

Energy Security and Net Zero Committee

Oral evidence: [Building support for the energy transition](#), HC 734

Wednesday 18 June 2025

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[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Bill Esterson (Chair); Sir Christopher Chope; Torcuil Crichton; Wera Hobhouse; Luke Murphy; Melanie Onn; Mike Reader; Bradley Thomas; Claire Young.

Questions 1 - 72

Witnesses

I: Luke Tryl, Executive Director, More in Common; Rachel Brisley, Director, Energy and Environment, Ipsos UK; and Professor Karen Bickerstaff, Professor of Human Geography, University of Exeter and Chair of ACCESS Net Zero Taskforce.

II: Amanda Grimm, Policy Manager, Community Energy Scotland; Claire Chappell, Head of Climate Behaviour Change & Engagement, Welsh Government; and Dr Amanda Slevin, Co-Director, Centre for Sustainability, Equality and Climate Action, Queen's University Belfast.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [ACCESS Net Zero Taskforce](#)
- [Community Energy Scotland](#)

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Luke Tryl, Rachel Brisley and Professor Karen Bickerstaff.

Q1 **Chair:** Welcome to this afternoon's Energy Security and Net Zero Committee session, which is our first session on a new topic: building support for the energy transition. We have two panels today. I will ask our first panel if you would kindly introduce yourselves, starting on this side, please.

Professor Bickerstaff: Hello. I am Professor Karen Bickerstaff, Professor of Human Geography at Exeter University. I am a member of the ACCESS research network and led a recent taskforce that was specifically focused on the social dimensions of net zero.

Rachel Brisley: Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Rachel Brisley. I am a Director at Ipsos and Head of our Energy and Environment Service. We do polling around net zero and general climate concerns.

Luke Tryl: I am Luke Tryl. I am the UK Director of More in Common. We are a public opinion research organisation.

Q2 **Chair:** Thank you, you are all very welcome indeed. I will start the questions by asking about broad levels of public support for the energy transition. Would you agree that polling evidence suggests strong support for action on climate change, but that that support is declining and there is confusion on what action is needed? Who would like to go first?

Rachel Brisley: Thank you. On this matter around three quarters of the public generally say they have a concern about climate change, although that has decreased slightly in the last couple of years by around five percentage points. Also, the concern around the impacts of climate change has increased. From earlier this year back to 2022 there has been an increase in people in the GB public saying that they are concerned about climate impacts.

Overall, there is strong support for action, and for individual action, but this has definitely been something that has decreased since 2022, and there is uncertainty on what individuals need to do as well. There is also a divide on how much the country should do in terms of responsibility for Government; most think it is the Government's responsibility to act, rather than the responsibility of individuals.

Luke Tryl: If I could pick up there and take a step back a bit, there is a tendency sometimes to assume that attitudes to climate and environment exist in isolation. It is fair to say that people's attitudes to climate are very much being shaped by the macroenvironment at the moment. What we have seen since the pandemic is the cost of living crisis, which directly affects—in both directions—how people think about transition, both the idea of, "Will it lead to lower bills?" and, "Will it generally benefit me?"



We have also seen two big international conflicts in Ukraine and in the middle east. I would say the big shift that I have noticed in how people think about tackling climate change and net zero is that greater emphasis on energy security, which comes up much more unprompted in focus groups now. The interesting thing is that the balance of risk has shifted on renewables. People now see renewables as the safer and more reliable option, which is feeding into their sense that transition is the right thing to do.

To echo what Rachel said, it is important to think about this in layers. At that top level, concern about climate change remains strong. We conducted an MRP that looks at support across the country and there is no UK constituency where concern about climate change falls below 50%. In Sefton Central, 70% are concerned about climate change—that top level of concern is there. There is generally then more support than not for getting to net zero. Where the crunch comes is the specific measures, and “Will they be fair on me? Will they be manageable for me as an individual?”

Q3 Chair: Thank you. It is possible that the reason the support is so high in Sefton Central is that their Member of Parliament talks about it all the time. Are there parts of the country where there is evidence that there is information or influence against it?

Luke Tryl: Areas where concern is lower tend to be in parts of Scotland, where the oil and gas industry is particularly important to people’s livelihood, as well as some of the deindustrialised areas of the UK. I should say in those areas concern remains above 50%, so people are still worried, but there is a little bit more convincing to do about what needs to be done in those areas and about how the transition will not compound the economic shocks that those areas have felt since the 1980s. Will it be an opportunity to regenerate industry and jobs in those areas, or will it make things worse?

Q4 Chair: Thank you. That is consistent with what we heard in Port Talbot on a Committee visit. You said a lot there about energy security, and you mentioned lower bills. Is there greater or lesser belief now that the transition will see lower bills than there was a few years ago?

Professor Bickerstaff: From the perspective of the net zero work that we have done at Exeter, in tandem with colleagues at the University of Bath, we did a one-off poll where we found about 75% of people were concerned. But to echo what Luke has been saying, people look at this in a very varied way. As Luke has said, there is consistent support for renewables, and concerns seem to be very much in the context of the cost of living crisis.

There is a view that net zero puts an emphasis on individual choices and that a lot of the actions involved require expenditure—at a point where people have been through multiple crises and there is pressure on that capacity to invest. There is a pushback against those measures—the heat



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pumps, the EVs, solar PV—that are seen as investing too much responsibility in individuals.

To go back to the point about worry, one of the things we also asked about was support for net zero targets, and we got a rather different picture there: about 51% of people support net zero targets, but quite a significant minority oppose those targets. So there is confusion and misunderstanding around net zero, but it has a slightly different resonance with the public than climate change.

Q5 Chair: Is there any more to say on whether there has been a change in the view on bills being higher or lower in future?

Luke Tryl: When we asked in July last year, 50% of Britons said that they thought energy bills would be lower if energy came from renewable sources. That has dropped slightly to 41% this year, but I should say the public are still two and a half times more likely to say that lower bills will come from renewables than dependence on oil and gas. There is a sense that they are cheaper than the alternative, but the public are not necessarily convinced that they will be cheaper in an absolute way.

Q6 Chair: Do you have any evidence between you on whether people believe there will be jobs as a result of the energy transition?

Professor Bickerstaff: We asked a question about co-benefits—what other benefits are associated with net zero—and the ones that came up least were jobs and economic benefits, and that it would produce a fairer society. People see those connections in terms of air pollution, nature benefits, wellbeing, and health benefits, rather than necessarily future jobs and economic benefits.

Luke Tryl: I agree with the top line; in general, people are sceptical about the Government delivering jobs. In the areas where there seemed to be evidence of it, people are more positive about jobs. In the focus groups that we have done in areas like Teesside, for instance, people tend to talk about green jobs—although we should call them “good jobs” rather than “green jobs”, because people think green jobs are something like gardening when we have looked at that in focus groups. People talk about good jobs in areas where they have been delivered.

Rachel Brisley: We have seen from our research projects that there is support and belief about new jobs, and concern about the transition and about losing jobs as well. That is almost in equal proportions.

Professor Bickerstaff: In those deindustrialising communities, there is a history of raised expectations, but then things not being delivered quite as they expected. That history of previous promises perhaps plays into it as well.

Q7 Luke Murphy: Thank you and welcome to the witnesses. FGS Global put out research recently that said that a third of the public are now sceptical of climate science. Does that sound right to you?



Luke Tryl: That does not match with what we have found. We have found that out-and-out climate scepticism is quite limited. In fact, I think in our latest polling it was under one in 10 who did not believe that climate change was man-made, so I find that figure quite surprising. There is pessimism—and this extends across a range of public policy areas—about whether we can do anything about it, and we found in our latest polling that one in five thought that net zero by 2050 was achievable. But that is about people's low faith in Government rather than the science.

Professor Bickerstaff: We asked a similar question about the feasibility of net zero targets and about 40% of our sample were sceptical that those could be achieved. The scepticism is more there. Obviously, we have talked about public concern being quite high; when you ask people what they think the public level of concern is, it is much lower. So there is a perception gap where everyone assumes that either the Government are not particularly concerned about delivering net zero or the public are not particularly concerned. When you look at the polling data, those levels of concern are much higher than it appears to the public, so that perception gap is an issue. There is a sense that the Government are not behind it and the public are not behind it, but in fact they are.

Rachel Brisley: Yes, we would completely agree with that. We have seen exactly the same thing with people thinking that other people do not support net zero, but the proportion out there is much lower. Another thing that is quite interesting is about age. You are talking about different parts of the country, but in terms of age it is traditionally always thought that younger people are more supportive, and generally younger people are more concerned. But we have seen from polling earlier this year that younger men aged 16 to 34 are the most likely to be fatalistic about climate change, and are most likely to agree with the statement, "It is too late to do anything about it."

Luke Tryl: Part of the challenge there is that I do not think the story has been told to the public about how much has been done already. Only a quarter believe that we have made any meaningful difference to reducing Britain's emissions, and only 22% think we have made a meaningful difference to tackling climate change. That fatalism is being compounded by the idea we have been talking about this for ages, but we have not done anything about it, which of course is not the case when you look at the statistics.

Q8 **Claire Young:** We have heard in the previous set of questions that there is regional variation in concerns about climate. Is that also reflected in support for the energy transition, or is there a different regional variation for that?

Rachel Brisley: We generally see less of a direct regional difference and more of an affluence focused element around support for the transition generally—that is generally people on higher incomes. That potentially links back to cost of living and almost having the luxury to think about



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things like heat pumps. We definitely see it is very much an affluence related element, and also more in cities and more women as well. That links in with what Luke was saying about disenfranchised communities that have struggled in the past, such as the deindustrialised areas.

Q9 Claire Young: When we are thinking about communication, if we are communicating about climate, you are saying that we need to be thinking about geographical differences and communicating to different geographies in different ways, but not if we are talking about the energy transition. It is an interesting conundrum if one has a regional variation and the other does not, but you are trying to communicate about both of them.

Professor Bickerstaff: It does have a regional element to it; for those communities that are deindustrialising, there are potentially future jobs in the green economy. However, the energy transition will mean something completely different to people in Exeter and those in London, so I think there does have to be tailoring of communication to the place context. There will be different relationships to energy and climate in those different places, so it is about having structures that enable that connection to know what the issues are, and to know what energy and climate means in a specific context.

