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Official Report

TRANSPORT, INFRASTRUCTURE AND CLIMATE CHANGE COMMITTEE

Tuesday 23 March 2010

Session 3

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TRANSPORT, INFRASTRUCTURE AND CLIMATE CHANGE COMMITTEE
8th Meeting 2010, Session 3

CONVENER

*Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
*Marlyn Glen (North East Scotland) (Lab)
*Charlie Gordon (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con)
*Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD)
*Shirley-Anne Somerville (Lothians) (SNP)

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Alasdair Allan (Western Isles) (SNP)
Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Jim Tolson (Dunfermline West) (LD)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING GAVE EVIDENCE:

Jody Fleck (Scottish Government Climate Change and Water Industry Directorate)
Stewart Stevenson (Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Steve Farrell

LOCATION

Committee Room 4

Scottish Parliament

Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee

Tuesday 23 March 2010

[The Convener *opened the meeting at 14:00*]

Subordinate Legislation

Road Works (Inspection Fees) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2010 (SSI 2010/68)

The Convener (Patrick Harvie): Good afternoon. Welcome to the eighth meeting this year of the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee. There are no apologies to record for the whole meeting, but Alison McInnes has let us know that she is likely to be a little late. I remind everyone present to switch off any mobile devices.

The first item on the agenda is subordinate legislation. We are considering a negative instrument, the Road Works (Inspection Fees) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2010 (SSI 2010/68). Members have been informed that no motion to annul has been lodged and that the Subordinate Legislation Committee raised no issues in relation to the instrument. Does the committee agree not to make any recommendation to Parliament in relation to the instrument?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Climate Change Adaptation Framework

14:01

The Convener: Item 2 is evidence taking on the climate change adaptation framework. We will hear from the Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change, Stewart Stevenson, and his officials, who are Gavin Barrie, the head of unit for climate change policy, and Jody Fleck, policy officer for climate change adaptation. Welcome to the meeting. Thank you for joining us to answer questions on the framework. I invite the minister to make some brief opening remarks before we begin questions.

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): Thank you for giving me the opportunity to engage with you on this important subject. Jody Fleck joined the team in the past few weeks, so this is his first public outing on the subject.

Members will be aware that we published the final version of the adaptation framework in December. That was the culmination of more than two years' work and two public consultations. The framework was informed by the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 and the new United Kingdom climate projections, UKCP 09.

We heard three clear messages in the consultations. The first was that ministers had to take a stronger lead. Earlier drafts of the framework focused on matters for which the Scottish Government is directly responsible, but the final framework takes a wider view and accepts that we have a role to play in ensuring that Scottish society as a whole is prepared and ready. That means that implementing the framework will not be simply a legislative issue—we will need to educate, persuade and cajole wider Scotland.

Secondly, the actions that were set out in the consultative drafts were not seen as ambitious enough. To address that point, the final framework initiates 12 sectoral work streams; I am sure that the committee will want to ask us about those.

Thirdly, a real wish was expressed for engagement at community level. We are continuing to make progress on that issue. We accept that there is a need to broaden the focus of community engagement. Having 12 work streams gives us the opportunity to do that in a way that might otherwise have been more difficult.

The framework is a good, forward-thinking document. It is worth saying that this is one of the more interesting and challenging areas in which we have been engaged on climate change,

because thus far no other country in the world has produced a comparable document. My usual dictum is that I am always prepared to copy good ideas, wherever they come from, but in this case we are in the lead. I know that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is taking a keen interest in what we are doing. We will work with DEFRA and others around the world on adaptation.

The Convener: The framework recognises that climate change impacts to which we must adapt are already taking place and are affecting a wide range of people and lived experiences in Scotland today; you have done the same in debates on the subject in the chamber. How is the adaptation agenda being applied to the Scottish Government's work across the board, including legislation that is not within your remit but is being taken forward by other ministers and groups of civil servants? In what way is the adaptation agenda given the status that it deserves in the preparation of bills that are introduced to Parliament?

Stewart Stevenson: You are absolutely right to say that we accept that changes are happening. Furthermore, we know that, even if we were to zero our carbon emissions right now—which cannot be done—the carbon that is in our atmosphere from a long period of industrial emissions, in particular, would continue to affect us for as much as 40 years.

You asked how the issue affects wider Government, beyond the bounds of my ministerial responsibilities. It does so at two levels. First, responsibility for responding in policy and practice terms to the adaptation framework lies with every minister and every part of Government. Secondly, the work streams include business and industry, marine and fisheries, health and wellbeing, emergency and rescue services, and others for which I am responsible. The framework has been with us for only a couple of months, following extensive consultation. We expect that it will lead to identifiable responses in legislation and, more fundamentally, in the programmes that we bring forward across Government, not just in the climate change area.

The Convener: If policy is being developed into legislation on health, housing or any of the other issues on which you would not automatically be the lead minister, what is the internal process for ensuring that the climate change aspects of those issues are considered fully?

Stewart Stevenson: I need to go back to something that happened when we came into government. We sought to change the whole structure of Government so that, instead of functional areas operating in isolation, responsibilities that were exercised by civil servants, especially at a senior level, crossed all areas. In effect, we now have a civil service cabinet, made up of the most senior civil servants. For example, the civil servant who is responsible for local government must touch on all policy areas.

Now civil servants have a collective responsibility to address policy right across Government and to share its successes and failures. When the subject of building a new hospital arises, it is no longer considered within only one directorate; at the most senior level, it is considered by all directorates. Part of the purpose of the arrangement is to create an opportunity for the work of other directorates—in this context, climate change activity—to be reflected in the work that is done on health, which is one of the areas that you mentioned. For example, we know that health buildings are large consumers of energy. Generally, the temperature in those buildings is kept at a higher level, because people there are less mobile and require a higher temperature for their health.

