The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Wednesday 20 February 2013

Session 4

Wednesday 20 February 2013

CONTENTS

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE
5th Meeting 2013, Session 4

CONVENER

*Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Stuart McMillan (West Scotland) (SNP)
*Anne McTaggart (Glasgow) (Lab)
*Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con)
*John Pentland (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
*Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

George Eckton (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities)
Sylvia Gray (East Dunbartonshire Council and Sustainable Scotland Network)
Alistair MacDonald (Royal Town Planning Institute Scotland and Heads of Planning Scotland)
David McCall (Comrie Development Trust)
Janice Pauwels (City of Edinburgh Council and Sustainable Scotland Network)
Dave Watson (Stop Climate Chaos Scotland)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

David Cullum

LOCATION

Committee Room 2

Scottish Parliament

Local Government and Regeneration Committee

Wednesday 20 February 2013

[The Convener *opened the meeting at 10:33*]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Kevin Stewart): Good morning. Welcome to the fifth meeting in 2013 of the Local Government and Regeneration Committee. I ask everyone to switch off their mobile phones and other electronic equipment.

Under our first item of business, I ask members whether they agree to take agenda item 3 in private.

Members *indicated agreement.*

"Low Carbon Scotland: Meeting our Emissions Reduction Targets 2013-2027"

10:33

The Convener: Agenda item 2 concerns the Scottish Government's draft second climate change report on proposals and policies. We have a round-table oral evidence session on the issue this morning.

In the interests of efficiency, I ask our witnesses and members to introduce themselves, for the record. I am Kevin Stewart, the convener of the committee.

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

George Eckton (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities): I am from the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities.

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

Sylvia Gray (East Dunbartonshire Council and Sustainable Scotland Network): I am chair of the sustainable Scotland network, and am a sustainability and energy officer at East Dunbartonshire Council.

Anne McTaggart (Glasgow) (Lab): I am an MSP for Glasgow.

Janice Pauwels (City of Edinburgh Council and Sustainable Scotland Network): I am vice-chair of the sustainable Scotland network, and am the low-carbon and green projects manager for the City of Edinburgh Council.

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

Alistair MacDonald (Royal Town Planning Institute Scotland and Heads of Planning Scotland): I am the convener of the Royal Town Planning Institute Scotland. I am also a member of the executive committee for Heads of Planning Scotland, and am the head of planning in Glasgow City Council.

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

Dave Watson (Stop Climate Chaos Scotland): I am the head of bargaining and campaigns at Unison Scotland, and am representing Stop Climate Chaos Scotland today.

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

David McCall (Comrie Development Trust): I am the chair of the Comrie Development Trust.

The Convener: Do you feel that RPP1 has been effective and has given a satisfactory policy framework to drive down emissions?

David McCall: We are looking at the practicalities of being able to achieve a specific outcome. The first thing we did was consider a feasibility study and the pursuit of an approach that would engage the residents and locals of Comrie. We did specific design studies, renewable energy studies, legal structural reports and outline business plans to identify where we could go and how we could take things forward. We managed, working within that framework, to achieve quite a bit.

I do not know whether members know much about Comrie and the nature of our acquisition of Cultybraggan Camp, but it gives us an opportunity to develop particular elements using the grants system that we have been able to access. We are now in the second stage of that, and are in a position to consider things like hosting the youth climate conference, undertaking studies in partnership with universities and taking on energy advisers.

I could go on for ever.

The Convener: How has the policy framework of RPP1 helped with what you are trying to do?

David McCall: It has helped with our ability to engage local people in order to achieve a specific outcome. One of the biggest barriers is change. In the context of a small village such as Comrie, change means that the trust has a great challenge when it comes to promoting specific policies. The biggest benefit has come through creating awareness and enabling the community to engage far more and to achieve a specific outcome with regard to the climate challenge. It has also enabled us to engage the community in activities by bringing them to a specific point in Comrie and enabling people to give us their views.

Engagement with outside stakeholders has given us a wider context. We have been able to promote our activities and to open up to a number of outside sources.

The Convener: As the chair of the sustainable Scotland network, what is Sylvia Gray's feeling about the effectiveness of RPP1?

Sylvia Gray: RPP1 has helped to raise the profile and the credibility of climate change in local authorities. Obviously, councils and the wider public sector did a lot of work on climate change prior to the introduction of RPP1. However, from my experience in East Dunbartonshire Council and the evidence that we have gathered through

the SSN, I can say that it has definitely helped to up the ante in terms of buy-in from the top down.

On specific aspects of local authority activity, carbon management plans are one of the big areas of RPP1 that are relevant to local authorities and which we have done quite well on. All councils have carbon management plans and we have worked well with the Carbon Trust and each other to build on our baselines and make significant reductions.

The Convener: Does any other witness want to come in? I will take ladies first.

Janice Pauwels: I will add, from a local authority perspective, to what Sylvia Gray said. RPP1 gave the work a good strategic focus by bringing together areas such as transport, housing and planning in one strategic framework. However, it raised some issues—certainly in my council—in relation to setting targets and baselines. Some of the methodologies were quite complex for us to understand, and resourcing is an issue, but that was part of the debate, which was helpful.

The Convener: Many councils have established carbon reduction boards—I do not know whether the City of Edinburgh Council has done so. You talked about resourcing. My experience is that such projects pay for themselves quickly through creating quite a lot of savings, which can be sunk back into the local authority. At the same time, the projects achieve the great goal of reducing carbon emissions, which is what we all hope for.

Janice Pauwels: There is certainly a clear benefit in relation to emissions across our estate. We also look at area-wide emissions in the authority's boundaries, which are a more difficult element.

I will add to what Sylvia Gray said about carbon management plans. We all have those plans and we all have targets in them. We are seeing progress with the plans, which give us savings. The benefits become much more rounded, because those savings can be reinvested in other energy projects and so on.

The Convener: Do you feed your local monitoring into central Government?

Janice Pauwels: We feed back that information through our climate change declaration reporting mechanism, which captures it.

Dave Watson: As everyone else does, we welcome the concept of the RPP process. However, as we said in our submission, the overall plan is insufficient in that it is stronger on proposals than it is on policies, and a lot of it is a bit vague and difficult to measure. In order to be credible, the RPP needs a clearer plan of measures. A bit more transparency and

consistency of reporting in plans is also needed; for example, RPP2 does not look the same as RPP1, so it is difficult to draw conclusions by looking at the two reports.

In local government—I represent the workforce in local government—we have seen useful individual actions by authorities, but to suggest that that is the promised transformation would be a tad optimistic, to put it mildly. The behavioural change that we looked for as a result of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 is not there.

The advisory guidance is overreliant on heroic leadership models and does not build behavioural change from the bottom up. The Carbon Trust has highlighted the lack of leadership in some areas, which is certainly reflected by staff who are at the sharp end of the process. We need more to be done on that.

Inconsistent reporting is an issue in local government, too. There is good work in the sustainable Scotland network and there are good examples, but very few local authorities report in the same way, including reporting on carbon management plans. Our view when the 2009 act was passed—it is still our view—was that reporting should be mandatory, not to create rigidity in the process, but to provide a template that would ensure consistency and help local authorities in performing the task.

The Convener: Is good practice being shared to a huge degree through the sustainable Scotland network?

Dave Watson: Good practice is being shared. I was a member of the advisory board that advised on the guidance that was drawn up on the public sector duty. We said that it was overreliant on leadership models for delivery. There are one or two good examples—for instance, South Lanarkshire Council has done good stuff on green workplaces—but lots of other local authorities have not really taken up the task. Some chief executives and leaders have said that the subject is important, but it is passing by the vast majority of staff in a lot of areas and they cannot get engaged in the process as they should.