If you think about places that are low lying by the coast, the energy transition and net zero will mean something completely different. While it may not show in polling data, there is plenty of qualitative work that focuses on communities with different vulnerabilities that makes clear the point that how we communicate has to differ.

Q10 Claire Young: In your answer to the previous set of questions, you gave the example of North sea oil affecting how people see the need for climate action, and you said that on the energy transition you are picking up more about affluence and women versus men. Do you think the geographical variations are all explained by quite straightforward things like North sea oil and gas, or are there are other things that are the real reason, and it just happens that those factors cluster by geography? What I am trying to say: is it the geography or is it factors that affect those particular geographies?

Luke Tryl: I think it is a confluence, which might sound like a bit of a cop out. Certainly, areas that depend on fossil fuels—however broadly you want to define that—are more sceptical about the transition itself. As Rachel was saying, it is more granular than at a regional level; it comes to individual towns. It builds on what Karen was saying that it is because these areas feel they have been let down at every stage of transition. If I do a focus group in these areas there is often excitement about the potential of it. The sense of, "Our region used to power the country; we want to do that again." There is a sense of agency that I think the transition can bring, but those areas do feel like they have been let down so many times.



In those geographies, you often get, as Rachel was talking about, the affluence issue, and there is a big link between affluence and fairness. Those who are less financially secure are much more likely to say that they do not think the transition will be fair to people like them. That fuels their worries and often they are struggling as it is. In addition to cities there is a big graduate/non-graduate gap on this as well, and that has a geographic clustering. I would say it is both.

Professor Bickerstaff: One of the factors that comes out quite clearly as well in terms of people's support or position is their political orientation. One of the most significant relationships we observed in our data was where people position themselves in terms of left and right, and what that looked like then in terms of support. As you would expect, people who position themselves on the right were more sceptical and critical. I think that overlays all of this as well.

Q11 **Claire Young:** I have one more question. We have talked about bills and so on in relation to the public's views on the energy transition. How much does concern about the country's energy security factor into their views?

Rachel Brisley: Very much—concerns about energy security are something that we have picked up on quite a bit; Luke raised this before. The main way to address concerns about energy security and international issues is by increasing renewable energy, increasing energy efficiency, and spending less. That very much comes into the support, and I think the concern about bills does not seem to be as directly related to increasing renewable energy as some would make out.

Luke Tryl: We find that it is one of the most significant arguments now for transition. Two thirds of the public say they are quite or very worried about threats to energy security. In focus groups I cannot tell you the number of times I have heard variants of, "We cannot be dependent on madmen like Putin for our energy any more." The war in Ukraine has genuinely led to a paradigm shift.

When we asked people, "What should be the top responsibility of the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero?" it will not surprise you that the No. 1 answer was bills at 58%, followed by making the UK less reliant on foreign imports at 42%, and then reducing carbon emissions at 26%. Energy security is a much more powerful way into this discussion than purely the transition and climate change itself.

Q12 **Chair:** Perhaps having "energy security" in the title of the Department has had an effect after all.

Luke Tryl: It certainly does.

Q13 **Chair:** Are you seeing a backlash over up-front costs? That has been a bit of a theme in what you have been saying.

Professor Bickerstaff: There are concerns. What came at the top of our survey were costs and concerns about the financial impact on



households. As Luke said, it is the question of a lack of fairness. Research from all the main social science research groups highlights that equity is key for most people in terms of how they engage with energy transitions. There is a view that at the moment too much is focused on those up-front costs and the individual requirement to pay those costs at a time when people have been through multiple stresses and crises. The cost of living crisis is obviously key there.

Rachel Brisley: On a sort of macro scale, we regularly get the response that there is more concern about the costs of climate change—as in the costs of its impacts rather than the costs of addressing it—but that is much more on a sort of global Government scale. When it comes down to individuals, however, there are challenges. I think in last year's polling about a third of people were saying that they still try to choose the environmentally sustainable option, even though they are concerned about the cost of living. But a similar proportion were saying that they are too concerned about the cost of living to worry about climate change. So those issues are still sort of clashing.

Luke Tryl: We did a sort of split sample where we asked people whether the cost of transition for society will outweigh the benefits, and whether the cost to the individual will outweigh the benefits for society. People think that the benefits of transition will outweigh the cost, but that flips when you ask about the individual directly. That is the area that you need to address: the benefits to individuals.

Chair: Yes, we will be coming back to that shortly in a bit more detail.

Q14 **Wera Hobhouse:** It is absolutely fascinating, because you have already pointed out that there is general support for net zero—people are generally saying yes to it—but when it comes to the specifics it becomes more fragmented. I am wondering whether that is reflected in the support and whether, once you know a bit more about it, how complicated it is and how much it might cost, the support will drop. It is easy to support the wider picture because it sounds like the right thing to do, but then when you get into the specifics people start to worry more about it and, therefore, their support drops. Is there any evidence of that?

Rachel Brisley: We did some citizens' engagement—a citizens' panel—last summer for the Climate Change Committee on net zero living and net zero policies, and when you get into that detail, people's views change. But there is also a willingness to know what they should be doing and to understand, "How do I go about getting a heat pump? What measures do we need to take?" and to be given a bit more advice and clarity about that. That is one of the challenges. People are not sure what the best actions are to take, and particularly anything with a big up-front cost is challenging, but it is definitely coming down more to the individuals and when they look into it, yes, it gets more difficult and pricier.

Q15 **Wera Hobhouse:** Do you find that people trust these new technologies



or not?

Rachel Brisley: There is wariness about some of them. It is not a sort of knee-jerk, anti-technology feeling, but with heat pumps there have been myths in the media that have been pushed by various organisations. That has made people very wary about them and concerned about the cost. I think it is the same with things like electric vehicles, but heat pumps are the big one where there is a worry about, "Do they actually work? If I got a heat pump who would fix it?" Most people have said they do not understand how a boiler works, and they do not understand how a heat pump works, but they know they would be able to get their boiler fixed whereas they are not so sure about getting a heat pump fixed. They worry about the supply chain as well.

Luke Tryl: There is a bit of a "show, not tell" challenge. When you ask people who have the tech—such as an EV or a heat pump—they are much more positive about it than people imagine. The flipside of that is that the perception has become embedded in some segments of the public that these are luxury goods that those who are rich or more affluent can afford. If you are a Londoner you can afford it if you cannot find a charging point immediately, because you do not need to drive that far, or you can afford to have a more expensive heat pump. That is a real risk to green tech—that it becomes associated with being a nice-to-have, but not something if you need a really reliable product.

Rachel Brisley: Though arguably, it is newer tech and with any tech, richer people have it first. There is also that sort of argument about how it then gets out to the community.

Q16 **Wera Hobhouse:** Is it that some things are plain wrong, and misinformation drives all of that, and if only there was reliable information that would disappear?

Luke Tryl: It is a mix. If you ask people about EVs, what are they most worried about is, "Will there be a charging point?" Cars are quite integral to people's sense of security, "Can I get my family to a hospital if I need to? Will I be able to charge it up?" So there is definitely a practical concern there, and similarly with heat pumps. There is then a much smaller group where urban myths about EVs in particular have crept in—

Q17 **Wera Hobhouse:** They start combusting.

Luke Tryl: Yes, they burst into flames. I had someone in a focus group say, "If you're not careful, they'll burn your house down. They're too heavy for the road. We are destroying the DRC and places in order to get the stuff for the batteries." There is that level there, but I think driving it overall is, "Will they work?"

Professor Bickerstaff: The gaps in the information are not just at a national level; it is having that information—impartial, trusted information—at a local level. It goes back to the point we were making about selling the good news. People are not aware how widespread some



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of these technologies are and who is taking them up, and the opportunities and supports that are in place. There is a range of information that is lacking.

Q18 Wera Hobhouse: Have you seen any changes in support for particular things? Is it the big things like EV or heat pumps, or are there other things where you have seen changes in support?

Professor Bickerstaff: There is DFT data that shows the vast majority of people support EVs, but they do not see them as something in which they can invest. It is not the lack of support for the technology, per se, but the idea that, "It isn't something that's available to me as an option," that is the barrier.

Q19 Wera Hobhouse: So it is linked to the economy?

Professor Bickerstaff: Individual finances.

Luke Tryl: And reliability, I would add. If you ask people, "Petrol cars versus EVs?" 71% say petrol cars are more dependable; just 13% say EVs. If you look at heat pumps it is not quite as stark as that. A majority of 52% think that gas boilers are more dependable, and just 18% think that heat pumps are more dependable. The fundamental question for people is, "Will they keep my home warm?"

Professor Bickerstaff: You saw with solar PV the importance of local champions—you can see it everywhere. Where solar PV is in a neighbourhood, it has expanded around that area, so there is something critical about getting those local champions and making that much more visible, "This is how comfortable my house is. This is what my bills are like." I think that has happened with solar; it is perhaps yet to happen quite so much with heat pumps.

Q20 Chair: Thank you. I wonder whether you are familiar with any older research around what you called the introduction of newer tech and how people's attitudes have changed as it has been rolled out.

Professor Bickerstaff: How it has changed in terms of demographics?

Q21 Chair: The attitudinal shift as new tech is introduced.

Professor Bickerstaff: There will be stuff around solar and that gradual layering out and some of the things that enabled that to happen.

Q22 Chair: Do you think it is more established for solar or part of the same agenda?

Professor Bickerstaff: There is work on sociotechnical transitions and how they happen, and looking at large-scale shifts and smaller-scale shifts. It talks about the steps that happen to support a technology transition that is both about changing the infrastructure and shifting norms and so on.



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Luke Tryl: I would also say there are counterexamples. The biggest one that often comes up is diesel. People will say, "You are telling me to get an EV, but we were told to get a diesel car and now we are being told that they are very bad." Consistency is important in terms of messaging from Government.

Chair: I worry that someone will string a few clips together of things you have cited on the counter side, and it will become a viral video. Now I have said it, someone probably will—but let's hope not.

Q23 **Mike Reader:** We would also like to know about people's understanding of the economic benefits and costs. I will start with Rachel: when we think about policies relating to the energy transition, are people more concerned about the cost to themselves or the cost to society?