The answer comes from measures that are taken not just for a climate change reason but for broader policy reasons. Moving down from that level, there is a climate change delivery board that covers and provides oversight and strategic direction for the whole of Government and all its actions.

The Convener: I take the point. However, some individuals have worked up clearer expertise on climate change adaptation and perhaps understand the issues better than others. Legislative proposals on housing are being worked on at the moment and further policy ideas are likely to lead to legislation in future. How has climate change expertise been applied to those proposals before legislation is introduced to the Parliament?

Stewart Stevenson: There are two answers to that. First, those who have expertise have to be in a position to help those who do not. Secondly, and more fundamentally, if we are going to deliver on the climate change agenda, which is wide, we will have to equip a much wider range of policy makers with the necessary skills, so we are undertaking the necessary work to do that.

In relation to housing, one of the early pieces of work that I commissioned delivered the Sullivan report, which took a long-term look at how we should adapt and design our buildings for the climate change agenda. It considered international experience and, interestingly, found that, in certain respects, we were slightly further ahead than we thought and, in certain other respects, we had key lessons to learn from others. The international people whom we brought to that table took some

things back to their countries, which was not our objective or expectation.

We expect that model to be repeated in Government. Not only will the people with the greatest skills in the climate change area—whether in mitigation or adaptation, or more generally—contribute in other policy areas but, through being exposed to those other policy areas, they will also learn more about the challenges that they might not otherwise have been aware of. It is a two-way process. Climate change officials cannot second-guess what is going on housing or the health service because their knowledge of those areas is comparatively thin. This is about making everybody work together so that all parties to the formulation of legislation, policy and practice end up with greater knowledge and an ability to identify more of the questions. As you have heard me say before, it is not only about finding the answers but about understanding what questions we should ask.

Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab): That is encouraging, minister. I am heartened to hear that discussions will cross ministerial portfolios. Will that expectation of mainstreaming across departments exist for public authorities? Will you look for that in their action plans for the future?

Stewart Stevenson: We certainly expect that to happen in public authorities in general and local authorities in particular. It is not for us to tell them how to do it, but it is for us to provide support that means that they can do it, and we intend to do that. I may be moving on to someone else's question, but the work also involves public engagement, which will not simply be engagement of members of the public with Government but engagement of members of the public with one another in different parts of the community and with business, local government and public bodies. The number of connections that we are trying to make work perfectly is formidably challenging. We have made a start, but I would not like to suggest that we have identified everything that needs to be done. What we want to do on engagement is not a one-time effort but something that will be embedded and continued sustainably, both for climate change and for future decision making.

The Convener: I still want practical examples of the impact that the agenda could have on legislative proposals. Much of what you say is entirely right and welcome, but it is phrased in terms of what we expect to happen rather than examples of what has happened. For example, have any changes been made to the legislative proposals on housing as a result of a climate change lens being applied to the subject? I seek practical examples.

14:15

Stewart Stevenson: Yes, most certainly. We have set out our stall. We have a cycle of three-yearly updates to building standards, and we are working right now on the next set—I believe that they will be published later this year but, if you will forgive me, I will check that I am correct. In broad terms, the climate change agenda has clearly had a substantial impact on building standards, predominantly in relation to mitigation but also to some extent in relation to adaptation. We are also working on the 2013 and 2016 legislation in that area. That is an example involving legislation, which you focused on in your question.

In other policy areas, we have, for example, the adapting to climate change skills programme, which is a programme to help farmers and growers to adapt. That is a policy initiative rather than a legislative initiative. We are well aware that we can legislate until we are blue in the face but if we do not make a difference on the ground, what is the purpose of doing that? We are focusing on ensuring both that legislation is more responsive to the agenda and that we are undertaking activities on the ground.

The Convener: Climate change is having, and will continue to have, diverse consequences. What methodology does the Government apply to identify the consequences, and how is that monitored? How are the data kept up to date and how do you ensure that we have the right methodology, based on what we learn?

Stewart Stevenson: Ensuring that the data are up to date is clearly important. I will give some examples of things that might not immediately be on the radar but to which we need to be alert as they occur. We are still in the winter. I still have snow at home—not much, but some. This is the 14th consecutive week of snow. During the winter, train services at Upper Tyndrum were disrupted by an avalanche. Such events, which we have not seen much of previously, would not necessarily have been considered in our planning before, but they will be considered in future. The important thing is that, across all policy areas, we spot that individual things are happening that might have a more general applicability to the agenda, and they should be monitored from now on. That example, which is the first example that we have had for many years of that kind of disruption to the rail network, will become part of the operational considerations of Network Rail as a public interest company that is separate from any Government.

The Convener: I asked about the methodology, though, and the general approach that is used to identify what the impacts are going to be. I am particularly interested in the concept of managing for uncertainty, which is one of the headings in the section on assessment in the framework

document. What methodology does the Government use to identify what the impacts are going to be? How will we ensure that the methodology is refined in future?

Stewart Stevenson: The UK's climate change risk assessment process seeks to identify risks and impacts. It is due to come along in a couple of years' time and it will be updated on a five-year cycle. It will look at various sectors and it will map into the 12 sectors that we are looking at. Managing for uncertainty is a challenge because it is difficult to know what some of the risks to which we might be exposed will be.

Two vectors are associated with risk. One is the likelihood that a risk will occur, and the other is the impact of a risk when it occurs. Both vectors must be considered in deciding where to place risks in our future deliberations.

In several areas, we do not yet have the quality of information that is fully adequate for purpose, which is why the UK risk assessment is important. That approach involves working with the UK. We in Scotland will be exposed to a number of risks that are similar to those in the rest of the UK, but we also have distinctive risks that are more particular to us, of which avalanches are probably an example. In England and parts of Wales, flooding has been a bigger risk thus far than it has been for us. Even when it is clear that one jurisdiction rather than another is affected, we still have the opportunity to share information and to ensure that we respond in all our work streams.

