewart: If developers do not sign by 31 October, will you consider any penalties or other processes, or is that just a date in the diary?

Màiri McAllan: As with other negotiations, I and my officials will be doing everything that we can to make sure that it is signed by 31 October. As you can imagine, we are dealing with a number of different developers, all of which have their own legal teams. One way that we have tried to overcome that is by regular communication, which

I stress has been positive. Nothing right now would indicate to me that we are going to have trouble.

Equally, we work with Homes for Scotland as the representative body, and it agreed the terms in principle, subject to an exchange of legal views, some time ago. I would not say that I would be happy if it is not signed by 31 October—I would not be happy, and it needs to be done—but nothing right now indicates to me that that will be a problem. Ultimately, we are all moving in the same direction, and it is just about a bookend, which I think is much needed.

Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con):

Good morning. Before I move on to my questions regarding single building assessments, how many buildings could be contained in a single building assessment? That is important for transparency and making sure that we have the full picture.

Màiri McAllan: Stephen, of the assessments that are already under way, do you have a flavour of how many of them have multiple buildings within them?

Stephen Lea-Ross: Of the Government-commissioned SBAs that have been delivered, we have, at the outside, one SBA that includes six blocks that are, however, not individual buildings because they are joined by an underground car park. An SBA can include any number of buildings or stairwells where there is an underground or overground connection between them that means that we need to assess the building holistically. In some of the other SBAs that we have undertaken there have typically been two, three or four connected blocks, with anywhere in the region of 250 to 300 individual dwellings in some of the largest and more complex SBA blocks.

Meghan Gallacher: That is helpful; thank you very much.

I would like to explore what qualifies as a high-risk building over 18m tall that should be remediated or demolished by 2019. I understand that there is a residential element, and I hope that the cabinet secretary can expand on that. I am certainly interested in other buildings that have cladding attached to them, such as hotels, hospitals, boarding schools, hostels and so on. I have tried in the past to gather an explanation or an answer from Government on whether those buildings will be included in the remediation work. Will the cabinet secretary confirm that?

Màiri McAllan: Between us, we will, Ms Gallacher. You referred to our ultimate overall goal, which we published in the summer. I will read it out, because I think that you inadvertently said that the target date was 2019. It states:

“I am determined that by 2029, every high-risk residential building over 18 metres identified with unsafe cladding will have been resolved — whether made safe, decommissioned or replaced — and that every building between 11 and 18 metres will be on a defined pathway to resolution”.

That was the commitment.

Ultimately, we will not be able to say whether a building qualifies as high risk until it has had an SBA. That is the beauty, or benefit, of having the new bespoke statutory assessment in place. Ultimately, it will be the decider of risk, but there are other factors, such as the building's height—18m plus is the riskiest, and then the measure moves down—and the cladding type. Aluminium composite material and high-pressure laminate cladding have the greatest potential for risk, so cladding type is another risk factor that would be considered.

That is why, in our plan, you will see that we have spoken about 512 high-rise buildings that have some cladding. According to the high-rise inventory and other sources, 144 high-rise buildings have ACM or HPL cladding, and they are the ones that I have my sights set on most of all.

That speaks to the characterisation of risk and what we are looking at. Ultimately, the SBA will determine that risk. Stephen might be able to say more about the different building types.

Stephen Lea-Ross: For clarity, our programme is concerned with the remediation of residential buildings only. That is partly because the highest risk from dangerous cladding is posed in residential buildings that are not otherwise staffed and that are therefore not typically monitored through round-the-clock service provision.

The risk is appreciably different in other building categories. Under respective portfolios, remediation work has been progressed in relation to hospitals, particularly the Queen Elizabeth hospital in Glasgow. The expectation is that, for non-residential and commercial buildings such as schools and hotels—I accept that those are residential buildings but they are serviced or occupied by staff 24 hours a day—it will be the building owner's responsibility to take the works forward. Our programme deals exclusively with residential properties.

Meghan Gallacher: I accept that, but there is a problem with those particular building types. My concern is that Scotland has still not extended the ban on cladding in order to include such buildings. Is that actively being explored? When will we see an answer on that? For months, I have tried to get a direction from the Government on whether an extension or potential extension of the ban will include such buildings. Does the cabinet secretary agree that such an extension would bring us into

line with what is happening in the rest of the United Kingdom?

Màiri McAllan: I understand that you are concerned about that. We have not had the opportunity to properly discuss it, so I undertake to do so with you. I know that you made an attempt to use the Housing (Scotland) Bill to extend the ban. I considered your amendment, which we were unable to accept for a number of reasons. I propose to discuss the issue with you offline, and I will speak to some of my Government colleagues who are dealing with other building types and come back to you.

In another part of my portfolio that relates to building standards, I am working with official colleagues to respond to the Cameron House inquiry's recommendations, which refer to hotels and fire safety. A suite of work is on-going, which I want to update you on. I will also come back to you on the cladding question.

Meghan Gallacher: That is helpful.

The BS 8414 testing system has been seen as a route to compliance when it comes to cladding. What is the Government's position on that particular testing model, given that the stark evidence from the Grenfell tower inquiry was that it should not be used as a testing system?

Màiri McAllan: That is a technical question, so I will pass it over to my colleague, who I hope can attend to it.

Stephen Lea-Ross: In Scotland, the position since 2005 has been that cladding systems in residential properties should be non-combustible and/or have independently passed a large-scale fire test. The ban on combustible cladding has subsequently been extended through amendments, post-Grenfell and in 2022, so, in principle, the requirement for non-combustible cladding has been extended to buildings of any height in Scotland. Following the building standards amendments in 2005, it was the case that, in principle, combustible cladding of the type that was found on the Grenfell tower would not have complied with building standards in Scotland.

Meghan Gallacher: That is helpful, thank you. My next question is linked to cladding but also the proposed building safety levy. What is the estimate for the total amount of Scottish Government funding that would be required for evidence gathering, single building assessments, remediation work and future monitoring requirements, and what role would a potential levy play in that, if any?

Màiri McAllan: That is a very pertinent question. Earlier, I referred to the significant expansion in the programme that we are seeing now and expect to continue to see. The

Government is turning its mind to the total costs but in a way that fulsomely backs this with public money, because we want to see it done. I think that our current estimate is between £1.7 billion and £3.1 billion over 15 years—is that right, Stephen?

