

Energy Security and Net Zero Committee

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

Wednesday 14 January 2026

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Members present: Bill Esterson (Chair); Ms Polly Billington; Sir Christopher Chope; Lizzi Collinge; Graeme Downie; Wera Hobhouse; Melanie Onn; Mike Reader; Claire Young.

Questions 347 - 479

Witnesses

I: Priya Brahmbhatt-Patel, Executive Director of Communications and Engagement, Ofgem; Neil Kenward, Director for Strategy, Economics, Research and Net Zero, Ofgem; Ian Macrae, Director of Market Intelligence, Ofcom; and Laura Rhea, Director of Standards and Audience Protection, Ofcom.

II: Chris Stark CBE, Head, UK's Mission for Clean Power 2030, Department for Energy Security and Net Zero; and Ben Golding, Director, Clean Power 2030 Unit, Department for Energy Security and Net Zero.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Department for Energy Security and Net Zero](#)

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Priya Brahmbhatt-Patel, Neil Kenward, Ian Macrae and Laura Rhea.

Q347 **Chair:** Welcome to this afternoon's session of the Energy Security and Net Zero Select Committee on building support for the energy transition. Welcome to our first panel—a combination of Ofgem and Ofcom witnesses. Can you introduce yourselves, please?

Priya Brahmbhatt-Patel: Hi, everyone. I am Priya Brahmbhatt-Patel. I am the Executive Director of Communications and Engagement at Ofgem.

Neil Kenward: I am Neil Kenward, the Executive Director for Strategy, Economics, Research and Net Zero at Ofgem.

Ian Macrae: Hello. I am Ian Macrae, Director of Market Intelligence at Ofcom.

Laura Rhea: I am Laura Rhea. I am the Director of Content Standards at Ofcom.

Q348 **Chair:** Thank you all very much for joining us and for your patience as we were somewhat delayed this afternoon. I will ask the first set of questions, which are to Ofcom. You accept that climate science is settled and, indeed, that is very much in your remit. However, given that you say it is settled, are you not overly cautious in the way you regulate and in the way you approach the broadcasters and, as a result, we rarely see regulatory action?

Laura Rhea: I thought it might be helpful just to very briefly set out to the Committee our processes for regulating broadcasters. Ofcom is a post-broadcast regulator, and Parliament gave us powers to protect audiences from a range of harms, such as protecting children from content that is unsuitable for them, protecting audiences from things like hate speech or material that incites crime, and preserving due accuracy and due impartiality in news. These are distilled into our broadcasting code, which is a set of rules that broadcasters must comply with.

When we receive a complaint to Ofcom, we fully assess it and see whether it raises substantive issues warranting investigation under the code. In doing that, we take into account the full context in which that content was broadcast and have regard to a broadcaster's right to freedom of expression and the audience's right to freedom of expression. If we find issues that are substantive, we launch an investigation, and the outcomes of those are published on our website. If we find a broadcaster in breach, then we set out the full reasons for doing so. I think probably most relevant to this discussion are our rules on due accuracy and due impartiality in news and, when it comes to non-news programmes, that factual programmes and factual matters do not materially mislead the audience.



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You referred to the guidance that we gave around anthropogenic climate change, and that was a specific part of our guidance to help broadcasters understand how they could comply with our rules on due impartiality. "Due" is an important qualification when it comes to impartiality. It is a flexible concept. It does not mean that every argument or every facet of every argument has to be represented. It recognises that where there is a broadly established scientific or evidential consensus, such as with anthropogenic climate change, broadcasters are not required to treat that consensus as if it is still a matter of contention or debate with the heightened due impartiality requirements, and that ensures that our regulatory approach is fair and proportionate.

Q349 **Chair:** Sorry to stop you, Laura. Did you just say that broadcasters are required to treat it as if it is a matter of debate or not?

Laura Rhea: No, they do not have to treat it as a matter that is still contentious or a matter of debate on the science. Having said that, we are aware that there are many issues that broadcasters may wish to scrutinise around climate change and net zero; for example, Government policies, the efficacy of those policies, and international Government approaches to climate change. Broadcasters have the editorial freedom to do that and to explore those things robustly, including platforming different views and sometimes contentious views, as long as they comply with our rules. This is not about shutting down debate.

Q350 **Chair:** Thank you for your explanation. According to the DESNZ public attitudes tracker in 2025, 1,221 Ofcom complaints were made about climate misinformation between 2020 and 2025. None resulted in an upheld breach on climate coverage. Are you telling me that they all qualify for sitting outside the principles that you just set out?