Shirley-Anne Somerville (Lothians) (SNP): The framework says that adaptation should be pursued when it costs less than the predicted costs of climate change. Will you explain how that can be evaluated and how the Government will take into account additional factors—not just money, but the impact on wider society?

Stewart Stevenson: It is clear that consideration of costs is important, on the simple basis that, with a fixed pool of money, we must ensure that the money is directed to where it delivers the greatest protection. We must understand the costs of intervening and of not intervening—both are important.

By the same token, it is equally important to consider our citizens' quality of life. For example, the substantial support that was announced for Aberdeenshire Council's work at Bervie braes to protect the quality of life and property of people who live in Stonehaven is unconnected to any legal responsibility on the Government or the local authority. That support is provided because we are the supporter of last recourse, if you like.

The framework has undergone an impact assessment—an equality impact assessment, which seeks to address the effect on the most vulnerable in our society. That shows that we have not considered purely and simply financial matters in the work that we have done. The work is about the quality of people's lives.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Will you describe the evaluations? Do you have practical examples? Is a procedure followed for evaluations? I realise that the framework is still in its early days, but how will evaluations happen in practice?

Stewart Stevenson: Some examples exist. Shirley-Anne Somerville is correct to say that the document is not finished yet. For example, we will produce later this year 12 separate updates on the sectoral work that will flesh out the work streams. However, some activities that are happening throughout Scotland answer the questions to an extent. The Scottish Environment Protection Agency launched earlier this month a £1 million scheme to protect vulnerable communities from the threat of flooding in areas in north-east Scotland. That will support some 2,000 homes and businesses around the Dee, Don, Deveron and North Esk basins. That is the kind of thing that we are starting to do that shows practical engagement.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I will follow up on the costs of adaptation. The framework says that the

"current economic situation must not be used as an excuse not to adapt."

What is the Government doing to ensure that that excuse is not used in its departments and in wider society?

Stewart Stevenson: I have made the rather obvious point that we do not have a bottomless pit of money, so we must ensure that we get value for money as we direct it in our various work streams and respond to incidents.

There are no specific funding streams associated with the work on climate change adaptation per se. That takes us back to the questioning that the convener developed at the outset. Climate change adaptation affects the whole of Government, so it must be integrated into decision-making processes and budgets. Bervie braes is an example in that context. We will now have to consider what we will not do elsewhere as a result of the £2 million that we are providing for Bervie braes. It is clear that a priority need had to be met, and we will always seek to respond to such needs.

Of course, the approach tends to come in two parts. There are short-term interventions to solve immediate crises that have arisen or crises that can be seen to be coming shortly, and there is longer-term planning, in which the normal budgeting process and more competitive views on how we should allocate our money will come into

play. We are deploying money to address important matters. In particular, I refer to the Scottish Climate Change Impacts Partnership, which co-funds UK initiatives such as the UK risk assessment to which I referred.

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I have lodged a motion on the peatland project that the International Union for Conservation of Nature is undertaking. The project is related to the subject that we are discussing, and involves investing in extending peatlands and not letting them dry up. According to estimates, we could probably save twice the amount of money that might have to be spent as a result of CO_2 emissions through an input of around £6 million a year over a 10-year period. That is an example of where there is no money for adaptation—I refer to the convener's methodology—but it is a practical measure that could save as much CO_2 as a large amount of transport generates. Can we find ways to get such decisions taken at an early stage? Is there any flexibility to do that in these hard financial times?

Stewart Stevenson: It would not be appropriate for me to make an announcement that relates to another minister's policy area. More generally, however, we recognise the significant importance of peat as a CO_2 sink. I can give an example of that. Yesterday, I was at Glenluce on the A75, where there is to be a relatively small—2.4km—road improvement. A dual carriageway is being put in to support overtaking. The initial plan was to have an online upgrade of the existing road, but it was realised that that would have an adverse impact on peatlands and would release a considerable amount of the CO_2 that was sequestered in the peatlands. Therefore, the upgrade will be on a different, rather longer route—the two carriageways will, I think, be out of sight of each other at one point, because they will be so far apart. We recognise the importance of peat, at least in the transport policy area.

It is also fair to say that a recognition of the importance of peat played a key part in the refusal by my colleague Mr Mather of a section 36 application under the Electricity Act 1989 relating to a wind farm on Lewis. You can see the effects of our understanding of the importance of peat.

That does not directly answer the question about whether we will find money to stop peatlands drying up. I am simply not informed on Government thinking on that. If the committee wants me to ensure that we understand better, we can, of course, provide information on that.

I have just been reminded that our land use strategy, which, under the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, we are required to produce by the end of the year, will include such considerations. However, at this stage I cannot anticipate the outcomes.

14:30

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I take you back to the Scottish climate change impacts partnership, which you mentioned in a previous answer. Has that assisted and is it working effectively? What plans does the Government have to develop the partnership and to learn from the work that has been done to date?

Stewart Stevenson: The partnership was established in 2005, so it is well established. However, the Government significantly increased its funding in 2009, in recognition of the importance of having a body that promotes knowledge transfer, builds the necessary links with public and private sector organisations and provides advice on the impacts of climate change and how to adapt. We value the Scottish climate change impacts partnership and we continue to provide it with significant support.

Charlie Gordon (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab): The framework states that the effect on Scotland of changes in our climate will be determined by several factors, including exposure, adaptive capacity and competing pressures. Will the minister explain how the framework allows for each of those to be assessed?

Stewart Stevenson: I ask one of my officials to develop the answer to that.

Jody Fleck (Scottish Government Climate Change and Water Industry Directorate): There is nothing official in the adaptation framework, but it seeks to establish a key stakeholder group. The full remit and membership of the stakeholder group are yet to be developed, but we would like one of its roles to be the establishment of indicators and monitoring to measure our progress towards outcomes.

Stewart Stevenson: The question is a good one, but it illustrates that we still have work to do in several areas.