Rachel Brisley: We did research in 2021, 2022 and 2024 on net zero living, looking at a series of different net zero policies—things like frequent flyer levies, taxing meat and dairy, or subsidies for energy heat pumps. The way we have asked that is by asking people whether they support things per se—yes, the majority do—but when we ask, "Do you support them if it affects your lifestyle in some way?" they say, "Not so much." Then we have asked about the cost, and that is where it really hits—apart from energy efficiency, which is still very much supported even if it meant taxes would go up, and renewable energy, which is also still supported even if it meant taxes would go up generally.

Your point there is that it generally always comes down to the individual and what it means for them. One thing is about selling the co-benefits, so saying that it is something you do not for the climate, but for your health or for saving money, or other lifestyle aspects. But when something is more expensive than the alternative and the only benefit people can see is the long-term impact on climate change, that is where individuals struggle, particularly on things with high up-front costs.

Luke Tryl: On an individual level Brits are quite proud of the actions that they take on the environment. If you talk to people about recycling they will say, "I'm proud of the recycling that I do. I'm proud that I take action." I think part of it might be the slightly sort of curtain-twitchy attitude we often get as well, "My neighbour—they never bother to recycle." I think there is a tendency, in talking about things like the transition, to sometimes denigrate that small stuff, whereas building on the things where people are proud of doing their bit—which is very integral to the British psyche—is the way forward, "You have done this, now you can go a bit further, and now you can go a bit further than that."

Q24 **Mike Reader:** You mentioned a point there, Rachel, about people's views on the transition to renewable energy. To what extent does the UK public think that the transition to renewables will have a negative impact on the cost of living?



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Rachel Brisley: As in increased bills potentially? That is not something we have come across as a major concern. In fact, the general view is that an increasing focus on renewable energy would affect energy security and bring bills down.

Professor Bickerstaff: I guess the only way that is reflected is in, for instance, domestic PV, which goes back to those issues of up-front costs. Renewables generally are recognised to be, if anything, cheaper than fossil fuel.

Q25 **Mike Reader:** In terms of very recent work you have done, some of my colleagues in the House are now very obsessed with policy costs. Is that changing the views at all about renewables? Luke, have you seen any new data?

Luke Tryl: Certainly not for the moment. Again, our research is aligned with the others in that people see renewables as the cheaper and, crucially, safer way forward from an energy security perspective. Among those who oppose the net zero target, cost is cited there, but overall, the public do see renewables as the cheaper and cleaner way forward.

Karen made an important point that I would reiterate: sometimes purists on this want to limit it to the climate transition, but people will talk about things like the fact that renewables are also cleaner, so there will be less air pollution, and that is a real driver for people. They like the fact that they are not just cheaper, and we produce them, but cleaner.

Q26 **Mike Reader:** Luke, you touched on this earlier in terms of cost, but how do views among the UK population diverge on whether climate action needs to be taken immediately or delayed until economic conditions are better?

Luke Tryl: At a top level there is quite a limited caucus for slowing down on climate. In fact, when we ask about slowing down it is very clearly a minority. Most people either say we are moving at the right pace or that we should go faster there. That is at the top level. It is a bit more split on some of the specific measures. When the previous Government introduced a delay to the heat pump and electric vehicle targets there was an interesting split; people tended to be less supportive of delaying the heat pump mandate and a little bit more supportive of delaying the EV roll-out.

One of the things I should say is that one of the myths that got embedded among a group of people was that the end of EV sales meant, "I will not be able to drive a petrol fuelled car any more." You saw that a bit in what happened in Uxbridge with ULEZ; there was a sense that, "I will not be able to afford to drive the car that I have." People thought it was that writ large. Once it was explained to people that this is about your new car, which may not necessarily be—again, this is important—a brand new car, because you will be able to do second-hand EVs as well, then people were much more supportive of the timeline.



Professor Bickerstaff: We asked a similar question, and we found that again the majority wanted swift, immediate action, but there was a group of around 34% who wanted a delay until the economy was in a stronger position. So that kind of discourse of delay is definitely coming through in our data. When we looked at that there was a political dimension to it. The delay narrative was much more supported by those who took a position on the right.

Q27 **Mike Reader:** Can I ask one more quick question? I will start with Karen: in your broader work, are there any international examples of where Governments have this messaging right and have that buy-in from their citizens?

Professor Bickerstaff: This might relate to a later question. There is something about devolved leadership on the energy transition that makes a difference. In some parts of Europe where you have much more localised, locally-led devolved Government, and opportunities to shape and make decisions at a local and regional level, we see, although not universally, more positive support for the direction because people have a say in it. They are closer to Government, and they feel that they have more influence. That is certainly something that people are asking for in our survey, and I think that has been successful in international experience.

Rachel Brisley: On your previous point about whether we need to go faster, or have we gone too far, our polling showed exactly a third and a third either way—quite interesting. On the international point, the polling is not hugely different between England, Scotland, and Wales. However, there is more action being seen in Wales and Scotland than in England in terms of work around climate messaging, citizens' assemblies and things like that. There seems to be more movement there.

Professor Bickerstaff: We did find in our poll on questions of support and fairness, although it was not significant, that England consistently came below the devolved Administrations. There may be something about proximity to Government again there, but there is a pattern of Scotland in particular performing better.

Q28 **Chair:** Is there an awareness that electricity prices in the UK are the highest in Europe?

Luke Tryl: Yes, certainly, and that will often come up unprompted in focus groups.

Q29 **Chair:** Going back to your point about EVs, is there increased awareness now that it is not the end of the ability to buy a petrol or diesel car?

Luke Tryl: Yes, I think that has shifted. The messaging has landed there.

Q30 **Chair:** What is the awareness like of the different policies of different political parties? Is this something you have tested?



Luke Tryl: We have looked a little bit at variations in support between different political parties. I would concur with Karen that it is not that there is a left/right split, but that split has become more polarised since the Conservative party took a more gradualist approach to reaching net zero. What we tend to find on something like climate is that voters on the right in particular are much more responsive to the stance of their party leaders.

For voters on the right having Boris Johnson as a champion of net zero policy clearly trickled down to influence those voters. Similarly, voters for Reform UK are quite interesting in the sense that, while they are more climate sceptic, it is not a top issue for them. About 80% of Reform voters say migration is why they vote for Reform. Under one in five say that transition is. We conducted an experiment where we had Nigel Farage saying pro- and anti-net zero things, and it led to a significant shift in attitude. They are very responsive to political leadership on that.

I do think one of the dangers for maintaining a consensus on transition is if it becomes left/right coded and that becomes even more embedded. At the moment we are far less polarised than in the US where there is significant divergence between Republicans and Democrats on climate concern. Here, the level of concern between Conservative and Labour voters it is not that different.

Rachel Brisley: On your point about leadership: at COP26, where there were obviously a lot of politicians talking about it, when we asked people in our monthly issues index 40% of people said that climate change was one of their three biggest concerns. That number has been around 10% to 20% since the year 2000, which was when it shot up.

Also, generally on the political parties, while voters for parties like Reform and the Conservatives, who have been critical of net zero, were overall less supportive of policies, nearly half of Reform voters and 70% of Conservative voters said that they were at least fairly worried about climate change. Across the board Reform and Conservative voters are generally less supportive of net zero policies with one exception, which is around the energy efficiency of homes. That does get cross-party support in terms of subsidising that for everybody.

Professor Bickerstaff: One of the issues that has been picked up by the parties on the right and also by the media is the economics. Some of the traction of those issues around the cost to the UK economy and the inequities of net zero policies has been projected through the media. That particular equity dimension and the costs—the idea that it will hit vulnerable people hardest—has certainly been picked up and is reflected in the relationships we see in terms of who supports and who does not.

Q31 **Luke Murphy:** You have partly answered this, but I am interested in what you think is the most important factor in setting the narrative and driving public views on net zero policies. We have talked about a bit about events like Ukraine, the climate impacts, media stories and digital



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comms about net zero policies, and Government comms and the way that politicians talk about it. Is it too simplistic to say there is a clear, overwhelming driver that drives people's opinion, or is it a range of those things that drives people's views and narratives?

Professor Bickerstaff: People's views are not consistent, so you can hold the view that, "I'm very concerned about climate change," as well as saying, "I'm not very keen on this aspect," or, "I'm not very keen on net zero." So I do not know that people have ultimately very stable views. There is the stability behind that worry for climate change, but other things are very much in the mix, and it will reflect who you have had conversations with.

Social media is a huge issue and certainly what came up in our poll is that people are worried about disinformation and the messages that are flowing through social media. Again, the people near to you make a difference but the overall political narrative and the media reflection of that will be key. One of the things that came up consistently is, "We want Government leadership. We want clear messages from Government that this is important." That cross-party consensus is sort of gone and it is quite hard for people to orientate themselves when you have quite different messages coming through.

Rachel Brisley: We are seeing exactly the same, particularly through things like focus groups and workshops. The changing view on the commitments leaves people confused and frustrated about what the messaging is and what they are supposed to be doing. On what drives opinion, I completely agree that it is various things. Linking action with climate impacts is important. The challenge there though is always that the impacts happen now and whatever action you take will not reduce emissions for some time, so that cause and effect is not as direct to send that message.

We saw that climate concern increased hugely two years ago when our temperatures first hit 40°, when there were big floods, and when the TV was full of wildfires in California and Greece. However, that tends to last about a week or two weeks, and then the concern goes back to where it was. There is that thing about local messaging, and understanding what it means for your community and your environment, and having people working together.

Luke Tryl: At the macro level we are—in public opinion terms—in another moment like the 1970s where you had the big energy price shocks there, and the tests that people are applying are, "Will transition be the way out of it? Will it provide me with greater security? Will it protect us from the extreme weather events? Will it make my life more affordable?" I know it sounds a bit overblown, but we are in a paradigm shifting moment.

The other thing that I would add, which I think was also true in the 1970s, is that trust is a big factor—"Will it be net zero for me but not for



thee?" drives the mood. We found, for instance, during the partygate episode, people would say in focus groups on net zero, "But will this not be the same? We'll be told to follow a set of rules and make the changes and bear the costs, and those in positions of power will not do the same themselves." So I think that political trust element should not be underplayed in convincing people this is a whole society endeavour.

Rachel Brisley: Yes, that is something we get very regularly—"Why are you expecting the little person to bear the brunt of this and you're not worrying about the big corporations?"

Professor Bickerstaff: Yes, and the research literature on that goes back decades. There is the whole narrative around green choices that puts a focus on the individual. But we need a plan and we need leadership—it is not about the individual—so that critique of putting too much on the individual is a persistent problem that needs to be tackled.