Laura Rhea: You are right: since 2020 we have had that number of complaints on climate change-related issues. For a bit of context, we received 50,000 complaints last year alone, so that just gives you an indication on the numbers. Every complaint we receive at Ofcom is fully assessed. We look at the full context in which the complained-about content was broadcast and we make a determination whether it warrants investigation. The fact that there have been no recent investigations probably speaks to the fact that the broadcasters that we regulate have a good understanding of the code and they are complying broadly with our rules.

Q351 **Chair:** All 1,221 of those complaints complied with the rules?

Laura Rhea: They were assessed and they were not seen to warrant further investigation.

Q352 **Chair:** Okay. And you are happy that you have the authority to act within the current arrangements.

Laura Rhea: Yes. We feel that the powers that we have been given in the broadcast space and the code that derives from them gives us



sufficient flexibility but also a robust set of rules to which we can hold broadcasters to account.

Q353 **Chair:** Thank you. I think my colleagues will have some follow-up questions on this, but Roger Harrabin told us recently that mainstream reporting and commentary varies significantly and has a profound effect on the view of the public about the energy transition. How do you respond to what Roger told us?

Laura Rhea: We recognise that political debate may be moving and that broadcasters may wish to explore a range of views on that and the richness of that debate. Consistent with freedom of expression, broadcasters have the editorial freedom to explore those things as long as they comply with our rules. As I said, the code is suitably flexible for us to adapt our rules accordingly, but we feel that they are guardrails, preserving editorial freedoms for broadcasters but also making sure that they comply so that news is duly accurate and non-news programmes do not materially mislead the audience so as to cause harm.

Q354 **Chair:** You said in your opening statement that a degree of judgment is exercised by the broadcaster and, indeed, by you. Is there a danger that that judgment is flawed?

Laura Rhea: We are the expert regulator. We regulate complaints over a broad range of issues. We have deep expertise in this area. Where we find breaches we set out our full reasoning for doing so. It is important that broadcasters have editorial freedom and can exercise their right to freedom of expression and that audiences receive a range of views and ideas. I think that broadcasters understand our rules and that we apply them consistently, rigorously and fairly.

Chair: Thank you. We will pursue this further with Mike Reader.

Q355 **Mike Reader:** What we have just heard from you, Laura, is that Ofcom's regulatory approach is to wait for a complaint. Is that effective regulation in the current media environment?

Laura Rhea: We are a post-broadcast regulator, so we have no powers to intervene before broadcast. On receipt of a complaint, we will fully assess it and the context in which it was broadcast. As I have already said, we had 50,000 complaints last year. Twenty-four investigations were launched. We found 15 broadcasters in breach. We can sometimes carry out monitoring of broadcasters if we feel it is proportionate and necessary to do so. As a post-broadcast regulator, we can only consider complaints about specific programmes, each one on a case-by-case basis.

Q356 **Mike Reader:** So you are post-broadcast but you have to wait for a complaint before you can review. You are not proactively reviewing post-broadcast, particularly where there are outlets, such as GB News, that are very clearly biased in one direction or another.



Laura Rhea: Our role is not to investigate the editorial approach or editorial policy of a broadcaster or broadcasters towards any particular issue. Again, as I said, this goes back to a broadcaster's right to editorial freedom, and that is consistent with their rights to freedom of expression. That is central to our consideration. They can explore a range of views, and contentious views, as long as they comply with our code. If we find that the broadcaster is in breach of our code, that breach is noted on their compliance record. Where we find that there is a serious, deliberate, repeated or reckless breach, we can, if we consider it proportionate, impose a statutory sanction, and we will take the compliance record into account when we consider that.

Q357 **Mike Reader:** We have heard clearly during our inquiry that there is a drop in trust in the media and what some would call mainstream media. Do you think that Ofcom has been an effective regulator to support trust in the media? Surely one of the key functions of a regulator is to maintain trust in the services that it regulates.

Laura Rhea: I think trust in news is an important issue and it is something that Ofcom takes incredibly seriously. It is interesting—I might be able to pass to Ian here—because while we know that people are consuming news from many different sources, our news consumption survey found that there is still very high trust in broadcast news. One of the things that we are actively looking at, and we have suggested in our public service media review, is that public service broadcast news should probably be given prominence on something such as YouTube, and we have made that recommendation. Ian might have more to say about public trust in news, but I think public trust in broadcast news still remains consistently high.

Ian Macrae: We track this annually and around seven in 10 adults say they find broadcast news trustworthy. If you look at news on social media, that falls to four in 10. People have different expectations of content that is on broadcast and online. You have similar metrics if you look at the accuracy of news and the impartiality of news.

Q358 **Mike Reader:** We have seen in the past year a loss of political consensus on the delivery of the Climate Change Act and reaching net zero by 2050, particularly with the policy U-turn from the Conservative party. How does that affect Ofcom's application of due impartiality on broadcast debates on these issues?