Charlie Gordon: The framework suggests that single outcome agreements and community planning will have key roles in building resilience for climate change adaptation. Are resources in place for the levels of adaptation that will be required and is such future proofing a priority at local level?

Stewart Stevenson: Are all the resources that will be required in the next 40 years in place as of today? Clearly, they are not—not least because budgeting works on a three-year cycle. However, the single outcome agreements, which I have always regarded as being a shared commitment by local authorities and the Scottish Government to the people whom we serve, are a good vehicle for addressing the issues in successive uptakes. Is

everything that we need currently in all the single outcome agreements? Of course it is not.

On community planning, which plays an increasingly important role in single outcome agreements, there is more work to be done. However, community planning addresses the absolute need, to which I have referred a couple of times already, to engage partners beyond the narrow confines of Government and the public sector. We must ensure that we understand those partners' concerns and the information and advice that they can give, and that we give them the opportunity to learn from us. In other words, of all the agendas that are currently around, this is the one in which "partnership" has to mean the most.

Charlie Gordon: The framework states:

"Planners need to factor the changing climate into their plans now."

What planning guidance has the Scottish Government produced to support that message? Can you give examples of Government planning decisions that have taken the changing climate into account?

Stewart Stevenson: I referred to a refusal in relation to a wind farm on Lewis—that is such an example. If you want me to consider the issue more closely, I will go away and do so.

However, the core question that I am being asked is how planners are responding to climate change issues. We have a high level of engagement with planners on reform of the planning system more generally. I will speak to a young planners conference on Friday, ensuring that the next generation of planners understand some of the issues that matter to this agenda and to others. The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth, Mr Mather and I have a rolling programme of meetings with planners—we have been meeting them about twice a year. Part of the discussions that we have with them—the cajoling, urging and encouragement that we provide—is on this agenda as well as on the agenda of seeking to sharpen up the general operation of the planning system.

The Convener: The role of encouraging, cajoling, training and inspiring people to take the right action is all very important, but planning decisions often come down to questions of what is allowable under the system—what must or may happen. Does climate change mitigation have a sufficiently high status in planning decisions, either at local level or within the Scottish Government? For example, would a decision to refuse planning permission be defensible if it were made on the basis that a development would not be compatible with our climate change objectives?

Stewart Stevenson: The climate change objectives that are reflected in the legislation that we passed in June would be a material consideration—I use that formal phrase, which Mr Gordon, with his experience in local government, will understand—in making decisions. For example, it is likely that, in considering planning applications for power stations or whatever, one would examine the potential climate change impact in making one's decision. I make no specific reference to anything in saying that.

The Convener: I understand exactly what you are not making a specific reference to. I am thinking more of lower-level day-to-day decisions on housing developments or minor changes to a shopping centre—relatively low-level decisions on local developments that may be made by council officials rather than by planning committees. Is it now automatic and par for the course that climate change considerations are brought into those decisions?

Stewart Stevenson: There are already examples of that happening right across Scotland. Mrs McInnes will be familiar with the rural housing policy of Aberdeenshire Council. It is an example of a policy in which—I simplify somewhat gratuitously—there is a predisposition against building new rural housing. One of the key reasons for the council having that policy is that it wants to avoid the transport impacts that are associated with people living in a rural location. For example, I do not have a bus passing the end of my road, therefore there is a climate cost associated with the rural location in which I live. I choose Aberdeenshire Council simply as an example—it is by no means the only council that is already taking climate change issues into account. Climate change is increasingly among the environmental considerations that apply to planning decisions and there is evidence that, when planning decisions are made at local government level, there is a clear understanding of the need to take account of climate change.

Charlie Gordon: Will you comment on the concept of sustainable adaptation, which does not harm the environment in the short term?

Stewart Stevenson: Sustainable adaptation is likely to come in a wide range of forms. The forests and forestry work stream is one example, in which we have already made a commitment to plant 100 million trees. There is a carbon cost associated with disturbing the land when trees are planted, so we will need to ensure that we balance that against the carbon benefit that we get through sequestrating CO_2 when we plant the trees. There is also a biodiversity and ecosystem resilience leg that must be sustainable.

In the built environment and through changes that we are making to building regulations, we are

looking to create long-term value in new buildings. As we know, that is limited in its effect in the sense that we build only about 1 per cent of our housing stock a year; the other 99 per cent already exists. The sustainability of our existing houses is something that we are addressing in other ways, such as increased insulation and so on.

In the marine and fisheries sector, excellent work has been done to build alliances between fishermen and WWF—which 10 years ago one might have thought would never happen in our lifetime—in order to promote sustainable effects in the marine environment. That is perhaps not directly the climate change agenda, but sustainability is significantly permeating everything that we do.

The strategic environmental assessments that are so much a part of major projects also take account of the sustainability agenda.

Charlie Gordon: Thank you, minister.

Cathy Peattie: Under the pillar "Provide the evidence base", the framework says that the United Kingdom climate change risk assessment will not be published until 2012. How does that fit with the rolling out of early actions required to build resilience in Scotland?

Stewart Stevenson: We are not waiting until we have the outcome of that framework to make all our decisions. We are part of that work and, although it has not reached the point at which the decisions are ready to be published, it is clear that things will emerge to which we can respond. In the contributions that I have made to the committee in the past 45 or so minutes, I have given a number of examples of work that we are doing. Indeed, the work has been going on in the Government for a good deal of the decade that we have just completed. The process that is being undertaken for the UK climate change risk assessment will itself inform all those who are engaged in it, including us.

Cathy Peattie: The framework highlights the importance of equipping decision makers with skills and tools but indicates that existing tools are underused. Why is that the case, and how can it be rectified? I am thinking in particular of elected representatives: how can they be encouraged to use such tools?

Stewart Stevenson: A number of the tools that are used in all parts of government are not always particularly accessible to lay people, which elected representatives might be. A lot of the information is very complex.