The Convener: It would be interesting for the committee to get an idea of who is involved in each local authority in Scotland—I do not know whether the sustainable Scotland network has that information. In some places, chief executives and senior members of the administration joined carbon reduction boards.

10:45

Sylvia Gray: We are in the process of gathering year 5 reports for the climate change declaration. I cannot be sure of this without checking, but I

imagine that the information that you are looking for would be available through that process. It is certainly information to which we have access.

The Convener: If the information is available, I would be grateful if you could pass it on to the clerks, because it would be useful. At the end of the day, if the chief executive is involved in attending meetings and driving things forward, there is more likely to be success in the local authority.

Stuart McMillan: Dave Watson said that there is a need for a template that can be followed. You also said that some council leaders and chief executives have commented on the subject. Are you aware of good examples of a bottom-up approach in local authorities, whereby people at the front line have passed good suggestions to management? If that happens, are the ideas being taken up or rejected?

Dave Watson: The best example is South Lanarkshire Council, which has a good green workplace and used the Scottish Government's climate challenge fund to help to resource the approach. The council has produced a report about how it did that. One or two other local authorities have tried to do something similar, but South Lanarkshire is the best example.

We said at the time—a number of chief execs said that this was not one of my better ideas—that every chief exec and council leader should have an annual meeting with schools in their area, to report on their progress on climate change. I had a few phone calls suggesting that that was not my brightest idea. However, from experience I can say that that type of event focuses attention, and if a few chief execs and council leaders had to do that each year their reports might become a bit more credible than reports currently are in most local authorities. If the staff side was involved in that kind of green workplace initiative, people would be encouraged to take part. It has happened in the private sector and other areas, but it rarely happens in councils.

Stuart McMillan: What about local authority departments whose staff are out and about a lot? There could be better scheduling and management of transport operations, for example, which would save carbon. Is that kind of information being passed up the tree in local authorities, and is it being acted on?

Dave Watson: That is not happening enough; we have discussed transport plans with only a couple of local authorities. Quite simple things can be done, however. For example, in Edinburgh there was a walking plan for staff; people thought about the quickest way to get from one place to another without using a car, either by walking or by using public transport. Small-scale practical

things can be done from the bottom up and there are one or two good examples of people wanting to do that sort of thing. Champions at the grass roots want to do that.

The difficulty is that such activity is not encouraged in most local authorities. A few of our members are told to go away and write a plan, and they report on one or two instances. However, is such activity part of the culture of the organisation? The answer is no. Is climate change impact built into every decision that the council makes, in the way that equality impact assessments are supposed to work? In some cases the answer is yes; in others there is just a tick-box exercise. The issue needs to be more ingrained in authorities' day-to-day decision making.

George Eckton: Given that I represent all 32 local authorities, members might expect me to take a slightly different view on the question about examples of good practice, and especially initiatives that came from staff. I can point to two pertinent examples of initiatives that have been taken forward in recent years.

First, the greening of Dundee City Council's fleet came from officers looking at costs going forward. It has, in decarbonising its fleet management, become a pilot authority for all others. Secondly, officers in West Dunbartonshire Council and East Dunbartonshire Council highlighted to members not just the energy costs of street lighting but the distribution and use-of-system charges for the infrastructure that we have to pay to the electricity board. There are clear cost avoidances that can be either reinvested or shifted to other spending.

We are one of the few nations in the world to have at local government level that kind of voluntary agreement, which was signed by all council leaders more than six years ago and on which we have reported for two years. As we have acknowledged, we can get better at this; indeed, that is why the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the council leaders have endorsed the report that is in front of the committee this morning, which is critical of the process and recognises that we have to get better at it—as everyone is detemined to do. My political boss Councillor Hagan, who is COSLA's spokesperson for development, economy and sustainability, is keen for that to be driven forward.

I therefore have to disagree with the previous point. I can cite numerous examples, and the SSN provides a very good network for passing them around and helping us to build a business case for wider roll-out across all councils.

The Convener: Can you give us an example of good practice in one council that has been taken to the SSN and then rolled out to a number of, if not all, councils?

George Eckton: The street lighting example that I mentioned is being rolled out across all councils. The two Dunbartonshire councils have identified where savings can be made and what they have done has operated as a business case. I have not been involved in the detail of that work, but I know that Dumfries and Galloway Council is rolling it out over the next eight years and, in doing so, will save millions of pounds. We are now looking at how we can roll it out through joint working between the Scottish Government and local government and how we can fund the business cases for the other 29 authorities to introduce the measure over the next six to eight years. It would represent a significant saving to the public purse.

The Convener: It would be very useful to know where that good practice is being exported to and how many councils it is being rolled out in. You mentioned the two Dunbartonshire councils and Dumfries and Galloway Council and said that many others are considering it. Could you get in touch with the clerks afterwards with that information?

George Eckton: Certainly.

Stewart Stevenson: I want to pick up on Dave Watson's use of the phrase "heroic leadership", which I absolutely recognise as the model of change adopted by too many organisations that want to say that they are doing these things in their annual report but are not actually doing them in real life. I want to explore with our colleagues around the table not just behaviour change within councils but the effect that councils can have on people in their areas. After all, it is broadly accepted that we cannot engineer our way out of this issue and that we as individuals must change our behaviours.

Having visited Comrie on many occasions, I know that a great deal has been done there—indeed, my judgment is that you have underplayed your achievements in that respect—but it would be interesting to find out what opportunities there might be for behaviour change and, in particular, given councils' substantial responsibility for quite a lot of transport, what opportunities there might be to get people to transport themselves in a variety of ways. Are the general public, the councils and all of us in the public sector taking practical opportunities and driving through change? Are we doing well or badly? Are there any tricks that we are missing?

Finally, what are the regional transport partnerships doing? They are costing a lot of money and I am not quite sure what it is being spent on.

The Convener: Because you mentioned Comrie, I will take David McCall first and then bring in Alistair MacDonald, who has not had an opportunity to speak yet.

David McCall: No matter which way you look at it, behaviour change is a challenge; indeed, one of the biggest challenges is the cynics and sceptics we have to face regularly. However, there are a number of other things that we could greatly benefit from. At last year's Development Trusts Association Scotland conference, Alex Neil told us that there ought to be far more engagement between local trusts and the development of carbon challenge, renewables and so on and he was very happy for trusts to take on more responsibility. However, that would take away a lot of responsibility from local councils. So far, nothing has happened, and there has been a change of minister, so I am not terribly clear about how that is being taken forward. However, I thought that the idea was incredibly good, first because it gives ownership to the communities and secondly because the communities are the ones that are facing the issues, definitively, and it is they who are looking to solve the problems and issues in a practical manner.

I will mention three areas that we are working on at present. First, we developed a youth climate conference, which is a two-day residential event, to get youth involved so that they can potentially form the basis of a new junior climate challenge fund. Secondly, we have been engaging with the University of Dundee to look at a partnership. We are taking 100 households, inviting them to take part in a three-year behaviour change policy and assessing the barriers that exist. Finally, we have engaged an energy adviser to promote solar thermal photovoltaic bulk purchasing, to look at energy audits and to consider all the efficiencies that can be achieved by local residents in the Comrie area.

Those are three good examples of where we are engaging. It is an on-going issue on a daily basis to get that engagement, but I hope that, in time, we will be able to come back and show evidence of what we have achieved.