Laura Rhea: We recognise that political debate may move and change, and our code is sufficiently flexible to deal with that. As with all areas of political debate there is editorial choice for broadcasters about what they cover and who they invite on to programmes to discuss it. I think that our code is sufficiently flexible that we can move with political consensus as it evolves and develops.

Q359 **Mike Reader:** You have received a number of high-profile complaints about the lack of impartiality in GB News's recent broadcast of an



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interview with President Trump. Can you update us on your assessment of whether the case requires investigation?

Laura Rhea: We have received complaints, as you know, about that programme. That is currently under assessment and going through that due process. Unfortunately, I cannot really comment further because we have to follow due process at this stage, but we will be publishing the outcome of our decision. We are very happy to follow up with the Committee later and let you know the outcome of that decision.

Q360 **Mike Reader:** How long does that process take? Someone has made a complaint. You are now in an assessment. You just have to watch the programme and make a decision, so how long do you take to make that assessment?

Laura Rhea: That can vary depending on the nature of the programme.

Q361 **Mike Reader:** In this case, how long will it take you to make a decision?

Laura Rhea: It will take us as long as it needs to take to make sure that we have done a rigorous assessment and looked at all the facts and all the contextual analysis, and to look at all the complaints that we have received to see what they are raising to us and make sure that we have done a thorough assessment before we decide.

Q362 **Mike Reader:** Typically, is that weeks, months?

Laura Rhea: It is very much on a case-by-case basis. We try to work quickly, but we also have to do due diligence and follow due process. We have to make sure that our assessment decisions are rigorous and fit for purpose.

Q363 **Mike Reader:** For your assessment of this case, what do you think, roughly? Are we talking a few months? Are we talking a year?

Laura Rhea: I cannot put a timeline on that in real time at the moment, I am afraid, because I have an expert team looking at that particular case. As I say, once we have made a determination on that, we are very happy to come back to the Committee and update you.

Q364 **Chair:** In France, CNews was fined €20,000 when a speaker on one of its programmes said climate change was "a lie, a scam". Arcom, the French regulator, has found four broadcasting code breaches related to the climate crisis in the last two years. Your broadcasting code says factual programmes must not mislead the audience. Why is there a difference, or is there a difference, in the assessment being made in France?

Laura Rhea: I cannot speak for the French regulator, but we always keep across what other regulators do in the broadcasting space. Often regulators in other countries are working in different political, social and broadcasting contexts, so it is difficult to compare like for like. To your point, I think that we have done our processes rigorously and fairly, and I do not think that particularly speaks to a disconnect.



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Q365 **Chair:** There are people in this country who have gone on broadcast media and called climate science a lie or a scam, or both. Have you had complaints about those?

Laura Rhea: If we have complaints, we will assess them thoroughly. Quite possibly we will have had complaints about those programmes and—

Q366 **Chair:** What complaints have you had about climate science broadcasting?

Laura Rhea: We get a range of complaints about climate change and the science, and about various issues—political issues and policy issues—around climate change, and we will assess those.

Q367 **Chair:** Can you give us some examples?

Laura Rhea: I can't at this particular moment, in real time, give examples. The reason for that is that the ones that most likely come to mind might be cases that are still under assessment so it would not be appropriate for me to do so. If you would like a range of examples of cases that we have closed, I am sure that we can provide that to the Committee.

Q368 **Chair:** It would be a good idea, yes. It is a shame you didn't come to the Committee with some of those, seeing as you knew what we were going to be asking you, isn't it?

Laura Rhea: I apologise for that.

Q369 **Ms Billington:** To follow up, do you have at least a categorisation of them so that we have those where the people who are complaining challenge the science and think that something was biased because they assume that it reported the science without any challenge, or do you have the other way around? I would have thought you would be categorising and tagging complaints into different approaches.

Laura Rhea: We look at the substance of every complaint that we receive. We do not necessarily publish aggregated data or categorise complaints by topic. We are transparent about our regulatory decisions. We publish the outcome of our standards investigations, and we also publish a list of programmes where we receive more than 50 standards complaints weekly. We try to be as transparent as possible. More broadly, we sometimes publish high-level information about complaints volumes and themes in our annual report. That is another way that we try to be transparent about that.

One thing I will say, though, is that the number of complaints does not necessarily indicate that there has been a breach of our rules. A high level of complaints does not always indicate that there has been a breach, and a low level of complaints, or just a few complaints, does not necessarily preclude—



Q370 **Ms Billington:** No, I am aware of that. I am just interested to understand how you keep an eye on where the trends might be in complaints, bearing in mind there is some polarisation about this debate, whether the science is settled or not. I am just interested to understand how you are measuring the dynamics of that debate through the nature of the complaints.