Stephen Lea-Ross: Yes.

Màiri McAllan: That is the estimated expenditure, and the Building Safety Levy (Scotland) Bill, which my colleague Ivan McKee is taking through the Parliament, will make a contribution to that cost of around £30 million per annum from 2027. That is the expected provision.

Meghan Gallacher: On that point, Homes for Scotland, the Scottish Property Federation and Scottish Land & Estates say that they do not agree with the building safety levy, so how will you, as cabinet secretary, discuss that and engage with people who are concerned about it, to ensure that those concerns are voiced? In the grand scale of what you are trying to achieve to make buildings safe, £30 million per annum seems quite small.

Màiri McAllan: Yes, and I would probably start with your final point, namely that, when you consider that the public purse might contribute between £1.7 billion and £3.1 billion to a very important matter, which we absolutely need to do and will do, £30 million per annum is a small contribution. Therefore, I am very supportive of the building safety levy in order that it can contribute to the overall costs. That is not to say that I do not understand that there are concerns, particularly from smaller operators, and I have already discussed this, in relation to small and medium-sized enterprises, with Homes for Scotland. Therefore, I am open-minded about ensuring proportionality in the way that the building safety levy operates, but it must operate, because we need that contribution to what is a significant task with a large price tag.

The Convener: We now go online to Fulton MacGregor. *[Interruption.]*

We are having a technical pause.

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): I am sorry—I always do the same thing of trying to unmute myself while broadcasting is doing the same. I apologise.

Good morning to the cabinet secretary and officials. I will follow Meghan Gallacher's line of questioning. You have touched on this, cabinet secretary, but, for the record, when do you expect the remediation of all other buildings affected by RAAC to be finished?

Màiri McAllan: I refer to the new commitments that we made over the summer, which were that, by 2029, every high-risk residential building taller than 18m in Scotland will have been resolved,

whether that means made safe, decommissioned or replaced; and that every building between 11m and 18m will be on a defined pathway to resolution, supported by a robust assessment, planning and funding for essential cladding remediation.

It is worth noting that that was a new goal that we set over the summer. It is ambitious, but it is right that we focus on getting that work done now that all the building blocks are in place. Stephen Lea-Ross will correct me if I am wrong, but I think that that brings us into line with the timetable in England.

10:00

Stephen Lea-Ross: Yes, that is broadly in line with remediation timetables across the UK. It is anticipated that, once high-risk high-rise buildings have been dealt with, we will have a remediation pathway for everything else, and that that remediation will be done as quickly as possible thereafter.

Fulton MacGregor: I have a follow-up question. The cabinet secretary will be aware of the RAAC issues in the North Lanarkshire Council area that I represent. It is not, by any means, the worst-affected area, but there have been some high-profile cases involving RAAC. Is there any direct support available for councils such as North Lanarkshire Council with regard to meeting deadlines and getting the necessary work done?

Màiri McAllan: We have been discussing the cladding issue, which arose following a tragic event in relation to which dishonesty and so on have been uncovered. As we have just discussed with Meghan Gallacher, the programme for addressing that will be a significant programme with a significant price tag. Over the summer, the Government put tens of millions of pounds more into resolving the cladding issue across Scotland.

Reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete is a building standards issue. RAAC is a product that, when maintained properly, can remain usable and safe. It is still used in countries throughout the world. Therefore, it occupies a different realm from the cladding question. Given that the Government fulsomely backs spending on the remediation of cladding issues across Scotland, it is apparent, I hope, that the use of public money on the same scale simply cannot stretch to other potential issues.

The position on funding in respect of RAAC is that it is an issue for home owners. Essentially, it is a matter of building maintenance, which is always, in principle, the responsibility of the home owner. In some cases, the home owner will be an individual, and, in some cases, the home owner will be a local authority or a registered social

landlord. I have made it clear that there will be no pot of money from the Scottish Government for dealing with RAAC. We simply do not have the flexibility to provide that.

There is only one Government across the United Kingdom that has the flexibility to respond to such unforeseen expenditure, and that is the UK Government. That is why I have pressed the UK Government to create a national RAAC fund. RAAC is present throughout the UK, and the homes in question were sold under the right to buy, which far predates the devolution era. I will continue to press the UK Government on that.

In the meantime, I have said that I will consider applications for the existing funding that we make available to councils to be used flexibly. Last week, as colleagues might have seen, we were able to come to an agreement with Aberdeen City Council in respect of the delivery of affordable homes.

There will be no Scottish Government RAAC fund, but I will work with home owners—whether individuals or councils and RSLs—to provide support, best practice and shared learning, and to consider the flexible use of existing funds.

I am sorry—that was a rather long answer.

The Convener: It was a very helpful answer, and it brings to mind an issue that the committee as a whole has been exploring since it first came up in one of our first sessions on cladding. You said that the responsibility for dealing with RAAC lies with the home owner—the differentiation that you made in that respect was helpful.

I can imagine that home owners do not necessarily know what their homes are made of. We have been discussing in the committee whether we need to get something set up so that people will know not necessarily the tiny details that go into homes but the general products. It would be something to ensure that, when people buy a home, they know what they are buying and whether there is RAAC in it or it is clad in a particular material. That would let people start to understand that they are not just buying a home but they need to maintain and operate it in a particular way because of the materials that are involved.

That is a different way of looking at a home. Many people are used to just buying a home and living in it, but we are moving in a new direction in which we are exploring things such as the Passivhaus approach. The point that is coming up is that we need to learn how to maintain and operate homes—not just to clean the gutters but to understand in a bit more detail what we are living in. Do you have any thoughts on that?

Màiri McAllan: That is something that has been on my mind. When I state the principle that it is the home owner's responsibility if RAAC emerges, I am of course considering what that actually means for the people who are involved. I hugely sympathise with them, because that is a very difficult thing to go through. One of the things that we can do—in exactly the train of thought that you put to me, convener—is to work with, for example, the Institution of Structural Engineers on clear and readily understandable guidance about what to do if you think that your home might have RAAC or other building maintenance issues.

I recently created a RAAC in housing leadership group, which I chair. I bring the leaders of councils together with the heads of the RSLs and others to share best practice on what each council is doing, and so on. One thing that I am keen to use that forum to do is to make sure that there is a clear understanding of what the Institution of Structural Engineers guidance for housing, which is nearing completion, suggests in relation to RAAC, and to make sure that councils are well equipped to inform householders about that.

