

Energy Security and Net Zero Committee

Oral evidence: [Heating our homes](#), HC 115

Wednesday 10 January 2024

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 10 January 2024.

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Angus Brendan MacNeil (Chair); Vicky Ford; Barry Gardiner; Mark Garnier; Sir Mark Hendrick; Mark Pawsey; Lloyd Russell-Moyle; Derek Thomas; Mick Whitley.

Questions 279—382

Witnesses

I: Fay Holland, Senior Energy Policy Advisor, Energy Systems Catapult; Paula Widdowson, Local Infrastructure and Net Zero Board, Local Government Association; and Dan Norris, Metro Mayor, West of England Combined Authority.

II: Richard Clewer, Co-President, UK100; Ian Morrison, Director of Policy and Evidence, Historic England; and Victoria Vyvyan, President, Country Land and Business Association.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Energy Systems Catapult](#)
- [Local Government Association](#)
- [West of England Mayoral Combined Authority](#)
- [UK100](#)
- [Historic England](#)

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Fay Holland, Paula Widdowson and Dan Norris.

Q279 **Chair:** Good afternoon and welcome to the Energy Security and Net Zero Committee's third session on heating our homes, with a focus on local leadership and the challenges. Before we go much further, I would like to say congratulations to our Deputy Chair on his OBE in the New Year's Honours, certainly from a Committee perspective a very worthy recipient. Congratulations, Mark Garnier.

Mark Garnier: Thank you very much, Angus.

Chair: We have two panels this afternoon, both panels of three, and as usual I will ask the panel to introduce themselves, name, rank and serial number, starting on my left.

Fay Holland: I am Fay Holland, a Senior Energy Policy Advisor at Energy Systems Catapult. We are a non-profit that exists to accelerate innovation towards a net zero energy system.

Dan Norris: Hello, I am Dan Norris, the Mayor of the West of England, which covers Bristol, South Gloucestershire, where I went to school with JK Rowling, Bath and North East Somerset, where I didn't go to school with Mary Berry but she comes from there and I may have gone to school with Banksy because he comes from Bristol, but I will never know.

Chair: Yours was well-known face in this parish once upon a time, and, who knows, maybe again.

Paula Widdowson: Hello, I am Councillor Paula Widdowson, no famous alumni, speaking nationally for the Local Government Association as a member of the Local Infrastructure and Net Zero Board and spokesperson for the environment at the City of York Council.

Q280 **Chair:** The Local Government Association is a collection of councils, districts and regions in England, is it? We have COSLA in Scotland, so I am trying to orientate myself. Paula Widdowson first: what steps do you think are necessary to clarify the roles and responsibilities of different levels of government for heating our homes?

Paula Widdowson: The steps that we require for the different council levels, different districts and local councils across the country, are clarity and consistency. If we could have the policies—whether to do with planning, infrastructure, skills, funding—set out and consistent for five or 10 years, so that we know what we are doing, we can prioritise actions and work collectively, that is what is required across the country to decide who can do what and when.

Q281 **Chair:** Do you feel that from a Westminster perspective the policymaking is too short term and reactive rather than longer term and sticking with a plan?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Paula Widdowson: Absolutely. If you take funding for example, you have a beauty parade going on for all the different sections of funding. There are five or six different sections of funding to do with housing. They are done on a short-term basis with reactions to a specific action, which means it is difficult to build the skills pipeline, the supply chain pipeline and certainly the consumer offer, because it is too short-term. If we could elongate that and give confidence that it was going to happen for five to 10 years, you could build great partnerships and deliver even more than the local councils are already delivering on the nation's behalf.

Q282 **Chair:** Thank you. Fay Holland, should local government be obliged to play a greater role in co-ordinating local action and granted greater enforcement powers to do so?

Fay Holland: Yes, local government should certainly be encouraged to play a greater role. The way we advocate this happening is the process called local area energy planning, where local areas work with stakeholders from communities and their district network operators to create a whole system plan for the decarbonisation of their area. That includes how we heat our housing as well as transport and electricity generation. By taking that whole-system approach with a bottom-up perspective from the local level, areas can be more successful in attracting investment. When there are funding pots available they can identify how to use that funding most cost-effectively to feed into the long-term plan that they have set up.

We feel that this is best done at the local level because local councils have that kind of democratic accountability to communities, but it also needs co-ordination at regional level. It needs a supportive framework from national government as well in endorsing guidance about how this should be done and providing funding and capacity building so that local authorities can do it and do it successfully.

Q283 **Chair:** I don't necessarily disagree with what you said but one of the things I put to you on that sort of approach is that there will be some councils that are quite good and quite proactive and some that may be, not bad, but less good and less proactive, and you would have a patchwork of outcomes. How do you respond to that?

Fay Holland: I think that is certainly what we are seeing at the moment, with some councils in local areas who are forging ahead with local area energy planning and being very successful in attracting investment off the back of that and others that are not. We think that endorsing a national framework, with national guidance for how to do it and funding every area to do it, would avoid that kind of patchwork, so it would mean that some areas are not left behind.

Chair: Thank you. Paula, do you want to come in?

Paula Widdowson: Yes, I would love to come in on that point. The Local Government Association is aware of some of the patchwork you have



described, but it is working really well in cascading the road maps that they have across the country. I am sure you are all aware of the accelerator programmes. I know that the ones in the West Midlands and Manchester are very successful, and there are a number of others. Once the learnings from those have been brought together, that can be taken across the country so that it is even more successful. I would challenge on how much power you give local authorities without the resourcing and the funding. We can't be given the responsibility to deliver without the capacity and the resources to do that delivery.

Q284 Chair: Turning to Dan Norris on a similar theme, how can we ensure that a national framework for local action ensures fair and efficient outcomes across the country and does not constrain local innovation?

Dan Norris: The thing to remember when we are talking about warm homes is that this is about people. Sometimes I think we get drawn into the jargon, which means we get into these kinds of discussions that are important but we have to remember that getting this right makes a big difference. Warm homes mean healthier people, happier people and a more productive economy. There are also benefits from doing those right things in the sense of for every pound spent on retrofitting, for example, you will reduce the national health budget by 40 pence for that pound spent. You have to look at it in a much more rounded way.

My view is that the Government have been remiss in some of the ways that have already been hinted at by other people. There has been short-termism, too little long-term thinking, too many poorly designed initiatives, perhaps too focused here in Whitehall rather than reaching out to get local input. It seems very important to me that the things I am doing, like providing advice and funding and so on, for the 1.1 million people within my region should be done nationally by government overall.

Locally what I should be doing as a regional mayor is putting the cherry on the cake. Getting good advice should be pretty universal anywhere in the country, but what I have in my region, for example, which includes Bath as I mentioned, is an awful lot of Georgian homes. There are 5,000 listed buildings in Bath alone, many more in Bristol and right across the region. I would like to be expert at that so that I could cascade, from direct knowledge, that experience to other areas, so that they could benefit from that, and vice versa where they are very good at things.

We have the Severn and the Bristol channel, so we are interested in generating energy from the second-highest tidal range, of course, and we are working with our Welsh Government colleagues on trying to do that. We also have a lot of former mines in the area; we want to try to get energy out of the pits that are closed now—have been closed since the 1970s—so that we can have heating systems for the public. There is a nice irony in that because since the mining industry contributed to CO₂ emissions so greatly, it would be lovely to be able to do something positive about the climate emergency, which I sincerely believe is a huge



HOUSE OF COMMONS

problem and one that we can't row back on. We have to move more quickly on it.

Chair: Time does not allow at the moment but I would be interested in a bit more in writing about what the plans are for the coalmines. I take the point. Evidence from the NHS in an earlier session is that asthma alone is costing the NHS hundreds of millions, if not more than a billion, from damp housing. I turn now to my colleague Mark Garnier OBE, no less.

Q285 **Mark Garnier:** Paula, perhaps I could start with you. I am trying to get to the bottom of what resources are available to local authorities for staffing and all the rest of it. My first question is: is more money from central Government a silver bullet to resolve your resourcing problem?

Paula Widdowson: There is never a silver bullet, we all know that, but you also know that the local government authorities are £4 billion behind in funding. There is never a silver bullet. If you could find that money at the bottom of the sofa that would be great, but I don't think you will. What we need is more resources and more capacity. That can come in a variety of ways. Funding is definitely necessary but, as I said to the Chair earlier, it is about longer-term planning. If we can get security, we can build confidence. If we can build confidence, we can get a good consumer offer and we can go back all the way through to the skills to be delivered and the supply chain. It is that confidence that we require. Money always helps because it means you can bring in the resources and the capacity.

Local government is doing a fantastic job working in partnerships. There are numerous examples from the West Midlands to Cornwall, up in Newcastle and even the Eden Project. For instance, the Eden Project has a borehole that is 3 miles deep which can supply 35,000 homes with energy. You have got everything, including the mines. There is a plethora of resource and expertise right the way across the LGA area that we can pull together.

What is required is, first of all, if we can get some more money, great, but secondly, an adult conversation between central Government and local government on how we work in partnership, how you sort out the national framework and then how we can deliver that. There was a report from Innovate UK and PwC that demonstrated that if you deliver this nationally, it will cost £195 billion and get £444 billion return. If you do it locally, it will cost £58 billion and you get £825 billion return. If you do it locally and we have had the adult conversation, you basically do it for a quarter of the cost and double the return. I think to start with we need a grown-up conversation, and then we need long-term planning because nobody can work in such short-termism as we have currently.

Q286 **Mark Garnier:** Given local authorities are under a certain amount of financial pressure, well-publicised stuff, if money is coming to local authorities to try to promote this type of thing, would it be welcome if that money was ringfenced, so that it would not get drawn into other very needed services but you would not have that argument?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Paula Widdowson: I am not sure how we can ringfence because, as Dan has already said, there is a knock-on effect. If you can do warm homes, you have a knock-on effect for health, productivity in business, the local economy and industry investing, so I am not sure how you completely ringfence and whether that is sensible. I would need to look into that and get back to you, but I am conscious that you don't want the money to be, "Right, we will go and build a windmill over here with it." It has to go to the right place, but at the same time if you are too targeted, which has been the result of some of the green voucher initiatives, it fails to deliver what we are looking for.