Stewart Stevenson: Can I come back with a little question?

The Convener: Certainly.

Stewart Stevenson: Do you think that you are more likely to get the general public to change their behaviours in little steps or in heroically large projects?

David McCall: I think that little steps are the way in which we can go forward. Achieving this really comes down to active involvement.

Alistair MacDonald: Glasgow is carrying out a pilot on street lighting at present. We connected with a European programme and looked at various cities and towns across Europe and the benefits that they have had from changing their street lighting. Some quite significant results are coming through on that. I hope that Glasgow will follow it through and make savings.

In our written submission, we welcome the draft RPP2. However, the Royal Town Planning Institute has its own seven points towards tackling climate change, which we mention in our submission, and we suggest a slightly different direction. Many of the items that are mentioned in RPP2 deal with the micro level, but there is also a macro level to be considered. Your own studies say that half a million new homes are expected to be required in the country by 2035. Where will they go? Where is the infrastructure to support them? How sustainable will they be? Will we create walkable, cycling communities that will be well ordered and have decent communications, which will lower their carbon footprints?

It is important to tie that back into national planning framework 3, which is out for consultation, and the involvement of planning. We need to consider where we have growth, where we perhaps have medium growth and where there is no growth, and to start to evolve sustainable communities in the long term, because a long-term approach is required. That is what planning is about. At times, it involves setting out things that are unacceptable to people, but showing the positive aspects.

A national planning framework that is linked to a regional planning framework can avoid the adversarial nature of the planning application process. We get involved in that, and we are almost holding the jackets between different sides. Instead, we should be looking at a framework that covers the whole of Scotland. NPF3 gives us that opportunity, but it has to be more about outcomes and where growth is achievable.

At present, we are in a recession so house builders are finding it difficult to take housing forward, but there is a pent-up demand for house building and new homes. Where will they go? Will they go into compact towns and cities and benefit from the infrastructure that is there? Will they be on the edges of towns and cities, which means that people will have to commute back in? My experience is that, at present, public transport is unwilling to penetrate communities on the edges of our towns and cities because transport providers do not see that as a profitable way forward. As planners, we continually encourage such development, but we cannot get private entities such as the providers of bus services to go

into those estates because they contain two-car and three-car families.

11:00

What about communities of 5,000 or 6,000 that are built as stand-alone settlements—the mini-new town concept? How do they connect to employment, to business opportunities and into the towns and cities in the areas concerned? We need to address things at a macro level if we are going to reduce carbon footprints.

We mentioned 10 principles that we feel NPF3 should take on board. The framework should lead the key agencies in the country to where their infrastructure will go. That creates density and an infrastructure, and that is where new communities or the additions to existing communities can be planned.

We should not overlook the historic stock. Work is being done with Historic Scotland in Glasgow and Edinburgh on how to deal with pre-1919 tenements. We have an experiment running in five locations at the moment, and some significant reductions are being made—a 40 per cent energy and carbon footprint reduction through tenement refitting. It is possible to do that. Lots of the old stock is actually very adaptable, and it can be changed over time. We should be considering that.

Margaret Mitchell: Street lighting has been mentioned by George Eckton and Alistair MacDonald. Could you elaborate on how measures are working in that regard? Are there any competing priorities to which local authorities must have regard relating to safer streets, for example? If so, how has that been overcome?

I found the information on planning very interesting with regard to the micro and macro levels, with some positive ideas about how those need to be considered when planning developments—walkability and cycle paths, for example, could be factored in. While the policy is cascading down, there is a clear need, as David McCall mentioned, to develop things that people will buy into, and that means consulting the community. It appears that RPP2 was developed with two formal workshops for stakeholders, but with none of the consultation with householders, communities, non-governmental organisations, businesses and so on that had been intended under the policy. Could you comment on those general points?

George Eckton: As regards competing demands for street lighting, we were reflecting on the fact that some authorities have out-of-date lights that do not comply with the European directive. It was an initial policy driver to replace those with more efficient lighting with more

environmentally friendly components. A second driver was the increasing energy costs over time, which have meant that it is possible to justify investment in LED lighting on a capital basis over a very short payback period. That would accrue enough savings to reinvest in rolling that out across the whole estate.

A third issue, albeit not one of the higher-profile ones, is the distribution use of system charges for unmetered street lights or other street furniture, which is a throwback to the old electricity boards—although that is now in the hands of SSE and Scottish Power. They can charge what used to be like a standing charge on an old electricity bill, and that is worked out using a methodology that was calculated by the Office of the Gas and Electricity Markets—Ofgem. In Highland, for example, the bill went from about £350,000 a year the year before last to £750,000 last year. Similar increases are planned as the power companies make investments in their infrastructure. There was a cost avoidance rationale there.

On community safety, the two Dunbartonshire pilot projects received significant help from the Scottish Futures Trust. I will forward information on that to the committee after the meeting. There was community engagement around issues of light dispersion. LED lights give out the same amount of ambient light, but they tend to focus it on the ground more, so there is less general light coverage. That gave rise to concerns about community safety: would the streets be darker? We are required to light footways. Through community engagement, and by lighting a street with LED lights and comparing it with one with older lighting, we demonstrated to a community that there is not that much difference in the radius of the light that is spread on the street. We could sell the measure to the community because of the cost savings to them as council tax payers and the impact on emissions in the community. That was a practical demonstration.

Margaret Mitchell: That is helpful.

Alistair MacDonald: The situation is similar in a European context. LEDs have a longer life than the original low-pressure sodium lighting. We all associate our cities and towns with the orange glow from that lighting but, in certain streets in Glasgow, we have moved from that to what we call white lighting. The perception has been that it leads to better public safety. That will also be the case with LED lighting.

There is new technology and kit that can be put into the head of the lamp and then controlled by computer, so that light levels can be taken up or down according to needs. That can come in the future. In Eindhoven, Philips is working with local government on how football crowds are moved. The routes that fans are supposed to take are lit

up brightly, and then the lights come back to a lower level later at night. Savings can start to be made through lighting, but in a way that also allows improvements in the way that a city is organised and in public safety.

Janice Pauwels: Street light dimming is an option for councils. The Scottish Futures Trust is running a series of workshops on street lighting with the seven cities in the Scottish cities alliance, and it is making available a tool that street lighting officers can use to run a number of scenarios, which might include replacing 50 or 20 per cent of the street lighting estate. The tool provides facts and figures and financial information to allow consideration of future investment.

Stewart Stevenson: I have a brief follow-up question on Alistair MacDonald's point about controlling the delivery of street lighting almost down to the lamp standard. Is there any tie-in between that and the work that is largely led by the UK Government and Ofgem on the development of the intelligent grid? That is not necessarily this committee's direct interest. If there is not an answer now, we could get one later.

Alistair MacDonald: I am sorry, but I do not have any information to provide on that.

Stewart Stevenson: That is fine.

Margaret Mitchell: What about the consultation angle? Does anyone have a comment on the fact that only stakeholders were involved, or were you the stakeholders who were consulted?

The Convener: Sorry, Margaret, but I forgot that you had asked about that. Perhaps we could wrap that up in a broader question about engagement. How have the witnesses felt involved in the process and what has been the effect of the engagement that has taken place?

Dave Watson: Needless to say, we were one of the stakeholders. It was all very heart-warming and we had tea and biscuits at the consultation session, which was nice. However, that is probably not the level of community engagement that was described at the outset of the process.