I am also keen to bring together organisations such as UK Finance and the Association of British Insurers to ask questions such as whether, now that we have this guidance, we can get to a position in which we accept that, if RAAC is present in a house but has been remediated and is now at green status, the house can be borrowed on.

I digress slightly, but your point about people understanding their building is critical. The guidance from IStructE will help with that, and it will also help us to address issues of borrowing and mortgaging.

Fulton MacGregor: I want to clarify a point and also give my apologies to the convener and the cabinet secretary for perhaps being opportunistic, given issues in my area and the constituency casework that I have had, by muddling up—for want of a better word—cladding and RAAC. I will be in the clerks' bad books for having started another conversation about RAAC, but it was good to get some of that on the record. There was probably not a better place to bring in that supplementary question, so I just want to apologise to the convener. I also apologise for not giving the cabinet secretary any advance notice that I was going to ask that question. I appreciate her answer and it was good to get some of that on the record.

The Convener: We will now close the door on cladding, but it was useful to hear some of the processes that you have been through, cabinet secretary, and where you are at with those. It was also useful to have a bit of a discussion about RAAC.

We will move on to some of your broader portfolio priorities, and there are many areas that we want to cover. We will talk about the housing emergency action plan and its implementation, housing supply and investment, the heat in buildings programme, dampness and mould regulations and regulatory controls. I will start the conversation by focusing on the housing emergency action plan. What difference will having a housing emergency action plan make in tackling the housing emergency? How does that represent a change of approach?

Màiri McAllan: That is perhaps not the easiest question for me to reflect on, simply because of when I came into post. When I took up my role in June, I immediately wanted to spend the summer speaking to as many stakeholders as I could, to members, and to representatives of the housing and charity sectors. There was a question that I often posed to them, noting that we have some of the most protective anti-homelessness laws of any country and that, in difficult times, we have consistently invested in the delivery of affordable homes—with 140,000 now having been built.

For a long time, it felt like the system was in a state of equilibrium. I was seeking views on what had changed to lead us to a situation where there is considerable strain and demand is outstripping supply. My objective was to turn that into a plan that could respond now, with actions in the immediate term to help release the pressure that exists in temporary accommodation—which was never intended to operate to its current scale—while setting the groundwork for change over the long term.

My plan sought to do that, first, by ending the situation of children living in temporary accommodation and, secondly, by supporting the present housing needs of vulnerable communities, with a longer-term piece of work to create the conditions for investment and growth, which is how we will ultimately reset the housing system in Scotland to function as it was intended and as it ought to. That is what my plan is trying to do. I am very confident that it will make a difference. I would not say this if it was not true, but it has been roundly welcomed by charity and the housing sector, although it is not the last word by any means, and it will continue to be a live document and a live approach to managing what is a complex task.

The Convener: Because it is a live document and a live approach, we would be interested to get a sense of how you intend to monitor implementation of the plan. It seems that you are using a two-pronged approach of tackling the initial pressures, along with long-term investment. What can you say about monitoring implementation and the impact? What indicators

will you use to assess whether the housing emergency is actually reducing?

Màiri McAllan: I will address those two questions separately: first on monitoring and then on the indicators. The plan having been completed, my attention is immediately focused on its delivery and on tracking that delivery. As the plan deals with issues ranging from protection from domestic abuse through to flipping and acquisition of existing houses and building and planning, it requires me to work across Government. I have set up a group of officials who will report to me fortnightly. I will have a written update on a weekly basis and a fortnightly meeting, at which representatives of the teams across Government will report to me on how each of the 20 actions is being taken forward. That is an internal, good-governance piece of work. I also have the Cabinet sub-committee on economy and investment, which the Deputy First Minister leads. Housing is a big part of that, so that is another way in which we manage internal delivery.

Externally, the housing to 2040 board will meet shortly, for the first time since the housing emergency action plan was published. I have taken a bit of time to consider how we might pivot to having that board oversee the delivery of the plan, as well as our wider 2040 ambitions—none of which, incidentally, has been replaced by the plan; they have been added to.

There is a really important piece of work with the folks whom I am relying on to deliver the plan, chief among them being local authorities and registered social landlords. Early in post I had a suite of meetings with the leaders of the five councils with the most strained homelessness situations, and I will now do another suite. I am very likely to put that on a quarterly basis, which will involve understanding the pressures that those councils face now and how they are implementing the plan to make it work.

On the point about indicators, I was pleased to work with Mark Griffin on his amendment to the Housing (Scotland) Bill that concerned the housing emergency—how we know when we are in it and when we are coming out of it. We will now work to implement that provision. It needs to be carefully done. As we all know, Argyll and Bute was the first council to declare a housing emergency, and coming out of that will look very different there from what it will look like in Glasgow. We need indicators that are specific but also broad enough to reflect different circumstances.

10:15

The Convener: You said that you met the five councils with the most strained homelessness situation. Which councils were they? More than

five have declared housing emergencies, so it would be good to see whether we are on the same page.

Màiri McAllan: They are the City of Edinburgh Council, Glasgow City Council, South Lanarkshire Council, West Lothian Council and Fife Council. If I am wrong, I will correct that, but the first three are right.

The Convener: It is great that you are pulling in the housing to 2040 board and various people to support the process. There is a housing emergency delivery action and assurance group. Is that one of the groups that you mentioned, or is it separate? If it is separate, what is its role?

Màiri McAllan: I will bring in Matthew Elsby on that, because it predates my time, and I expect that it is an official-led piece of work.

Matthew Elsby (Scottish Government): It is indeed. The group was set up primarily to support officials across the Scottish Government on the housing emergency. It works across portfolios, bringing in officials from health, justice and education, because we acknowledge that a housing emergency is not just a housing problem. The group meets monthly and is chaired by the director general for communities.

The Convener: I come back to indicators. Cabinet secretary, you mentioned the provision that Mark Griffin secured through the Housing (Scotland) Bill. Is that where you are going to start to delve into what your indicators might be?