Q32 **Luke Murphy:** What is your assessment of how politicians talk about this? Do you think it reflects what you have said around public opinion? What would your advice be to a group of cross-party politicians about how they should talk about climate? What do you think of the Government's communication strategy—and I do not mean just this Government, but previous Governments—in terms of talking about climate more generally, and also the policies they are implementing?

Rachel Brisley: Consistency. One of the big issues is around consistency. Obviously, things cannot always stay the same, but the rolling back of policies by Rishi Sunak had quite a big impact. It is also about being honest about the costs, so being clear that there are up-front costs that will not be resolved. The public do not trust politicians, so it may be about who else can speak in support if we want to have campaigns around this.

Professor Bickerstaff: Trust is a complicated concept. We asked who should have the most influence on climate policy, and MPs and the Government were right up there at the top. As with covid there is an expectation of the Government to lead and that is their role. Clear messaging from the Government is important. At the moment it feels like net zero is a bit hidden, and things are happening but they are not visible. It should be about increasing the visibility, increasing the consistency, and telling people what has happened: things have happened, things have changed, people are putting in heat pumps.

If you go back to ULEZ, there are plenty of LTNs. We looked at school streets projects, where you have limited time restrictions, that have been incredibly successful and incredibly popular. There are positive messages to communicate, but as Luke said, it has to be clear that there are trade-offs, that there will be difficulties along the way, and that this will not be perfect for everyone, because people just do not buy that rose-tinted vision of the future.



Luke Tryl: Can I ever so slightly disagree with Karen? Obviously, we range across different areas of public policy and look at how Government Departments are communicating. My view is that the Secretary of State's messaging on this area has been one of the better communications from this Government. I think there is a risk, when talking about climate change and transition, that you always talk about it through the deficit model—a bit like people would talk about the EU in the past—"It's a bit annoying. It's a bit painful, but ultimately we have to do it."

I think the stance of talking about the wider benefits, as I say, on energy security, bills, technology and having a competitive advantage, is quite important. It is not about talking about it through rose-tinted glasses but tying it back to those wider issues. If the top three issues that the public are concerned about—as they are quite regularly—are the cost of living, the NHS and migration, what is the green transition doing, particularly on those first two, to make bills not just more affordable but more reliable, so that I know what the next bill is going to be? Bear in mind that bill volatility stresses people out as much as rising bills. Giving it a sense of purpose—"It's more predictable, it's more stable, it's more secure, and it will lead to a healthier country"—could be a unifying message for the Government.

Q33 **Luke Murphy:** A final question from me: do you foresee trouble ahead, as climate impacts increase, or issues about the sophistication of messaging that is needed around climate mitigation and adaptation? That is quite a nuanced message to deliver.

Rachel Brisley: We have done quite a bit of work on adaptation, again in focus groups with the public, and it was similar to Luke's point earlier, where people said, "Have the Government ever thought of doing anything about flooding?" and I was thinking, "Well, yes, they have probably put quite a bit of money into flooding," and it was similar for local authorities. There is strong messaging needed, but it is about trying to bring the two together. There is too much one or the other.

The previous warm home programmes were looking at airtight homes, and then they would be boiling hot in the summer. There is that whole thing about looking at policies together—you need warm homes, but you will also need to have cool homes—bringing the two agendas together much more and not doing things that might affect the other.

Luke Tryl: I totally agree with that. The public tend not to compartmentalise in the way that policy wants to, to be frank, so speaking about it as one central mission works for people. The important thing about the adaptation piece is that it can help with the mitigation piece because it helps to tackle that sense of fatalism. We know there is stuff that is already happening, but we can deal with that, and what we want to do now is make sure it does not get any worse. That is quite a nice follow through between the two.



Professor Bickerstaff: I suppose the key thing is to make sure that adaptation is not, "This is what we do because we cannot meet the net zero targets." But yes, people obviously do not compartmentalise issues and there is a need to wrap them together, and it empowers people to think, "This is what I can do to help."

Q34 **Mike Reader:** We have talked about the net zero and energy security narrative, but to what extent do you see nature protection and environmental benefits coming up in how people talk about the energy transition?

Luke Tryl: It is important to people. We talked about the different sort of political persuasions of people's attitudes to net zero, particularly for more right-leaning or socially conservative voters. Nature preservation is one of the strongest ways to reach that group. In terms of messaging around net zero and climate, keeping climate and nature as a parallel track will be important because if they diverge it becomes difficult. I often joke that if you put the word "ban" or the word "animal" in a poll question, support shoots up massively because they are the two things that Brits love most. It is an important part of it.

Q35 **Mike Reader:** Banning things?

Luke Tryl: Brits love banning things and they love animals, so if there is a ban that involves animals it is the sweet spot.

Rachel Brisley: The whole biodiversity angle links in quite well with nature-based solutions and adaptation, which also supports climate mitigation. So there is a holistic way of looking at it that will have much more resonance with the public.

Professor Bickerstaff: With these co-benefits as well, they will not necessarily be salient for everyone, and I think there is a way of tying it back to some of the questions we were talking about in terms of place and regions, and thinking about the kinds of benefits that could come to different communities. In London there is air quality, which does tend to get picked up as a key co-benefit. It is fitting those issues that can bring people together to particular contexts, because nature may not work for everyone.

Q36 **Torcuil Crichton:** Thank you all for coming in. I am formerly a journalist, so I have an interest in messages and messaging, but I am also interested to look at what you said about people responding to political leadership. I have a quote here from a political leader who is particularly good at messaging. His message to the UK is that we, "stop with the costly and unsightly windmills, and incentivize modernized drilling in the North sea, where large amounts of oil lay waiting to be taken." That is Donald Trump. Contrast that with Ed Miliband, our own Secretary of State, who says that Rosebank, one of the proposed North sea wells, is a colossal waste of taxpayers' money and climate vandalism. Who is winning that war?



Luke Tryl: It depends whether you are looking at a specific local level and at people who are impacted by jobs. I think the first message can be particularly powerful, not least because people in communities that tend to be dependent on more fossil fuel intensive or extractive industries have a general feeling of being left behind. But it is important to say that for lots of the public the view is: we will get to clean energy and renewables; it is a matter of when.

The danger of that first message for a political leader is it starts to look a bit activist; it starts to look a bit like putting a finger in the dam. Whereas with the second message, what you need to do is carry people with it, so what is next for people who rely on the oil and gas jobs in Scotland? How can they be part of the transition, and how can you do the transition in a way that will not leave them behind or immediately pull down all the shutters?

Professor Bickerstaff: There has been work done in Yorkshire and the Humber talking about transition. There is support for a transition but there are those anxieties about what will it mean for community and the identity of a community, and about young people and their futures in the community. It is about creating a vision where those communities have a future that preserves those identities and places. That vision of what a just transition looks like is critical.

Q37 **Torcuil Crichton:** There is good news in the research—for you anyway—in that 42% of people trust you as a messenger, whereas only 13% would trust me as a journalist and even fewer as a politician. Should the Government be using different messengers and different people in different demographics?

Professor Bickerstaff: Yes, different polls produce different results on that. If you look at the history of covid, people do look to Government for leadership. They do put faith in the Government. It is a particular form of trust. We have talked about targeted communication; that also has to reflect a much more variegated set of messengers.

It goes back to that question of thinking about how we devolve some responsibilities around communication and planning a transition to the local level, and about the role of local government. We can see a range of different structures and schemes that have emerged around climate change, such as climate commissions that have emerged in regions and cities to bring together stakeholders. Part of that role is communication, part of it is research, and part of it is public engagement and building structures that are much more embedded in communities and can bring together these intermediaries where there is a strong trust relationship with particular communities. It also enables reach to communities that perhaps do not typically engage.

Q38 **Torcuil Crichton:** You mentioned a particularly difficult community—the 16 to 34-year-old males who are very fatalistic about climate change. Should I be on TikTok? How do you get through to these difficult to reach



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communities and the left behind communities who feel that, "This is for rich people and not for me"?

Rachel Brisley: There is definitely a need to look at different ways of messaging. Going back to your point, from our research the trusted groups are definitely scientists, teachers, doctors and Martin Lewis, but when it comes to young people, it is definitely much more about social media, and for older generations it is more about TV for getting the message across.

The other thing that we have found important is having people you know telling you about it—so your local communities, which goes back to that point about someone you know having a heat pump that works. It is people you know who you trust most of all, so it is about somehow getting down to the community level.

Q39 Torcuil Crichton: While not quite repeating Luke's question, DESNZ looks in and listens to this Committee. I want to know what your advice and brief would be to the Government to get their net zero message through. Is £250 off your bill enough, or do you need something more sophisticated that says, "This is not about other people. This is about you, and you will have a share of the benefit of this"?

Rachel Brisley: One thing to say is the role of public engagement. Obviously, we are talking about communication here, but part of communication has to be two-way: engaging people early, building a vision, and understanding what the problems are, where things might go wrong and what the trade-offs are. It comes up with any survey or any public engagement, and in the UK Climate Assembly, that people ask for sustained public engagement—for that to be built into the fabric of moving forward with the energy transition.

I know DESNZ is obviously building a public engagement strategy, but I think one of the key messages is to build public engagement into that strategy. It should not be one-off engagement but part of a longer-term conversation.

Torcuil Crichton: You talked about consistency as well.

Rachel Brisley: And maybe delivering it locally as well as nationally.

Luke Tryl: It has to answer the fundamental question, "How will this make my life better? My life has been difficult for far too long. I have been struggling with bills. I feel like the Government are not in control of things." How do you make this the agenda that gives a renewed sense of national purpose and helps the individual? That is where finances, bills and also insulation from shocks come in particularly.

Q40 Chair: Do you think that what you said there, Luke—"How will this make my life better?"—is what is coming across from the Government in this space? You were saying in relative terms that the communication from DESNZ is the best.



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Luke Tryl: Yes, I think it is coming from the Department, but I do not think you would take that away as a whole-of-Government message at the moment. Sometimes it comes across slightly too much like a barnacle that leaves you with the worst of both worlds, which is both, “We’re going to do this anyway,” and, “It’s not something we particularly want to be doing.”

Rachel Brisley: The messaging is also bigger and less direct for individual people’s home lives. If you are talking about clean energy or what is happening with Sizewell or whatever, that does not mean that much to individuals. The lifestyle issues need to be addressed more head on. Ultimately being convenient and cheap is basically the way that we will get people to move towards net zero.

