



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

INFRASTRUCTURE AND CAPITAL INVESTMENT COMMITTEE

Wednesday 26 June 2013

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INFRASTRUCTURE AND CAPITAL INVESTMENT COMMITTEE

15th Meeting 2013, Session 4

CONVENER

*Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

Adam Ingram (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Jim Eadie (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)

*Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con)

*Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)

*Margaret McCulloch (Central Scotland) (Lab)

*Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Margaret Burgess (Minister for Housing and Welfare)

David Fotheringham (Scottish Government)

Andy Robinson (Scottish Government)

Steven Scott (Scottish Government)

Valerie Sneddon (Scottish Government)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Steve Farrell

LOCATION

Committee Room 6

Scottish Parliament

Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee

Wednesday 26 June 2013

[The Convener *opened the meeting at 10:00*]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Maureen Watt): Good morning and welcome to the 15th meeting in 2013 of the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee, the last meeting prior to the summer recess. Members are reminded to switch off all mobile devices, as they affect the broadcasting system, although some members of the committee may consult tablets during the meeting.

We have apologies from Adam Ingram; Gil Paterson has been delayed because of an overrun of the Health and Sport Committee's meeting.

Agenda item 1 is on taking an item in private. I seek the committee's agreement to take item 5 in private, to allow the committee to consider its work programme.

Members *indicated agreement.*

Sustainable Housing Strategy

10:01

The Convener: Agenda item 2 is evidence from the Minister for Housing and Welfare on the sustainable housing strategy. I welcome Margaret Burgess, the minister; David Fotheringham, team leader in the Scottish Government's housing sustainability and innovative funding division; Andy Robinson, head of home energy efficiency programmes, area-based schemes; Steven Scott, principal architect in the building standards division; and Valerie Sneddon, team leader for housing stock, quality and private sector climate change regulation.

I invite the minister to make an opening statement.

The Minister for Housing and Welfare (Margaret Burgess): Thank you, convener, for inviting me to talk about "Scotland's Sustainable Housing Strategy", which was launched on Friday. I emphasise at the outset that the strategy was developed with major input from the sustainable housing strategy group, which was made up of stakeholders from the areas of housing, fuel poverty, the environment and consumer protection, and it builds on the major consultation exercise that we undertook last year.

The strategy sets out a vision for everyone in Scotland to have the opportunity to live in a warm, high-quality, affordable, low-carbon home. It is an ambitious strategy, but it is a way of meeting the needs of people who are in fuel poverty and our commitments on climate change. It presents a real opportunity to create jobs in the low-carbon economy. As energy prices continue to rise, the Scottish Government is making sustainable housing a high priority. We need to reduce people's energy bills and carbon emissions. With the current powers of the devolved Parliament, the only way that we can do that is by improving energy efficiency.

We have already made considerable progress. Since 2008, more than one in five households in Scotland have received free or subsidised insulation for their lofts or cavity walls. That is not enough, however, and more needs to be done. We are building on the success that has been achieved through our home energy efficiency programmes for Scotland, or HEEPS for short. HEEPS is the Scottish Government's national initiative for retrofitting Scotland's housing stock and helping those who are in need to heat their homes for less.

Despite Westminster's cuts to the Scottish Government's capital budget, we are investing £79 million in HEEPS. We aim to make Scotland an

attractive place for the energy companies to meet their energy companies obligation—ECO—thereby creating a £200 million annual investment that will create jobs across Scotland.

The strategy recognises the need to consider minimum energy efficiency standards for existing private sector homes, and a working group is now in place to develop that. We are working with the Scottish Housing Regulator to ensure that all social housing meets the Scottish housing quality standard by 2015. Later this year, we will publish the new energy efficiency standard for social housing, which will set out the first milestones for 2020.

We want to transform the market for sustainable housing. We want people to think about energy efficiency when they choose the home that they are going to buy or rent. In response to a European directive, we recently introduced legislation that requires the energy performance of homes to be included in adverts. It is important to build on that. We will work with lenders and surveyors to consider the evidence and to move forward the market for more sustainable homes.