Let me give an example of the difficulties that we have to face and engage with. In transport projects, a range of models are used that assess carbon impacts, but because the data have not necessarily been normalised to the same fundamental approach, they do not necessarily lead to our being able to compare the carbon cost of one project with that of another.

The example that has exercised the convener, among others, is the fact that the development with the highest CO_2 cost of any major project in Scotland is the Edinburgh trams project. That runs entirely counter to what we would expect, but there is a reason for that, which is associated with the method that applies to it. The reason, in part, is that the numbers on the emissions couple light rail with the trams. In a model that separated them, trams would be one figure and light rail would be another, because light rail is not always electric. The trams project is an example of how systems, models and information that are being used to assess the impacts of projects can lead to what even the lay person can recognise is probably an anomalous outcome. There is therefore much more work to be done, not just in Scotland but across the UK, than some people might imagine.

I see that the convener has now at last realised why the numbers for trams are as they are—maybe he had realised that already, of course. I do not have my glasses on, convener, so I cannot quite see your expression. I will put them on. Yes, I have got it now.

14:45

The Convener: I can hardly avoid coming in with a supplementary to that. Perhaps, minister, we might invite you back another time to discuss trams in more depth.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: That would be delightful.

The Convener: Shirley-Anne Somerville and I would both be delighted by that, apparently. We could do that rather than necessarily deflect this meeting to talk just about trams.

On the question of tools that decision makers can use, they need to be accessible and usable for MSPs, local councillors, community councillors and all sorts of people who influence policy-making decisions. If we have only tools that specialists, advisers and civil servants have access to, we will miss a trick. Particularly when political decision making is done in a balanced way between different party groups, whether in periods of coalition or minority Administration, all the decisions and not just Government or local authority decisions need to be well informed. The question is whether we have tools that demonstrate, for example, that one transport project has been assessed differently from another. That issue might come up in the later meeting that we will have, which Shirley-Anne

Somerville and I will attend and which might answer some of the minister's points. Again, do we have tools that are usable by a lay institution, such as a Parliament? If not, is not the priority to develop those?

Stewart Stevenson: When you engage with the subject of trams, I hope that you will direct the majority of your questions to the owners of the project rather than to the minister, who merely has the unhappy task—which was forced upon him by all parties in the Parliament apart from my own—of financing the project.

The Convener: And doing that job to the best of his abilities.

Stewart Stevenson: Let me pass on from the subject of trams, convener, to the more significant matter that has been raised in connection with today's business. I simply make the point that it is in the natural order of things that we all, including me as minister, rely on experts to advise us on the technical detail, because many models are beyond our reasonable engagement. However, it is perfectly proper that they should be exposed to public gaze and be open to challenge; that is certainly true. You make the point, convener, that the public needs to have its own model and to put in its own hypotheses and its own variants of public policy and to see what the model gives as an outcome. Quite often, the outcomes in certain policy areas can be counterintuitive. I acknowledge that, across Governments generally, comparatively little work has been done on such public engagement.

We need to be cautious, however, about imagining that you and I, convener, or other members here—I may be doing an injustice to the committee's members, of course—can engage with the level of detail, granularity and understanding that professional civil servants and their advisers can. However, that is not to say that we should have secret processes that do not allow people to get involved. We have the sustainable Scotland network, for example, to provide local authorities with assistance, and we also have Planning Aid for Scotland. We use a number of models to help people to understand and engage with the decision-making process more than they did in the past.

Cathy Peattie: I want to take that one stage further. You talked earlier about public engagement. I am pleased to see what is in diagram 2 and to hear about the work on engaging with communities. Do you think that elected members should have a role in public engagement and that local authorities also need to be engaged in promoting and working towards public engagement? How do we ensure that there is public engagement across the sectors? Is there a timescale for taking that forward? I am pleased to see public engagement in the framework, but how wide do you think such engagement will be?

Stewart Stevenson: You are correct: public engagement does not mean anything unless we actually engage the public. It is not a question of our putting forward things and then saying, "What do you think?" Engagement is about bringing the public inside the decision-making tent in advance of making decisions.

We have good examples of how that can be done. In the past couple of weeks, we have been running three charrettes—one in Dumfries, one in Lochgelly and one in Grandholm in Aberdeen—to engage the public in planning before the plans are even drawn up. Many local authorities are using planning for real to engage people in the process in a way that lowers the barriers to entry.

We are working on the public engagement strategy itself, but we will not be in a position to bring it forward until the end of the year, because it is quite a big piece of work. We have to work with our colleagues in local government in particular, because public engagement is not simply for central Government to carry out, and we have to take account of the views and needs of a substantial list of public bodies, the definition of which in the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 goes as far as to include every general practitioner and dentist. There are thousands of people whom we have to make part of this, so we have to ensure that we take account of their needs when we place the duty on them.

Cathy Peattie: Planning for real is a good example. In another life, I used to run seminars on planning for real, which was about participation and communities having ownership of how things would work. Do you envisage that the public engagement that local authorities and other bodies will carry out will emphasise participation and listening to what people are saying in order to help them to understand decisions that might make a difference to them?

Stewart Stevenson: I will wear my constituency hat for just a moment. I am a great fan of planning for real and have attended a number of planning for real events in my constituency, which are of great value. In one case, I attended an event seven or eight years ago and can now visit the outcome of it, which demonstrates that the engagement that took place delivered what the community was looking for.

Planning for real is one of those things that certain people get a bit snotty about—I think that that is parliamentary language—because it is a paper-and-pencil approach, not a high-tech approach. It is all the better for that, because it deconstructs the barriers that might be created if you require people to tap at a keyboard or press a

button on a piece of electronic equipment. Just being able to put yellow Post-it notes on a diagram to say, "Here's what I think should be there"—which goes with the planning for real approach—moderated by people at the periphery to help people understand and respond to the process, is the kind of approach that I want us to adopt here. In that way, we level the playing field so that planning is not just the property of the professionals, and we create opportunities for the public to be a real part of the decision-making process.