Laura Rhea: We have a broad understanding of that. We look at the complaints that we receive and the nature of them and we track that through. We have a broad understanding. We keep across a whole number of policy areas where there may be debate and so on, as you can imagine. That is part of our role. We keep across that, but we may not have something completely measurable.

Q371 **Ms Billington:** It just seems that you probably have the data to be able to do it, so it seems odd that you do not. For full transparency, as a journalist at the BBC a long time ago, before we had any of this clever data tagging or whatever, I could access the complaints data and search and say, "Last night there were X number of complaints about Y issue." I could then measure that against what it had been like the last time we reported on that.

Laura Rhea: Yes, we can do that—sorry.

Ms Billington: That kind of tagging and aggregation would be useful, bearing in mind some people will be saying, "Why have you got those greenies on banging on about this and it is all a lie?" versus other people saying, "Why are you allowing those people on who are just completely denying the science?"

Laura Rhea: We have a team that looks at complaints and tracks through complaints. They can see the complaints we are receiving, the nature of those complaints and the number of those complaints. It gives us a broad indication of how that works. So we can do that and we can do that on a whole host of issues, as you can appreciate. However, we had 50,000 complaints last year and that is quite low for the number of complaints year on year, so there is a lot of data there. But yes, we do track that through so that we have an understanding.

Q372 **Chair:** Can you tell me what preparation you did to come to this session?

Laura Rhea: Well, quite a bit. I am very happy to follow up further in writing if there is anything that you think is missing from my evidence today, but we did do quite a lot of preparation ahead of this.

Chair: Okay, but you have not told me what.

Laura Rhea: Well—

Chair: Never mind, we will move on.

Q373 **Lizzi Collinge:** We have heard that Ofcom is a post-broadcast regulator and a complaints-led regulator. You have to wait until there have been



complaints about broadcast media, and I think we understand that very clearly. Given that there have been complaints about content relating to climate change and energy but there has been very little regulatory enforcement—those complaints have not been upheld—do you think that the complaints-led model provides deterrence to broadcasters from breaching your code? Because you are regulating against the code, yes?

Laura Rhea: Yes.

Lizzi Collinge: From my perspective, I am not seeing an awful lot of deterrence for broadcasters from broadcasting whatever they like, whether it breaches the code or not, if there is not strong enforcement. So first, do you think the current complaints-led model provides that deterrence—yes or no?

Laura Rhea: Yes, I think it does.

Q374 **Lizzi Collinge:** How does it do that?

Laura Rhea: It does that because if we find a broadcaster in breach we give full reasons for doing that and we publish that on our website. It is fully transparent. It is noted on a broadcaster's compliance record that there has been a breach. If we find that there have been, as I said previously, serious, deliberate, repeated or reckless breaches of the code by a broadcaster, we may decide that it is appropriate to impose a statutory sanction. There is a range of sanctions at Ofcom's disposal to do that. That ranges from saying to a broadcaster that they have to broadcast a statement of our findings and not repeat the programme through to financial penalties. The strongest sanction that we can give is to revoke a broadcasting licence.

Q375 **Lizzi Collinge:** I can see that there is a range of penalties and that seems perfectly appropriate. How many times has any regulatory enforcement action been taken about climate change or energy in the last year or five years?

Laura Rhea: I think there have been only two breaches, which we have given full details of to the Committee already. However, that does not mean that we are not regulating appropriately. I think that the broadcasters have a strong understanding of our rules and we have to be fair and proportionate. We are consistent in the application of our rules. We think that they are sufficiently robust and that there is a deterrent for broadcasters. Many of them do not want to be in breach of the code and they want to comply with our rules. We think that we strike an appropriate balance between enforcing rules to protect audiences from harm, which is the central premise of the code, while at the same time enabling broadcasters to have freedom and the freedom to debate important political matters, which is important for democracy and more broadly.

Q376 **Lizzi Collinge:** Absolutely, the Committee understands the need to do that. We have heard that you understand the broad themes of the



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complaints that you receive as a regulator but Ofcom does not routinely publish an aggregated analysis of complaint trends relating specifically to climate or energy content. In fact, I do not know if you publish them for any subject. Should you?

Laura Rhea: I don't necessarily think we should. We feel that we are transparent about the data that we do publish and that it is a good indication of where we are and our regulatory approach. We always try to be transparent about the work that we do, but I would suggest that publishing complaints by topic is quite a vast job.

Q377 **Lizzi Collinge:** Could you explain to the Committee what you do publish? You are saying you are transparent about how you regulate. Can you please tell the Committee what you put in the public domain that is therefore available to analyse?