That gets back to my broad point about how we can do that. George Eckton gave a couple of examples of ideas that have come up, but that is not the same as a systematic or consistent approach. For example, not every local authority has a green workplace initiative, although there are plenty of them knocking around. When we have done them, we have found that the workforce comes up with bright ideas about issues such as street lighting. Even better, we should remember that people in the workforce have families and friends in the community and that they go home and generate support and volunteer in local community organisations. That spreads the cultural change.

You cannot drive behavioural change through grand mission statements alone; it has to be built through organisations and encouraged from the bottom up. We are missing that trick in Scotland and need to get a grasp of it. Of course, it is not being achieved anywhere else, but if we had, say, more green workplaces and more community engagement on some of these issues, some of the bright ideas would come from the bottom up, not from top-down initiatives.

The Convener: So the voluntary code and the declaration reports by themselves are probably not enough.

Dave Watson: They are good and help to spread best practice, but they are not enough. In fairness, even the report that we are discussing today, which I have only had a chance to take an overview of, says that there are limitations to the system and that reporting is inconsistent. We need to adopt a more systematic approach across Scotland—not, I should add, by telling people, "You must do all these things," which I know will get COSLA very excited, but at least by having some template. Our members who have to do a lot of this say to me, "Actually, Dave, we could do with a bit of help here and a template would be useful to us."

George Eckton: I will try not to get excited.

Both of the COSLA spokespersons who have been involved in this issue over the years have called for the RPP to be localised to 32 RPPs across Scotland. The community planning review might provide even more of an mechanism in that respect; indeed, at the last SSN conference, Councillor Hagan asked whether the review could act as a conduit for local RPPs.

The Convener: Would it be best for community planning partnerships to take on this role?

George Eckton: No, but they could be a conduit for delivering local RPPs. You could see how such a document could, for example, be linked to the sustainability outcome in single outcome agreements.

The issue that we have—and the appeal that we have made to the Government—is about giving councils access to the available knowledge on and technical ability in carbon reporting to allow them to produce a local RPP and then allowing them to engage with communities on that. As far as green travel plans are concerned, councils are developing either transport plans or worksmart initiatives; the difference comes down to whether they feel they can make most gains through accessibility to services rather than mobility to places. Nevertheless, we think that we can do

more, and we are appealing for RPPs to be localised so that we can do more and get communities to participate more.

The Convener: John Wilson got very animated during that response.

John Wilson: I did not get animated, convener, but I want to ask about the suggestion of having 32 RPPs and tying them in with CPPs. Given that many local authorities are jointly commissioning and working together to deliver services, would you consider having RPPs not at individual local authority level but at a level that would allow local authorities to come together? For example, a number of local authorities have come together to consider how to deal with waste management. If RPPs are produced by individual local authorities, we will end up with 32 solutions to the same issue and we need to consider where local authorities can work jointly together. Although certain conurbations certainly fit, the unnatural nature of the local authority boundary means that, sometimes, authorities just do not work together.

Speaking of the 32 local authorities, I also want to look at the issue of community engagement, by which I mean engagement not within the workforce itself but with local communities and activists to work through what local authorities and the Government are trying to do in the RPP. It all comes back to procurement and how we save money in that process.

George Eckton referred to local authorities purchasing energy from companies such as SSE and Scottish Power, but there has been a great deal of discussion about authorities producing their own energy more efficiently at a local level and creating community hubs that would produce and supply energy to local residents and businesses. That was seen to be more efficient than getting energy from large wind farms or other large producers, which incurs transmission charges. Have local authorities talked about going for that model, which would involve carbon reduction as well as greater efficiency, instead of relying on large plants and large wind farms to deliver energy in remote areas?

11:15

The Convener: Before I invite panel members to answer those questions, I ask John Pentland whether he has a question about CPPs.

John Pentland: I just have a comment to make to George Eckton. I visited some communities yesterday and I think that the last thing that they would want is any further responsibility going to CPPs.

The Convener: Stuart McMillan has a question. Is it about CPPs?

Stuart McMillan: It is on the same point; it relates to a middle way. Instead of having the framework that Dave Watson suggested or the 32 plans that George Eckton suggested, could we have regional operations, whereby local authorities would work together rather than doing their own thing and having separate operations?

The Convener: We should deal with John Wilson's two questions separately. The best way of doing things would be to deal with the initial question about CPPs before we deal with the question about procurement and energy production. Who wants to have a go at responding to the question about CPPs?

I doubt that you want to answer, Mr Stevenson. Do you have something to add?

Stewart Stevenson: I just want to make the simple point that transport is a large and difficult area of policy. It is one of two policy areas in which performance has been adverse over the piece. We already have regional transport partnerships that are part of the local government family. What role do they have to play?

The Convener: Let us deal with the local government, CPP and RTP aspects first.

George Eckton: As far as localising is concerned, I think that there would be flexibility with regard to whether there would be 32 plans or seven or eight plans. I suppose that we could pick any number. We have strategic development plans, which cover 19 or 20 local authorities. They would give a place-based solution around our four city areas. We would then have 12 remaining councils that would have quite different, rural needs, which could be grouped accordingly.

The issue for leaders was devolution of decision making down to a local level at which they could engage with communities. It is clear that a solution that would work and drive most emissions reductions in Glasgow might not be suitable for, say, Argyll and Bute. Until we have a highly mature market for electric vehicles, with the best will in the world we will not see bus services resulting in a substitution of emissions in Argyll and Bute, because there is not a sufficiently high level of bus service there to enable that modal shift. Therefore, the community in Argyll and Bute might choose another way of making an emissions abatement. That would be a participatory process that involved the local community.

As far as RPPs and local priorities are concerned, waste management is a highly pertinent area. It is an area in which there might need to be economies of scale and shared services to drive further improvements. The Arbuthnott report dealt with the partnerships that exist in the Clyde valley. However, I do not think that having shared services across councils would

negate a devolution of responsibility and engagement below a single RPP. It would just represent a council perspective on the delivery of best value, just as in the RPP we have to reflect on what the UK Government is doing and what the European directives say. It would be a similar constraint, but there would be other areas in which local democratic decisions could be taken by communities.

The Convener: Can you also answer Mr Stevenson's question about regional transport partnerships?

George Eckton: The RTPs are taking forward particular initiatives, especially in connection with Transport Scotland's smarter choices, smarter places demonstration projects on behavioural change that were trialled across at least six of the RTPs. Those projects looked at different ways of engaging with communities in seeking to change people's behaviour. That was based on an Australian model of personalised marketing and engaging with communities and individuals to demonstrate what choices are available and how they might be utilised differently. The RTPs are taking forward initiatives, which could perhaps be grouped by exploiting the geography that is used for strategic development plans.

The Convener: Would it be fair to say that some RTPs have more buy-in from local authorities than others?

George Eckton: In terms of the political representation on RTPs, I do not think so.

The Convener: As a former chair of an RTP, I tend to disagree with you. If we are putting certain bodies in the driving seat—if you will excuse the pun—to deal with such issues, we need to ensure that they secure buy-in across the board. On where we should devolve that responsibility to, no one yet has really mentioned people or how they can engage with the various bodies.

Does Sylvia Gray also want to answer the question that was asked?

Sylvia Gray: I echo George Eckton in saying that there is a role both for the more regional approach and for being aware of local peculiarities. In this era of shared services, when the need for efficiency is emphasised more than ever before, we are all conscious of the need to collaborate in new ways. To an extent, regional collaboration happens naturally—we see that among our members in the SSN—but an important point that was crystallised in the research that we did in preparation for today is that we need to be aware that each local authority has its own particular needs and conditions, which sometimes mean that a local authority-based approach is required rather than something at a higher level.