Existing homes form the bulk of our housing stock, and it is right that they have to be our priority. However, we must also consider the new homes that we build and the legacy that they will represent. Alongside proposals for further improvement to energy performance through our building regulations, we want to work with the industry to ensure that the innovative design and construction techniques that are being developed here in Scotland deliver more sustainable homes and create export opportunities and other economic opportunities. We have already announced £13.5 million of investment in greener homes, using modern construction methods to build more than 300 affordable homes.

It is not right that, in an energy-rich nation such as Scotland, people are still struggling to pay their fuel bills. The strategy sets out our vision for how we will help people to reduce their fuel bills—focusing on those who are most in need—tackle fuel poverty and reduce our carbon emissions.

I am happy to answer questions from the committee.

The Convener: During the discussions on “Low Carbon Scotland: Meeting our Emissions Reduction Targets 2013-2027: The Second Report on Proposals and Policies”, or RPP2, the Scottish Government emphasised the importance of leveraging in funding through schemes such as the energy companies obligation. Could you provide an update on the most recent interactions with the obligated utility companies in their work with the Scottish Government and local authorities?

Margaret Burgess: Officials meet representatives of the utility companies on a regular basis—twice a year bilaterally, and also collectively through quarterly meetings. The three biggest utility companies that we work with—Scottish Gas, Scottish Power and SSE—are all members of the Scottish fuel poverty forum. It last met on 18 June, when its members discussed how the ECO is to be delivered. There is regular interaction with the companies. We are confident that they want to work with us, and we want to work with them to ensure that we can get the most out of them.

The Convener: It is hoped that, with energy supplier funding, the Scottish Government will be able to deliver a total of about £200 million in annual expenditure. Can you provide details on the level of funding that Scotland has received from the energy companies so far?

Margaret Burgess: The money that the Scottish Government has submitted into HEEPS has now been distributed to local authorities, which are working up programmes with the energy companies for the schemes that they are producing. Authorities have told us that, for the money that we have allocated so far, they hope to bring in £125 million. That is the figure that they are working on for the schemes that they are putting together—and that is not using all the £60 million for HEEPS. We are confident that we will make that.

The affordable warmth scheme, the energy assistance package and other schemes attract the energy companies obligation, and we think that we are on track to make that total. In the previous Scottish programmes under the carbon emissions reduction target—CERT—scheme, 540,000 households got more than 600,000 measures installed. We got more than our share of CERT for our population: we have 9.4 per cent of the population, and we got 10.4 per cent of the CERT allocation. We are confident that we will still get our share or more than our share from the energy companies.

The Convener: That is only right, as it is a few degrees colder here.

Margaret Burgess: Absolutely.

The Convener: You mention the three major companies. We had a submission from Calor Gas. In the consultation that preceded the strategy, the Scottish Government asked a specific question about how to improve energy efficiency in rural areas, most of which, if not all, are off grid. However, that issue does not seem to have been clearly continued into the strategy document. Can you explain why that is the case?

Margaret Burgess: The strategy relates to all of Scotland, with every house in Scotland having

measures installed against fuel poverty. We are considering different ways to address that. We started out with the easier measures, through which we knew we could get a high volume done. We are now moving on to the harder-to-treat properties, which cost more. In particular, we are considering properties in rural areas.

The fuel poverty forum is well aware of the issues in rural areas and the challenges that we face. However, the strategy is for the whole of Scotland and does not leave out any rural area. All the rural councils have received a share of the HEEPS funding and will be working up their programmes for that. David Fotheringham might want to say something further on that.

David Fotheringham (Scottish Government): Yes, just briefly. The minister has made the point that I was going to make—that all 32 local authorities have been awarded allocations under HEEPS, so it will apply right across the country. Local authorities have a lot of discretion about the areas that they target and can focus on fuel-poor areas.

The energy companies obligation contains a specific rural element to try to ensure that some of the ECO is targeted on rural areas. That obligation, combined with our funding, should help to address some of the problems that are faced in rural areas.

Margaret McCulloch (Central Scotland (Lab): A property cannot be carbon efficient if it does not meet other criteria—for instance, if the windows or doors need to be fixed or the roof is in disrepair. What is the Government doing to encourage property owners to get such properties to an acceptable level of carbon efficiency? There is not much point putting in cavity wall or roof insulation if the rest of the property needs repair.