Laura Rhea: We publish the outcomes of all our broadcast standards investigations. They go in a fortnightly broadcast and on demand bulletin that is published on our website. We also publish weekly a list of programmes that receive more than 50 standards complaints a week. We do not include fairness and privacy in those, for obvious reasons perhaps. As I said before, we publish high-level information about complaint volumes and themes and the number of complaints in our annual report, which will give a broad indication of where audiences' concerns lie. I think that that is quite indicative of the complaints that we receive.

Chair: Graeme Downie was not very impressed with your answers, so he is going to ask a follow-up.

Q378 **Graeme Downie:** Very briefly, you said that many broadcasters want to comply. Which ones do not want to comply and what do you do about them? Laughing implies that you know that some do not.

Laura Rhea: No, not at all.

Graeme Downie: What do you do with them? Secondly, you have used the word "transparent" many times, yet through questions from various members of the Committee we know that you do not publish lots of data routinely. You do not tag it in the way that, frankly, I would expect. How is that transparent? It is quite the opposite. That is incredibly opaque. You are asking us to trust that you know what you are doing without publishing the data.

Laura Rhea: We feel that we are transparent, and I am very happy to take away your concerns. I am sorry if you do not feel that the answer that I have given is sufficient, but I think—

Chair: I do not think what you have just said fits with our understanding of the definition of the word "transparent", I am afraid.

Q379 **Graeme Downie:** On matters like this where we are asking for data to be published, has it been considered at any level inside Ofcom that, "Actually, we should be publishing this data regularly. We are a regulator.



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We should be telling people what it is we are regulating and how we are doing it"? Has that even been considered by Ofcom?

Laura Rhea: Yes. We do consider how we regulate broadcasters—of course we do. We take it incredibly seriously and we try to be as transparent as possible about our work.

Q380 **Graeme Downie:** What is stopping you being transparent? You say "as transparent as possible". What is stopping you being more transparent?

Laura Rhea: I am very happy to take that away and follow up with the Committee in writing about whether there is more that we could put into the public domain about our data. Broadly, we try to be as transparent as possible and very accountable, and I absolutely stick to that. The way that Ofcom has always operated is to be as transparent about our broadcasting regime as possible and I think that broadcasters broadly understand and comply with our rules. Where we find that they fall short, we will be rigorous in our regulation of that and we will follow up with our rules accordingly.

Ian Macrae: Laura has said that for all programmes where we receive more than 50 complaints we publish data about the number of complaints. We also publish full details about investigations we open and when we decide not to open an investigation, and details about the decision that we make. That feels quite transparent to me. It is a little bit outside my area of expertise.

Chair: My sense is that people watching this might think that you have just said you are as transparent as possible while publishing very little. Lizzi Collinge wants to come back.

Q381 **Lizzi Collinge:** What I am hearing is that when we are talking about an individual instance or an individual complaint, you publish a certain amount of data about it. What we are not seeing is an ability for either us as elected representatives or members of the public to see what the trends are in what people are complaining about and what the problem could be. We know that numbers of complaints do not necessarily match with breaches of the code—we understand that. However, we are not able to go in and interrogate the work of Ofcom at a higher level, and we are unable to see at a glance what the public's concerns are. If, for example, you published aggregated analysis of complaint trends specifically to climate change and energy, which is our remit here, we could see what the public is concerned about. We could see what the issues are from a public perspective and we could then see what the regulator's response is. What I am hearing is that we do not have that whole picture.

Chair: Christopher Chope has been waiting patiently.

Sir Christopher Chope: Can I try to bring some balance to this? It seems to me as though the prosecuting authorities for the net zero zealots are having a go at Ofcom, yet I would like to suggest that Ofcom



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is probably erring in not bringing to book the people who are broadcasting net zero zealotry. Take as an example the relative lack of broadcasting time given to the report two days ago from the Institute of Economic Affairs, which says that the overall costs of net zero have been massively underestimated and are now thought to be about £9 trillion—nine million million pounds—by 2050, far in excess of anything put forward by the Climate Change Committee and other commentators. There has been very little of that in certain parts of the media, and it seems from the line of questioning that people who do not like GB News because they think it is supportive of Reform and the Conservative party are trying to use Ofcom as a means of attacking GB News. I am on the side of Ofcom because I think you are doing an excellent job in trying to maintain balance, and I would not accept any of the accusations that have been made against you.

Ms Billington: Be wary of your allies, Ofcom.

Chair: I am not sure there was a question there, but anyway—

Laura Rhea: Can I just come back on one thing about the data that we publish? Everything that we put in the public domain about our complaints determinations and so on is searchable on our website. It is searchable by code rules and by broadcasters. There is a search mechanism for people to go in and look at that data and to search it themselves, just to clarify that. You can go on to the Ofcom website and look at the complaints and look at the rules and the broadcasters and it will give the nature of the complaint.

Lizzi Collinge: That is very good to hear, Chair. I still am not convinced that the amount of data that is available to us is sufficient.