Q287 **Mark Garnier:** Yes, okay. Fay, I will turn to you. What interventions do you think are necessary to ensure that local government can take on responsibilities to co-ordinate and plan local energy transitions?

Fay Holland: As I mentioned before, national endorsement of the guidance for local area energy planning, so that we can ensure that there is a consistent approach across the country and comparable plans in different areas. Then, it is funding for local authorities to do that and, of course, funding for the implementation, which is at separate stages of varying complexity. The example that the Welsh Government are undertaking at the moment is an informative one, where they have mandated local area energy planning to every local authority in Wales and are providing resource and capacity building at regional level within Wales to enable local authorities to do that; then those plans will be aggregated into a national energy plan in 2024.

That kind of approach, where a national government sets the framework and empowers local authorities to do it, can allow local authorities to approach some of the changes that we need to heat homes more sustainably and make sure that everyone has access to warm homes in a more strategic way. They can know what the no-regret options are and that they are using the funding that is available in the most cost-effective way.

Q288 **Mark Garnier:** Dan, do you agree that there needs to be a more formal role designated to local authorities from central Government?

Dan Norris: Mr Garnier, I will reserve judgment on that, if you don't mind, but I will come back to your first question and say that I think there needs to be a degree of ringfencing. The pressures on local government are so vast it is inevitable with the duties they have under the law for the responsibilities they hold that they will try to eke out the money that comes to them from any other direction. As a mayor, I would want the powers to be able to say that this money is specifically for this range of green initiatives because it would be helpful to give the ability to plan ahead, which is the secret to it.

I was going to talk about the PwC research that was mentioned by Paula, where for a third less cost you get twice the impact if you do it locally. I hope that ringfencing that money it is an incentive to central Government



HOUSE OF COMMONS

to do so because they will get more bang for their buck when they do it locally.

Q289 **Mark Garnier:** Yes, okay. I must just quickly ask you: Tutshill primary with JK Rowling?

Dan Norris: No, I was at St Michael's junior school in Winterbourne. Shall I leave you to speculate why the cat in her books is called Mrs Norris, given that my mother bred cats for a very long time in our area?

Mark Garnier: Fantastic, brilliant.

Chair: I was going to guess Hogwarts and I would have guessed dogs from your picture in the brief. Anyway, so much for my guessing.

Q290 **Sir Mark Hendrick:** Fay, I will ask you first. Should our local authorities be obliged to develop a local area energy plan and have the powers to intervene to ensure its delivery?

Fay Holland: Yes, certainly local areas should have the powers to develop local area energy plans and we think it is important to approach it in a co-ordinated way. At the moment, areas are taking on LAEPs themselves or, as in Wales, as a nation or in Greater Manchester the Greater Manchester Combined Authority is taking the lead on that. A co-ordinated approach to local authority energy planning has the potential to save the system about £252 billion in costs between 2025 and 2050.

As more local areas do local area energy planning, the co-ordination of that becomes much more important, with a regional approach to ensure that plans make sense across boundaries. Lots of the transmission networks for the energy that we need to heat our homes cross local authority boundaries, as do supply chains. Having that co-ordination has the potential to save money for the system and have better outcomes and warmer homes for people, which is ultimately the aim.

Q291 **Sir Mark Hendrick:** Okay, thanks. It is nice to see you, Dan. Obviously I knew you in one of your previous lives and it is nice to see you back here. By the way, I went to school with Bernard Sumner from New Order, and Albert Finney also went to my school.

Chair: Is this a moon Monday or a happy Wednesday?

Dan Norris: A theme has started here.

Sir Mark Hendrick: Can I ask you, Dan, what processes should be put in place to support local government in developing local area energy plans and ensure proper co-ordination across local areas?

Dan Norris: I know, Sir Mark, that the Committee is looking for recommendations. One of the strongest recommendations I can make as a regional mayor is to say that I understand that the Government have changed the rules when it comes to energy standards for new build homes. That is now overridden by what the Government say centrally



HOUSE OF COMMONS

and ignores the higher standards that there may be locally. For example, we have a very strict net zero 2030 target in my West of England region. We are doing everything we can, despite some of the things I was mentioning about the Government earlier, to counter that and get that on course. We need to have a 25-fold increase in retrofitting to hit that target, a huge increase that will need resource.

I think we have to be very honest and say you can get all sorts of efficiency savings, you can do things more smartly and you can get local knowledge to make things more impactful, but you also need significant resource; there is no question about that. It would be really helpful to me if I could have resource over the longer term to aid and assist my skills and training responsibilities. I think something like 57% of young people now say that they want to work in green industries, but only 10% of them do. This is about person power as well as monetary resource and other kinds of resource. If we are going to make this happen in the way that I suspect many of us want, we need to have those skills ready to apply when the resources are made available centrally or from wherever else they may come.

Q292 Sir Mark Hendrick: Thanks. Coming back to Fay, how can we ensure that the advice provided to consumers from local area energy plans does not conflict with other messaging that they receive, such as from energy performance certificates?

Fay Holland: That is a very important point, because at the moment energy performance certificates are based on a measure of energy costs, and if they recommend a change of heating system, they tend to recommend a new combi gas boiler. Our recent research found that about 25% of properties that have an EPC have been recommended a new gas boiler. Of course, local area energy plans are looking at decarbonisation pathways, so looking at what future low-carbon technology options are available in those areas. We have highlighted that if people are getting very different messages for an EPC, they might invest in a change of heating system in their property. If they are subsequently told they have the opportunity to connect to a heat network or that they might want a heat pump for their property, they are less likely to engage in that because they have already spent the money they were expecting to spend.

We need to make sure that those messages are consistent and we advocate for a change in the way that EPC recommendations are done so that they allow you, with local area energy planning, to inform consumers about the options available to them. Rather than being prescriptive and saying, "You should do this to increase your EPC," it is saying, "This is what the local area energy plan says for your area, these are the options available, this is how you might explore it as a personalised retrofit advice for your property." That leads people down that pathway to become more informed to make the decisions that they need to make.

Q293 Sir Mark Hendrick: Paula, should the planning system be reformed to



ensure that net zero and low carbon retrofit are mandatory considerations when taking other local actions on housing?

Paula Widdowson: Can I come back to your question and just add something on the local area energy plans? Is that okay?

Sir Mark Hendrick: Sure.

Paula Widdowson: Nearly half of local councils have already done local area energy plans. I can take York as a specific example. We did that in partnership with North Yorkshire because by doing it in partnership, as I alluded to earlier, we reduced the cost and the time. It cost us half the amount of money and it took half the time. The local area energy plans are fantastic but there is a big blocker, certainly for York and North Yorkshire—I can only talk in detail about that case.

The big blocker is the district network operator—in our part of our world, Northern Powergrid. A live example that I got this morning is we know where we can put a solar farm. It is on the top of a tip, an old waste site. It is concave, you can't see it, it is not on arable land. It costs £150,000 to put it on the list to get connected to the grid, but it is £7 million to connect it to the grid and it won't happen until 2034. There is a big blocker with the infrastructure across the country to put the renewable energies that we can create into the grid and feed them around the rest of the country. That keeps being highlighted in a lot of the local area energy plans.

I would recommend, if we can, that this Committee look at that area as one of the big enablers to bringing electricity, which is where we are doing all the decarbonisation, into all the houses. The Climate Change Committee reported that between now and 2050 the amount of electricity our country uses will double, so it is how we do that. Apologies for going slightly off, but I think that is a very important point that we need to consider.

Planning is not in my remit. I am genuinely sorry about this. I will have to get back to you in writing about what the details are. Certainly it would be extremely helpful if we could have more powers so that the local councils do not make decisions that immediately gets bumped to a judicial review, because that seems to be what happens. If the developer does not like what is said, it just gets bumped.

Q294 **Mark Pawsey:** I want to drill down a little bit on what the role of local government is. In our written evidence many people said that local government should play a greater role in home heating and energy efficiency, and gave as a reason better knowledge of the local area and properties. If you ask any local authority, "Would you rather have more powers than fewer?" they will always say more. There is a presumption that you would want the ability to do that but, Dan, you told us that in Bath you have a large proportion of listed properties. I don't think you have a register of every single property in your area, so how do you



HOUSE OF COMMONS

know what you have? If you do know what you have got, how does knowing that make it better for you to deliver the improvements than somebody sitting in Whitehall?

Dan Norris: The Bath example is an interesting one because obviously it is a world heritage site. We get a lot of data because of that, as well as the rest of the West of England. I am quite excited by new technology in maybe helping us provide warmer homes. I think some of you will be familiar with the technology that has been developed for satellites from Britain that can look down and see hot spots where there are leaky buildings.

Q295 **Mark Pawsey:** What I am trying to get at is why you are better at doing that than any other organisation.

Dan Norris: Well, because we know the types of homes. For example, we have a lot of Georgian homes. There are all sorts of different databases and we also know—

Q296 **Mark Pawsey:** Tell us about those.

Dan Norris: The databases will be the historic ones where there are particular examples like Bath, but there are also examples of where different corporations have built homes historically, so there will be that sort of data. There is a wide range of data—

Q297 **Mark Pawsey:** You will know what the fabric is because of having a planning authority. What exactly do you have that somebody else hasn't?

Dan Norris: As a regional mayor, I don't have the same powers as local councils, unitary authorities. It is a different thing but obviously we work very closely together. The data I will have are things like the type of demographic, where people live, that kind of thing, which is also important. As I said in my opening comments, it is so important because this is about people after all.

Mark Pawsey: The DWP will have that.