Màiri McAllan: That is right. Doing so sensitively, I already monitor the number of people in temporary accommodation, the number of children in temporary accommodation, the number of breaches of statutory obligations at local authority level and the number of people indicating that they have slept rough in the months prior to presenting as homeless. I already monitor all those things and have management information in respect of them. The task now is to pull all that together into reasonable ways of deciphering whether things are getting better or worse, or when we might say that we are through it. However, that will be different in different areas.

The Convener: I come back to your point about relieving the pressure, particularly relating to children in temporary accommodation. The committee would welcome updates on that. It would be helpful to be kept abreast of that, move along with you on that journey and understand the concern about people in temporary accommodation, particularly young people.

Màiri McAllan: Of course. The most recent homelessness statistics from two or three weeks ago did not make for easy reading. However, within that, there were some green shoots, in that

certain councils had managed to reduce substantially the number of children who were in temporary accommodation. Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City had 45 or 50 per cent reductions—to be absolutely accurate, I will come back to you in writing on that. It is clear that the situation in Glasgow in particular is very strained. There are things that are adding to that, not least the UK Government's asylum policy, which is causing difficulty and has to be handled exceptionally sensitively.

One of the main things that the housing emergency action plan does is to double the fund for voids and acquisitions, which the committee will be aware that we have been doing for a year. Councils have demonstrated great progress in using that money to bring social voids back into use. That work has gotten us to the point where there are very few social voids left to be turned over. I still want what is left to be turned over, but we now move to acquisitions—buying on the open market. In particular, I have asked local authorities to use that money to buy family-sized homes. They are harder to come by but are the homes that will get children out of temporary accommodation.

Another part of the plan that I am ambitious for is asking councils to implement the Association of Local Authority Chief Housing Officers guidance on flipping. It would mean councils asking households who are currently in suitable accommodation, except for the fact that it is temporary, whether they would like to change it to a permanent residence. That kind of thing could make a difference quite quickly, albeit that we would have to backfill the supply of temporary accommodation, which the acquisitions fund could do.

The Convener: That sounds good. If a temporary place could become a permanent home, it could be a way to reduce the unsettling nature of having to move on.

We move to the topic of housing supply and investment.

Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP): Recent statistics reveal that housing completions and new-build starts are down from the previous year. Will the cabinet secretary share what she feels is impacting the programme and what we are dealing with?

Màiri McAllan: That is a good question, which I have asked myself over and over again. In the past three weeks, I have had to present to the First Minister homelessness statistics that are going in the wrong direction and, more recently, house building statistics that I was not happy with. As I noted earlier, Scotland's laws on anti-homelessness are strong and they have been

further strengthened through the Housing (Scotland) Bill. Equally, we have consistently spent hundreds of millions of pounds every year to build affordable homes—we have a great record in that regard—but we still have strain on the system.

Recently, there has been a bit of a perfect storm, whereby economic conditions have been either stagnant or poor. For example, between 2020 and 2025, the cost of materials has risen by 40 per cent. Any house builder facing that would immediately not be able to deliver as they would want to. Other general economic headwinds have been difficult for the industry as well as for the Government—our capital budgets have been under severe pressure. At the same time, the difficult economic conditions have affected households to the point that people in the private rented sector are experiencing precarity. They might have been able to manage their bills before, but the cost of energy has sky rocketed, with their rent payments potentially suffering as a result. For the house building sector, construction inflation in particular has been a massive issue in the past five years.

Evelyn Tweed: The Government has a target to deliver 110,000 affordable homes. How will that be achieved given what you have just said?

Màiri McAllan: We are all turning our minds to that. My goal is to change the direction of the homelessness stats and the house building stats, or at least to set the groundwork to enable those things to happen.

I mentioned to the convener that the third part of the housing emergency action plan is about creating the optimum conditions for investment in our housing sector. One aspect of that is to do with confidence. Over the summer, it was put to me that it would be very helpful if we had multi-annual certainty on funding, so we have delivered that—at least, I have committed to it and Shona Robison will set that out in the spending review. More money always helps, and the commitment to multi-annual funding is accompanied with an uptick in funding for the affordable housing supply programme, with about £808 million this year and up to £4.9 billion over the coming four years. We have also set a target to increase delivery across all tenures by 10 per cent each year over the next three years. That is in response to another call from the sector for leadership from the Government to say, “We want you to go ahead and build.”

There are other facilitators, such as planning. Ivan McKee has been doing a huge amount of work with the planning team to ensure that it is an enabler of development rather than an inhibitor of it.

I pulled out information on planning to highlight to the committee. We have created a national planning hub, which has the capacity to offer surge capacity to local authorities that are under pressure. We have recruited 17 future planners to work part time with the Scottish Government while they study. We have trebled the number of bursaries for student planners.

A big piece of work is also on-going on stalled sites. I do not have the figure for how many stalled sites we have, but I will make sure that it is sent to the committee. Those are areas for which planning permission has been given, but the build has not taken place. We are brokering agreements to address what is holding things up and how we move forward to delivery. We added to that in the plan, with a new notification direction to local authorities. Essentially, we will oversee how national planning framework 4 is being applied across local authorities. We have added other bits and pieces, including asking for proportionality when dealing with SMEs.

The package as a whole is about trying to create optimum conditions for investment and delivery. The exemption from rent control for mid-market rent and build-to-rent properties is another means by which we are trying to make progress, because we need to build capacity quite rapidly.

Evelyn Tweed: I used to work at a high level in housing associations, so it is music to my ears to hear that you are coming at the issue from all angles. When I worked in housing associations, there were always obstacles. At times, it felt like the Government was quite far away from the real nub of the problem, but it sounds like the Government is really getting into planning issues, which I hope will unblock a lot of new development. That is great to hear.

My last question is about a recent report, "Affordable Housing Need in Scotland Post-2026". It looked at housing pressures and housing needs, and it particularly focused on the east of the country as having high housing need. Is the Government looking at all housing need proportionately, or must we look at things differently?

Màiri McAllan: Is that the report that was funded by the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations, Shelter Scotland and—

Evelyn Tweed: Yes, and Share.

Màiri McAllan: My key takeaway from the report was the number of homes that those organisations suggested need to be built. I am very mindful of all that. We will respond to the report in full. I welcome the report and all the other work that Shelter, the Chartered Institute of Housing Scotland and the SFHA have done with us.