David McCall: I can talk only as chair of a community trust, but I have some concerns about the relationship with the local council. We are well represented and supported by our MSPs, but the issue lies in the fact that we are left almost in isolation on occasions. If there was greater empathy or sympathy for, or in some ways a greater understanding of, what we are trying to achieve, that would help us to feel supported. The idea is that there should be engagement between local authorities and trusts. I may be going on a little about this, but I think that it is important that trusts are supported by local authorities in what they are trying to achieve, which is in effect about going back to the individuals and the community as a whole.

To give one example, recently we invested in a biomass boiler for heating some Nissen huts that we were developing at the time. The cost of that was pretty hefty, but the long-term transition will give us the benefit of greater economy. There will be an efficiency over the long term, but the initial cost was rather heavy. Had we had some support or investment, or acknowledgement of the issue by the local authority, there might have been an opportunity for joint engagement or joint benefit.

The Convener: Sylvia Gray made the point that control should be left with local authorities. Local authorities are smaller than the regional bodies, but some local authority areas include many diverse communities. We need some cohesion to ensure that we deal with issues in depth, but do you think that there should be further devolution of some of those responsibilities to local bodies such as your trust?

David McCall: Yes, that ought to be far greater. We engage as well and as much as we can with the local authority—do not get me wrong, as I think that a lot of positive work comes out of what goes on—but I feel that the community trust is far more proactive than the local authority is, although I may be biased on that. Devolution of certain responsibilities would be beneficial to the community.

Alistair MacDonald: The point about regional delivery picks up on my earlier point about how the national planning framework can be much more outcome based and focused on what it wants to achieve at the regional level.

On getting the community interested in changing, we have heard talk about a modal shift to cycling and walking. The Glasgow and Clyde valley strategic development plan has the Glasgow and Clyde valley green network, which is looking at connecting across the Clyde valley and to the central Scotland green network woodland project that has been under way for many years. Falkirk Council got the town planning award this year for the work that it has been doing for the

past 20 years on cycling and connecting path networks to the Forth and Clyde canal and the Union canal, which cut through the district.

That 20-year plan sought to change people's perceptions, and to encourage cycling and walking. It deals with communities that are sometimes disadvantaged and feel that they cannot access the countryside. In fact, the plan evolved into dealing with a hospital in Falkirk by giving those who were recovering in hospital access to a footpath network that allowed them to walk into the forest and spend some time in contemplation before coming back to the hospital.

We can work with communities in different ways to get the message across about how they can change the way in which they engage with the local area. We should all be aiming to ask whether people can walk or cycle from the edge of their town or city into the centre in a safe, reasonable and enjoyable way. That would be a challenge in many places at the moment, and it is one of the things that we should aim to achieve during the next 10, 15 or 20 years.

The Convener: We move on to the issues of procurement and electricity generation. Mr Watson caught my eye first.

Dave Watson: Stuart McMillan mentioned the third way, which always makes me nervous, so we should move on.

On procurement, I have only skimmed the SSN document, but it contains some good examples. South Ayrshire Council is highlighted as an example of trying to incorporate procurement into the reporting process. However, the SSN shows that there are isolated examples but they are not being followed through across every local authority in Scotland.

Later this year, MSPs will have the opportunity to lead on the issue when they discuss the proposed procurement bill. You will understand that SCCS is a bit concerned at the dropping of the word "sustainable" from the title of the bill; let us hope that that does not mean that sustainable procurement will be missing from the substance of the bill when it comes before Parliament.

John Wilson made a particular point about energy. One of the problems with energy in Scotland is that, unlike what happens in some other European countries, it is being driven by the big energy companies. Examples such as David McCall's project are the exception, particularly in urban Scotland. In fairness to some of the power companies, they tried to develop local initiatives and joint ventures in urban areas but they struggled to get community buy-in. For example, there are some good models in Denmark, where local authorities have a big role in generating local energy. They also encourage co-operative

developments, as well as genuine community buy-in. I was at an event in this very building that was looking at an island in Denmark on which half of a big offshore wind farm was developed by a local authority and the other half was developed by co-ops.

There is, of course, the issue of the grid and grid access is often a key problem with getting such projects off the ground. Denmark benefits from having a state-owned grid, which is something that we strongly support, although I might upset Margaret Mitchell with that point. We would see it as development if we had a different way of organising our energy in Scotland and included our local authorities. It used to be that the local authority was the gas company and the coal company; energy generation was a local authority function and, if we got back to that, there would be some real benefits and it would support climate change policy.

The Convener: George Eckton might want to come in on that point. Dave Watson has widened the procurement point beyond energy. Could you give us some examples of good procurement practice in the buying of local food? Local food is normally of a better quality and such procurement tends to cut down the scares that we have had recently, such as horsemeat entering the food chain.

11:30

George Eckton: I will try my best, although it is not a topic that is covered by my team in COSLA; it is covered by a colleague's team.

Dave Watson was quite correct in saying that the local authority used to be the energy company. That function was taken from local authorities and only given back two and a half years ago. Previously, we could generate energy from the burning of waste but the cross-party zero waste Scotland agenda means that local authorities wish to do that only as a final available option, although Shetland is generating energy for a very successful district heating system by burning waste.

Local authorities are actively engaged in pushing local energy generation where they can, but the projects can be quite big and can take more than two or three years to get off the ground. Also, they have been able to do that only for the past 18 to 24 months.

I freely admit that food procurement is not my area of expertise. I think that many local authorities try to buy as much as they can as locally as they can within the procurement regulations and the matrix on which they let their contract. The issue is quality versus cost and how much local authorities can specify one over the

other and discriminate against suppliers in the context of a European regulation that tries to enable free competition.

The Convener: I am sure that we will look at food miles when we consider the proposed procurement bill. It is an important issue for carbon reduction.

Janice Pauwels: The SSN has been running a sustainable procurement working group for a number of years, and it would be fair to say that we have struggled with the issue at times. It is very technical and complex and the group is made up of a diverse range of representatives from the Scottish Government, Scotland Excel, health boards, council procurement officers and sustainability officers. We need better case studies and examples of good practice to share across the different public bodies. Where we can see possible synergies in procurement activities, those would be extremely useful. Ultimately, we are procuring a lot of the same commodity, whether it be food contracts or office consumables. We need better joined-up working and we have revamped the sustainable procurement working group to seek to implement such working.

Edinburgh has a food for life project, which is a three-year programme of work with NHS Lothian and the University of Edinburgh that looks at sustainability in food procurement and supply chain issues.

John Wilson: We seem to be focusing on local authorities but I am aware that there are a number of other public bodies. We talked about the 32 local authority RPPs, but we have health boards and Scottish Water. Not far from where I live, Scottish Water has a biomass plant. It is producing ethanol and supplying it back to some of the local authorities that bring their waste into the plant to use in their vehicles. How far are the local authorities and the sustainable networks going to include other public sector organisations? That would get economies of scale from the initiatives that are taking place.

As I said, Scottish Water is recycling waste and that is a good example of Scottish Water working with several local authorities in the North Lanarkshire area. The initiative is benefiting Scottish Water and its energy use as well as benefiting some of those local authorities and their vehicle management structures, particularly for refuse vehicles.

The Convener: Sylvia, would you like to discuss that in relation to cross-cutting co-operation between public bodies?