Dan Norris: Yes, it will do but I think it is not a complete picture. We have to dovetail it all.

Q298 **Mark Pawsey:** Tell me why local government is better at delivering.

Dan Norris: I think that when it comes locally it is more trusted.

Q299 **Mark Pawsey:** More trusted, okay. Paula?

Paula Widdowson: I absolutely build on what Dan said. If you ask the public about trust, 73% will say they trust local government and 17% will say they trust national Government, which is a lousy statistic because it should be 100% for both. If you want an example of how retrofit works well, Leeds has done a fabulous way of going about it. It used the social deprivation index, because that ripples out. It affects health, education and the local economy. If somebody has a very high—or low; whatever



HOUSE OF COMMONS

you want to call it—deprivation score, it ringfences an area because the council knew, and knows through our social—

Q300 **Mark Pawsey:** The local authority has that information that other people don't have; is that what you are saying?

Paula Widdowson: Absolutely. It is not just about the information. It is also about how you put it into practice. Leeds put out a whole marketing campaign, put somebody in the community and got people to buy in. The first time it did the project it got about a 40%, 45% uptake. People watched it, saw it and thought it was fine. It then did the project a second time and got over a 90% uptake of people buying in, whether that was social housing, council housing, private landlords or private homeowners.

Q301 **Mark Pawsey:** If we accept that local authorities are better equipped because of the local connection and perhaps greater levels of trust, how does the local authority make sure it has the right skills to deliver it? Would it be better to have a national organisation with real expertise and that is all it would do and it could focus on that? Would that not give better delivery, for example?

Paula Widdowson: Not necessarily.

Q302 **Mark Pawsey:** Tell me how a local authority resources itself with the right skills to make it happen.

Paula Widdowson: If you go back to what you said about the national picture and go back to the green voucher scheme, nationally the result was underwhelming. Local government spent all that funding and delivered significant changes to homes across each of the areas that won the beauty parade to get the money, so it can happen locally. What we need for it to happen locally—I go back to what I said at the very start—is certainty. We need to understand what the policy is, what the funding is and how it works over the next 10 years.

Dan Norris: Mark, can I come in here because I want to give a good example? The Lawrence Weston wind turbine in Bristol is the biggest onshore wind turbine in England. That was a community initiative using local emphasis, enthusiasm and expertise supported by Bristol City Council and my West of England Combined Authority. We are now in the place where hopefully we are going to create 13 more and fund getting to the planning stage with that. That is how local can make an added value difference to what has to happen nationally too.

Q303 **Mark Pawsey:** I am going to come back to the certainty bit, Paula, because I accept that is of value. However, we have a pretty uncertain landscape, have we not, right now because we have this bid-based approach? How does that make life more difficult? There may be a scheme but it is not universal across every local authority because local authorities need to make a bid to the Department for the Department to then subsequently decide to allocate the funds. The making of the bid



HOUSE OF COMMONS

demands resource and it may or may not be acceptable. In an ideal world perhaps what you would be campaigning for is a more universal offer than a bid-based approach. What is the challenge of the bid-based approach?

Paula Widdowson: Absolutely. The bid-based approach means it sucks up resources, especially from smaller councils.

Q304 **Mark Pawsey:** Does it not mean that that council is resourced and wants to give it a go compared with other councils that might be just saying, "They are going to give us some money and we will get around to doing it at some point in the future"?

Paula Widdowson: If I can finish, first it takes resources from the smaller councils that do not have enough resource to put the bid in. It then takes time and effort to keep going around the bids, the beauty parade, whatever you want to call it. What the LGA would call for is consistency and long-term commitment so it is actually based on need and the ability to deliver. If you have the need—large urban areas will have different needs from large rural areas—put how much funding it needs in the local area energy plan so there are costs against it. Over 80% of local councils have already written a climate strategy with a climate action plan that is costed so we know roughly how much it is going to cost. If you know they can also deliver then what you can do, nationally, is say, "This is how much it is going to cost. This is how much we are going to put together. We know you guys can deliver. Show us you can." Then you can put the funding out rather than wasting a lot of time putting the bids together.

Mark Pawsey: Thank you. Thank you, Chair.

Chair: Thank you very much, Mr Pawsey.

Q305 **Vicky Ford:** Some quick fire questions before I get to my main questions. Paula, given what you said about your solar panels, I am assuming you would welcome what the Prime Minister said in his speech before autumn about the top priority should be making sure we speed up decisions to get things on the grid.

Paula Widdowson: Yes.

Q306 **Vicky Ford:** Thank you. On EPCs, you said they should be tied to the local plan. Do you think an EPC should be looking at emissions as well as cost rather than just cost?

Paula Widdowson: Yes.

Fay Holland: Yes. We have suggested that energy cost, energy use and climate impact should be the main three indicators.

Q307 **Vicky Ford:** That is helpful. Dan, we are going to deal with this in the next session but on historic buildings, I was very taken with what you were saying about Bath. I was massively taken by the statistic we were



HOUSE OF COMMONS

given that if you could improve the fabric of listed buildings and historic dwellings that could deliver 30% of the requirements needed by the Sixth Carbon Budget. Do you think we should be more relaxed about things like double-glazing in listed buildings and give a bit more flexibility on some of these to help them be more energy efficient?

Dan Norris: The answer, Ms Ford, is that we need to weigh this up much more carefully than we have been doing so far. If you accept there is a climate emergency and the need to move on that then you need to make some pretty difficult decisions because you cannot do everything at once, you have to prioritise. That is why I was referring earlier to the satellite because that can point to where the leaky homes are. Then you get into the difficult dilemmas, these are because there are no absolutely correct answers. Should you prioritise the older homes or should you prioritise where there are many more people living?

Q308 **Vicky Ford:** I have just given you the statistic; 30% of the reductions in the Sixth Carbon Budget could come from listed buildings and historic dwellings.

Dan Norris: They could, but what I can say to you is in Bath—where there are other issues, not just to do with heating about these listed buildings but how beautiful they are and how to protect that while at the same time modernising—there is an awful lot of inertia and slowness, unfortunately. I think the answer to your question is yes, theoretically, that is correct but in practice it is much, much more difficult.

Q309 **Vicky Ford:** Much more difficult, so we will come on to that. I was also very taken by what you were saying about using mines where there is spare energy, and putting up community wind turbines that will also be generating spare energy on very windy days when maybe they are getting constraint payments not to pay. Do you think part of the local energy plan should be encouraging local areas to think about innovative solutions where they have spare energy?

Dan Norris: You absolutely need innovation because that is the key to maximising the impact for the benefit of human beings as well as the environment. How you do that is a dual process, dual tracking, where national Government take the lead on the things that are pretty common right across the country and does that really well and then it allows the local areas—local mayors or whatever it might be, councils—to focus in on their own particular areas and challenges. For example, my region could become very expert on what you do to retrofit Georgian homes because, after all, there are thousands of them. You do not want to do them as just one house here and then one house here; you want to do a whole street at time.

Q310 **Vicky Ford:** I am going to yeah-but-no at you. For example, we went to see the community hydrogen project up in Fife, a national policy to have some pilots where local areas could bid into the pilot project to be innovative. The local area then gets the incentive, "I am going to be the



pilot". In your experience, how do we more effectively share a local innovation with other areas?

Dan Norris: That is a big challenge because good ideas are often preciously guarded, of course, so there is inevitably this tension. I think there is quite a lot of sharing that currently exists, which could be encouraged. I do believe that could happen.

Q311 **Vicky Ford:** Maybe come back to us afterwards if you have clever ideas, ideas of clever sharing of innovation.

Dan Norris: Yes, of course, we will write something down for you.

Paula Widdowson: The LGA already do that with the road maps. I know you are talking to UK100 in the second session and they do an awful lot of sharing through their Climate Leadership Academy.

Building on what you said about historic buildings, Vicky, we have a fabulous example and we do partner a lot with Bath because there is a lot of synergy in the types of buildings we have. York Minster, the grade 1 listed refectory, now has solar tiles right the way across it. York Minster itself is about to have solar panels on the roof.

Q312 **Vicky Ford:** You have given me an example. My question was, how do we better share this innovation. You need to come to our Committee to share.

Paula Widdowson: Absolutely.

Q313 **Vicky Ford:** Think about recommendations we could give on better sharing of innovation. Should more one-stop shops for consumer energy advice be mandated across the country to help embed that offering for local councils and local areas into communities? A lot of consumers are saying to us, "We do not get good advice. We do not know where to get good advice." You said, some of you, that local councils are trusted better but people do not even feel they can get that good advice locally.

Fay Holland: It is a confusing landscape at the moment for individual households that are looking for advice. I think a form of energy performance certificate is part of that. It is a starting point and is often the first place people will look. However, that needs to signpost on to trusted forms of advice, whether that is in the form of a one-stop shop or whether it is a platform where you can find local trusted retrofit advisers. At the Catapult we do not have a strong view on the exact form that should take but we do think it is important that people do have access to good quality retrofit advice and that we build the skills and supply chains. Often if you do want to do something like install a heat pump or get insulation on your property it is very hard to find a high-quality installer at the moment. There are also questions around consumer protection.

Q314 **Vicky Ford:** You would like to see improvements in that one-stop-shop. I am going to keep going through the questions, I only have one minute left.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Is there a danger that if we have more decision making on home heating at local level, we could risk slowing down the transition? We have done very well on things such as the energy efficiency of social-rented houses but very poorly, in my view, on owner-occupied. If we end up with this all being local decision making, will we lose some of the national push?

Dan Norris: I think there is a bigger danger that you slow things up. If you allow innovation, it cascades anyway, people get to know about it and do things well. For example, what would be really innovative would be to allow local areas to make their own decisions and set heating standards, so that rather than big solar farms we had solar panels required to be built on new homes at the outset. That would be an innovation in itself, to give that freedom. Then, where best practice was clearly happening, others would inevitably follow.