Cathy Peattie: I look forward to seeing that. Sometimes it takes time to evaluate that kind of approach, but it is worth doing.

The framework requires that adaptation be integrated into regulation and public policy. How can the Scottish Government ensure that climate change adaptation is given the prominence that it requires, given the competing pressures? Will you give us some examples of where the Scottish Government is meeting that requirement in its current policy decisions?

Stewart Stevenson: One area where there was a significant input was in the strategic environmental assessment that was associated with the national planning framework. How would you see that directly? I am saying that it is the case, but how can you test that it is so? Doing that is probably not quite so straightforward, because it is about some of the internal processes of government, which is, in a sense, right. We should be looking at the outcomes of processes, because if we are too prescriptive about how things are done, rather than what is to be achieved, we deny the opportunity for innovation and we shut off people who have good ideas that are at odds with the prevailing norm. We are not, in our general approach to government, particularly minded to overprescribe on processes, but we are very focused on outcomes. We want to be able to demonstrate that we have shown increasingly over time, in regulation and in public policy, that we have taken the steps to respond to the needs of adaptation and, for that matter, mitigation.

Rob Gibson: I have a comment for a start. I wonder whether it was necessary to talk about pillars—pillars 1, 2 and 3—in this context, given that we already have pillars in the agricultural legislation, which makes it somewhat confusing, given the complexity of what each of those pillars is expected to do.

Stewart Stevenson: The best that I can say is that I note Mr Gibson's comment.

Rob Gibson: No doubt those pillars will be around longer than the common agricultural policy. Who knows?

Can you outline how a key stakeholder group will be constituted, given the range of topics that climate change adaptation covers?

Jody Fleck: As I mentioned, we are still at an early stage as far as developing the membership and the full remit of the key stakeholder group is concerned. One idea that we have is that, given that the sector work streams obviously cover a considerable range of portfolio interests, we want one or two key stakeholders from each of those groups to be nominated to sit on the key stakeholder group for the adaptation framework as a whole.

Rob Gibson: Okay—so that is work in progress.

We have mentioned the fact that strategic environmental assessment and a sustainable development checklist for use by Scottish Government officials in developing primary legislation are identified in the framework as key tools for policy makers. What other tools are under development to ensure that appropriate consideration of climate change adaptation takes place at all levels of the Scottish Government and its agencies?

Stewart Stevenson: That is a hospital pass.

Jody Fleck: I am not sure that I am aware of all the individual tools that are being developed, but it is certainly a matter that I could look into and get back to the committee on.

Stewart Stevenson: Gavin Barrie has suggested the public sector duty, which is part of the answer. We have to be open and straightforward about this: the 12 work streams are precisely that. What we have expressed so far is high level and a great deal of work is yet to be done identifying some of the questions as well as developing the answers.

Rob Gibson: I have experienced the kind of tools that we have talked about, such as planning for real. Do you agree that communities feel more ownership of such exercises when they make the initial proposals and planners listen to them, rather than their being presented with a set of suggestions by planners who are taking a wider view? We want people to buy into the process and it is clear that communities can see ways to adapt to climate change.

An important point that worries me is that, especially as we have very large local authorities, planners might suggest things that do much more for the overall view of a much wider area than for the particular community. I am not saying that the wider view should not be taken into account, but the starting-off point for adaptation ideas probably ought to be the community.

15:00

Stewart Stevenson: I think that we already have some good examples that show us the way: Cumbrae; Eigg, which is an obvious recent example; Fife; the sustainable Glasgow initiative; and Biggar, which I seem to recall also has an initiative. However, we recognise that greater support and buy-in can be obtained at various different levels if people are given the opportunity to contribute at a point where they feel that the plans are not yet complete.

In that context, the Planning etc (Scotland) Act 2006 requires that there be engagement strategies on major developments. We will not allow that to descend into a simple tick-box exercise, in which the question is simply whether the developer had a strategy for engaging with the community. It will need to mean rather more than that. Planning for real, with which a number of us are familiar, is a good example of grass-roots engagement that works.

Another example is the charrettes activity that has been promoted by our chief planner, Jim Mackinnon. In the past couple of weeks, we have been applying that particularly to the development that is proposed in Grandholm, north of Aberdeen, where we are essentially talking about a new town of perhaps 5,000 houses. Before anyone has even put a suggestion on the map about where a single house might sit, or before it is suggested that the development might have 5,000 houses or that it might connect to the transport network in a particular way, people are already inside the tent. Those are exactly the models that we want to pursue.

Rob Gibson: What is a charrette? Is it related to a charabanc?

Stewart Stevenson: "Charrette" is the French word for a cart. The word is used by planners and architects because, before planning really existed in its modern form, planners traditionally brought their designs to the prospective purchaser on the back of a cart. Often, the planner would stand there and continue to complete the very large pictures and diagrams. The word "charrette" has been adopted by planners to describe a process of engagement between the planners and the plans.

Rob Gibson: I am glad that I had the courage to ask.

Stewart Stevenson: I know only because I, too, had the courage to ask.

The Convener: I was a little surprised to hear the sustainable Glasgow initiative mentioned in the context of approaches that generate public involvement, participation and a sense of shared ownership. Have those things been achieved through the sustainable Glasgow project?

Stewart Stevenson: I will not make any big claims for someone else's piece of work. My point was simply that the project is being driven not by the Scottish Government but by local government and others at a level that is closer to the people who would be impacted by its outcomes. I think that useful lessons can be learned from that initiative, but I do not think that any single thing that has been done so far provides a single answer about process or outcome.

The Convener: I will not press you on that.

Marlyn Glen (North East Scotland) (Lab): I acknowledge that we are talking about works in progress, but are there any more details about how the Scottish Government is developing the sector action plans? In particular, how much resource is available within the Scottish Government to take that work forward?