Margaret Burgess: To start with, an assessment will be carried out to determine what insulation measures are required. In some instances, that can include double glazing or windows. We are currently considering the general state of repair of properties through the private sector strategy. We are even considering whether we need, in the proposed housing bill, to give local authorities more power to ensure that properties are up to a tolerable standard. In terms of the carbon measures, therefore, an assessment will be carried out to see what can be done. Clearly, fitting double-glazed windows to walls that are going to fall in would not meet the criteria, so that is part of our overall housing strategy.

Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab): What were the criteria for the funding that you say has already been allocated to local authorities? Was funding allocated on the basis of bids or after an assessment of the degree of fuel poverty?

Margaret Burgess: To start with, the distribution was made according to a formula that was agreed with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. That was written down. I would have to look for it, but it was based on, for instance, the number of fuel-poor households in the local authority area, the percentage of the population that is fuel poor and the share of dwellings that have solid walls or hard-to-treat cavity walls—that is, the hard-to-treat properties. A figure was set aside for every local authority based on that formula. When the strategy was launched, we announced the amount that each local authority area will get. That took up £46 million, if I am right.

On the balance of the £60 million for HEEPS—the area-based part—local authorities can apply for additional funds if they work up the programme. Therefore, local authorities know the amount that they have been allocated and they negotiate with energy companies to bring in what they need for their particular scheme.

Elaine Murray: So is it down to the local authority to determine what area it tackles first in spending the money? Is it a local authority decision, rather than part of a bidding process?

Margaret Burgess: No—the local authorities fought for their share of the £46 million part of HEEPS. The formula also provided that local authorities could get only up to 10 per cent less than the universal home insulation scheme money that they previously had. Some local authorities were planning in advance, so they came in with their proposals for projects. Obviously, different local authorities have different local circumstances that determine need. That applies to some of the rural issues as well.

Elaine Murray: I detect something of a hiatus at the moment because, although people knew what the previous scheme was, nobody is quite sure how they will qualify to be on the new scheme. Do you have any idea of the timescales?

10:15

Margaret Burgess: I think that I am right in saying that all local authorities have put in bids; indeed, I can give the committee some examples. Glasgow got the highest percentage—Aberdeenshire was the second highest—and the bids were for cavity wall, loft, solid wall and external insulation. On the other hand, I think that Aberdeen's bids related to boilers. It all comes down to what local authorities require to meet their obligations, and they choose those areas.

Elaine Murray: Have the local authorities indicated when the programme will start to roll out?

Margaret Burgess: I think that Andy Robinson will be able to answer that.

Andy Robinson (Scottish Government): I might be able to give the committee some information. Local authorities were advised just last week of the funding that they received in the first round, and we expect them to start to put measures in place on the ground. Some of them will be in the middle of procurement processes, while others will have carried out their procurement, and it is likely that they will start contacting households in selected areas very soon—in the next few weeks, I would imagine.

Jim Eadie (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP): Minister, your sustainable housing strategy sets out an ambitious home energy efficiency programme, and in your introductory remarks you alluded to the opportunities that it will create for reducing our carbon emissions and promoting sustainable economic growth and employment. Given the opportunities in the programme to increase the number of homes that are eligible for home insulation and energy schemes, how will we be able to protect the public from unscrupulous companies, some of whom will claim to be local authority and Scottish Government-accredited when they are not? What sanctions are available against companies that behave irresponsibly? Will there be any role for the trusted trader scheme that is to be developed and administered at local authority level?

Margaret Burgess: We do not expect the trusted trader scheme to be a national scheme; instead, the intention is that it will be used locally in areas where consumer advice centres and local authorities have worked with traders in the past. After all, they will know which traders in their area can be trusted. In any case, most of the schemes—certainly the Government schemes—are being administered through the Energy Saving Trust in the energy advice centres, and the centres will, with individuals and local authorities, build up lists of traders who can be trusted.