Chair: Polly Billington, you indicated you had another question.

Ms Billington: I think that my point has been somewhat lost and distracted, unfortunately. I am sure we have got what we need.

Q382 **Claire Young:** A number of submissions to this inquiry have raised online misinformation as a major barrier to building support for the net zero transition. Your own research shows that four in 10 UK adults say they have recently encountered misinformation or deepfake content, mostly online. We are seeing a growing policy discussion about media literacy initiatives. Is media literacy becoming a substitute for regulation, where you either lack the powers to act or just do not want to?

Ian Macrae: I can talk to that. First, the primary purpose of the Online Safety Act is to prevent the spread of illegal content online and protect children against content that is harmful to them. Misinformation and disinformation is not a listed harm under the Online Safety Act. Unless it falls under a specific illegal harm—for example, if misinformation is state sponsored it might fall under a foreign interference regime—under the Online Safety Act, there are no rules on platforms.



I will clarify a couple of things and I will come to media literacy in a moment. First, the transparency requirements under the Online Safety Act mean that platforms are required to comply with their own terms of service, and many of them do have terms of service that relate to misinformation and disinformation. I am saying that because that relates to our media literacy powers. Parliament made a decision not to have misinformation and disinformation as a specific harm in the Online Safety Act, but it acknowledged that misinformation and disinformation is an issue for which Ofcom should be charged with responsibilities. That was a clarification of our media literacy duties.

We have set out a strategy with three pillars for media literacy. Very briefly, research and evaluation is one of them. The second is people and partnerships. We have 700 organisations that we work with across the UK to build our research and evidence base and reach agreement on what works. The third, critically, because Ofcom is very well positioned for this, is engaging with online platforms in what they are doing on media literacy. Media literacy is a fundamental part of our regulatory toolkit for tackling misinformation and disinformation. It is also complementary to some of the work that we do under the Online Safety Act. For example, user empowerment tools and content control tools are a critical way in which platforms can keep their users safe online.

When we write the codes of practice for illegal content and for protection of children, what is good practice there is set out as mitigations that platforms can use to protect their users from harmful content. A lot of those mitigations are similar to those used for misinformation and disinformation. For example, we published a piece of work in 2024 that set out best practice principles for delivering media literacy online. We have had five platforms so far that have signed up to those principles, which are on how information should be shared and provided and how users can be protected. That includes Google and TikTok. Using those media literacy powers, albeit they are a bit softer than the hard powers related to illegal harms, is having an impact.

Q383 Claire Young: It sounds like you have a lot of people working on it, but what measurable outcomes should Parliament expect from these initiatives, specifically in relation to the energy transition?

Ian Macrae: First, we don't have a lot of people working on it. That is why one of our key objectives is to work with—there are a lot of people in the UK generally working in media literacy. We have an important role in convening and sharing research and working out what works best. As far as evaluating what is working, each of the three pillars in our media literacy strategy has outcomes that we are targeting to achieve. There are three umbrella outcomes for each of those pillars. Underneath that we have 14 measurable outcomes. We can share the details with you later. It is a three-year plan. We have a mid-term evaluation piece that is coming out in the summer this year and then the full evaluation will be in September 2027. Has that answered your question?



Q384 **Claire Young:** Yes, I think so. What further legislative powers and resources would Ofcom need to effectively regulate misleading information online about the energy transition?

Ian Macrae: We use the powers that are available to us. One thing that I should say is that the—

Claire Young: I am asking what other powers you would like.

Ian Macrae: We know there is a lot of misinformation online. We have research. You mentioned that 40% of adults have seen misinformation. Around 4% of those 40% say the misinformation relates to climate change. The corollary to having a whole load of, frankly, misinformation and rubbish out there is that people have access to trusted news and information. On the powers that we have asked for under the public service media review, we have recommended to Government that public service broadcasters' news services are given due prominence on YouTube and other video service platforms. I think that a meaningful way of addressing misinformation online is to make sure that trusted news providers have due prominence online.

Q385 **Claire Young:** I shall move on to my questions to Ofgem. We have seen the massive impact that the energy crisis had on people. Ofgem's mandate includes protecting consumers and facilitating net zero at least cost. This is probably a question for Neil to start with. How does Ofgem balance those objectives when they pull in different directions; for example, investing in low carbon infrastructure versus protecting consumers from short-term price increases?

Neil Kenward: We have, as you mentioned, a range of statutory duties that are essentially our objectives, but we have a principal objective, which is protecting the interests of energy consumers in the long and the short run. Since 2010, that principal objective has included the interests of consumers in the reduction in greenhouse gases. That was strengthened in 2023 by the previous Government, which redefined that to be a net zero duty. So we have a net zero duty and that obligation to consumers. The way our board, GEMA, makes these big decisions is informed by stakeholder opinions, which we consult on and get views, and the analysis that our in-house economists and analysts do. They will take into account the full range of evidence.