Luke Tryl: You need to add “healthy” to that too. I remember in a focus group we spoke to a woman called Reena in Glasgow whose husband worked on the buses, and she said that the switch to EVs meant that he was coming home not coughing because of fumes any more, and that was why she was supportive. We forget these small examples of, “How will it make my life better?” That is another example.

Q41 **Torcuil Crichton:** Glasgow has one of the most polluted streets in Europe.

Professor Bickerstaff: “Making life better” could be a strapline. The net zero strapline is a useful policy framing, but I do not think it necessarily resonates, so there could be something that talks to people more directly. As a final point on the school streets project, a lot of those projects were quite controversial and contested, and the way in for a lot of communities has been around children’s health. That point about health is not necessarily ignoring climate change and the environment, but it is recognising that there are other agendas out there that bring people together.

Chair: Thank you. That is a particularly good place to end.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Amanda Grimm, Claire Chappell and Dr Amanda Slevin.

Q42 **Chair:** Welcome back to the Energy Security and Net Zero Committee session on building support for the energy transition. Welcome to our second panel, and could you please introduce yourselves.

Claire Chappell: Bore da, everybody. My name is Claire Chappell. I head up the Welsh Government’s Climate Action Wales Public Engagement and Communications Programme.

Amanda Grimm: I am Amanda Grimm, Policy Manager at Community Energy Scotland. We are Scotland’s national charity and membership organisation supporting over 400 community energy groups to deliver



energy projects and engage their wider communities in the energy transition.

Dr Slevin: I am Dr Amanda Slevin, I am an environmental social scientist and Co-Director of Queen's Centre for Sustainability, Equality and Climate Action. I am involved in numerous research projects related to climate and energy.

Chair: Thank you very much, you are all very welcome. We will look at how the energy transition is communicated across the UK and how the devolved Administrations communicate. I am sure you will, between you, be able to tell us about that and how they interact with the campaigns by the UK Government.

Q43 **Luke Murphy:** Welcome to the panel. What lessons do you think the UK Government can learn from the devolved Administrations in the way that they communicate around climate and net zero?

Amanda Grimm: In Scotland, currently too many people feel the transition is being done to them, not by them or with them. Communities who are hosting energy infrastructure and facing new developments are paying a high proportion of their income on energy bills, shouldering too much of the burden and not feeling enough of the benefit. The Scottish Government understand this, which is why they have been saying that new onshore development should offer mandatory community shared ownership, and that they should also provide mandatory community benefit funds, which should help retain a social licence for new developments.

The Scottish Government are also revising the heat in buildings Bill to make sure that it will reduce fuel poverty as well as decarbonise homes. That is important in Scotland where fuel poverty levels are up to 70% in some communities. Reducing bills is important but we would say it does not fully address concerns about new energy infrastructure, and it also does not allow communities to be actively part of shaping the transition in a way that will benefit them.

We would say that the best way to do that is by enabling more community ownership of energy generating assets. For example, the Point and Sandwick Trust in Lewis—Mr Crichton will be well aware of this—are a community energy group who own a 9 MW wind farm that generates about £900,000 a year, and that is all reinvested in the local community. With that money they have set up an energy support unit that not only provides grants for households in fuel poverty but gives advice on how to insulate your home to reduce bills permanently.

Other communities in Scotland that own renewables have used the income to invest in affordable housing, low carbon transport solutions, like EV car clubs or electric buses, and also deliver many projects that improve quality of life, reduce people's bills, and build community wealth



in a tangible sense of community. That is why community ownership of energy increases public support for renewables.

A YouGov poll shows that 62% of the public across the UK would support a community owned energy project in their area, but only 40% support a privately owned project. I know the Committee has already taken evidence on unlocking community energy and I will not repeat the policy points that were made there, but I would stress that implementing policies to enable more community energy is a great way to build support for the energy transition.

Dr Slevin: I think we can learn from Northern Ireland about perhaps how not to do things. We have been a bit behind in terms of our policy approaches. Indeed, our own climate legislation was introduced only in 2022, so we have been behind. However, the research I have recently completed for the Department for the Economy in Northern Ireland is clear—and its findings are similar to what Amanda has shared—around the fact that we need to bring communities with us on the journey. The communities have to be part of the solutions. Community benefit funds on their own are not enough to get support. Communities are not involved with planning decisions, they are not involved in design decisions and they are not involved in where the benefits from renewable energy generation occurs. That is generating resistance to renewable energy developments and the energy transition more broadly.

If we want to change that—and we need to change that, given our climate aspirations—we have to look at how we do that with communities. Amanda has been clear on the co-benefits that come from that but for me one thing I can emphasise to you is that we have to focus on community. That is our way that we will enable the energy transition. It has to be community ownership; it has to be community benefit. We have to move beyond individualised focuses, such as payments to individuals or lower bills; it has to be about how we make our communities better, how we generate our own electricity, how we improve our energy security and how we tackle and address the crisis that we have.

It is also about that sense of, “We’re in this together.” If we can learn from what has happened well in Scotland, and the direction we need to go in Northern Ireland, those are some of the lessons that we can bring across the UK more broadly.

Claire Chappell: Our programme has been running since 2023 and there are lessons that can be learned. First, do not underestimate how you need to consult and engage with stakeholders who will help you deliver the communications and the engagement. That investment up front is important and also ongoing. In Wales we have the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act so we are legally obliged to involve people in decisions that will affect them.



The focus of the conversation so far has largely been on communication, so broadcasting at people. In Wales we have flipped that. It is very much about engaging and involving people and giving them a say in what those solutions look like. Also on the importance of language and framing, we have very, very carefully chosen language and framing, not just lots of talk about net zero. The public do not understand in detail what net zero is or the targets, or necessarily have interest in that. What they want to know is how it will affect them and their communities.

It is not just looking at the topic in isolation; it is looking at all the related co-benefits. They have been mentioned before: health, cost of living, climate adaptation, nature, the environment. I do not think you can separate these topics. In the public's mind they are very interconnected. It is building a strong national Government-led narrative that is clear to people but not too complicated, and underpinning that with different layers of communication and engagement using the right influences.

The lesson for us—and I think it has been mentioned—is the call for ongoing participatory engagement: do not do it as a one-off to get buy-in for a policy or programme. You have to invest in it for the long term. The question was mentioned earlier about whether we should be postponing or going more quickly. It does take time to do detailed engagement and involvement, but without that the policies and programmes will not necessarily land very well. They are needed. There should be more transparency regarding progress being made. It is quite easy to fall into the trap of communicating all the benefits and what Government are doing, but it is about showing what is being delivered as a result and giving those case study examples of what it is leading to.

I have mentioned strong leadership and action at a national level—getting that narrative right, and making sure that narrative carries through. Also, finally, there should be a robust evaluation methodology. How will you measure this and make sure that you can show that what you are delivering is working? There are learnings in there but the biggest one for us is about involving people. Unless you involve people, rather than communicate at them, it will not be successful.

Q44 **Luke Murphy:** Essentially the message I got there was that the practice of how you deliver policy, and the actual content of the policy, are more important than the communications. That is where you have broadly focused; is that a fair reflection of what you have said?

Claire Chappell: Communication plays a role in re-enforcing policy and in helping broad levels of knowledge, but you cannot do one without the other. Our programme is heavily reliant on behavioural science. I am sure you have heard about the COM-B model. You cannot do one without the other, so you have to build capability, you have to provide the opportunity through policy levers, and you use the communication then to motivate. Communication plays a role, but it cannot play a role on its own.



Dr Slevin: It is a chicken and egg situation. We have to have policy to enable actual participation beyond communication. Often we think that, if we do the right campaigns, if we have the right messaging and public information, that will be sufficient. You need to create mechanisms to bring people together to listen to voices. The previous panel talked about citizens' assemblies. I was a co-founder of the Belfast Climate Commission as a mechanism to bring different stakeholders together. When you have those spaces for people to come together, to learn together, that is where change happens.

That has to be embedded in policy as well as practice. Change has to happen in practice and policy, but it has to be clear that it is not just about communication. It is participation. It is creating the opportunities for that and maintaining that throughout all stages of the energy transition, from conceptualising what is possible to designing, co-designing, implementing, and, as Claire has said, evaluating as well. People have to be participating.

Q45 Luke Murphy: Do you think there is enough collaboration between the UK Government and the devolved Administrations in that process? Do you think people will understand who does what—whether the Welsh Government or the UK Government is in charge of delivering a net zero policy?

Amanda Grimm: I think your average person might not think very much about that. I would say Community Energy Scotland has noticed that co-operation has been better between the current UK Government and the Scottish Government. For example, it was welcome that the funding from GB Energy went into Scotland's CARES fund—the Community and Renewable Energy Scheme—rather than setting up a whole separate fund alongside that.

However, as for public perception, there is a perception that decision makers on crucial energy issues are too far removed from many Scottish communities, especially those in remote rural and island areas. People there feel powerless to bring about the changes that are needed.

For example, the journalist Lesley Riddoch recently released a short film about Applecross in the highlands. It is an area that is overflowing with renewable energy potential, and there is already a community owned hydro scheme there. However, the grid capacity is so small that no new renewable projects can be built. The current projects cannot export all of the energy that they are generating. Businesses cannot locate there because they cannot get three-phase electricity supply. Homes cannot have electric showers, there are no EV chargers, and seven in 10 people are living in fuel poverty.

In this film, one of the residents said he feels like it is a case of out of sight, out of mind when it comes to Westminster. The UK Government could do more to visit those remote communities, listen to people, as you were saying, about the challenges they are facing, and then work more



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closely with communities on the ground and with the Scottish Government and representative bodies, like Community Energy Scotland, to help address those challenges.

Chair: We will have to move on; Claire Young, please.

- Q46 **Claire Young:** I would like to address my question specifically to Claire about the Welsh Government. Polling indicates that trust for the Welsh Government, the UK Government and local authorities differs depending on what aspects of an energy transition we are talking about. Does this factor into your communications?

Claire Chappell: I do think that the Welsh public expect the Welsh Government to engage and communicate with them. They are expecting a voice from the Welsh Government. In terms of whether they distinguish between where the policies are coming from at a UK Government level or at a Welsh Government level and what is devolved and what is reserved, I do not think they really think in those terms, and they do not need to know.