My impression, having been in the portfolio for a few months, is that the team that operates the affordable home supply programme in Government is extremely nimble. You might be thinking back to your experience on the other side, in the housing sector, but what I see is a programme that is well funded and embedded in its areas. We have area-based teams that know their part of Scotland extremely well and work closely with the RSLs and councils in the area, and they are flexible. If a development looks as though it is nearing completion, we will back it and back it. If a step back has to be taken with development for whatever reason—you will know that there are a plethora of reasons why that could happen—we will be able to put the resource elsewhere and be flexible to ensure that homes are being delivered.

Matt Elsby might want to say more about the east or how the programme can flex.

Matthew Elsby: That is exactly how it works. As the cabinet secretary said, the programme is set up with a number of area teams that work closely with RSLs and local authorities. We have a lot of flex within the programme, which means that we are often moving money around from projects and programmes quite rapidly through the year.

We are also increasingly taking a place-based approach to all of our policy making—that is, not only across the AHSP but across all aspects of housing that we think about—to build on what we have learned from the housing emergency and the approach that we have taken there to work closely with, in particular, the five local authorities that are most affected by housing difficulties.

Evelyn Tweed: Just to correct myself, I gave Share a shout-out for that report, which I probably should not have done.

10:30

Meghan Gallacher: I will pick up Evelyn Tweed's initial line of questioning on the affordable homes target. The funding for that was reduced in previous years and although its level has now been reinstated, that is still a real-terms cut. I am looking for reassurance from you, cabinet secretary, that that will not happen in future years in order to give certainty to the market, particularly when you are trying to meet affordable house building targets.

Màiri McAllan: That is the idea of the plan. As I said, we have £808 million in the programme this year and have committed to investing up to £4.9 billion over the next four years, which is to give that certainty. Meghan Gallacher puts on the record that, in one year, the funding of the programme took a step backwards. However, that was in response to extremely difficult budgetary

decisions in Government and is a very small interruption to what is otherwise 18 years of consistent investment in and delivery of affordable homes.

Meghan Gallacher: I understand. The issue is about having certainty of funding, and I appreciate that you have talked about providing multiyear funding.

It has taken 18 years for the Government to elevate housing to a cabinet secretary post. We have got there—I am pleased that we have done so—but it should not have taken that long.

You mentioned investing up to £4.9 billion over the next four years. I refer to the report by CIH Scotland, Shelter Scotland and the SFHA, which says that you will need almost to double that amount—I think that you will need £8.2 billion as opposed to £4.9 billion—to invest in housing and to build the number of homes that are required in order to tackle the housing emergency overall.

Will the cabinet secretary review the target of 110,000 affordable homes by 2032 and update it to the 15,000 homes that is said will be needed each year? Are you looking into that? What is your response to the calls to double the investment from other housing spokespeople and charitable organisations?

Màiri McAllan: I will not review the target of 110,000 affordable homes by 2032. To date, the Scottish Government has delivered 140,000 affordable homes, so a lot is being done and will be done before we reset our target.

I absolutely welcome the research by the three groups that I mentioned. I have the greatest respect for them and the work that they do, as well as for the work that they are supporting us to do. In principle, I completely agree with them that the number of affordable homes that is delivered each year must now increase to meet the significant demand in the system. However, first, we do not have the capacity to deliver 15,000-odd homes a year just now. I am trying to pre-emptively do the work now so that we can build to that kind of annual delivery towards the end of the target, which we must meet by 2032.

Secondly, our capital budget over the spending review period is expected to fall by 1.1 per cent in real terms, and prices are ever increasing, as we have discussed. As a Government, we have difficult decisions to make about the prioritisation of capital funding. I have just argued in favour of and had agreed that we will spend £4.9 billion over the next four years on housing, which is a significant win in very difficult economic circumstances. I note that £8.2 billion is unrealistic at this stage, when we also have bridges, schools and prisons to build and roads to fix. It is a difficult

decision to make, but housing has already been prioritised in the budget.

Meghan Gallacher: I understand where the cabinet secretary is coming from. The national director of CIH Scotland has said that the

“£4.9 billion is a welcome demonstration of intent, but it fails to meet Scotland’s social and affordable housing need and resolve the housing emergency.”

Without investing more, is there a real risk that we will not be able to tackle the housing emergency? Is that work still the top priority of Government?

Màiri McAllan: I will always argue for the greatest possible investment in housing. That is my job in Government. We have succeeded in that because, as I said, in difficult economic circumstances, when the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government has been looking at a very strained budget, we have argued for that significant uplift over the next four years and that was agreed. To put it into a bit of context, we will spend £3.5 billion over this five-year period, and this is £4.9 billion over the next four-year period—so less time, but more money. It is a significant uplift.

The private sector will have to play an important part. That is why I have confidently said that, alongside investment in affordable homes, there must be the right circumstances for private investment, not least in the work that we have done to create institutional exemptions from rent control. That is all about saying that the Government will do as much as we can to support affordable homes and make circumstances right for the rest of the sector, because we need more investment and we need all-tenure delivery. Only through the combination of all that will we get to where we need to be in the coming years.

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): Good morning, cabinet secretary. I come back to the target of 110,000 affordable homes by 2032. Up until June this year, almost 30,000 homes had been built. The Government’s plan is to build 39,000 homes over the next four years. By my maths, that leaves a ballpark figure of 40,000 affordable homes to be built in the final two years. How is the Government planning on ramping up supply from around 40,000 homes over four years to 40,000 homes in the final two years?

Màiri McAllan: I was not able to follow your figures as you were speaking, so I am unable to say whether they are the ones that I am working with, but, no doubt, you have done the maths correctly. Everything that we are doing just now is about trying to go from where we are—despite significant headwinds, not the least of which is inflation—to where we need to be, which is to build 110,000 homes by 2032.

Achieving that involves everything that I have mentioned: increasing the affordable supply programme; giving four years of funding certainty, to allow RSLs, councils and others to plan; setting the all-tenure target; and making sure that planning is a facilitator, not an inhibitor. It is all those things, as well as trying to build up the capacity to where we need it to be, because the curve is steep.

Mark Griffin: Is the cabinet secretary able to set out the detail of how that Government commitment of £4.9 billion will be spent? Will it be in the form of a capital grant? Will it be partially leveraged from the private sector? Will it be in the form of loans? Will you paint a picture of what that £4.9 billion comprises and how it will be spent?