To be honest, on the big infrastructure decisions—the ones we are directly responsible for, primarily around network investment—in that space you have the net zero policy, the framework, and the speed of the transition is set by Government. What we need to do in the network space is make sure that we are building the networks to connect the new generation to support increasing demand from electrification, for example. So in a sense, the pace is set by the Government of the day and it is our job to make sure that the networks try to keep up with that and ensure we have a proper, safe, secure, reliable sector at least cost. That is where Ofgem, as you say, has its regulatory mechanisms, and



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because of the certainty around those we can unlock tens of billions of pounds of investment in networks and deliver that at a low cost of capital, so at least cost to consumers, recovered over decades in this case.

Q386 Claire Young: Can you give examples of how Ofgem has tried to communicate these trade-offs to the public?

Priya Brahmhatt-Patel: We always start from a point of what consumers will want to engage with, what will they understand and how we make sure that they understand the benefits of what we are saying. Whenever we talk about any of the regulatory changes, we try to make sure that we simplify that message so that we are using plain English, for example. We have done a lot of work and we have had a lot of feedback that suggests a lot of the things we publish are quite technical. Some of them have to be, by the very nature of them, but on the whole, when we are doing consultations, we are using tools online that make that a much easier process for consumers to engage with.

Another big part of how you make sure trade-offs are understood is engaging with different stakeholder groups. We make sure that we are speaking regularly to consumer groups because they are a channel in themselves for speaking directly to consumers. In anything we do we have to make sure that consumers are going to sources that they trust, that they can engage with and have a conversation with. We are looking at how we develop that ourselves. How do we speak directly more to consumers? Do we hold more deliberative events and things like that, where we can actually have that conversation? At the moment we work with good partners to have that conversation with consumers directly.

The trade-offs themselves need to be understood in the light of the complexity in which we operate. Our starting point, as Neil said, is always going to be how we are making sure we are protecting consumers now, but also future consumers. How are we also making sure that we are looking after growth? How are we making sure that the mandate that the Government have set for decarbonising by 2050 is also balanced? There are three competing areas, you could say, and we have to be clear and factual about those in any of the communications that we do. Let's make sure that the facts are there, that the information is accessible and available for consumers who might be looking for it, and that we are working with our partner consumer groups that have that direct access to consumers as well to help explain what we are doing.

Q387 Claire Young: Yet the Government have said that consumer trust and satisfaction in the energy market is systematically lower than where it needs to be. What are you doing to rectify that?

Neil Kenward: Trust has really taken a blow from the energy crisis in particular. Trust levels in the energy sector fell to very low levels. We do a consumer survey roughly every six months to try to track trust and satisfaction levels in the sector and, indeed, in ourselves. I am delighted



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to say that trust levels have been recovering. They remain lower. Trust in the sector in particular remains lower than we would like to see, but there is an interesting difference. Consumer trust in the industry has recovered, but only to 41%, but consumer satisfaction with their energy supplier is up at a record level of 82%. It dipped strongly during the crisis, as you would expect, but that level of 82% is now higher than before the crisis.

We have been doing work establishing clear standards, because ultimately a consumer's experience is the thing that counts. We have deep dived and put in place good new rules around billing, customer treatment, debt pathways and so on to make sure that the consumers get the best possible experience. Credit to the sector, it has also risen to that as we have monitored it, and we are getting better consumer satisfaction scores in the sector now.

Q388 Claire Young: Do you think you have the powers to do this or do you think some of this rests with the Government? Or do the Government need to be giving you more powers?

Neil Kenward: In this particular area of consumer service, we have a very strong set of powers. There is a supply licence that tells energy suppliers what they must do and we determine the contents of that supply licence. We updated it in the light of the crisis, for example, to strengthen the standards. Then we monitor very closely and enforce against those. We have taken multiple enforcement actions over the last few years to make sure that that message has got through and suppliers are driving up their standards.

Q389 Claire Young: Does that help with the question I opened without about how you are communicating the competing demands? Do you feel that a lack of remit is inhibiting your ability to communicate that or do you think that is within your power?

Neil Kenward: Our statutory duties do not include an explicit requirement or duty to deliver public messaging specifically. Of course, in delivering our role, as Priya has explained, we make sure that we consult very broadly with consumer groups and charities, we consult widely, and we take those views into consideration. Then we try to communicate very clearly the decisions we have made, as Priya was explaining, in language that people can properly understand.

Q390 Melanie Onn: I want to ask about customer engagement by Ofgem for vulnerable groups in particular. I heard your point, Priya, about the meetings with various consumer groups. Who are those groups?