Q315 **Vicky Ford:** Should we do more to encourage energy companies and local councils to show and tell—as I describe—with open houses, “This is a house we have retrofitted”? Should there be more of an incentive for renters or owners to open up their property to others to show that they have delivered?

Paula Widdowson: That does happen already. It happens around the country. Going back to what Fay said, we also have lots of one-stop shops in numerous councils right the way across the country.

Vicky Ford: That does not happen everywhere.

Paula Widdowson: There is a great example: Retrofit West Advice service in the West of England does a fabulous job. I know York does. I know North Yorkshire and Yorkshire do. There are numerous examples where that works.

What would be helpful is if national Government could get behind one or two particular schemes. I know it is fanciful but look at what Finland did: they said everybody has to have heat source pumps and they put it at a price that you could not resist the offer, which was just over £1,000 and out it rolled. That is what everybody has done. What we are currently doing is that there is a whole plethora of different systems and we say, “The heat source pump is £15,000 and we will give you a bit towards it.” It goes back to how you make the consumer offer compelling and therefore you can build your supply chain and you can build your skill set.

Q316 **Derek Thomas:** Can I pick up on that? You are right, it is very expensive to do air source and ground source. We are doing a lot of that in Cornwall but it is an expensive investment in a home. There are various other things, as you know.

What more can be done to give homeowners or landlords the right kind of incentive and tools—possibly confidence as well—to install these heat-generation systems into homes? There is also an issue about confidence in whether the systems are good and whether they will not cost more to run, particularly air source, than maybe they would expect. What more



HOUSE OF COMMONS

can be done to resolve that issue?

Paula Widdowson: You have to go back to communicating, marketing, conversations, and—Vicky is dead right—show and tell. There is an awful lot that has to happen to educate people to understand that the change will be good in the end. Everybody hates change, we all know the change curve.

It also needs serious Government support. If you know that you can get a gas boiler for £2,000—you know how it works and it has worked for the whole of your lifetime—and then we are asking people to change to a technology they are not familiar with that is going to cost seven times as much, that is where the incentives need to go in. How do we get people to do it? If you work with a local council, you should be able to get economies of scale because you can do 200, 300 or 400 buildings together. Therefore you can get the economies to happen, whether that is social housing, council housing, privately owned or private rental, landlord owned. You can do it in blocks, which is what Leeds has proved can happen and many other councils have proved can happen as well.

Derek Thomas: There are some good examples in Cornwall.

Paula Widdowson: Absolutely.

Q317 **Derek Thomas:** The Eden Project, as you have mentioned already, is looking to heat all sorts of homes. In United Downs, they are looking to geothermal to heat an estate in Truro of several thousand homes. Porthleven are looking at whether they can take heat from the seawater. Heat the Streets and Stithians are schemes from a private company, Kensa, which has provided heat to a number of homes. However, it is very time-consuming, and at the end of the day on existing homes, as we have said, you have to convince the owner or the landlord to take that on.

Are the Government doing enough to ensure that community energy schemes are easy to set up and can be facilitated by local government? I do not know if anyone else wants to comment. Is it just that we do not have the technology in place and so we do not have enough going, on or is it that the Government are not doing enough to make it easy for these things to be rolled out?

Dan Norris: It is both really. We are at that stage where we are in between, someone has to take the lead and show that leadership. I think that has to come down from national Government, to be frank, because they will have the resource. If they make that commitment for the long term, which you have heard about from all of us today, so you could reliably plan, then I could do things that would allow show and tell and various other things to try to encourage people to take up stuff and do it on a bigger scale. Big scale is the thing. If you have lots of Georgian or Victorian homes, or whatever, you want to be doing whole streets of them at a time to get real efficiency, rather than just here and there and giving grants and what have you. Someone needs to take leadership. The



HOUSE OF COMMONS

question is who that should be. In my view, it should be national Government where it is obvious, with local government and regional government coming in with expertise where it has particular challenges in its own area and knowledge that it can then spread around and share with other communities up and down the land.

Fay Holland: On your question about how to increase consumer confidence, I think there is a place for innovative business models and propositions as well. It is things like heat as a service, where consumers buy the outcome of a warm home rather than buying the technology and hoping that it gives them the outcome they want.

On community energy, and going back to the local area energy grants, they are fundamental to identifying where there is potential for community energy projects, where there is need for extra generation and where the grid connections can be most easily done. As we have said, those are often the blockers. Then you can work with the community to see what they want in those places and hopefully have greater success from that point of view rather than starting from a blank slate.

Q318 Derek Thomas: Your point about winning the argument by consumers paying for the outcome rather than the massive upfront cost must be explored. We have the problem where people are in these quite expensive homes but they are reluctant—as Paula has said—about spending £15,000 or even more to put in something that will save them huge amounts of money in the future and obviously do good things for the planet. I have been speaking to high street banks about how they could maybe take a charge against a building in order to release that kind of investment.

Do the Government need to facilitate some alternative financial models to look at how you shift the dial to do what you have described, Fay? What kind of examples would you have considered that the Government should be doing to facilitate that finance? You do not want taxpayers paying for investing equipment in a private home where the benefit might be.

Fay Holland: An interesting question. As you say, there are lots of green finance models that can be explored. Some of them can be explored within the existing policy framework and, as you say, they are being explored. Potentially there are some things the Government could do in terms of investment or enabling that to happen. I do not have a list of recommendations.

Q319 Derek Thomas: My point is about the taxpayer. In the past, we have used a tariff to support the investment of solar panels on roofs or even ground source heating. However, it is often people who have the means to pay the upfront cost who then benefit at the taxpayers' expense, or certainly energy-bill payers' expense.

What other models might be able to deliver the outcomes we need in terms of moving homes from fossil fuels but not putting a burden on those, let us say, just about managing in private people's properties? Do



HOUSE OF COMMONS

you have any ideas, Paula, about how we might deliver that?

Paula Widdowson: I will have to write back to you with the details on it but I know the LGA has looked into energy as a service, which is a really innovative way of looking at it. You pay for the energy over time and that is what pays it back. If I am correct, it is in the same way as—I know it is rolled out across the UK—the Solar for Schools, so you get the energy that way. It is how you get people to buy in for the long term. The issues will be how often people move home, how it goes against the property; all those types of issues. However, it is a good model to explore.

Q320 **Derek Thomas:** You would use private finance to put the cash upfront?

Paula Widdowson: You can use private finance to do that. I also will build on what Dan said, I certainly know across a lot of local planning issues it is mandated that if you want to build your houses in York, North Yorkshire and parts of West Yorkshire you must have solar panels on the new build, you must have EV charging and it must have insulation to such-and-such a level. On the whole—I must agree with what Dan said—they are higher levels than are set nationally so you get challenges from the developers because locally we are expecting more.

Derek Thomas: That comes up later on in the second panel. Thanks, Chair.

Q321 **Chair:** The debate that was going on there was basically whether it is upfront funding, or the Finnish model with taxes or whatever, or private or sovereign funds in some other countries or a mortgage fee, or whatever. There are plainly a number of ways to fund it.

Paula Widdowson: I absolutely agree, it is a number of different models. Going back to the phrase you used at the start of the meeting, there is no silver bullet.

Q322 **Chair:** It was Barry that said, “silver bullet”, I think. Somebody said, “silver bullet”. I was struck by a number of things there. One of the things you find when you are on this Committee, especially as Chair of this Committee, is that people expect you to be an absolute expert on energy all over the place. It can be a handicap because the expertise can be quickly shown to be not too expert.

I was struck by the Eden Project you mentioned and I was quickly googling it. Four megawatts at £17 million and 25-centimetre or eight and a-half inch borehole four kilometres down producing water at 180 degrees centigrade coming forward.

Mr Norris mentioned the coalmines. I am googling them. The water fills at 18 degrees centigrade. I presume they are using heat pumps.

Dan Norris: Yes, that is probably what they do. It is already there; the water down there is warm and the mine is flooded. It is about how you take that heat out and use it wisely.

Q323 **Chair:** It is about 18 degrees centigrade; it is quite low but you probably



HOUSE OF COMMONS

heat pump it up.

Dan Norris: It depends on the depth, Chair. The further distance down you go, the hotter it gets but then you get distance issues.

Q324 **Chair:** I was also struck by the Bristol turbine, which I thought brought up a philosophical question between yourself and Mr Pawsey. The argument was between central Government being in a position to better capture a lot of information and enabling people locally to see opportunities—to use the hackneyed phrase of self-empowerment—to see what can be done in their area. What you are saying is that more could come around from that because it is not being imposed centrally.

Dan Norris: And funding it so that more does come around. That has already happened, I funded a lot of that. However, we now need to explore 13 more to get them to the planning stage. I have resourced that to get it to that stage. Then you would have to identify where they would go, clearly, and there may be resistance among some communities to that. That is part of this resourcing I am doing, to try to find places that would welcome it in the same way Lawrence Weston has, they have embraced it wholly and are benefitting from it. They get the profits from the energy that is generated to put back into their community and enrich it financially as well as socially.

Q325 **Chair:** A final thing, we have concentrated a lot on England and Wales but, Paula, you mentioned Finland. As a panel, how much do you look to other countries? We have the Whitehall/regional England debate but what is best practice in other countries? If you were asked to mention one other country apart from ours in the 60 seconds we have left, would one spring to your mind that we should maybe learn more lessons from rather than anywhere else?

Paula Widdowson: On building and infrastructure you can learn from Scotland because some of the Fabric First is very, very useful and also from some of the Scandinavian countries in the same way. That is one of the areas we do explore.

Dan Norris: I will say exactly the same. The Scandinavian countries do tend to lead the way on this. There are good initiatives within the UK, frankly, as well. We have a lot of answers within our boundaries.

Chair: Fay, I started with you so I will finish with you.