Moreover, the energy advice centres are looking at getting out into communities and talking to hospitals, home helps and so on to get the message across and ensure that people are not duped by unscrupulous traders. There has been a lot of concern about phone calls and whatever that people have been receiving. We are looking closely at the issue, and the energy advice centres are very aware of it. We would emphasise the need for everyone to use the Scottish Government helpline, as those calls will be referred to the energy advice centres, where individuals will receive assistance in getting a local trusted trader with which the local authority is happy.

Jim Eadie: Obviously, there is a shared desire to protect the public, particularly older and

vulnerable people, but what steps are we taking to ensure that those people have the necessary information—such as, for example, the helpline number—that we are disseminating to households? Also, to go back to my initial question, what sanctions are available against companies that behave irresponsibly?

Margaret Burgess: On your first question, I tried to make clear in my previous response—perhaps not very successfully—that energy advice centres now provide outreach services and intend to deliver more than 750 over the coming year. Those services are not just about providing individuals with advice, as the centres will also talk to home helps, care services, Macmillan Cancer Support and other groups that are in contact with vulnerable people about how to make referrals. If they can identify people who should be referred to ensure that they do not use tradespeople who are not legit—if we want to use that word—they do so.

Perhaps David Fotheringham can explain about the sanctions that can be taken.

David Fotheringham: On sanctions, Jim Eadie is right that the situation can be difficult. If people literally turn up on the doorstep and misrepresent themselves—saying that they work for the Government when they do not—that is a matter for local authority trading standards officials. If there is an implication that an energy company is connected, ultimately that is down to the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets. There have been examples in the past of energy companies being fined by Ofgem for inappropriate selling in certain situations. However, we have heard more frequently about situations where an individual turns up at the door and misrepresents themselves. We would like local councils to take strong action on that.

Elaine Murray: Given that HEEPS is an area-based scheme that looks at overall problems of fuel poverty, how can it particularly assist those who are most vulnerable in that respect, such as older people, pensioners or those with disabilities?

Margaret Burgess: As you say, HEEPS is an area-based scheme and local authorities will determine the areas, based on the criteria that I set out. There are also the affordable warmth and energy assistance schemes, which will target vulnerable individuals. Again, the energy advice centres play an important part in identifying vulnerable people who might be eligible. The affordable warmth scheme is for home owners as well and applies to the whole United Kingdom.

We extended the energy assistance scheme in Scotland with a further £16 million, to ensure as far as possible that nobody misses out. With the two schemes running together, we anticipate that more people will have measures installed and that

more vulnerable people will be assisted than under the previous energy assistance package.

Elaine Murray: Can you say a bit more about what the criteria are under the new assistance scheme?

Margaret Burgess: The affordable warmth scheme is UK wide and applies to people on certain benefits, such as pension credits and child tax credit, and to certain vulnerable people who are over a particular age or are disabled. The energy assistance scheme adds to that, as it includes those who are terminally ill, carers, people over 75 whose boiler is not working—

Andy Robinson: Or with a low income—

Margaret Burgess: Or with a low income. The scheme aims to include as many people as possible. We are happy that our scheme covers more people than any other scheme in the UK.

Elaine Murray: Are there any plans for the scheme to continue after the set two-year period?

Margaret Burgess: That will be reviewed as we go on; we are currently looking at a period of two years with a review at the end.

Margaret McCulloch: The Scottish Government plans to make it easier and safer for older people to access equity in their homes to meet their housing needs and maintain independent living. Can you expand on the Scottish Government's plans and how you will support older people to access the equity in their homes?

Margaret Burgess: There are a couple of points to make. The sustainable housing strategy concentrates on energy efficiency and housing standards. The equity release we are considering is about adaptations to the homes of the elderly.

We are looking at working up a scheme to help people who proactively want to adapt their home so that they can remain in it. That is in conjunction with the home adaptation scheme. We had a meeting recently with Age Scotland, which is anxious to have some input into the home equity release scheme. That is work in progress; it is not at a final stage.

The Convener: What was the rationale behind having the strategy focus on energy efficiency rather than take a more comprehensive approach to housing sustainability, including adaptation?

Margaret Burgess: All those things are part of the overall vision. There are a number of strands to housing policy. For example, our older persons strategy will focus on adaptations and the need to enable people to stay in their own homes. The overall vision, under which all the strategies sit, is that everyone should live in a house that is warm, comfortable and suitable for their needs. A focus

on one issue does not exclude consideration of another; it is about looking at all the different strands.