Màiri McAllan: I completely understand the desire to have that detail, but I cannot pre-empt the spending review or the budget that Shona Robison is working on, which will set out all the detail. However, I can say that it will be a combination of public investment and leveraged private investment. It is absolutely incumbent on me to work to deliver that, because of the chronic shortage of public funding that we are experiencing across the UK just now.

Up to £4.9 billion will be spent. It will be a combination of public and leveraged private investment. The other detail that I will confirm is that it will retain the 70 per cent social target and the 10 per cent rural and islands target.

Mark Griffin: Thank you.

The new ambition to increase all-tenure delivery by 10 per cent a year is a really welcome change in Government policy. The sector and parties have been calling for it, too—it is really important to get an all-tenure target as well as that crucial affordable homes target. How will the Government facilitate the hitting of that 10 per cent target? A 10 per cent increase is a relative target. To help our understanding, on what baseline are you measuring the increase?

Màiri McAllan: In my discussions over the summer, the all-tenure target was probably third most frequently put to me as something that would make a difference, after multi-annual funding and the increase in funding. I am therefore glad to have been able to commit to it, and I think that it will drive development.

There was a question of whether we went for a target that was X number of houses or whether it should be a percentage. I decided to go for a percentage that climbs to reflect that we need to build capacity, and we have been discussing how to do that today. I feel that it is more realistic to take the 10 per cent each year over three years rather than set an overall figure.

Matt, do you want to say some more about the baseline from which we start?

Matthew Elsby: I am sorry, cabinet secretary, but I am unable to answer that.

Màiri McAllan: We will come back to you on that. I do not have the figures for the all-tenure delivery this year; they were just released last week. Ultimately, we will be baselining it from that and moving forward from where we are now with 10 per cent each year for the next three years.

The Convener: It is good to hear you say that you have your eye on the 10 per cent target for rural and island housing. I will ask for your thoughts on whether the rural and islands housing fund will move into a multiyear pot. There are situations in which housing is built for future proofing; there are different approaches to how the fund is used. I have encountered communities that are building high-quality housing that is future proofed and which helps us to lower our carbon emissions, whereas other housing does not go as far as that. I know that the fund was reviewed recently, but my sense is that we might need to consider reviewing it again to look at whether more money could be put towards designs and projects that support the reduction of carbon emissions.

Some rural communities that have been given the funding do not have a wind turbine or something that generates an income that allows them to keep a project officer on. They have money for the housing, but they do not have money to keep the project officer from one year to another. We desperately need a pipeline of housing in rural and island communities, and we are giving money through the fund, but we are not making that easy, and that is a block that we need to address. I wonder whether you have your eye on that situation, given that you have your eye on delivering the 10 per cent target—and I would say that the figure should be at least 10 per cent.

Màiri McAllan: Absolutely—the aim is at least 10 per cent, and we have exceeded that. I do not know whether we have the figures, but Matt Elsby will have a look for me. I am very pleased that we have exceeded the delivery on that, and I want that to continue.

I always encourage every community group in my constituency to get a stake in a turbine, because it provides a group with on-going revenue and stability. We should be moving towards much more community ownership of energy assets.

I will always be open to ideas about how the rural and islands housing fund and the key workers fund are working and how they can be improved. I would welcome the committee's views on that, if you would like to put them to me.

I am hugely enthusiastic about community developments, while being mindful that I do not want to put on to community groups what should be being organised and delivered by Government, whether national or local, and other housing actors in the area. I want to make sure that the funding works to best effect, but I do not want to overburden communities with responsibilities that ought to be part of their governments' responsibilities.

The Convener: It is great to hear that that is your perspective but, in my region, a lot of the housing is being delivered by communities because of that gap, so maybe there is work to do to fill it. There are situations in which community-led housing has been built with fantastic partnerships with housing associations, registered social landlords and so on. The community might do the development, but an RSL then takes a couple of the properties to house people. We need to look at why communities end up having to lead this; on the other hand, it is good that those communities are getting the housing that they need.

I would welcome you looking into that and seeing how we can get to a point at which local and national Governments are facilitating that better. I go to plenty of meetings where I hear about the many years for which a volunteer board has had to work to deliver maybe two houses, although those houses are crucial because they transform the community from a bedroom community into a thriving, full-featured community with kids in school.

10:45

Màiri McAllan: Such housing can absolutely make a huge difference. One question that has been put to me is whether there is a need for the process of identifying need to be more place based and specific. In your region, and even in places such as Clydesdale, an assessment for a whole area could be very different from an assessment of one small town or village in that area. I have my eye on that.

The Convener: People have given evidence to the committee on taking a more nuanced approach to need. If people do not see social housing in their community, they do not think to come and say, "We need it." That is a gap.

I will move on to heat in buildings. I am interested in hearing about a few practical things, and then I will bring in a couple of colleagues with questions. What are the timings for the expected heat in buildings programme of work, including the energy performance certificate regulations, the regulations that require private landlords to meet defined energy efficiency standards, the social

housing net zero standard and the proposed heat in buildings bill? We look forward to that with anticipation.

Màiri McAllan: Me too. I will try to work through those points, and I will bring in my colleague Jess Niven to speak to some of them.

In general, we have had a lot of discussion about the reality that none of us can escape, which is that the delivery of social homes in the wider sector has to ramp up considerably. We have discussed that the role of planning in the process must be facilitating, not hindering, and the regulatory environment is another area in which I have to be very watchful to ensure that that approach applies. To a large extent, much of the regulatory landscape—on safety, fire, accessibility and all those things—is non-negotiable as far as I am concerned. I am also deeply personally committed to net zero.

In that space, I need to ensure that changes are sequenced in a deliverable and reasonable way. They must not impede the delivery of homes, but they must ensure that people live in good homes when they are delivered. That is where I am.

Having come into the post in June and taken on all the parts of the work that you mentioned—the EPC reform, the private rented sector measure and the social housing net zero standard—I am taking a moment to look across the board and ensure that the changes are sequenced properly. They must be deliverable and not a drag on delivery. Jess Niven will help me out, but I will try to speak about them all.

The EPC reform is a hugely important piece of work. You will all have been involved with it and know a huge amount about it. It is the foundation from which we will deliver the minimum energy efficiency standards, and it will inform the heat in buildings bill. We will lay the EPC reform regulations shortly, and I suspect that we will be back in front of the committee to talk about them quite soon.