Fay Holland: I agree with what has been said. It will very interesting to learn from the consultation in Scotland about bringing in new targets for heat pumps or heat networks and decarbonising homes. Also the Netherlands has a similar climate and housing stock so some of the progress that has been made there in rolling out heat pumps is interesting to look at from the UK's perspective as well.

Chair: Thank you very much. All that will help contribute to our expected bank of knowledge and expertise on this Committee. With that I thank



the three of you, Fay Holland, Dan Norris and Paula Widdowson for being here today. We will take a short break before we have the second panel. Thank you.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Richard Clewer, Ian Morrison and Victoria Vyvyan.

Q326 **Chair:** Welcome back to the Energy Security and Net Zero Committee on the second half of our third session on heating our homes, local leadership and challenges. Again we have a panel of three in front of us. I will ask them to introduce themselves as we did before, name, rank and serial number starting on my left.

Richard Clewer: I am Richard Clewer, the Co-President of UK100. UK100 is an organisation of councils that are at the more aspirational end of tackling climate change and decarbonisation. I also chair the Countryside Climate Network. I am the Leader of Wiltshire Council as well. We are a large unitary. That distinction between types of councils is something worth coming back to, I hope, at some point. If we are playing the schools game, I went to the same school as the Prime Minister but I think he started the year after I left. I did have a scholarship.

Chair: When I chaired the Committee on International Trade, we used to have a viewer in Wiltshire to whom I used to refer very often and who was very interested in that. The people of Wiltshire are always very welcome on any Committee I chair.

Ian Morrison: Good afternoon. I am Ian Morrison, Director of Policy and Evidence, Historic England. Historic England is an arms-length body with a statutory duty to protect, promote and champion England's historic environment.

Victoria Vyvyan: I am Victoria Vyvyan, President of the CLA, the Country Land and Business Association. Probably my role here is representing not just the private rental sector but also very much the rural private rental sector, which is a voice that needs to be heard more loudly.

Q327 **Chair:** Thank you all for coming along. I hope you enjoyed the first session. To kick off this session, Victoria Vyvyan, do the Government's support schemes and incentives for home retrofit and low-carbon heating fairly account for the sheer variety in the UK housing stock and the differing circumstances?

Victoria Vyvyan: That is one of those quick answer ones; no.

Chair: I thought so. I stay on a small island in the Outer Hebrides.



Victoria Vyvyan: That is right. With our housing stock, there is even a geographical difference. It rains a lot more on the west side of the TB line I can tell you. Our houses melt in Cornwall, they just do not fall down, it rains so much. There is a very different type of housing, there is a very different challenge to that housing and 90% of our housing stock is more than 100 years old, so it does represent a very different set of challenges. It is beyond absurd to tell us that we would be much better off if we were on mains gas because we are not on mains gas—as you are not probably—and it is never going to happen. We need to have solutions that fit the rural need and not just ignore them because as a percentage of the whole population, it is quite a small demographic.

Q328 **Chair:** Incidentally I got a heat pump before it became a football in the culture wars.

More generally to the rest of the panel, what sort of finance options and incentives would be most effective in encouraging home improvements across all property tenures? Victoria, enthusiasm is what we like in this country. Away you go.

Victoria Vyvyan: Don't encourage me! Past projects that have worked really well in rural areas include the Renewable Heat Incentive. It had a very high take up. Projects that went into the Renewable Heat Incentive are still working now, principally with biomass. It is not necessarily an option for urban areas but it is a very realistic option for those in rural areas. We have a half-megawatt biomass boiler that was funded before the RHI and it is just reaching the end of its life now. It is 17 years old. It has been a very, very successful project.

Q329 **Chair:** How many houses would that heat, a half-megawatt?

Victoria Vyvyan: It has the capacity to heat 35 houses.

Q330 **Chair:** How many is it heating? I note the word "capacity" there.

Victoria Vyvyan: It is part of a planning thing but we have not built the second half so it is heating 15 at the moment. If we could just get that pipe in the ground to bring it to a few more that are in our immediate area then it could do that as well.

Ian Morrison: We think that area-based schemes are a sensible development model that has already been introduced. We would like to see some changes going forward. I think that the previous panel mentioned the opportunity of certainty and increased timescales. We think that the short timescales for existing area funding schemes have caused an issue and disadvantages people who live in traditional properties, because they are more complex to address and you need longer to assess which options are the right ones to put in them. We also think that the boiler upgrade scheme could have an increase in grant. That brings heat pumps, which we think are a sensible solution for the vast majority of traditional buildings, more into the realm of affordability, but there is still some way to go for owners. We know that affordability



HOUSE OF COMMONS

for those who live in historic properties is one of the main barriers to undertaking energy efficiency improvements.

Richard Clewer: If you look at the range of incentive schemes, some of the work around retrofitting social housing has been good, but the consistency of funding, as has been mentioned, is a major headache. You have to have a scheme to retrofit the entirety of housing stock. You cannot rely on piecemeal funding. It must be a long-term plan. When you come on to some of the incentives around private housing, they can work, but they take time to build up a head of steam, and even then, success—

Look at Solar Together: okay, there is no real incentive there, but it uses communal buying to deliver a reduced price for solar panels and batteries. We have run it for two years. It has hit maybe one half of a per cent of the housing stock each year. It is pretty small work given the timescales we need to work on for delivery. When you come onto the private rental sector, again we have had some funding from Government schemes, but you then have an awful of work to find landlords or tenants who qualify and who are willing to engage, so building up the steam on those schemes is very time-consuming. You also have no certainty that that funding will continue once you actually have something that is starting to deliver and provide these changes. I would say the incentives are really patchy, I am afraid.

Q331 **Chair:** Okay. I am not sure which of you may be the best, or perhaps all of you, but there are those living in alternative homes such as boats and caravans off the grid. Have the Government done enough to support those types of homes?

Richard Clewer: No, absolutely not. If you look at the recent work around the provision of heating support through the cost of living crisis, they were the last group that we got anywhere near being able to tackle and address, despite consistently pointing out that they are the ones who, at that point, are more likely to be in fuel poverty. You are more likely to be in fuel poverty in a rural area than you are in an urban area. What is it, 12.5% versus 11%? You are far more likely to be in an EPC F or G home in a rural area than in an urban area. Yet these groups, because they are difficult, because they are relatively small groups in the national picture—whether it be someone in pre-1915 housing or in a park home—because there are these different groups, they are much harder to come up with an approach for because you are dealing with fewer people. You are not getting more rapid support out to larger groups of people at once, which is what Westminster tends to like to see in my experience, and you have more complex solutions. You will need some form of green gas, for example, to deal with the home parks, certainly on all the bases I have seen from a Wiltshire perspective.

Chair: Well advocated for. Do Ian or Victoria want to add to that point?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Victoria Vyvyan: I think that the smallest of those groups is people living in boats, probably. The best work that you can do there is with insulation. Water is a good insulator and it is probably not such a profound problem. I think that damp is probably their number one problem. People living in caravans are unlikely to be dealt with by private landlords. People who live in parks of caravans, again, that will be district heating systems and there is not good money here for district heating systems and insulation.

Chair: Time is not with me, but I want to take in Lloyd Russell-Moyle briefly because he usually has a keen interest in these areas.

Q332 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** Do you think that the current plethora of different systems for people to apply for has hindered people's ability to seek grant funding to be able to support some of these adaptations?

Richard Clewer: In my experience, the erratic way some of these schemes have performed has been a significant hindrance because you then get the horror stories flowing out from them. The plethora, as you say—there are too many different options. There is no simple consistent advice. Across the country, we have ten standard housing types and then all the stuff on the fringe. We ought to be able to provide much more consistent advice as to what people can do for whatever housing type they are broadly in. That is not there. There are schemes and people are told, "Apply for this," and the they are pretty much on their own. You can try to do it but, because you are in a rural area, you cannot find anyone to give you good advice because the skills are not there. I am sure we will come on to that.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: I just applied for ECO4. All the providers in Brighton got back to me saying, "There is no one that can help you."

Victoria Vyvyan: That is typical.

Q333 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** That is typical. Then you can look at the boiler refit programme in a conservation zone and everyone says, "Oh well, the EPC of the house is not above C, so we will not even—" So you are stuck.

Victoria Vyvyan: In addition to that—and it covers off one of your other questions—our experience has been that the local authorities are not the best conduit for that funding to come through either. We have contacted our members and there has been a variety of responses.

Chair: The previous panel might have disagreed. I am not certain.

Victoria Vyvyan: I think they did. I think I am the one disagreeing. Some of them did not know they had funding. Some of them do not know who the funding is for. If you get past the desk where they say they have funding, the person who picks up the phone has never heard of the funding scheme. There are so many reasons why it is just not working. It is probably not more resource that is the answer. I think that bringing it all in under a single, national body—to go back to one of the questions



that was asked earlier, why do we think local is better than national? I think in this particular case, national is more efficient.

- Q334 **Derek Thomas:** Richard, local authorities can set higher sustainability standards in their planning policies. A year ago, Cornwall Council adopted their climate emergency development plan document, which allows them to go above and beyond building regulations on all new residential buildings. Is it helpful or is it a hindrance if local authorities have varying standards on building quality?

Richard Clewer: First, you can try, but an inspector can strike it down. A number of us are using a variant of that Cornwall model, and some have had it approved. Yet—I want to say Lincolnshire, but it was not—there was a council in the north of England using the same principle but had it rejected by an inspector. That in itself causes an issue there. The only absolute that we have is in areas where we are looking at significant regeneration. You can set higher standards in those regeneration areas. That is the only actual power that we have. The rest of it is arguing and the trade-off between viability for affordable housing and for everything else that we need to provide through the planning process. That lack of consistency is not good. The Government should instantly, in my view, change the building regulations to say that all new housing must, in essence, become carbon neutral.

- Q335 **Derek Thomas:** It is fine until it is challenged by the inspector.