What they need to know is where the advice is going to come from, where the support will come from, and we need to make sure we are signposting effectively to those sources.

- Q47 **Claire Young:** The question is more about who is doing the communicating and how that affects the level of trust they have. Regardless of who is doing the work, who is telling them about it appears to vary the level of trust according to which Government they trust more and whether they trust local authorities more. People are looking to different organisations for different things.

Claire Chappell: It is a mixture. It largely depends on what you are trying to communicate in the first instance. To date, our programme has been wholly delivered by the Welsh Government because our programme has been up and running for longer. In particular on the energy transition, we cannot do this alone. In fact, most of the policies that need to be introduced are non-devolved matters. That communication has to come from the UK Government.

I think the public do trust the Welsh Government. Those levels of trust are still relatively high, but they also trust other stakeholders. As I said earlier, you need a multi-layered approach to that communication, and it is not one or the other.

- Q48 **Claire Young:** Climate Action Wales acts as a one-stop shop for citizens and businesses to gather information about the energy transition. Is there evidence that it has helped to build support for the energy transition and increase the public's understanding of measures that can be taken?

Claire Chappell: The purpose of the programme is to build general understanding among the public around all the topics that relate to



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climate change, because as I said earlier, they do not distinguish and put things in pigeon holes in terms of having the energy transition here, and that topic there. They see nature, the environment, clean air, health—all of these things—as interrelated. The Climate Action Wales programme aims to draw together all those strands of communication and amplify other more targeted communications that are being delivered on each of those topics.

The programme also aims to explain the co-benefits. You cannot really just treat one topic alone. That is what it is about, and it has absolutely raised awareness of what people can do in their individual lives—people who are aware of the campaign. That number is increasing as time goes on, as I know it is for the Let's Do Net Zero Scotland campaign too, and as that builds traction and more people are aware of it, the more they are taking those smaller actions.

What we are doing with the campaign now is using what we call warm-up communication for the more difficult choices ahead. The advice we had from our behavioural scientists is you start with the choices that are easy for most, and then as people start to understand the range of things that they can do that are affordable, convenient and available to them, then you build on those.

I think now is the time, and we have had this advice from the CCC as well, that we need to ramp up that communication on the energy transition in particular, because the focus to date has been quite general around how we can all make a difference. A lot of it has been around circular economy behaviours and practising active travel, but the recent advice we have had from the CCC is that we need to do more with the UK Government now to build on that messaging around energy and prepare the public to understand that transition, because everybody will have to play a part in the next stage of the transition. The onus has been very much on industry and business to date.

Q49 Claire Young: Do you have any evidence that you could send us that shows the impact that has had on the levels of understanding and support?

Claire Chappell: I would be happy to submit written evidence on the impact of the campaign.

Q50 Claire Young: Finally, the Welsh Government have a public engagement strategy that aims to promote education and learning. What conversations have you had, if any, with DESNZ over its development of a public participation strategy to make sure that they are aligned?

Claire Chappell: We have a four nations behaviour change and engagement group and that reports into an inter-ministerial group where the Ministers of the four nations discuss topics related to net zero. The behaviour change and engagement group interact with DESNZ, and they are learning a lot from the Welsh Government's public engagement



strategy and the Scottish Government's engagement strategy. We are sharing resources and learnings. I know they are publishing their strategy, I think in the autumn, but yes, in answer to your question, we have had conversations with them about their strategy, and we have input into that.

Chair: Torcuil Crichton has questions about Scotland.

Q51 Torcuil Crichton: Unsurprisingly. Amanda, I will address them to you, and you very kindly talked about community shared ownership schemes in my constituency. It is important to emphasise that these community wind farms depend on community land as well—the land they are built on is owned by the community. Not all places are the same, but I wondered whether other kinds of communities could get a share in this—municipal communities, for example.

Although you say the relationship between the Scottish Government and the UK Government is good and their messaging is quite good, do you feel there is a gap there where councils could play a role, first, in becoming community shareholders and secondly, in community messaging?

Amanda Grimm: Glasgow council is providing a good example. I think next week it will launch a community renewable energy strategy or framework—I think it is called—that gives vacant and derelict land to local community groups wanting to develop renewable energy. That is an example of how a council in a more urban area, where there is not so much land, is trying to support community energy groups in the area.

Another good role that local authorities can play—as well as, of course, letting community groups install solar PV on their roofs, and on schools and other community buildings—is if the rules around local energy markets are changed, they could buy energy directly from community energy groups. That would provide those groups with that long-term security of income, which would be key. It would also benefit the local authorities because it could reduce their bills as well.

I am sure through GB Energy there will be many opportunities and projects where local authorities and community groups are working together. However, we would say communities still need to have a genuine role and play an active role in shaping the projects. It should not just be the local authority developing it and consulting the community as an afterthought or second stage. It should be genuinely community-led as well.

Around heat networks, local authorities are planning to roll out heat networks in Edinburgh and East Lothian, and there are community groups in both of those regions trying to negotiate a shared ownership stake so that it is not just a commercial and private local authority joint venture; there is community ownership there as well.



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Q52 Torcuil Crichton: I very cleverly got an answer about good connections, councils, local authorities buying energy power, heat pumps and messaging—very good. You also mentioned schools and education as one field where there could be more work. I find when I go to schools, kids are teaching me about the environment. I just wondered if there is a message in there.

You also, in your evidence, argued against top-down situation with the Government telling people, and that there should be a bigger role for people like you and your group in that message.

Amanda Grimm: Community energy groups that are already working in the local community already have connections. They are probably the best messengers to be delivering the message. A lot of it is about the messenger, not just getting the message right.

There is an example of a community development officer on Islay, who I visited recently, and he said he goes into people's homes and conducts EPC assessments. He was recently giving a woman advice about a heat pump. This woman is on the local community council and several local boards, and the development officer said that she will tell everyone in the community about the advice he has given, what she is doing to her home and whether the heat pump is working, and the information will spread effectively that way. That is much more effective than if he had written an article for the local paper or if they had seen something about heat pumps on an infomercial or read about it in the national news.

So, yes, Government could effectively use their resources by supporting these community energy groups that already exist, and by working with them to deliver the Government's message and to tailor the message in a way that resonates for each local community. It is not just one message for Scotland, or one message for Wales, because within Scotland we have quite different communities as well.

Luke Tryl mentioned that some post-industrial communities may take more convincing. Radio City Association is a community energy group in post-industrial North Ayrshire. It has just succeeded in developing a new community owned turbine and has won wider community support by being clear about the income it would deliver to that community, which faces high levels of multiple deprivation. It said that with every spin it will push up power and pump in cash to the local communities. That message works well there. Then there are other groups using other messages in other areas.

Q53 Torcuil Crichton: In short, if people have a stake in this transition—a personal stake or a community stake—they are convinced?

Amanda Grimm: Of course, that makes a huge difference. We should learn from Denmark and the Netherlands, which are both countries where there was strong and growing opposition to new onshore wind, so much



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that it was posing a significant threat to their wind industries and to the Government meeting its clean energy targets.

In both cases, the Government tried to increase local ownership of the wind projects and studies have shown that that has increased public acceptability, even leading to pride in local turbines. It has helped people feel more involved in local decision making because if they own a stake they also get voting rights, or they should do under the ideal model. It has reduced time in planning, because there are fewer appeals and objections to these wind projects, and it has enabled both countries to phase out fossil fuels from their energy mix much more quickly than if they had not had that local support and local ownership.

I know that DESNZ currently has a working paper out that explores making shared ownership mandatory. I would encourage the Government to learn from these other countries who have already done things like that and built public support that way.

Torcuil Crichton: I concur.

Chair: I call Wera Hobhouse, who is obviously going to ask questions about Northern Ireland.

Q54 **Wera Hobhouse:** Bath is as close to Northern Ireland as we can make it. The latest Northern Ireland Life and Times survey indicates fewer people in Northern Ireland believe that human activity is the primary cause of climate change compared with those recorded in the UK and Europe. Why do you think this is? We have already heard about some of the comparisons.

Dr Slevin: It is an interesting and important question. I reached out to colleagues involved directly in that research before coming here to look further at the data. We see the highest levels of views on climate change being caused by natural sources rather than being man-made. We see them come from particular communities and we see particular resistance around particular communities as well.

Generally, it is important to say—as colleagues emphasised in the first panel—that, overall, the majority of people in Northern Ireland agree that we are in a climate crisis, and that we need to act. However, we see that some communities, particularly some of our Unionist communities, are more likely to think that climate change is not real. They do not believe in it. When we look at where that is coming from, it also ties in with the question of political leadership and the history of how climate policy has formed in Northern Ireland.

Since 2008, when the UK Climate Change Act came into place, Northern Ireland has been inactive for a long time. Despite advice from the Climate Change Committee, despite various public inquiries led by the Assembly, we did not act. Because we had parties in Government—particularly the Democratic Unionist party—with strong links to the agroindustry, that has



shaped the lack of action we have had. Now we are seeing that filtering through to Unionist communities, particularly supporters of the Democratic Unionist party, being less likely to be supportive of climate action. The problem there around political leadership around messaging, and the legacy of Northern Ireland's inaction around climate, is that they are now shaping our responses to climate and energy transitions.

Q55 Wera Hobhouse: Is that linked to Stormont often not sitting? Do you think that had an influence—that the messaging was going out from the UK, which is a long way away, and Stormont was not sitting?

Dr Slevin: Yes, I think part of it has been linked to Stormont's successive crises of governance that we have had. But it is also about the links that some lobby groups have had with some of our political parties and how that has shaped the messaging that has been coming out.

If you look at the communication that has been coming out from the Democratic Unionist party, even compared with the Ulster Unionist party, we see the DUP has been much more sceptical of climate change, and much more sceptical of the role of agriculture—the biggest emitter in Northern Ireland—in where emissions are coming from, compared with other Unionist parties and other Unionist supporters.

It is partly down to Stormont not sitting, but it is also about the relationships between parties and the interests that are held as most important by some parties, and how that shapes the level of understanding of the issues that we have. Yes, it is partly around Stormont, but it is also around the vested interests that we have in Northern Ireland and the voice they have been allowed to hold around climate and energy.

Q56 Wera Hobhouse: In many research projects—or whenever we talk about it—local leadership is always seen as very important, but what do you think that the UK Government could do to create that trust or these counter-narratives?