The private rented sector minimum energy efficiency standards are very much caught up with the bill, which I hope to introduce soon. We are taking some time to ensure that that really complicated piece of legislation, which I hope that you will be able to support, is lined up well so that I can present it to the Parliament. One issue is the UK's warm homes plan—we have some idea of what will be in it, but, frankly, not enough. My officials and I have asked the UK Government, which we have a very good relationship with, but we still do not know what is in the plan.

One of the really important things that will impact the bill is the work that the UK needs to do to balance the cost of gas relative to the cost of electricity, because that will impact the fuel poverty

implications of the legislation. Although I am keen to get all that done and present the bill to Parliament, the UK's warm homes plan, the detail of which I am not apprised of, could have a big impact on it, so I am balancing all that.

I think that I missed out the social housing net zero standard—

The Convener: Yes—the efficiency standard.

Màiri McAllan: That is paused just now. For parity across the sector, I want to ensure that we move these products forward at the same time. I appreciate that that is not very helpful, but, basically, we are doing the work. Does Jess Niven have anything to add?

Jess Niven (Scottish Government): I just reflect exactly what the cabinet secretary said—namely, that we feel that we have an absolute responsibility to align all these things. The committee knows that the Government will shortly bring forward the climate change plan, so we need to ensure that all the work is aligned and brought forward in a package that is deliverable and makes sense. The cabinet secretary referred to the other budgetary pressures; we need to ensure that, with all these pieces of work, we have a clear plan for delivery and for giving certainty to the sector, which we know is needed.

The consultation on the PRS MEES closed recently, so we will reflect on the responses to that before we give further advice to the cabinet secretary, in line with her steer on taking an overview of regulation to ensure that it is appropriate in the context of the other housing supply challenges.

The Convener: On the conversations that you are having with the UK Government about its warm homes plan and the lack of clarity, you talked about the unknown with regard to the electricity and gas link. Delinking electricity prices from international gas prices would radically transform our fuel poverty situation. Have you or Government colleagues had any conversations or discussions with the UK Government about the direction of travel on that?

Màiri McAllan: Yes, we have, because it is such a pivotal point. I think that it would be fair to say that officials have a very good cross-Government relationship with UK Government officials. Likewise, I had a good relationship with Miatta Fahnbulleh when she was the relevant minister, and I had good discussions with her about her warm homes plan, what the Scottish Government was trying to do and how the cost of electricity and gas was pivotal to us all. She has moved to a different department, but I have since met Martin McCluskey, the new UK Minister for Energy Consumers, and put the case to him. To be fair, he was two or three days into the job and

having to look at everything that had been prepared in respect of the warm homes plan and ensure that he was comfortable with it for his part. There has been a delay as a result of the reshuffle following the former Deputy Prime Minister's exit from the Government, but we continue to push for detail on the plan and on the UK's intentions in respect of the costs of gas and electricity.

The Convener: That is helpful. In my experience, when somebody gets a new post, it is good to get in early and get the priority thing lodged in their mind. Meghan Gallacher has a supplementary question.

Meghan Gallacher: Cabinet secretary, I am going to probe you further on the timings for the bill. The consultation began on 28 November 2023, but I believe that the Scottish Government started talking about the issue in 2021. That is a substantial amount of time. This morning, we are hearing that there is the warmer homes plan and that nothing will be brought forward until the climate action plan has been completed, but you have had all that time to bring something forward. We have five and a bit months of this parliamentary session left. Is there sufficient time for a committee to scrutinise the bill, for amendments to be considered and for the bill to be brought to the chamber for stage 3 proceedings before the Parliament is dissolved for the election?

Màiri McAllan: It is a substantial amount of time, and it is a hugely substantial piece of legislation. I know that you will all appreciate that point. I have said previously that I think that the heat in buildings bill will be one of the biggest and most important pieces of legislation since devolution, because, depending on its content, it could legislate right into the heart of people's homes, in relation to how they heat their homes. I appreciate that it has been a long time coming, but, at the same time, I cannot apologise for the Government taking the time to get it right for people in Scotland.

The other reason for the delay is how closely linked we are to policy in the UK. I mentioned the warm homes plan. I could introduce a heat in buildings bill and have the content of the plan render some of it inoperable or not ideal. As I was saying to the convener, gas and electricity costs will make a massive difference to the fuel poverty aspects of all that. Forgive me, but, as I am leading the bill, I am determined to ensure that we go into it with the greatest possible understanding of what will happen in the rest of the UK and what the impact will be for the people of Scotland. That is ultimately what we are trying to do.

I understand that it has been a long process. Equally, I completely understand the concern about the time that remains for scrutiny in this parliamentary session. However, I still intend to

introduce a bill and that it will be finished by the time Parliament dissolves.

Meghan Gallacher: Is that a cast-iron guarantee that the bill will come through before the end of this parliamentary session?

Màiri McAllan: Yes, that is still my intention.

Meghan Gallacher: Okay. We have heard that the warmer homes scheme has been delayed for several reasons. It was introduced in 2024—I have just looked it up. I understand that you are still relatively new in post, but your predecessors had a sufficient amount of time to bring something concrete to the table. I know that there have been issues, given that you were in coalition but now are not, but there is uncertainty for the sector, which I do not think is fair. Is that a fair assessment—that you must ensure that the sector is coming along with you on that journey and that the uncertainty as to whether a bill will be introduced is not very helpful for it?

Màiri McAllan: First, the warmer homes Scotland scheme is a Scottish Government scheme that is separate from the warm homes plan, which has not been introduced yet. The plan is due to be introduced, but I do not know what the UK Government will introduce with it. Although that is unsatisfactory, it is the way it is, and I will keep pressing for detail.

Secondly, I understand that we want to give certainty to the sector because there is huge opportunity—for example, in heat networks—and I want that opportunity to be realised. At the same time, the bill is a highly complex piece of legislation, and it is incumbent on me and my officials to get it right. It is not aided by the fact that we do not know what Scotland's other Government intends to do in respect of warm homes. I am continuing to press for more detail on that and to try to refine the bill. It remains my intention today to introduce the bill and to have it passed.

Meghan Gallacher: What happens if the UK Government's plan does not come in?