Richard Clewer: It is challenged by developers on viability, and you are then stuck in a trade-off. I have had a lot of conversations through UK100 with council leaders who are desperate to do this and yet find that means that their affordable housing delivery falls away. We have major issues with a need for affordable housing in rural areas across the country as well. That trade-off is difficult.

- Q336 **Derek Thomas:** Okay, thanks for that, Richard. I know that we were trying to claim fame earlier. My only claim to fame is that Vyvyan is one of my constituents.

Victoria Vyvyan: Victoria.

Derek Thomas: Victoria. I should know that. Victoria Vyvyan.

Victoria Vyvyan: It is an excellent name.

Derek Thomas: I just upset my constituent.

Chair: He is new on the Committee today. We forgive him everything. He is doing very well.

Derek Thomas: Victoria, I have a question for you that we discussed previously. How well aligned are current standards for heritage and rural homes with the realities faced by those living in and retrofitting these properties? As you say, Cornwall has its fair share.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Victoria Vyvyan: In retrofitting our properties, there is no recognition in the EPC—the estimation of the cost of doing the work on the EPC is sometimes only 10% of the real cost of doing the work. It is completely unrealistic. We could be quite brutal and say that some houses would be better off—not the beautiful historic houses, obviously—but some lousy housing stock would be able to get better planning to start again because it is so unlikely to ever be a warm home. That is something I am a bit equivocal about here because I do not quite know whether we are talking about getting everybody into warmer homes or improving our carbon sequestration at the same time. Sometimes those things lead in different directions. I think that principally with housing stock, it is planning and costs. It might take us 18 months to get a reluctant planning officer to come out and check out the programme.

Q337 **Derek Thomas:** In theory, done properly, a healthier, warmer home should also be cheaper, but you are right, the EPC does not necessarily deliver that outcome. Ian, should local authorities be empowered to require the installation of energy efficiency measures when owners make changes to a property that requires planning approval?

Ian Morrison: Consistency is important across local authorities. What you will find, particularly for installers, if you get different requirements in different places and different suppliers, that causes confusion and affects the development of supply. We think that it is important that measures are taken where feasible to improve the energy efficiency of historic buildings. We think that the changes we made to Part L, the approved document of building regulations, have struck the right balance between the encouragement of new efficiency measures where appropriate. However, each historic building is unique and you need some flexibility. Yes, we want to see far greater energy efficiency improvements to our existing building stock.

Q338 **Derek Thomas:** Will you be talking at all this afternoon about the work you did before Christmas around historic buildings and the skill set bit?

Ian Morrison: Absolutely.

Derek Thomas: We will get to that later, but I did not want it to be missed.

Ian Morrison: Yes. I can cover that now if you would like me to.

Derek Thomas: Does the skillset bit come up later?

Chair: It does, in one of the questions. We will touch on skills later. Very good. Thank you, very efficient. I should say before Mark Pawsey starts that we are expecting a vote. Normally we suspend for about 15 minutes for one vote—and I think it is just one vote—and 10 minutes for additional votes. I think it is just one vote and then there is a pause, then there are three votes.

Vicky Ford: There are more debates and then three votes, so when we



come back, we better be quick.

Chair: I was alerted to this by Ms Ford, so I am being guided by that. We are expecting a vote, but we will start at the moment with Mark Pawsey. If we stop, we will stop for a maximum of 15 minutes. If the group assembled here comes back earlier, we will start when everybody, or at least four or five are back.

Q339 **Mark Pawsey:** Victoria raised an important question: what is our objective here? Are we talking about improving people's welfare in their homes, giving them warmer homes, or are we looking to reduce the country's CO2 emissions? In an ideal world, we would be talking about the same thing, but the measure of performance that we currently have is energy performance certificates, which each of you referred to. Can you tell us your thoughts about the limitations of EPCs? I think that one of you pointed out that to meet an EPC in many cases the best solution is to stick a condensing gas boiler or a combi boiler in.

Victoria Vyvyan: Even to be able to bring it up to a standard where I can legally let it. If I put in an air-source heat pump, it will fall below the necessary EPC certificate and that house will likely fall out of the private rental sector. I want to quickly add there that among our members in the rural area, we let 80% of our stock at less than commercial rent, and of that, 25% at less than social rent. We really are providing that sector with accommodation, but if we are forced to move into air-source heat pumps, we will not be able to let them.

Q340 **Mark Pawsey:** Sure. I hear from people in the private rental sector who own leaky old houses that are unlikely to get to level C that they will simply sell their leaky house and buy a new house from a developer that will be able to comply. The only people left in the old leaky houses will be owner-occupiers. We will have transformed our problem that way. I am interested in what you see as the problems with EPC and what we might do about them.

Ian Morrison: There are acknowledged issues with EPCs that were mentioned in the previous panel. There are two. There is a perverse incentive to invest in carbon-emitting upgrades, particularly new heating systems, and that has to change. We have to have to promote low-carbon energy-efficient approaches. The other key issue is the current methodology that underpins the EPC assessment, the standard assessment procedure.

Q341 **Mark Pawsey:** I am offering you the opportunity to revise EPCs. What would you do?

Ian Morrison: Absolutely. Improve the methodology that underpins the assessment. We know, and there is good evidence that shows, that the current assessments are underestimating the thermal performance of historic properties. We are working closely with DESNZ and DLUHC to improve that methodology and we believe there will be a consultation soon that sets out those improvements.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q342 **Mark Pawsey:** Richard, what would your input be to the consultation that Ian has referred to?

Richard Clewer: My concern with EPCs is that they are simply a blunt tool. There is one set of EPCs. I think that if you are looking at historic solvable buildings, you should have an entirely different rating system for EPCs that would apply to those buildings.

Q343 **Mark Pawsey:** Would you determine that by age? How would you distinguish?

Richard Clewer: It is by construction type.

Q344 **Mark Pawsey:** By construction type? That is a minefield, isn't it?

Richard Clewer: It is and is not. When we looked at decarbonising council housing in Wiltshire, we were able to identify roughly 4.5 types of houses, and about 200 on the edge that are complicated. You can break your housing down relatively simply by the kind of work that will be needed to make a meaningful input there. It should deliver both energy saving and carbon saving. You cannot have the same EPC for every house type. If you have a solid wall construction pre-World War I, you probably want a different type of EPC rating and a different set of criteria that you can use to improve the energy efficiency of that house to a 1980s build or a 2020 build.

Q345 **Mark Pawsey:** Right, so you would accept that we do need to improve the insulation of our existing housing stock, but at the moment, we seem to have this fabric first approach that says that you cannot do anything about improving the heating system. You do not deal with the fabric at the same time. Is that the right approach to take or should we change that?

Richard Clewer: Again, it depends on the property. For the bulk of my council house properties, which are the ones I have the most granular detail on yes, fabric first is very much the right way to go, but it involves robots spraying foam in spaces humans cannot get into, which we never expected when we started. Mostly, fabric first will make sense, but there are areas where it will not.

Q346 **Mark Pawsey:** Ian, with the older housing stock, where trying to take a fabric first approach may involve a substantial change to the character of some of these older properties, should we not worry about that and get the more environmentally efficient heating system in regardless?

Ian Morrison: We think that the fabric first approach can incentivise unnecessary interventions that are actually increasing carbon emissions and may damage the property in the long term.

Q347 **Mark Pawsey:** Tell us how they would increase carbon emissions. Is it by putting a gas boiler in?

Ian Morrison: It could be. There is both the heating system, such as the boilers as we have already covered, but it is also sometimes pushing



towards fabric interventions that are not necessary to achieve the thermal performance. That is partly because the standard assessment protocol does not properly account for the thermal performance of the existing building. You have to factor in—and this is something we are keen to see more of—the whole life carbon cycle of the products that are used in retrofit. Insulation has a high carbon footprint in itself, both in the manufacture, transport and installation, and quite often they are not necessary. I would draw reference—

Q348 Mark Pawsey: You would accept, then, that on occasions it might be better to leave the property less well thermally insulated and retain its existing character.

Ian Morrison: It is about having a much more nuanced approach and understanding. Thinking about the building in its context, how it is constructed, as Richard said, how the building is used, and taking very simple measures, such as loft and underfloor insulation. These can be very effective before you look at things like wall insulation.

Q349 Mark Pawsey: Will that not make assessment incredibly complicated? At the moment, we have a relatively simple formula, and we will make this thing so complicated that nobody will know where they stand.

Ian Morrison: It is striking the right balance, isn't it? This is always the technique. You want to have a methodology that is helpful and that works. At the moment, the EPC methodology has to develop to be more appropriate to inform better choices so that unnecessary works are not undertaken. You have to improve it. I agree, you do not want to make it too complicated that it becomes unworkable. It is about striking that right balance and we are working closely with the Government to try to improve the methodology to make them more adaptable and useful for historic buildings.

Richard Clewer: You touched on health. One of the problems you can get, particularly with older buildings, is that if you insulate, you end up with major condensation problems, which in turn, causes a health issue and means the windows are opened to clear the condensation, so you are pumping more heat out into nowhere. That nuance is important.

Q350 Mark Pawsey: How do you resolve that? What is the solution?

Richard Clewer: You have to have a better understanding of those different types of buildings, particularly when you get to these small areas with boats.

Q351 Mark Pawsey: Are we not better doing what Victoria suggests, which is if they are a bit old and difficult to make efficient—were some of these houses built in the 1880s expected to be around today and should we not look at replacement in some instances?

Richard Clewer: In some cases, from a council housing stock perspective—I have nothing that old—but yes. Demolition is the only way



HOUSE OF COMMONS

in some cases to deal with the issue. It gets much more contentious when you are dealing with anything with heritage in it.