Sylvia Gray: I will start by describing my experience at East Dunbartonshire Council. I think I speak for every other council when I say that co-operation with other public sector bodies has been a long-held priority for local authorities, especially through community planning partnerships. It makes sense that what we do in our organisation should not be limited to our organisation's boundaries, and that we should share experiences and ideas as much as we can. In East Dunbartonshire we have had some interesting partnership working opportunities with Scottish Water—which you mentioned—regarding food composting education as part of school work and so on.

That approach has been coming sharply into focus for the SSN recently, and it has been a long-held aspect of our work. Through the renewed funding that we got from the Scottish Government last April, we are broadening our reach beyond local authorities. The SSN is now a network for the wider public sector. It is still relatively early days for working out what our strategy will be, who we engage with and how we will implement it, but it is now officially the SSN's remit to reach beyond local authorities.

The Convener: I saw Mr Pentland's eyes light up again when community planning partnerships were mentioned. I am sure that folk will remember what he said earlier in that regard.

Anne McTaggart: I am aware that RPP2 offers some best-practice case studies. Should RPP2 provide a framework in which examples of best practice may be shared throughout the public sector? If so, what needs to be included? I think that George Eckton mentioned templates for local authorities—or perhaps it was not George who mentioned that.

The Convener: I think that it was Dave Watson.

George Eckton: It was.

Anne McTaggart: In asking that question I appreciate that every local authority will be different.

George Eckton: Considering our approach on a number of pertinent issues, and specifically on the subject of energy generation by local authorities, we organised best-practice sessions for dissemination at a major conference a few years back, which Aberdeen City Council kindly hosted on our behalf.

In addition, the Scottish Government funded the Scottish Futures Trust to do a piece of work, which was an attempt to do the technical work once for officers and members. A 200-page, broad framework document was produced, which suggested what councils could do to generate their own energy and take all the risks at one end. It offered a set of templates for how to go about that, how to engage and how to structure the contracts. At the other end of the scale, it was indicated what could still be done by risk-averse

authorities. Councils are all different, and they might not have the ability to generate their own energy by working in partnership through an energy contract.

Scottish Water was represented at that conference, and gave a very interesting presentation about what it had done corporately. That was available for all councils to take away. It was a starting point, and it stopped the SSN having to do the same work 32 times. The conference was delivered by a partnership between COSLA, the SSN and the Scottish Council for Development and Industry.

We are trying to do that with street lighting, too, through the Scottish cities alliance. There is a history of trying to do such things once and well, and then enabling local dissemination.

Dave Watson: That is a good example of what we are talking about. We are not talking about a rigid description. The template idea means that a range of options can fit the needs of individual local authorities. Food was mentioned earlier, and I can give a practical example. Some years ago, East Ayrshire Council had a very good approach to the local sourcing of food. I have now mentioned three councils, each of a different political leadership, just to show a nice rounded approach to the exercise—and so that I did not miss out a Scottish National Party council at the end. East Ayrshire has a very good track record in that regard. We developed something with catering staff in schools called the food for good charter, which set out how to do things under that template model. When we did that, our catering members in health boards said that they could buy into it, too. They got interested in it and started raising the matter at a health board level.

Scottish Water presents an opportunity. There is the hydro nation concept, although the proposals are a bit modest and we would like them to be on a bigger scale . Remember that Scottish Water is the biggest user of electricity in Scotland. If we are going to tackle climate change, Scottish Water has to be involved in climate change solutions, not just internally but in a bigger way, given the scale of its operations, the land that it owns and its involvement in many aspects of our lives.

The Convener: Does anyone want to comment on the point about a best-practice template? From what we heard about the SSN's work, I imagine that you could come up with a broad idea to share with folks across the country.

Sylvia Gray: It is fair to say that sharing best practice is the life-blood of the SSN, in many ways. It is something that we have always done and which we like to think that we do quite well. There are many opportunities for gathering and sharing information. Events such as annual conferences—George Eckton mentioned last year's conferences—offer a way of capturing case studies and sharing them. There is an onus on everyone to be aware of the resource that is available and to make the best use of it.

The Convener: How do you share information with people who are not members of the 32 local authorities, such as David McCall's organisation, which seems to be doing quite well? How do you interact with trusts? Do you leave that up to your individual local authority members?

Sylvia Gray: I suppose that information would cascade down to members, perhaps initially through the SSN, to encourage them to use the channels of communication in their organisations to reach out to community groups. I think that it was Mr Wilson who said that it is not always easy to reach out to groups. Sometimes the ones that we most want to reach are the hardest to get access to. It is fair to say that the SSN regards it as a priority to get better intelligence about the connections between councils and community groups and how we can make best use of and expand them.

Janice Pauwels: Previously, there was a small team in the SSN, which was covering a fair bit of ground. Communication was always a high priority, but now that we have more resources there is potential to develop case studies and share information more widely. We depend on information that comes in from representatives across the 32 councils, so we rely on a one-way flow of information, to some extent. We can pick the issue up—indeed, that is in our plans. We have not given real thought to whether there should be a template, but we could perhaps look at that.

The Convener: I do not want you to name and shame anyone, but are there councils that are really bad at communicating with the SSN?

Janice Pauwels: Communication varies, depending on the issue and its relevance to the council. It is fair to say that no council is really bad. We have the means of communicating and we can do so if we need to.

Alistair MacDonald: I have two points: one on Scottish Water and one on best practice or toolkits.

Following the devastating floods in the east end of Glasgow a number of years back, we set up, with Scottish Water and others, the metropolitan Glasgow strategic drainage partnership, which looked at all the catchment areas around Glasgow, at regional level. From that came sustainable urban drainage, particularly in new developments in the east end. Scottish Water is also moving in with new drainage networks in that

part of the city. We have had a successful partnership with Scottish Water.

In our submission, we talked about the RTPI's commitment to tackling climate change and how we celebrate best practice through our national awards. We also compile a compendium of best practice. We have not only 2,000 RTPI members in Scotland but 23,000 members across the world, and we hope to use them as a way of promoting best practice in planning and in planning communities.

11:45

Stuart McMillan: Following on from the convener's question and Janice Pauwels's response, I wonder whether, without naming and shaming, anyone can give us examples of local authorities that have not been very good at communicating with community organisations.

Janice Pauwels: To be honest, I am not sure that I can answer that question. We have not really done any research on that issue.

John Pentland: Returning to Janice Pauwels's comment about good, bad and indifferent reporting mechanisms in some local authorities, I have to say that I am concerned about those who are finding this really difficult. Is that because they do not have the tools or the expertise or because the cuts to local government mean that they have other priorities than delivering on climate change?

Janice Pauwels: Resourcing is always an issue. Responsibility for sustainability or climate change varies across the network; it might be a planning and regeneration function, it might be corporate or it might sit with environmental services. Some councils might have only one officer trying to pick up this work and deliver the programme, the tasks or whatever. As we know, other councils are better resourced and might have teams of officers who can cover more ground. That kind of variation can arise depending on council resources.

That said, the declaration reports that we have seen suggest that all the local authorities are being active on this matter. Positive work is being carried out, despite the pressure on resources.

The Convener: On my earlier point about the sharing of information, is knowledge of both the monetary savings and the carbon reduction that can be achieved being shared by local authorities that have looked at the issue in greater depth? Beyond that, are there any authorities where such work has been completely embedded in the organisation because the carbon reduction champion—or indeed champions—has had free rein in the matter?

Janice Pauwels: The SSN runs quarterly meetings, which usually focus on a particular topic. From that, SSN staff use our website to provide or share, say, case studies or information on specific cost saving issues. I suppose that there is always room for improvement but, generally speaking, I think that the quarterlies would be our vehicle for tackling a particular issue and getting examples of good practice that can be shared. They are a means of communication.