Màiri McAllan: There is a tipping point after which the Scottish Government might have to move ahead.

The Convener: Given that we will do some scrutiny on the climate change plan, it would be helpful to know how the UK warm homes plan would impact the climate change plan.

Màiri McAllan: I am very sorry, convener—I caught only the last bit of your question. Was it about how the warm homes plan would affect the climate change plan?

The Convener: Yes.

Màiri McAllan: Those plans are tied up, too. In the same way that it could affect the bill, the warm homes plan could affect what Ms Martin will take forward in the climate change plan.

The Convener: You talked about the opportunity with heat networks and, in a previous answer, about the importance of community ownership of renewable energy. I know that the idea of communities owning heat networks is quite strong. Are you taking it into consideration as you think about the bill? Although it is perhaps not part of the bill, the opportunity for communities to own heat networks seems to be another way to build community wealth.

Màiri McAllan: Yes. In principle, I am absolutely in favour of that. I represent a part of Lanarkshire that has many a former coal mining town, and I have seen at first hand the economic dislocation that came from mine closures. Transferring that capacity into renewable energy means that money can flow into communities, which is transformational—even more so when there is an ownership stake. I am absolutely in favour of that, and I want it to be considered in relation to heat networks, as it is with onshore wind and other types of renewable energy development.

11:00

The Convener: That is it on heat in buildings. Thanks for your answers on that. We will move on to other questions, which I will run through. The first few are on dampness and mould regulations and other regulations coming out of the Housing (Scotland) Bill. I would be interested to get a sense from you on the anticipated timings for the regulations that will come to us in order to implement Awaab's law for rented housing.

Màiri McAllan: I am very happy to answer that, convener. Quite a bit of secondary legislation will emerge from the Housing (Scotland) Bill. I am sure that the committee will be delighted to know that and will look forward to discussing it with us. The implementation of Awaab's law will be a key part of that. When we were finalising stage 3, I was keen to make the commitment that it would be in force from March next year. Therefore, the intention is to lay those regulations very early in the new year. We have already started to do the work to develop what will be in those regulations.

As the committee can imagine, we need to make sure that the differences between the sectors are taken into account, as well as what is realistic for landlords and protective for tenants. It is helpful that similar work is on-going across the rest of the UK, which I am keeping a close eye on.

The Convener: You mentioned that quite a lot of other bits of secondary legislation will come out of the Housing (Scotland) Bill. It would be helpful

for the committee to understand what you know now about what might come forward and at what time.

Màiri McAllan: We have discussed Awaab's law. We will also bring forward regulations to implement the housing aspects of the Domestic Abuse (Protection) (Scotland) Act 2021, which is a significant priority for me. If my memory serves me correctly, I committed in the chamber to doing that around Christmas time, so that will be done in advance of the Awaab's law work.

The other major piece of secondary legislative work that we will need to do is on the exemptions from rent control. There is quite complex work to do there, not least in relation to defining what, for example, build-to-rent is in law. Again, that work is under way.

Would that be the third of three, Matt?

Matthew Elsbey: Those are the three high-priority bits of secondary legislation. There will also be commencement of a number of the regs that came through the Housing (Scotland) Bill.

We are working on a plan for when we can do some of those things, which will be relatively straightforward. We will be able to do some of them before the end of this parliamentary session. To be clear, I note that Awaab's law will be subject to the affirmative procedure, so there will be time for Parliament to scrutinise those regs as well.

The Convener: I have a final question on regulatory controls. I would be interested to get an update on the progress of the assessment of the regulatory controls relating to housing. This year's programme for government includes a commitment to publish by the end of 2025 an action and implementation plan that is based on an assessment of the regulatory controls that exist in key growth sectors, starting with housing, public infrastructure and green industries, and designed to make it easier to do business, which is something you have been talking a bit about. Do you have any updates on that?

Màiri McAllan: I might get you a written update on that, convener. We will be on track to deliver against the PFG commitment. A lot of what I have been doing has been around reviewing the regulatory landscape as it is. That was an economy-led piece of work. The Cabinet sub-committee on economy and investment is the main interface between the Deputy First Minister and me. Housing has been a key part of that, and we have discussed some of the regulatory work around that. I will be happy to update the committee on the delivery of that piece of work in the PFG.

Jess Niven and I mentioned doing work on net zero and energy efficiency regulations, and it is

also worth letting the committee know that I have asked the Government's regulatory review group to assist me in that and, basically, to present to me what a reasonable sequencing would be. Again, that will be part of the work on the PFG agreement, and I will be glad to update the committee in writing. I am sorry that I do not have more information on it today.

The Convener: That is fine.

Another question popped up when you mentioned net zero. When we had the housing minister in post, a lot of work was done around the fact that we have a massive roll-out of renewable energy in the Highlands and Islands region and that a lot of worker camps and housing will need to be put in place in order to unlock that economic potential. Some of the discussion was around whether there is an opportunity for that housing to become legacy housing for rural and island communities. Have you picked up on that and had conversations with the renewables sector about it?

Màiri McAllan: The conversations that I have been having have been more in the space of trying to get more houses rather than the question of legacy. However, it is an excellent point, and we would want to manage it so that they could be used in that way once the need for energy workers to be there has passed—if, indeed, it passes.

I am more at the front end of that work, where it is about asking how we make sure that the homes get built to facilitate the economic opportunity. I was keen that there was a specific rural aspect to the housing emergency action plan, because not only is there a shortage, but there are also enormous economic opportunities, not least in relation to the energy revolution. I want to make sure that we have the houses to facilitate that.

The committee might also be interested in the commitment to work with the Scottish National Investment Bank and public bodies to understand public land across the board and the extent to which that could better serve housing need. I met the Scottish Land Commission on that question, which flows from research that it did with the University of Glasgow. Màiri Gougeon and I are, in essence, trying to take that forward.

The Convener: It is great to hear that you are doing that. Some of the amendments that I lodged at stage 2 were about unlocking land for housing, so it is good that you have picked that up.

You will be happy to know that that concludes our questions for this morning. It is good to have had you before the committee to talk about your portfolio and to get a bit more detail of where you are going with it, as well as on the cladding work that you are doing. Many thanks for joining us this morning.

As we previously agreed to take the next items in private, that concludes the public part of the meeting.

11:07

Meeting continued in private until 11:55.

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