Victoria Vyvyan: I want to come back to the minimum energy efficiency standard, which is based on cost instead of on carbon. I think that is the heart of the problem. If we could move to it being based on carbon impact, that would make a difference to the result. It would make a difference to the core problem rather than the solutions. Secondly, these old houses have a lot of embodied carbon already in them. We have not been ripping carbon out in order to construct them. They should be given a head start on their EPCs because they already have the carbon wrapped up in that building and it is not going anywhere, and it has been there for 300 years or whatever. There are different ways of dealing with that as well. The most important thing is that it has been so slow. It has been so desperately slow. I have been an officer of the CLA for six or seven years now. We have been talking about standard assessment procedures the whole time and we have never progressed because of the silos of it falling in two different places.

Q352 **Mark Pawsey:** And the lack of continuity.

Victoria Vyvyan: And the lack of continuity. Yes, we get some breakthroughs about solid wall construction, and that is great, and that will be 2025 or 2026.

Chair: The way the afternoon is shaping up, I think in the programme I can squeeze Lloyd Russell-Moyle in for one question for one minute.

Q353 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** Very quickly, what you are saying effectively is that we have one standard based on cost and one on carbon. If you are a renter, you still want to know before you rent the property how much this will cost you? Do we need two assessments, maybe done at the same time, but two figures, rather than what we are trying to do, trying to shoehorn two things into one? If you are a renter, you do not really care about your carbon, but you do care about how much cash is coming out of your pocket every month. On the other side, you might also care, from a Government point of view, the carbon and embodied carbon of the house. Are we trying to do two in one?

Victoria Vyvyan: I cannot remember if it is already mandatory or if it is about to be mandatory, but when we rent a house, we have to say what we estimate the costs to rent to be.

Q354 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** Is that on the new EPCs?

Victoria Vyvyan: No. As a landlord, you have to do that based on the bills that you already have for that property. I think that it is good to have both of those indices there, but what are we basing the actual performance on?

Q355 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** We should take away all costs out of the EPC and it should just be on carbon, and then we should do something else that is



HOUSE OF COMMONS

cost-based.

Richard Clewer: Yes.

Chair: Okay, thank you. Vicky Ford, you may be interrupted by the bell, but plough on.

Q356 **Vicky Ford:** I will be interrupted by the bell. Before I get into my questions, Richard, in the last panel we had two elected representatives making a number of comments about what they thought about various bits of Government policies. They were from different political parties. I wondered whether or not you wanted to make any of your general comments about how you think the Government are doing.

Richard Clewer: From a local government perspective, I think that we all share the same issues, the big one being consistency. I am a firm believer that in local government you have a wonderful opportunity to plan for the long term in housing. We think of housing in 30, 40 or 50-year cycles. We have to have consistency.

Q357 **Vicky Ford:** You have to have consistency. Thank you. That is very helpful. Victoria, you have probably answered this a lot in your answer as well. Do you think that the Government policy on rural areas and the challenges they face in decarbonising their homes is too difficult, so let us not even focus on it?

Victoria Vyvyan: We are a tiny demographic and therefore it is quite easy to ignore our voice in Government. I do not think it is this Government. I do not think it is a party political issue and I do not think it is particularly helpful.

Q358 **Vicky Ford:** You are a tiny demographic but the numbers we were given showed that the fabric improvements to the listed buildings and historic dwellings in conservation areas could provide 30% of the reductions required by the Sixth Carbon Budget.

Victoria Vyvyan: How much would that cost? I think that is the real question. You might get a 30% improvement at the cost of improving, I do not know, the whole of Leeds. The cost is prohibitive, I think. At the moment, I think that we could do other things.

Ian Morrison: Yes. That shows the potential of reusing and adapting our historic buildings. That is one of the most effective ways of reducing our carbon emissions and the unnecessary consumption of natural resources. It is important that we continue to invest in our historic buildings so that they continue to be desirable places to occupy. That is one of the key things for keeping them in place. Our view is that every historic building can be made more energy efficient and should be made more energy efficient. It is not a question of if that is done, it is a question of how.

Q359 **Vicky Ford:** Do you think that we need more guidance for people in historic buildings or more flexibility about being able to make changes that may change the historic nature a bit but enable them to continue to



HOUSE OF COMMONS

be inhabited?

Ian Morrison: We have supported a cross-government review of the barriers that stop people from making energy-efficiency improvements to their historic properties. That was published last week. That covers all of the areas you mentioned and more. Simplifying planning is a key issue. Addressing skills and simplifying funding are also important.

Q360 **Vicky Ford:** Would one of your asks to this Committee be that we as a Committee should encourage the Government to urgently look at implementing the recommendations of that review?

Ian Morrison: It is the Government's own review, so you would hope that they would implement the recommendations itself.

Q361 **Vicky Ford:** Yes, right. Tell me the key recommendations.

Ian Morrison: The key recommendations, as we have already touched on, are reforming the EPC framework so that it more accurately reflects, making sure that funding addresses the issues of traditional properties, and simplifying the planning system. Quite frankly, one of the areas where we can make the biggest improvement is around getting better-informed advice and guidance to the owners of properties so that they know what improvements they should undertake.

Q362 **Vicky Ford:** On heat generation, Victoria—I touched on it with the previous panel—you sometimes get local areas where there is excess energy. You might live, as this example was, near an old mine or geothermal source. You might live near a wind turbine that sometimes is paid to do nothing. Do you think rural areas could use that excess energy better for community heat sometimes? Should we look at pilot programmes on community heat in rural areas? Do you think rural areas could host more of those assets to produce community heat solutions?

Victoria Vyvyan: Yes. One of the interesting things that could be pursued is looking at how you can have a community heat solution, based on any of those things you said, that does not need access to the whole National Grid to be delivered to your particular area. If we could localise that as well, that would be great. We have plenty of big holes in the ground in Cornwall full of warm water. Eighteen degrees centigrade seems extraordinarily hot. I do not think we have anything like that. But yes, in this particular case, we could have local answers. On small landlord scale, there is nothing here that encourages us to put district heating systems in for four to 10 houses. We could take out little—there you go, there is your bell. We could take out those small groups and put district heating systems in.

Vicky Ford: I will really quickly ask you—*[Interruption.]*

Chair: We are now in Division time. We have 15 minutes. We will be back at maximum 3.51 pm, we think. We might be here before 3.51 pm. I apologise to our panel, but this is the risk of afternoon sittings.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Sitting suspended.

On resuming—

Chair: Thank you very much. The Committee resumes and I think that we were with Vicky Ford.

Q363 **Vicky Ford:** I was talking to Victoria about how rural areas could play a role in hosting the assets that may be required for a more decentralised model for community heat. You talked about geothermal, for example. I would be interested to go potentially further than that one. We saw the project in Fife with hydrogen. I was spare power from a wind turbine, which was not used always to provide electricity for the grid using the spare electricity to produce hydrogen and then having a local hydrogen network.

Victoria Vyvyan: As much it pains me to say it Scotland is definitely ahead of us in their use of renewable energy; however, I know a bit about the delivery of the borehole at Eden, which is a successful project but which is definitely done working with outside finance. One of the routes is to find the way you can finance that. With the reopening of South Crofty mine, which is being dewatered now, there are routes.

Q364 **Vicky Ford:** I have a specific question, Victoria, because you have already spoken about a community heat network. Could you also see that potentially being a community hydrogen network on a local hydrogen gas grid for example?

Victoria Vyvyan: I do not know enough about the delivery of hydrogen, is my answer to that. I can send that question to the office and they can give you the answer.

Q365 **Vicky Ford:** Any thoughts from anybody else about this local type of grid for off-grid rural areas?

Richard Clewer: We need to look at them. I think they will be quite unique depending on the area you are looking at; whether you have solar that is producing excess capacity that you can harness, whether you can use some form of battery or heat battery storage.

You asked what is different about rural areas. Well, 1.5 million homes in rural areas are heated by oil. That does not happen in urban areas. Our policy constantly is metropolitan because the bulk of our residents live in cities. The policy is not flexible enough to be adapted for rural areas, whether it be on heating our homes or on the need to decarbonise cars but keep them because buses in Cornwall or Wiltshire are not so hot. There is a huge range of areas when we are looking at decarbonisation. National policy is urban and does not easily translate to rural.

Q366 **Vicky Ford:** Victoria said earlier that she was not sure if what we were



HOUSE OF COMMONS

trying to do was to reduce people's energy prices—i.e. heat more homes affordably—or reduce people's carbon usage. The point with Richard is oil is both the most expensive way to heat and the most carbon emitting. Are you encouraging us to say the Government should do more to focus on those 1.5 million homes that are currently oil-heated?

Richard Clewer: The Government needs to set policy that is flexible enough to allow that focus to be done. We do not decarbonise until everyone decarbonises, until the countryside does as well as Manchester. When decarbonisation works there should be an incentive to do it because it should not only be better for the planet; it should save you money.

Q367 **Vicky Ford:** Ian, do you want to say more about the conflict between policies that are trying to preserve traditional homes versus those aiming to make them net zero compatible?

Ian Morrison: The fundamental thing is we do not see those as incompatible approaches; we think it is perfectly possible with the right approach to make every single historic building more energy efficient. It is a question of how you do it, making the informed choices and having the right information, the right assessment and the right knowledge about which interventions to make.

Q368 **Vicky Ford:** You said information, the right assessments, and clearly because they are historic, not a one size fits all approach. You want to have a more building-by-building bespoke approach.

Ian Morrison: That is right. Understanding the building, how it is constructed and how it is used is also important. Making sure we put in place sufficient advice and guidance for owners locally as well as nationally; I think that is important and maybe we will come back to local expertise and local authorities because that is an area of significant concern.

Q369 **Vicky Ford:** Does that also need to have more financial incentives to go hand in hand with it?

Ian Morrison: Without question, our own research shows finance and affordability is one of the real barriers. That has also been picked up by the Government in their review. You need to be able to make sure that financial solutions work for those who occupy historic properties as well as those who do not.

Q370 **Vicky Ford:** Does that need to be through public sector grants or can you see a private remortgage with a charge against your property?