The Convener: But my question goes beyond seeking examples of good practice to finding out whether there is any real overview of what is being done. I hate to use the term "business plan", but are there any examples of business plans that have been put in place to continue the reductions in carbon and, indeed, reductions in cost?

Let me give you an example. I know from work in which I was previously involved that replacement of boilers in various buildings leads to revenue savings which, in turn, leads to money being available to cover the capital costs for more new boilers—and so on and so on. One would think that a corporate view would be taken on such things. Has any local authority looked at that corporately?

Janice Pauwels: I am not sure about any local authority doing that corporately. The SSN is quite good at networking with the networks. For example, there is a Scottish energy officers network. Information comes from that into the SSN. It might concern energy efficiency measures or another energy-related issue. We can take that information and share it.

I am not sure whether I am answering your question, but having links with different networks means that the SSN almost acts as a central point of communication.

The Convener: We heard some evidence the other week from Robert Black and John Arbuthnott. One of them—I think that it was Robert Black—talked about creating a space in which people can think and exchange ideas. We have such spaces all over the place—networks, as they are called—but, sometimes, none of the good practice is shared.

There is room for the SSN to move much further in that regard and conduct a real analysis of what is going on so that a lot of the good work can be replicated. It would be interesting to see who is at the forefront of that work and whether they have considered it in the manner about which I am talking: making a business case not only for the carbon reductions but for the savings, which could be reinvested to do even more.

I am sorry for keeping Sylvia Gray waiting for so long.

Sylvia Gray: It is okay. I have a couple of things to comment on now. I will start chronologically.

I indicated that I wanted to come in because I wanted to comment on the back of what Janice Pauwels said about communication. I think that the question was about the sharing of best practice and the differences in how councils engage and participate in that.

It is important to note that a new opportunity for us to better understand individual councils' needs comes with the new staff team that Janice Pauwels mentioned. We spoke earlier about the fact that councils have their own peculiar conditions, which can include practical issues such as geography and the numbers in each sustainability team in councils.

One of the big opportunities that we have to share information through the SSN is at the annual conference. For various reasons relating to geography, budgets and staff teams, some councils tend to be better represented than others. However, through our new staff resource, we can engage with authorities throughout Scotland to understand better how we can engage with those councils that, traditionally, have not had the same practical opportunities to take part in such events.

On finance systems and budgets, we spoke earlier about the climate change declaration and the requirements within the reporting template. This year, the template has become a bit stricter and tighter in what it asks for. One of the questions within it relates to how low-carbon projects, especially within a council's own corporate emissions, are financed.

I expect that we will get a lot of useful intelligence through that process that we might not have had before. That will allow us to pull out the sorts of examples of best practice about which you asked, examine where they are happening and not happening and, in turn, share that information.

David McCall: My comments relate to communication and good practice as well.

We face a lot of issues in trying to get out to the community and advise people about what is going on. Equally, we try to do it with the local council. We do not find that that is successful. There are issues with that, but I hope that we will be able to get a two-way process going, rather than a one-way process, which we have at this point.

We work very much with DTAS because it is the representative body and I am somewhat surprised that you have not had a representative from it at the committee today. Councils could engage with DTAS far more, and I would certainly encourage them to do so.

The Convener: I call John Wilson.

John Wilson: My question is on a different issue.

The Convener: We can move on.

John Wilson: I will try to tease out the planning issues to which the Royal Town Planning Institute and Stop Climate Chaos referred. The convener referred to food miles and procuring food locally, and Alistair MacDonald referred to the growth in demand for houses—no matter who is creating that demand, it has been identified that more houses need to be built. How do we square the circle of trying to get our policies and priorities right in relation to climate change, when at the same time we see greater encroachment on the green belt rather than the use of brownfield sites?

Alistair MacDonald referred to town centre areas. A number of local authorities are beginning to review their policies on developing housing in town centres. Several years ago, Glasgow City Council did a lot of work on inner city residential developments. How do we get across the message about protecting the environment while dealing with the pressures and demands that are being made to create more residences in green belt areas? That drives people into their cars to commute, as the houses are being built outwith existing commuting areas.

Alistair MacDonald: I suppose that that goes back to my earlier point that there is an opportunity to tie in the issues that we have discussed with the national planning framework 3, so that it is not just a policy-driven document but has firm outcomes relating to the difficult decisions with which we will be faced in the next 10 to 15 years about where we grow our communities and provide new housing. The RTPI certainly recommends a greater connection with NPF3. As part of the process for NPF3, we have already made a submission that we feel that there is a greater need for that connection.

It could be that a combination of things are happening. If we are to have compact cities and towns, with densities around the main communication networks, we will need to use land that is perhaps derelict or vacant. Much of that land will be contaminated, so infrastructure funding is needed for local authorities to decontaminate the land and take it to the marketplace. That combination needs to be considered. The funding for infrastructure and decontamination will release the ability to get density in towns and cities.

The point about the reuse of existing buildings and the movement to use property above shops in towns is important. We have certainly encouraged that in Glasgow for many years. Such buildings, which allow people to have small two-bedroom flats in town centres, should be actively

considered. However, some town centres are controlled by large companies, which might have whole buildings within their portfolios and which might not be keen on releasing the upper floors for other uses because that would affect their ability to sell the building 10 or 15 years down the line. That point should be taken on board.

Dave Watson: We emphasise that planning is the key. Alistair MacDonald is probably being more diplomatic than I would be, but we should recognise the range of pressures that planning departments are under, not least of which is staffing pressure. We need to recognise that planning is key. I agree that we need to build in the approach to the new planning guidance. However, we need to recognise that planning works on a long timeframe. It is all very well looking at RPP1 and RPP2, but many of the planning decisions that we make now will probably affect RPP4, RPP5 and God knows what else. Therefore we have to get the timescale right.

One specific thing that we have suggested to the committee that needs to happen is that planning frameworks and development plans need to show explicitly how they will cut carbon emissions. Many of them give a broad description or narrative on that, but we need to be much more explicit about showing how development plans will cut emissions. We have given a couple of examples, such as Freiburg, which is a good overseas example. We need to get that right. Rather than out-of-town shopping centres, we need to consider how to develop a hub around work and homes, with the transport around that. If we start to plan in that way, we will start to get serious about cutting carbon emissions.

12:00

Alistair MacDonald: Just like companies in the private sector, local authorities have had to look at resources and that is what we are doing. We will go through a challenging period, but we will still have the expertise to give out advice.

On my earlier point about the local development plan, each of the 32 authorities must have its own particular local development plan—or, in some cases, several local development plans—within its geographical area. We have discussed with Heads of Planning and the planning regeneration section of Government in the past whether the strategic spatial development plans should be more proactive in identifying areas and making the hard choices about where future growth will take place. That would set the scene in a much more outcome-focused manner for the local development plan to follow and it would make it an easier process.

I did not mention before that the process for land release and where that takes place becomes very adversarial. We should be looking at a regional planning option and tying it back into the national framework to avoid the end stop, which is some poor planner with a pile of reports on his desk having to deal with a housing release of, for example, 2,500 homes. He has everyone coming at him from all directions—to grant it, refuse it, stall it and so on. We need to take the heat out of that somehow and take that back up to a regional level, linked back into the national planning framework.

The Convener: I return to the local level, because you talked about local development plans. At the end of the day, those are decided by councillors. How engaged are councillors in this carbon reduction process? Do local elected members realise their responsibilities in this area and is it up there with their many other competing priorities?