Steven Scott might want to talk about the building standards in the context of building homes for life.

Steven Scott (Scottish Government): Since 2007, we have incorporated lifetime-homes principles into building regulations for new homes. That involves looking at the flexibility of the accommodation and ensuring that there is accessible sanitary accommodation, with the aim of ensuring that people will be able to live in their homes longer. I think that we are leading in the UK on that.

In the technical handbooks for the Building (Scotland) Regulations 2004, section 7 is about sustainability and considers carbon dioxide emissions, energy use and broader issues such as flexibility of accommodation, material use and space for recycling. New homes are relatively well served in that respect.

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): Previous consultations focused on improving the sustainability of private sector housing. It says in the housing strategy that the Scottish Government has set up

“a working group to develop proposals for minimum energy efficiency standards in private sector housing”.

Can you give us more detail on the private sector working group's role and remit? When is the group expected to report?

Margaret Burgess: I think that the group has met twice. We expect it to make recommendations, on which we will go out to consultation. I think that the plan is to consult in 2015, with a view to making regulations by 2018. That is the current plan, although the group might come up with a different focus.

Alex Johnstone: There has been a commitment to encourage home owners in mixed tenure and shared-ownership properties to improve and maintain their properties to the condition standard. How is that to be achieved?

Margaret Burgess: Your question relates to what I said in answer to Margaret McCulloch. We are looking at introducing something in the forthcoming housing bill, if necessary. We are encouraging people in mixed-tenure properties to do their share of repairs according to the title deeds. We will consider whether local authorities can use their powers more effectively or whether they need more powers to encourage people to improve their homes—we are aware that there have been issues in that regard. If we introduce minimum standards, they will apply across the board to all property in home ownership.

Alex Johnstone: Are you confident that the structure of grants and support is flexible enough to deal with mixed-tenure blocks and shared-ownership properties? Are there voids in the cover, which will endanger opportunities—

Margaret Burgess: The working group will look at the issue and report on it. In the context of sustainable housing, an advantage of HEEPS is that area-based schemes for cavity or external wall insulation and affordable warmth measures cover home owners, too.

We are looking at the issue of general repairs, but it is the responsibility of home owners to keep their house up to a reasonable standard—beyond a tolerable standard. We are looking at what to include in the forthcoming housing bill to ensure that local authorities encourage home owners to do such work and let them know what is required, but we are still at a very early stage of the process.

10:30

Alex Johnstone: Will that cover the notorious situation in which a single home owner in a block blocks progress?

Margaret Burgess: It will cover it as far as sustainability is concerned, but the reality is that, even if we provide external wall insulation, I do not think that we will be able to cover the situation in which someone says, “I don’t want that in my property.”

Valerie Sneddon might want to add to that.

Valerie Sneddon (Scottish Government): I would like to pick up on something that the minister said earlier. Part of the consultation included proposals to extend local authorities’ existing powers. Ministers are thinking about that at the moment. The missing shares issue was one of the things that we consulted on.

The issue of repair is separate from but linked to that of energy efficiency. Local authorities have flexible powers to provide discretionary assistance for repairs, but it is very much the home owner’s responsibility to look after their property. We encourage local authorities to use their powers, when they can, to encourage people to carry out the work that they need to do.

Alex Johnstone: So, basically, we all need to monitor the situation. It is our responsibility to identify cases in which remedies are needed.

Margaret Burgess: The situation will be monitored.

Margaret McCulloch: When will the regulatory impact assessment on the new energy efficiency standard for social housing be published?

Margaret Burgess: We intend to publish that at the same time as the standard, which will be published in the autumn. Work on that is under way.

Margaret McCulloch: How would a single condition standard for all tenures interact with the planned social and private housing standard?

Margaret Burgess: There is little that we can say about that, because we are at a very early stage in the process. It is too early to comment.

Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP): I have a couple of questions, the first of which relates to the affordable housing supply programme. In the strategy, the Government says:

“We will continue to provide an extra £4,000 funding through the Affordable Housing Supply Programme (AHSP) for every home meeting the ‘silver’ sustainability standard for emissions and energy use”.