Ian Morrison: As with most things, it is a mixed economy and it is about making sure the public finance is invested where it is most needed, reflecting the income and ability of people to afford improvements.

Q371 **Vicky Ford:** How should the planning system be reformed?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Ian Morrison: The planning system needs to be made more straightforward. The Government review highlights two specific areas where improvements can be made. The first of those is the development of national management development policies, which the Government have said they will bring forward as part of the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act. Within that, we believe there is the opportunity to give the right advice about how you strike the balance between securing the preservation of what makes our historic buildings so important, preserving their significance, while also allowing for them to be adapted to be made more energy efficient.

Existing tools are not used very widely at the moment. Listed building consent orders for example is one area where we think there is a good opportunity to bring in blanket approval for things such as solar, for improving windows, insulation and heat pumps particularly. The Government are committed to consult on this in due course but we are working with local authorities at the moment—Bath was mentioned for example—for a local listed building consent order for solar panels, which would remove the need for individual owners to apply for individual consent every time they want to install a solar panel, providing they abided by a clear set of controls that are set out in the consent order.

Q372 **Vicky Ford:** So you could have a historic building planning consent that covered multiple houses effectively?

Ian Morrison: Exactly and that has to be a sensible way forward. It will be more challenging to do nationally because every area is different.

Q373 **Vicky Ford:** I will put you on the spot and you may not be able to answer this question, but of this 30% statistic we were given that suggested if you could improve the energy efficiency of our historic and conservation area buildings you could hit 30% of the carbon budget, how much of that 30% is actually realistic?

Ian Morrison: That is if we did everything to every single building, but it is an aspiration and we should work towards it. We do think you can improve the energy efficiency of every building; we think that is important and we think there are ways to achieve it. We know at the moment—

Q374 **Vicky Ford:** Do you think you could realistically aim to achieve half of that; a third of that?

Ian Morrison: Our ambition is to achieve as much of it as we possibly can. I would hope we could achieve more than half. At the moment we know that using the same mechanism that DESNZ used for recording progress with EPCs—notwithstanding the problems and issues with EPCs, it is still a useful mechanism for understanding progress in terms of retrofit more generally—we have moved towards 47% of dwellings that are now in band C or above. We know that for traditional properties, those built before 1919, that currently stands at 18%, so there is a significant way to go. When the survey was first undertaken in 2008, it



HOUSE OF COMMONS

was only at 1% so we have seen significant progress over the last 15 years but there is a still long way to go and there is great opportunity.

Q375 **Vicky Ford:** So 18% of our historic buildings are—

Ian Morrison: That is using the results of the English Home Survey that DESNZ bases its results on.

Q376 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** Have the Government done enough to integrate skills development into government-funded retrofit schemes? I know that, despite me going on at him for about five years, my plumber has gone on a scheme around air source heat pumps only this week because the opportunity has only just come up. Have the Government done enough to integrate skills development?

Ian Morrison: The Government are doing more and more to support skills. We undertook some research jointly with Grosvenor, National Trust, Peabody and The Crown Estate last year that showed the scale of the challenge to ensure we have the skills in our construction industry to meet the need of this retrofitting objective. That is at least another 100,000 people in the construction trade, so there is a huge challenge ahead. Historic England has broken that information down into local authority areas and made that available through an interactive online tool so it is there, available for local authorities and particularly for the employer representative bodies that are producing the local skills improvement plans to understand what they need, bespoke for their area, and what skills they need to deliver that energy efficiency programme. People in the previous panel mentioned the importance of local area energy planning; the key is bringing that together with the local skills improvement plans. It is these connections that are so important and that need to happen so action is co-ordinated to respond to what is a significant challenge but quite an exciting opportunity.

Q377 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** Richard, putting aside the disaster of taking FE colleges out of local authority control that happened 30 years ago, should skills development be devolved to local areas where there is greater local capacity to understand the needs and assessment, and in what unit of area should that devolution happen? I glaze over a bit when we talk about skills panels because they change every 10 seconds so there is no consistency in our skills planning locally. Is the local area the right body to devolve that to?

Richard Clewer: Yes, I think it is working inside the bounds of what you have been talking about. It is part of devolution policy that skills comes with every devo deal, which is sensible. You have a distinction between whether that should be skills on a regional basis, so where you have a metro or a larger area where it probably makes some sense to sit at that level. Inside a county area, it probably makes sense to sit at a county council or a large unitary level. However you have then got that disconnect between whether skills are being provided by the top tier authority yet districts are responsible for housing; where you have



district councils, you have a problem. Districts and counties do not necessarily play well together even where you have different unitaries—Wiltshire and Swindon have a very good relationship but we do not always see eye to eye and when it comes to the LEP and the schools agenda coming out of it there are all sorts of tensions. You have to be pretty clear in where you are assigning responsibilities and you have to be looking at a footprint of at least a county. If you let it become too granular and too micro, you will hit problems. The people who provide the plumbing services for much of the north of Wiltshire are coming out of Swindon, so to look at Swindon in isolation from Wiltshire in that context when it comes to skills would be wrong. You will need to get that strategic approach somewhere into that devolution.

Q378 Lloyd Russell-Moyle: It has to be done in a way that is not the county council trying to roll over the unitary authority that is on the side.

Richard Clewer: No, you definitely do not want to create conflict between the county and the districts, but also you need to be involving business and business does not always want to be engaging too closely with something that is political. My assessment from Wiltshire—and we are going through this with the LEP coming in—is to look at having not a LEP but a board there that is run by the council but involves business and not controlled by the council to understand what that mix of skills is—e only have one further education college and that makes it easier—to understand how that context should come together in identifying what those critical skills are.

Q379 Lloyd Russell-Moyle: I come to all of you with this question but you can answer and then pick up the other ones. You have mentioned this previously in connection with the grant but thinking about short-term funding versus long-term funding on skills development being a hindrance, where should the Government provide more certainty for that kind of funding development?

Richard Clewer: It is exactly the same principle. The problems we have at the moment are that we have the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, which is the easiest way to look at least at kickstarting skills and you can then try to access more funding on the back of that. We had two years of funding from UKSPF. We have incredibly tight controls on how we should spend it, which makes it difficult. We have struggled—in my own context—to get some skills funding through Wiltshire College to enable some retrofit programmes to be put in place. We have just made it, but that is because we are a large unitary and I have a lot of officers who can put their time into that. It is a different picture in different places. You need consistency for at least five years for skills. It has to be for at least the length of the course for skills, and if you are looking at some of the further education elements it must be.

Ian Morrison: The issue of national versus local delivery has come up a lot through the panel discussions. It is not a binary choice; it is not either/or, it is both of them working together. Clearly it is a very complex



challenge. The bulk of the delivery has to be at a local level but within a national framework and with national expertise in support. An example of that—I am talking of a very particular part of the building stock of course—is that understanding how to make energy efficiency improvements for historic buildings is a particular expertise. I am lucky enough in my organisation to have some fantastic people who have the best knowledge around heat pump installations in historic buildings. The challenge lies in using their expertise and how we spread that within local authorities. Each local authority will not have that expertise embedded within it so how do we share?

- Q380 Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** Each local authority might need a different level of it. Where I come from, Brighton and Hove, where we have almost 2% in conservation housing stock, much higher than the national average, we might need far more of those experts in that particular style of housing stock compared with something else.

Ian Morrison: That is right. You have to have a system that is flexible enough to respond to each local place.

- Q381 Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** If I go to my local college or school that does building teaching, they are teaching people how to build new—very exciting—but there is not a huge number of the teachers who necessarily know how some of these old buildings are. How do we get that pump primed and get the right teachers in?

Ian Morrison: This is a complex area and I am happy to write to the Committee with further advice. I cannot cover it all in the time available.

- Q382 Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** I think that is interesting because I am very concerned about that. Victoria, you are more critical about the national versus local distinction?

Victoria Vyvyan: This is about skills and education. It is the case that the greatest silo is the Department for Education. It does not seem to be very receptive to changing its ways or changing them very quickly. There are two distinct patterns here; how do we educate young people and how do we educate people who are already in the workforce. I think commerce will drive the people in the workforce to upskill if they see a profitable business as a result of it—like your plumber. I say be extremely aware.

I do not need any more people telling me they are experts; I need somebody to come and do the work and actually get dirty and bring a pasty and stay all day and come back tomorrow and do a job that is not the wrong job because they have not been properly trained and they never understood the training in the first place. I think adult training is a different area that needs a different approach from that in the schools and in higher education.

In rural areas—which is the only place I understand—I think it is about skills across the board, the great growth in how we can have green



HOUSE OF COMMONS

energy skills, the great growth in what we can do with forestry skills. At the moment we have a one size fits all education system and it simply does not deliver for rural areas, for historic buildings, for all of these niche things. We are very fortunate that we have a unitary authority, a very efficient one. Our chief executive was chief executive of the year and we have had a very good LEP. I think the LEPs were and are the people to deliver because they know what the businesses in the local area need; if we still have them obviously.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: If we still have them and if they cover the right areas.

Victoria Vyvyan: We are very fortunate because we have been in the position of seeing that it works.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: I think where LEPs have mapped better over local authorities they work quite well. In my area, for example, we had two different LEPs over one county council, district council split in half, and that makes things very difficult.

Victoria Vyvyan: Anywhere there is a muddle there is a mess.

Chair: Thank you very much. We were going for energy efficiency and we have covered that quite well today. We also touched on time efficiency. I did notice the subtle product placement of the Cornish pasty in one of the answers there.

Victoria Vyvyan: There is never any end to our product placement.

Chair: Marks out of 10 for that are 10. Can I thank the panel very much, Richard Clewer, Ian Morrison and Victoria Vyvyan for coming along today and for sharing their experiences. Particularly notable was the advocacy for caravans and people living on boats, which has been touched on by BBC's "Money Box" amongst other programmes and has been very much overlooked. It is welcomed that it was noted again today. Thank you all and thank you for remaining.