Stewart Stevenson: The work streams are under the control of the climate change delivery board. We have the leaders in place for the work streams, and it will be for each of them to work up their action plans. However, we have not yet done the work that would enable me to answer the question in the detail that you might wish at this stage.

Marlyn Glen: How much resource is available for that work?

Stewart Stevenson: We expect, given that we are trying to embed the action plans in our existing decision making, to use existing resources for the work. It is a question not of finance but of human resources, and we are bringing in people to undertake the work.

The plans involve 12 work streams, but they are not of equal size; they are quite individual. The work stream for forests and forestry is perhaps more restricted, whereas the transport work stream covers a lot of geography and a wide range of transport means. Different resources will be required for each stream, and it will be up to the people who have been appointed as leaders to identify those resources.

It is clear how important that work will be for Government. We will seek to use existing work and groups—of which there are a substantial number—wherever possible, but we have created through the work streams a framework within which we can draw together existing work and augment it with additional people.

Marlyn Glen: How will the Scottish Government assess how well local authorities and other public bodies are addressing climate change adaptation issues?

Stewart Stevenson: It is not for the Scottish Government to sit in judgment over local authorities, and we would not seek to do so.

However, it is important that we work with other public sector bodies under the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 and the duties that it creates to ensure that we offer support in areas in which less work is being done.

With regard to the role of local authorities, I meet Alison Hay, who is the spokesperson for the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, quite regularly, and we are clear on the issue. We jointly chair a local authority group on climate change; that is important, because it means that the minister is a key part in the group's decision making.

Alison Hay and the local authorities are masters and mistresses of their own destiny in that regard, but as we—the officials as well as the minister—are part of that group, we know what is going on. That is a key way of ensuring that we are there to detect any gaps that emerge in what is being undertaken.

Marlyn Glen: What happens if you find any gaps?

Stewart Stevenson: It is a matter for the local authorities, although we expect the work that they are doing to be reflected in single outcome agreements. Reports are undertaken on how those are delivering and which commitments are being met.

Single outcome agreements involve—as I expressed it earlier in this session—a joint commitment by the Scottish Government and local authorities to the people of an area. We share responsibility, but it is not for the minister to take control of local authorities, in that regard as in any other. A series of processes is in place to ensure that it is made obvious, clear and public whether the work is being undertaken.

Cathy Peattie: I am interested in the minister's last answer. I understand that it is up to public bodies to carry out their plans and meet their commitments under the 2009 act, and I know that their work will be audited. However, I also understand that it is intended that the Government has a stronger role and can make decisions or suggestions with regard to how public bodies pull together their plans.

Stewart Stevenson: We can all make suggestions. The fundamental issue is about a relationship of mutual respect between central Government and local government. It is not for Government to manage the processes that local government adopts for delivering what is in the single outcome agreements or, indeed, how councils behave generally. It might be for the Auditor General for Scotland to comment on performance. However, given that we are all in this together, you can be sure that we will work together and help one another. I am sure that local authorities will from time to time remind Government of areas in which it is perhaps their view that further work requires to be done. We will do the same, but we will do so on the basis of equality, not on the basis of Big Brother telling the family to get into line.

Cathy Peattie: We are looking at climate change, and that will be an integral part of single outcome agreements. Is that what you are saying?

Stewart Stevenson: Sorry?

Cathy Peattie: There is an expectation that climate change and adaptations and so on will be part of single outcome agreements. Is that correct?

Stewart Stevenson: Yes.

Cathy Peattie: And the Auditor General can consider whether that has been delivered.

Stewart Stevenson: Correct—among a wide range of other things, of course.

Cathy Peattie: I understand the other things; I just wanted to check on climate change.

Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD): I apologise for missing the start of your evidence, minister.

Beyond the Prince's mayday network and the climate change business delivery group, what is being done to engage the business community in adaptation?

Stewart Stevenson: Engagement takes place in a variety of ways. Just to be clear, the 2020 group is independent of Government, although it has the very public support of Government. The mayday network is a particularly effective group, which has moved from engaging essentially with larger businesses to having much greater success in engaging small and medium-sized enterprises. I cannot recall the number of companies that are engaged in the network; no one is putting a number in front of me, so none of us can remember it. If the committee would like information on that, we could provide it. The mayday network is a good way of drawing in the business community.

All the evidence is that there is engagement by the business community. As I suspect Ms McInnes is aware, the Federation of Small Businesses has just had a successful UK conference in Aberdeen. One of the sessions was devoted to issues of this kind. The Confederation of British Industry is taking substantial interest, and we engage with it. A similar situation applies to the Institute of Directors. There is a range of ways in which we are directly engaging with business. One of the work streams is business and industry, and the adaptation strand—of which we will publish the first version later this year—will have involved

engaging business and industry and may well create new vehicles for such engagement. However, at this stage it is not for me to anticipate whether that will be the case, or whether the existing vehicles are sufficient or fit for purpose.

Alison McInnes: You said earlier that we are all in it together. On this occasion, we need the public and the private sectors to work together, perhaps in a way that has not always happened. Do you envisage a kind of freeing up of the sharing of information that Government has with the private sector on this issue?

Stewart Stevenson: I would not want to suggest that this Administration, or indeed a previous one, has been unduly unwilling to share information with business in this policy area. As far as I can judge, business has been quite open with the information that it has. Obviously, there will be times when commercial advantage may mean that some information is not brought forward. It is often difficult to know whether that is happening. It is worth making the point that Ian Marchant, chief executive of Scottish and Southern Energy and chair of the 2020 delivery group, has observer status in our internal business delivery group. We are seeking to ensure that that join is there. The SCCIP is about providing people with a free information source. I think that we have taken the necessary steps, but we are happy to receive input that suggests other measures that it would be useful to take. We have certainly not set out to keep information close to our chest and not share it.

15:15

Alison McInnes: Has the Government drawn on any international best practice in the development of the framework?