How many homes are currently meeting the silver sustainability standard for emissions and energy use? How do we encourage greater take-up?

Margaret Burgess: The standard came into effect in May 2011 and it applies to new buildings. The most recent Scottish house condition survey relates to 2011, so we do not yet have overall data on the standard.

As you rightly said, we are encouraging people to meet the standard through the provision of £4,000 of additional subsidy for building a greener home. In addition, as part of the £13.5 million greener homes innovation scheme that we announced earlier in the year, 330 homes will be built using green techniques and technologies. We will encourage people to look at those properties to see the advantages of them.

However, it is too early to give numbers on the silver standard.

Jim Eadie: I want to ask you about the milestones for 2020 that are outlined in the strategy and the report on proposals and policies. There are three key milestones that are ambitious in nature: every home is to have loft and cavity wall insulation where that is technically feasible; every house with gas central heating is to have a highly efficient boiler; and at least 100,000 homes are to have adopted some form of individual or community renewable heat technology for space and/or water heating. How confident are you that the Government can meet those ambitious targets?

Margaret Burgess: The targets are ambitious, but we are fairly confident that we can meet them and progress is being monitored. We set out the situation after the last time that I attended the committee, and we have made it clear that we think that we can meet those targets. That is certainly what we are aiming for.

Jim Eadie: Okay. I would like a little more detail—perhaps from officials—on what the process is and on what mechanisms are in place to ensure that we are making progress year by year towards the 2020 target.

David Fotheringham: The main source of information for monitoring progress on that target is the Scottish house condition survey that the minister mentioned. The latest data is from 2011—we will get the 2012 data later this year—and an annex at the end of the sustainable housing strategy sets out the progress up to that point.

The CERT programme has really helped to boost loft and cavity insulation. The minister mentioned the figures earlier—there have been 629,000 measures under the CERT programme. We also had the boiler scrappage scheme, which has really helped with the boiler replacement.

Jim Eadie: You have anticipated my next question. I recognise, as your answer has just illustrated, the progress that has been made on home and loft insulation in particular—you mentioned the 600,000-plus measures that relate to around 500,000 homes—and on boiler replacements.

The third target is for 100,000 homes to have adopted some form of renewable heat technology—micro renewables, if you like—and it seems that only around 13,000 homes have adopted such technology. Is that right? Is that the scale of the challenge that faces us—13,000 now as against the 100,000 that we want to achieve by 2020?

David Fotheringham: Thirteen thousand homes was the figure in 2010. Some more detail is given in the annex on the figures for 2011, and we are seeing gradual progress.

Jim Eadie: But is that the scale of the challenge that we are facing or not?

David Fotheringham: The minister does not lead on renewable heat, but we know that the renewable heat vision sets out very ambitious policies to drive its uptake. The sustainable housing strategy shows the progress that we have made to date, and things are improving. There is also a determination to drive renewable heat further through the heat vision.

Jim Eadie: So if the 13,000 figure was from 2010, when will we get an update on it?

David Fotheringham: There is an update in the annex on the figure for 2011.

Jim Eadie: So what is the updated figure?

David Fotheringham: The Scottish house condition survey

“estimated that around 20,000 homes used solar thermal panels, biomass fuel or heat pumps by the end of 2011.”

That is progress on the previous year.

Jim Eadie: My final question is: what more do we need to do to ensure that we are on course to hit that 100,000 homes target?

Margaret Burgess: It has been pointed out that I am not leading on renewable heat; the Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism leads on it. A number of schemes are in place to encourage renewable heat and to ensure that we are encouraging renewable heating methods. There is quite a lot of discussion on that just now. The hope—and our intention—is that we will reach the target.

David Fotheringham: I can add a little to that. The Scottish Government has recently published a draft outline heat vision and draft heat deployment options guidance. Over the coming year, it will develop a new heat generation policy statement. That is what is being done to take forward the work on renewable heat. Of course, we also have programmes such as the renewable heat incentive and the renewable heat premium payment schemes.