Dr Slevin: That is a brilliant question. We see things happening. Since we had the climate change legislation, from the information that I supplied you will know that I participated in the coalition that co-developed Northern Ireland's first climate change Bill, which came from civil society in partnership with cross-party, cross-community MLAs. It did not come from the Government. How the Bill was introduced came from cross-community, cross-party MLAs.

Through that process we have now seen a sea change. Since we had that participative approach to developing that Bill, we had a very long journey, over a couple of years, with two Bills being on the train leading to the Act. That process was surrounded by big communications from the broad majority of parties that supported the initial private Member's Bill through more debate on the issues, and that has fostered greater awareness.



We are also seeing investment in our civil service and some excellent high-level civil servants who understand the issues that we are facing. From talking to DESNZ and getting support, I know that things are ramping up in Northern Ireland, but additional support and resources are going to be important.

I am aware that some resources have come from Great British Energy to Northern Ireland, and the Department for the Economy is looking at where that funding will be delivered. We need more funding and more capacity building from our civil servants and politicians, because when we still have some predominant parties denying that climate change is man-made and denying the extent of the action that we need, we have a problem.

I think we could do with more guidance, perhaps more support, and we need more resources: resources for capacity building, resources for learning, and resources for communities to lead on action. Because as Amanda and Claire have said, communities are where people are based, where they have relationships, and where messages are most meaningful. If we can direct more resources into communities, community energy and community ownership, we will see greater grassroots building-up of support for climate action, which is important.

Q57 Wera Hobhouse: Do you think that UK Government support should be focusing more on energy security or on the narrative around climate change? We have already investigated a bit what is a more popular approach. Do you think that would be the same in Northern Ireland and that, ultimately, if the Government focus on the message of energy security that will fall better than just an overall climate change message?

Dr Slevin: Given the evidence that we have already heard and the work that I have done, energy security is a key message in the context of the socioeconomic crises that we have had—particularly the cost of living crises, where we still have a lot of people living in conditions of deprivation, and the experience of fuel poverty in Northern Ireland. However, we also have to be careful that we do not separate it from the co-benefits and the other social dimensions, such as the educational and participation elements.

Energy security—having lower bills and knowing that we are not going to be threatened by issues of importing gas or oil—is all important. Through localised renewable energy, we can address those issues, but we need to have that alongside the other benefits to your communities. If you are generating your own electricity, if you have more efficient homes and community retrofits, that will bring benefits to your local community. It is a bit of both. It is not just simply energy security; it is around all those other social and health and cultural benefits.

Wera Hobhouse: Jobs?

Dr Slevin: Jobs, of course, yes.



Q58 Wera Hobhouse: So all of those messages would land well if they were packaged up in the right support for jobs, for people's pockets, for something that they can see with tangible benefits?

Dr Slevin: I think so. We also have to be cognisant of the particular circumstances that we have in Northern Ireland, in terms of where our large emissions are coming from: our rural communities and larger producers. We have to make sure that we do not leave anybody behind. What are the particular messages that we can have for our rural communities and for farming communities, particularly smaller farmers whose share of income and land ownership is decreasing? How can we support them to be part of the energy transition?

We also have to think about the new opportunities. We have a new start for Northern Ireland. With the legacy of the conflict that we have had in Northern Ireland, we still see communities being Catholic or Protestant as proxies for nationalists or Unionists. This is a way to say, "Well, actually, it doesn't really matter who we feel affiliated to, what state we feel affiliated to, what religion we are. This is an opportunity for us to all be together and move towards a better future for Northern Ireland."

We have these broader messages, and the nuanced messages of new starts, benefits for local communities and benefits for urban and rural communities. That is important as well.

Q59 Wera Hobhouse: In the last panel, we heard that more conservative communities are more receptive to nature recovery and the benefits to nature. Is that similar in Northern Ireland?

Dr Slevin: I think so, particularly given the composition of our society and the large percentage of farming communities that we have. I think stewardship of nature and connections to nature are important messages to put forward, as well as talking about future generations and recognising the actions that we take now are imperative for a cleaner, better future for our children and grandchildren.

Q60 Mike Reader: We have heard a general consensus among your panel and the previous panel that regional messaging is probably more effective than the UK Government leading on communications, but do you have any thoughts on how the Government can best work with local communities to communicate policies?

Claire Chappell: I am not sure I agree with what you just said. There is a need for Government messaging to be a clear narrative on what we are doing and why. That this is not a negative. As we heard earlier, there are three things that the public are most concerned about—the cost of living, the NHS and migration. All the solutions for tackling climate change are linked to those three things in one way or another.

It is a matter of having a much stronger narrative conveying that the things that are of most concern to the public at the moment—of course they are concerned about climate change, but the closer it gets to actions



that they need to take and sacrifices they need to make, of course, the less willing they are to act. That is why the focus has to be, as we say in our strategy, on making green choices easier, convenient, and more affordable. If we get those things right, people will act.

I think what we are missing is joining up. Again, the CCC has stressed that you cannot solve the cost of living crisis without solving the energy crisis. It is helping the public to understand that, and that climate change is inextricably linked to poor public health.

Although I see the importance of community energy schemes—and I totally see the importance of that because that gives the community a sense of ownership—Trydan Gwyrdd Cymru, the arm's length body that leads on renewable energy projects on public estate in Wales, has said that the discourse is almost shifting to say that the energy transition can be delivered by community projects alone. That is dangerous, because it cannot. For the energy transition, you need to involve those middle-level actors—those publicly and privately-owned businesses on the larger-scale projects.

Yes, community engagement and community projects are essential but, again, they cannot be delivered in isolation. There is too much onus on third sector engagement. Third sector engagement pulls together a lot of individuals who already have strong opinions on the matter, so we have to make sure that we are reaching people who are seldom heard through other methods, and also—not forgetting about those middle-layer actors—that we are not losing sight of the engagement and communications needed for those.

Q61 Mike Reader: Amanda, do you think the UK Government are best placed to deliver communications, or should it be done through intermediaries?

Amanda Grimm: I think both. A strong way that the UK Government can communicate is by setting clear and consistent policy. This is important, not just for the public but for businesses. They need to see a clear policy direction of travel and they need advance notice of legislative change. For example, the housing sector needs to know when EPC standards are going to rise and when boilers are going to be phased out. However, over the past decade or so, we have gone back and forth, things have been delayed or watered down, so that is not helping. The Government could be clearer in communicating in that way through their policy setting.

Through intermediaries, as you mentioned, we do think that is a good way for the Government to work. One good example of that is, in Scotland, the Carbon Neutral Islands project, which the Scottish Government funded. They funded anchor organisations and development officers on each of these large islands, and their aim is to get to carbon neutrality by 2040. The Scottish Government funded carbon audits for each island with technical support from Community Energy Scotland,



which enabled each island to create a climate action plan with that carbon audit as the baseline.

The community officers there said, “We would not have been able to do this without the support of the Scottish Government.” That is really crucial. Those projects have been successful. They have resulted in ambitious projects being delivered across the different islands, including a 100 kW solar farm, and solar panels on schools and other buildings, even in areas where there was previously resistance to private solar farms. There has also been a big increase in applications for grants for energy efficiency and clean heating. I cannot remember the other big highlight, but we would say that is an example of a successful model.

It has also been successful because it has had long-term funding. It started in 2021, and it is still going. The Scottish Government funded existing community energy groups and anchor organisations to continue and scale up their good work, reach more members of the community and build more support that way. That is a good example.

Q62 Mike Reader: Amanda, we heard in the previous panel that there is cross-political support for improving and insulating homes. A key part of communication is going to be advice. Do you think a national advice service—like we see in Scotland and Wales—could help with the transition in England and Northern Ireland?

Dr Slevin: Yes, absolutely. We see plans for that in the energy strategy for Northern Ireland, where there are plans for a one-stop shop. From the recent research I have conducted on community energy, where I involved a wide range of lay and traditional experts on community energy, there were concerns that that might be too focused on individualised energy efficiency in homes. It would be too much about energy reductions and what you can do yourself as an individual, and not enough on the community focus on the collective benefits.

If we have a UK-level focus on the community and on the collective benefits—and we have seen in Scotland and Wales what can happen at a community level—using existing bodies, such as the community and voluntary sector as well as community energy organisations, that would be useful and would complement the individualised focus, but it has to be both.

Some will appeal more to the individual, “You will save money. Your house will use less energy in winter. You will receive this much off your bills,” and so on. Others will be concerned about, “Well, this will make my community better. It will help air quality, and it will bring us together a bit more.” Those messages are important, and a one-stop shop should have those messages on what is available at a community level and for individual householders.

Q63 Mike Reader: In other inquiries that we are doing, we have frequently heard that the communication can be confusing for general consumers.



There is so much that we talk to people about. Do you have any thoughts on how we get that balance right between simple messaging people can understand and making sure it is technically accurate?

Claire Chappell: This is why there was quite a strong call in Wales for a dedicated campaign and communication from the Welsh Government. We do social listening. We look at the misinformation circulating. People will listen to those that they trust, but we need a clear and consistent narrative coming from Government and then, as I said at the beginning, we need to make sure that we invest in those relationships with those trusted messengers to make sure they are helping to communicate.

For example, we were talking earlier about electric vehicles. For electric vehicles, more needs to be done with the trade and with the media, such as Autotrader, to make sure that they are starting to help sell the benefits of EVs. That is something that the DFT has been working on and involving us in. It depends on the message that you are trying to convey, but there is quite a big role there for those middle players.

Chair: Autotrader has been waxing lyrical about electric vehicles recently, so perhaps that message has got across.

Claire Chappell: That was why.

Q64 **Sir Christopher Chope:** On the last point, in the press today, I think, we are told that electric vehicles are the most likely to break down. Those are the facts. Are you not concerned that there is a danger that we are going to get into a propaganda war, and what the people are really wanting is the facts? People will want to have the facts, for example, to know in 2050 whether the weather and the climate are going to be any different from now, or whether they are going to be even worse despite all the efforts and personal sacrifices people will have made to try to improve things.

Claire Chappell: That is exactly the point I was making: you need a clear, mis- and disinformation strategy. You may read something in the media one day, or you might read a post on social media, but if you look into how far that has gained traction—how many are actually supporting that message—sometimes, as we say in our misinformation strategy, it is better to stay silent rather than get into this war of words with people who are quite vocal on social media about these topics.