Stewart Stevenson: Bluntly, no, because we are the first country to produce such a framework. We use best practice as part of our general approach to the development of policy and documents, and to how we communicate, but since—to the best of our knowledge—we appear to be leading the way with our adaptation framework and exciting some interest in other jurisdictions around the world, there has been comparatively little for us to draw on.

Alison McInnes: That is probably a fair point, but do you envisage drawing heavily on international best practice as you develop the sector action plans? I can think of two areas in particular—how to cope with different climates in building design and how to deal with resource scarcity, such as water shortages—in which I am sure that there are a great many lessons that we can learn from other countries.

Stewart Stevenson: The Sullivan group drew on international experience in its report on building design and had as members people from Finland, Sweden and Austria. I am fairly confident that I have got that right, but should I be wrong, I will ensure that I correct myself later.

Water shortage is not a subject on which Scotland has great experience, but the efficient use of water is extremely important to us because moving water around is a high-energy activity. Even though we have an adequate share of precipitation to fill our rivers, our lochs and our water reservoirs in general, we must take action to ensure that we make good use of water for energy efficiency reasons. I am not particularly conscious of our having made international comparisons in that area. There has been an outflow of support to others from Scottish Water and, increasingly, from Business Stream, the business arm of Scottish Water.

Alison McInnes: Can you say a little more about the UK adapting to climate change group?

Stewart Stevenson: As I look round at my team, the straight answer is that we may not have much to say on that at this stage, other than what I have already said. We are engaged in the work of the group, which is looking at a 2012 publication. We will find out whether there is more that we can share with you, if you wish.

The Convener: Perhaps we can get an update on that down the line.

Do members have any final questions?

Alison McInnes: I have an issue that has not been addressed. On page 16 of the framework document, on which you talk about different climate models, you state:

"Organisations can decide for themselves what level of risk they are prepared to bear."

Surely the Government has a strategic role to play in ensuring that the country keeps operating, so we cannot have each public sector organisation choosing to carry a different level of risk. What is the Government's role in setting a bottom line?

Stewart Stevenson: I think that the point that is being made is a fair one. For example, over the winter, the Scottish Government resilience room has been meeting regularly. I have played a key part in that in relation to the transport infrastructure, keeping the arteries of business flowing and ensuring that food for people to buy gets delivered to our supermarkets. Now that we appear to be in calmer waters weather wise, we are undertaking a review of what happened. Local authorities have been a key part of that process. Pat Watters attended a very high proportion of the meetings that we held in the resilience room regarding weather.

It is not just central planning around acceptable risks for various organisations that will bring about outcomes. The transport risks that are associated with bad weather in Glasgow, for example, are entirely different from the transport risks that are associated with bad weather in the Western Isles. The risk level that Western Isles Council places on a failure of the rail network is substantially different from the risk level that Glasgow City Council places on the failure of the suburban rail network there. It is up to individual public bodies to consider what risks matter to them.

It is important that the risk evaluation is open to public scrutiny, so that the opportunity exists for those who might know better to say, "Ah, but." In this area, there is an "Ah, but." Risk is often difficult for people to engage with, because of the confusion between the likelihood of a risk occurring and the impact of the event if it occurs. There are things that would have high impacts if they happened, but if they will never actually happen it might be sensible to make no provision for them. For example, there is only one bank in the world, as far as I am aware, that has equipped its computer centre to resist nuclear attack. Every other bank concluded that, if there were to be a nuclear attack, their computer centre would the be least of the issue. That one bank is an Italian bank for some reason—I do not quite know why. That sort of assessment will be repeated at local level.

Alison McInnes: I accept much of what the minister says, and there are indeed local decisions to be taken, but at some point strategic national decisions have to be taken. Some things that fall within the remits of particular local authorities or organisations will have impacts across Scotland, so it is necessary to lay out where the lines need to be drawn in that regard.

Stewart Stevenson: There is a process that permeates from the UK Government. There is an identification of components of critical national infrastructure, at different levels of criticality. We work with the UK Government on that. In our own areas of responsibilities, we identify the things that matter for our infrastructure and society—the things that are necessary to keep everything working. Local government has to do that, too.

The process for assessing what is required to keep the country, councils and communities going is long established—it is not new. Now, we need to take more account of some of the risks that derive from the climate change agenda, regarding both mitigation and adaptation. More of those risks are reflected in the critical national infrastructure at the highest level, and more of them are being recognised by councils in the work that they do. We have a layer of responsibility for undertaking the tasks that we need to, but that will also be for local bodies to do.

Alison McInnes: It might have been useful for that to have been referred to explicitly in the framework.

Stewart Stevenson: That is a fair point.

The Convener: My final question is not so much about the adaptation framework. The committee has received a letter regarding the document "Towards a Low Carbon Economy for Scotland". Can you add a few words about that? The letter seems to have come somewhat out of the blue—both to the committee and to the Scottish Parliament information centre. It is not helpful in planning our work programme if we do not know what documents are coming from the Government and when.

Stewart Stevenson: I am not sure that I can add much to that. It has not come directly from my portfolio of work, although I have been aware of its being developed. It is probably imagined that the lead committee will be elsewhere. If the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee has not been adequately informed about our work in this area, we will examine why that has occurred, and we will seek to ensure that we do not get ourselves in that position again.

The Convener: I am informed that none of the relevant committees has been informed about the matter formally.

Rob Gibson: You are right, convener, but we have certainly been informed informally, for example at the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee.

The Convener: Informally?

Rob Gibson: Yes.

The Convener: Okay. As we are the climate change committee, it would be helpful to have formal notification of the timing of such pieces of work, so that we can contribute to their scrutiny.

Stewart Stevenson: I note your point.

The Convener: Many thanks.

There are no further questions. I thank our three witnesses for their evidence.

We agreed previously to take item 3 in private.

15:26

Meeting continued in private until 15:40.

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