Gordon MacDonald: I have a question about training and skills development. On page 12 of the strategy, it says:

“We will continue to support demand led training through our national training programmes, further and higher education programmes and our Low Carbon Skills Fund to ensure that employers have the skilled and competent workforce needed to meet current and future standards.”

However, on page 14, under the heading “Consultation responses”, it says:

“It was argued that the current state of the construction industry makes it more difficult to contemplate innovation or speculative investment in training and skills development.”

How do we square those opposing views? Can the Government do anything to resolve that?

Margaret Burgess: We are committed to promoting training opportunities and skills development, and knowledge in the sector is increasing considerably, which is why we are where we are today with the innovative methods that are being used in Scotland. We are encouraging those opportunities in every way that we can, and Skills Development Scotland is looking at that.

There are a number of other issues. The Scottish resource centre for women in science, engineering and technology is running a project to look at equality and diversity measures because it is recognised that there might not be enough women in the construction industry. That work also includes training.

We are aware of the situation and are looking at improving it because we know that we are not quite where we should be.

The Convener: I understand that the Scottish Government will be working with Glasgow Solicitors Property Centre and the University of Glasgow through the 2020 built environment subgroup to track homebuyers' attitudes to energy efficiency. That is the elephant in the room.

You mentioned the home energy report that is now required, but there needs to be more engagement with lenders, consumers and surveyors—and I would add lawyers and property agents—to include a valuation premium on energy efficiency measures. I just do not think that energy efficiency and the savings that can be made on current expenditure if a house is energy efficient register on the psyche of homebuyers. How do we engage with people to put energy efficiency further up the agenda?

Margaret Burgess: As you pointed out, the Glasgow Solicitors Property Centre and the University of Glasgow are doing work, and we will be looking at that. There is an issue about how we get the public to recognise the value of energy efficiency measures in their homes.

The Department for Energy and Climate Change has recently done some research in England that shows a link between energy efficiency and the value of homes. We are very interested in that and will be following it up to get more detail about what is happening.

We need to do more. When people have energy efficiency measures installed, they are looking mainly for savings on their electricity and gas, so we are encouraging people to say that there should be a green premium when they want to buy a home. There is work to be done on that, because I do not think that we are at that stage yet. The DECC research, which was published quite recently, has some interesting information that we will want to look at in more detail to see whether we can use it here in Scotland to encourage people.

The Convener: The James Hutton Institute was also involved in a pan-European project called GILDED—governance, infrastructure, lifestyle dynamics and energy demand—so you might want to contact that as well.

Do you have any further comments, minister?

Margaret Burgess: No. I think that is it.

The Convener: I thank you and your officials for that evidence, minister.

10:44

Meeting suspended.

10:45

On resuming—

Subordinate Legislation

Mobile Homes (Written Statement) (Scotland) Regulations 2013 (SSI 2013/188)

The Convener: Agenda item 3 is consideration of a negative instrument on mobile homes written agreements.

The regulations amend the specified information that the site owner must supply to the proposed occupier of the mobile home. The Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee determined that it did not need to draw the instrument to the attention of Parliament. The committee is invited to consider any issues that it wishes to raise in reporting to Parliament on the regulations. Members should note that no motion to annul has been received in relation to the regulations.

We discussed the regulations last week. As no member wishes to comment, do we agree that the committee does not wish to make any recommendation in relation to the regulations?

Members indicated agreement.

High Speed Rail (Preparation) Bill

10:46

The Convener: Under agenda item 4, the committee will consider a legislative consent memorandum on the High Speed Rail (Preparation) Bill, which is United Kingdom Parliament legislation. The bill covers some devolved areas, so the consent of the Scottish Parliament is required before it can progress at Westminster.

Paper 3 includes the legislative consent memorandum and provides details of the LCM procedure. The committee is invited to consider whether to report that it is content with the LCM and with the Scottish Government's view that the Scottish Parliament should consent to the UK Parliament legislating in this area, or to report that the committee notes the LCM.

Alex Johnstone: My views concur precisely with those of the Scottish Government.

The Convener: Okay, we will report that the committee is content with the LCM and with the Scottish Government's view that the Scottish Parliament should consent to the UK Parliament legislating in the area. Is that agreed?

Members *indicated agreement.*

10:48

Meeting continued in private until 12:05.

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