Sylvia Gray: I return to my initial point. Through the RPP process, the issue of climate change is moving up the agenda and it is now recognised at high levels.

The Convener: If we went to Dunbartonshire, how many of your local elected members would know what we were talking about if we mentioned RPP1 and RPP2?

Sylvia Gray: They might not know about them in those terms but, when you got down to the details, they would have experience in aspects of them, especially when we have been able to show that climate change relates to other priorities such as spend and health. One of the big messages that we try to promote is that climate change is not an issue that you can pigeonhole; it cuts across a lot of different aspects of local government life and even wider than that. If we can couch it in such terms, it is relevant to elected members. I would like to think that our own local elected members and others across Scotland are engaged enough to recognise that.

Janice Pauwels: I am not sure how familiar local elected members are with the terms RPP1 or RPP2. Certainly within my council there is interest in the carbon agenda, but mainly in the sense of where there is potential for saving on the budgets. That becomes a hook. However, once you have that interest, you can have briefings that widen out the debate.

A lot of the elected members understand the wider issues. The relevance tends to be within the individual portfolios. For example, our convener might have the housing portfolio and would be interested in domestic energy—naturally enough. We need to do more as officers to get across the broader perspective around the carbon agenda so

that members can see synergies across the different areas and so that we get more of a corporate perspective on it.

Alistair MacDonald: I will not speak on behalf of George Eckton; I can describe my experiences only from a Glasgow City Council background. We are talking about changing people's attitudes, at the local level, to climate change and to food and where it comes from. It is about how we deal with the schools system and how we educate young children. How do we get adults and children to use bikes? There was a time when bike use was popular. That does not seem to be the case now, so how do we change people's perceptions? All sorts of initiatives are happening at the local level in various communities throughout the city.

In planning terms, for the past couple of years we have been working on a stalled spaces initiative, which relates to the fact that, when developers stop work on housing sites as a result of the recession, they may not return for another five years or they may not pick them up again at all. We bring together developers and the local community with a small seed budget and get an agreement from the developer to lease the site or allow the community to use it for two or three years. In one instance, the land is being used as a mountain bike track. Lots of them have been picked up for food growing. We have had real successes dotted across the city. We are seeing communities engaging and growing their own food. We have even got one in the High Street, next to the merchant city, where disparate communities come together to grow their own food, with older members of the community teaching the younger members—

The Convener: That is a community-driven initiative, which is excellent, but I was asking about local elected members.

Alistair MacDonald: The members are involved in the initiative.

The Convener: Are they a help or a hindrance?

Alistair MacDonald: I would say that they are a help. They can see the positive benefits in the local community. There is an increase in the number of allotments, which is another positive feature that is supported by local members in the city.

Dave Watson: My earlier comments on leadership included political leadership as well as chief executives and other chief officials. The reality is that it is patchy. There are individual champions. I can think of some councils that have championed initiatives and have been involved politically and otherwise in the issues.

We need to recognise that these issues are often difficult for local councils because a lot of them, particularly when they relate to planning, involve some pretty tough political decisions. If you have a difficult planning application and you have to make a judgment on environmental and carbon-cutting grounds, it might involve having to make some unpopular decisions.

What the politicians need here is a bit of help. If they can broaden the engagement, get the community engaged in their local plan and explain what they are trying to do, it is much easier. Rather than an initiative being seen as something imposed on people from above, everybody in the community should understand that it is something that we need to do. It puts the political decision into context.

Stewart Stevenson: I want to pick up on what Dave Watson said about decisions that are unpopular now but which will lead in strategically favourable directions. What role is there for those who are here today to build public support for decisions that politicians of all political flavours will find difficult to make?

My hobby-horse, which I will now speak about in public, is reducing speed limits. It is the cheapest, most effective way of reducing carbon output and yet it is almost impossible for politicians to engage with it. That is an example of how one is not making a free choice that strategically addresses the issues. How can we, as politicians, help you guys and others in civic Scotland to get more public support for what are currently unpopular but potentially hugely beneficial decisions on this issue?

The Convener: Dave Watson brought that up, so he can deal with that one.

Dave Watson: Indeed. A good example is when you asked us whether people understand what RPP1 and RPP2 mean. The honest answer is that, although we know, because we are the anoraks on the subject, very few other people would. That is part of the problem. If you asked a member of the public, they would say, "What the hell is that?" We need to talk in a much more practical language about the issue, and to have that broader engagement. Alistair MacDonald gave the example of people dropping kids off at school and not using bikes. Those are all very difficult things to deal with, but we all have a role in broadening the engagement. The SSN has a role in educating elected officials to persuade them and explain the broader context.

At the end of the day, though, it is down to us, politically and in community terms, to explain the need for change and put it into context. We are not delivering on climate change cuts. We need only look at the change in the weather, the speed at which the Arctic ice cap is melting and many other things. People can start to see that, and we need

to broaden it out and say that if we are going to do something about these things, it will involve some hard decisions at local level.

There are also practical aspects. Some of these things can save money for local authorities, such as the green workplace initiatives that we were talking about. That is a good, positive thing.

The Convener: Does David McCall want to comment on the issue of councillors and Stewart Stevenson's question about how you can help us to deal with some of the unpopular decisions?

David McCall: I refer to Dave Watson's and Alistair MacDonald's comments about planning. One of our biggest issues with Cultybraggan Camp is planning. We have been pushing in many areas to develop work-live developments and eco hubs. Because we were not part of the local development plan, we have been unable to contribute at a point at which it would have been beneficial to listen to what we had to say. In effect, we are chasing our tails now, looking to offer solutions to the climate challenge but having to comply with the local development plan. That does not add up. It is about working from the community level up rather than the other way.

The Convener: George Eckton.

George Eckton: Thank you for coming to me last.

The Convener: Maybe we were leaving the best till last.

George Eckton: I do not think that even my wife would agree with that.

On councillors' awareness, I would agree with Janice Pauwels—yes, on certain issues. I would agree with Dave Watson that RPP2 is a very technical document. Where it points is that a refresh is needed of the public engagement strategy so that it outlines the themes and makes an existing councillor or, probably more pertinently, a new councillor, aware, in high-level, strategic terms, of how those themes relate to the thematic priorities in the document.

Through "Connections", COSLA's electronic communication with its members, there is detail on each of the convention papers, so that information is now given to every councillor in Scotland. I will be responsible for writing the one on RPP2, and next month councillors will be aware about what the document means and what the pertinent decisions are to be taken.

On community engagement and taking difficult decisions at local level, anyone who is or has been a local councillor will know that they take decisions on difficult issues all the time.

On behavioural change, I do not think that we are at the point yet at which councillors are saying,

"We need to induce fear tactics." The whole population still has to go through a process of change. It is similar to how we engage with different groups at different times through that process.

Mr Stevenson raised the issue of speed limits. There are things that are politically unpalatable but which may need to come on to the table over the next few years. Tough choices will need to be made. People may need to turn their heating down because energy costs will have risen so much.

To summarise, I would say that councillors are prepared to take difficult decisions. There are things that the whole public sector, the whole community and civic Scotland can do to support decisions being taken at local level.

The Convener: Thank you. I thank everyone for giving us their time today. It has been very useful. We might have questions about issues that we have not covered today, so do not be surprised if the clerks drop you a wee note.

12:14

Meeting continued in private until 13:03.

Members who would like a printed copy of the *Official Report* to be forwarded to them should give notice to SPICe.