In the main, you just need to have a clear misinformation strategy about when you do and when you don't tackle misinformation. You also need to have clear and consistent messages put out by Government, and by trusted messengers you work with.

Sir Christopher Chope: The fact about electric vehicles being more likely to break down is not disinformation. That is fact.

Wera Hobhouse: No, it is not.

Chair: It is funny, because the other day I was reading an article saying



exactly the opposite, so there we are.

Wera Hobhouse: Well, I have an electric vehicle, and it has not broken down in four years.

Chair: We will move on, thank you very much.

Q65 **Claire Young:** We have talked a lot about the information that is going from Governments to people, but do you think that people currently feel that there is a clear process for them to meaningfully contribute to the UK Government's policies on climate action? Is communication going the other way?

Claire Chappell: I am not sure if I can comment on whether they think there is a meaningful opportunity to contribute to UK Government policy, but certainly this is something we have just completed a review of with King's College London. It is being published next week, and that looks in depth at whether stakeholders and the public understand where to go to get involved in decisions that are being made by Government and by local government on climate change.

That will inform how joined up we all are in terms of what we are doing in outreach engagement, and if people actually know where to go if they do want to have a say and get involved in these things. How effectively we, as a Government, are working with local authorities is in the review as well.

In answer to your question, in general, there is a sense in Wales that people feel they are being involved in decisions, and they would know where to go in terms of their local community networks. But as I said, I cannot comment on whether people would know where to go to get involved in decisions at a UK level.

Q66 **Claire Young:** Just to be clear, this study—which I am sure we will be interested in—is it specifically looking at Wales.

Claire Chappell: Yes. It looks at the extent to which the Welsh Government and our delivery partners are involving the public in decision making, the different methods that are being used, and how effective they are being. In other words, are we following up? Are we actually conveying what happened as a result? Is it an iterative process?

There will be a lot of findings. There will be recommendations in there as to what we might do next.

Amanda Grimm: I would say, from my experience, that people are, unfortunately, feeling disempowered, especially those who are concerned about energy infrastructure, especially with the changes to the Planning and Infrastructure Bill and, in Scotland, to Scottish Electricity infrastructure consenting, which gives communities less chance to object or raise concerns. People are saying things like, "Well, it's going to be built anyway, no matter what I say, so I may as well just try to negotiate



better community benefits or something.” That does not feel like a healthy way to build support for the transition.

Climate and environmental campaigners also worked really hard to influence Scottish Government policy—well, targets on climate—but unfortunately the Scottish Government did not follow through and meet those targets, and they have now been dropped, so people have lost trust. So that shows that it is really important, if the Government are communicating about something, that they need to follow through with the policies.

I would say one positive in Scotland is that the Scottish Government have funded climate hubs in each region, which have done a lot to engage their wider community and to help them get interested in policy and respond to consultations. So that is one model that is working well. Again, I would say that what is needed is for communities to have an ownership stake in the transition, not just to respond to consultations, and we can do that by supporting more community energy projects.

If I could come back quickly on what Claire said about the concern that we cannot do the whole transition with community energy, yes, of course, we have got only about 100 MW of community energy in Scotland so far. We know we rely on developers as well, and we were hoping there would be more opportunity for communities to work with developers through shared ownership.

Scottish Renewables has been saying it needs various policy changes to support the industry, and we would support many of those as well. We want to be able to work with developers. We are under no illusion that the transition can be achieved by community energy alone, but we could see community energy playing a bigger part in it.

Dr Slevin: Again, it comes back to where we are at. We are at a much earlier stage in the journey than other nations in the UK. We are coming to a point where we should have our first climate action plan for Northern Ireland released soon. Along with that, we need guaranteed investment in the sectoral plans that are going to come as part of that from the different Departments, but we also need support for that wider piece.

What we can do is learn from Scotland and Wales and then leapfrog the challenges they have faced. For example, the climate action hubs: how do we have those in our communities across Northern Ireland—using our existing networks, such as Northern Ireland Community Energy, Drumlin Wind Energy, Rural Community Network, and NICVA—to work with them and support them to learn and develop capacity, so that they can then act as the trusted messenger to share and develop capacity across our communities? That is something we can advance in Northern Ireland, with support.

Q67 **Claire Young:** Would you agree that public conversation processes in the UK have generally been one-off events, and would you support a multi-



year, national campaign to raise awareness about the heat transition?

Amanda Grimm: I would say multi-year campaigns would definitely be preferable, especially if there is multi-year funding as well for climate initiatives in communities, because that allows community groups to build skills and capacity, and to develop those relationships, and you do not have staff turnover every year, which is an inefficient use of public money. Yes, long-term campaigns and longer-term funding are definitely needed.

Claire Chappell: Small amounts of funding can go a long way. We open an annual climate conversations fund—and I know Scotland has a climate fund as well—which is small amounts of money for third sector organisations to hold their own conversations within their communities and feedback to us. That is a really straightforward way of us continuing that conversation within the communities.

One thing that was raised earlier was the way that communities in Wales are reacting differs demographically. In the industrial communities of south Wales in particular—in the communities of Port Talbot, for example—we are getting quite different reactions. Net Zero Industry Wales is engaging with that community and getting quite different feedback. There is less support for decarbonisation strategies. People do not believe that they are going to benefit from these new green skills and jobs. They think they will be created, but they are not going to benefit from them.

There is also, understandably, less trust in Government and other players. There are also many young people leaving those areas, so there is a lot of evidence coming from that. Different conversations are needed, rather than just a blanket conversation with communities, depending on the different nuances that we have mentioned.

Q68 **Claire Young:** You have partly answered my next question which is: what would you most like to see included in the DESNZ public participation strategy? Do you have anything to add?

Dr Slevin: Just on that last point, I think it is really important that we make sure we do not try and utilise a one-size-fits-all approach. We need to be cognisant of different communities' needs, whether those are socioeconomic or geographic.

In terms of the broader campaign, what is going to be really important is looking at where we can have common messages, such as, "We're all in this together. We need to contribute to the energy transition. These are the supports that are available," but also then looking at the particular challenges. Whether it is in industrialised or post-industrialised communities, whether it is the farming communities, how do we tailor those messages to communities and ensure that the supports are there for that?



DESNZ will have a really important leadership role in that, in terms of the combination of messages, and also bringing on board multi-stakeholder voices, because DESNZ does not have all of the answers. Large-scale renewable energy developers do not have all the answers. Politicians, you do not have all the answers. I don't have all the answers, but when we bring people together, when we examine these things from different perspectives, and when we look at the scale of solutions across the social, economic, political and ideological domains, we find the best solutions for different communities.

Amanda Grimm: I agree, we do need tailored messages for different communities, not just one message for Scotland, one for Wales, and so on. I mentioned that in a post-industrial community, a message about the amount of income being generated might go down better, whereas in some Scottish, Ireland and coastal communities, a message about resilience in the face of depopulation, more extreme weather and sea level rises might be more effective.

I would also appreciate if DESNZ was mindful of the differences in policy and sources of support in Scotland. For example, we do not have the boiler upgrade scheme—we have Home Energy Scotland grants—but often those differences are not really communicated in publications from the UK Government and regulatory agencies.

I would also ask them to be mindful of limitations in remote islands and remote areas. I talked about Applecross before, where there is not enough electricity to electrify homes and transport. If there is a message coming through there urging people to electrify their home heating and transport, that is going to seem pretty tone deaf and will not be well received.

Finally, I would say, yes, it is important to raise public awareness of the benefits, but it is also crucial to resolve structural barriers so that people can act on those benefits. We need to make it easier for community energy projects to connect to the grid, or to resolve the technical barriers around the smart meter roll-out, which I know you were discussing last week. Once the public are aware, they need to be able to act; if they cannot act, that is going to increase resentment rather than build support.

Q69 **Mike Reader:** I want to come back briefly to trusted sources. I was thinking about the role of national identity, because you have Climate Action Wales, Community Energy Scotland, and I was thinking about the question about the applicability to England. Do you think a similar thing that actually has the word "England" in it would build the same trust? There is not that same level of national identity in England as there may be in Wales and Scotland. Do you have any final thoughts on whether, if there was that service in England, it should be England-wide or, as it sounds like is the case in Scotland, even more localised advice and focus would go down better?



Claire Chappell: We tested Climate Action Wales quite extensively, and we deliberately went for “climate” rather than “net zero” because of the public’s lack of understanding and so that we could build on it with lots of related topics. I cannot speak for England. What is needed is a really coherent message at a UK, regional and devolved nation level, and that is missing at the moment in terms of the energy space.

As I said earlier, because a lot of the matters associated with energy are non-devolved, it is really important that we work collaboratively. Our relationship with DESNZ has been good, but we have been briefed as a region on what DESNZ is delivering. A much more collaborative approach needs to be taken.

We have more experience in delivering communications on climate-related topics, and—similar to Scotland—there are different nuances in Wales, particularly the need for bilingualism and the way different messages might land within different communities. We have a lot to offer in terms of how a UK national message can be delivered within Wales.

Q70 **Chair:** Rather than it being an England body—you mentioned regions there—maybe the answer is a regional rather than a national one.

Claire Chappell: Maybe it is. Because Wales isn’t a region—we are a nation—we need a stronger seat at the table in terms of how we would deliver a UK-wide campaign. We are quite far advanced in terms of delivering our communications.

Q71 **Chair:** Amanda, do you have any final thoughts?

Dr Slevin: I would be inclined to look at the specificities of each of the nations, but also at how we can have a global message in this too without trying to confuse messages. We have a problem now where we have a rise in nationalism that is compounding the social issues and economic issues that we are experiencing.

Can we think more about the broader issues? What do we all hold in common? We are all humans. We share one planet. While having local responses in each of the regions and each of the states, can we also have global-local dimensions? Can we think globally, but act locally, and have those—

Q72 **Chair:** Amanda Grimm, a final thought?

Amanda Grimm: I think something that probably everyone wants in all communities across the UK is a greater say, greater influence and greater benefits from the transition. If the messaging can really focus on how the transition will help people own, influence and benefit more from renewables and from the transition, that would be really effective wherever you are.

Chair: Thank you very much for your evidence.

Sir Christopher Chope: Point of order.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Chair: We do not do points of order in Committee. That is the end of the session.