Priya Brahmhatt-Patel: Citizens Advice. National Energy Action. There are specific smaller debt charities that we speak to. The engagement happens across the board, from working level through to our board members. We have monthly consumer groups and charity calls where different regulatory areas will be talking through the changes that we



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might be making to regulation or where we want to introduce new regulation. In the process of developing regulation, the trade-offs—

Melanie Onn: It is all right. I do not need any more detail.

Priya Brahmhatt-Patel: Sorry.

Q391 **Melanie Onn:** It is interesting, though. You say you are working with organisations like Citizens Advice and that confidence is improving. What did you say—an 82% customer satisfaction rate?

Neil Kenward: Yes.

Melanie Onn: Yet Citizens Advice says that regulators and suppliers are “out of touch” with everyday bill pressures and explicitly blames Ofgem for failing to act against unfair energy suppliers for nearly a decade, which has, as we have recognised, upset and concerned lots of people, the vulnerability around the price shocks leaving people very worried every time they receive an energy bill. Should relations not be more improved than for one of your partners to be saying something so critical of Ofgem? What do you think you need to do to improve, either on performance so that Citizens Advice does not feel the need to do that, or on relationships with Citizens Advice?

Neil Kenward: We recognise that energy bills have been extremely high. They still remain higher than historic levels and huge numbers of households and businesses are facing real struggles. We have some very robust requirements on suppliers in the way they handle and communicate with vulnerable households in particular. We published a refreshed vulnerability strategy last year, and it set out some very clear standards that suppliers need to meet in engaging with vulnerable consumers and in making sure they understand the vulnerabilities and can respond in a crisis to those who need special support, and that they communicate clearly. We do a lot of work. We talk to Citizens Advice an awful lot, and we are always open to feedback on how we can improve what we are doing and how we can—

Q392 **Melanie Onn:** Do you disagree with its assessment that you are “out of touch”?

Neil Kenward: I would say we disagree. All the executives, for example, have calls with actual consumers. They are set up so that we are not just existing in our bubble—our ivory tower. We are hearing on-the-ground experience from householders and business consumers. We have that direct line as well as talking to the consumer groups regularly.

Q393 **Melanie Onn:** We know that three quarters of consumers—not even vulnerable consumers; all consumers—are confused by their energy bills. If you have released a vulnerability study, presumably you are expecting to see a quite rapid turnaround on that figure that three quarters of people do not know what their bill means when they open it.



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Neil Kenward: We fully understand that energy can be complex. We require the suppliers to provide clearly understandable energy bills as far as possible. Indeed, we have an explainer on our website to try to help consumers understand if they are unsure.

Q394 **Melanie Onn:** How many consumers do you think go to the Ofgem website?

Neil Kenward: We have good data on that.

Priya Brahmhatt-Patel: Yes. We had 6.5 million visit our website between January and October last year. The top page on our website that is visited is "Find your supplier". They want to know who their supplier is. That is why the licence conditions around the information that suppliers have to provide on their bills is so important, and we are making sure that they are being complied with. Consumers go to the point that they know somebody will be able to act to help them, and the supplier is that and—

Q395 **Melanie Onn:** Presumably, vulnerability will include people who do not have access to the internet and will not find it easy to access Ofgem's website.

Priya Brahmhatt-Patel: Yes. It might be worth mentioning that we have a campaign called Energy Aware. It is not a campaign you will see on TV or anything like that; it is very much a targeted campaign that looks to reach out to those who do not have high levels of energy literacy but also do not find it easy to engage with traditional channels like a website. We took that campaign on a bit of a roadshow. We targeted areas in particular where we know there are high levels of vulnerable consumers. They just find it easier to speak to people. That roadshow was aiming to make sure they can understand where they should go to for help.

Q396 **Melanie Onn:** How many stops did that roadshow make?

Priya Brahmhatt-Patel: We identified eight areas in the initial cohort of that roadshow. We also found that within vulnerable communities there are voluntary groups and charities in the high street that provide a whole range of services. It is not restricted just to energy; when a consumer is going to get help, they often have multitudes of issues, so we want to make sure those consumer groups, those charities, have the information they need to help those consumers. Part of our job is to make sure that we can provide the briefing collateral, whether it is leaflets or posters, to those groups to reach the consumer directly. That is just one way, and we continue to monitor how effectively our website is being used as well so we can offer more ways of reaching more vulnerable consumers.

Q397 **Melanie Onn:** It will only be those who make the effort. Presumably, there is no way of knowing those who do not.



Priya Brahmhatt-Patel: Yes, and that is why the roadshow was good. For example, we would go to a local shopping centre—not one of the big shopping centres like a Westfield, but local shopping centres where people—

Melanie Onn: Areas like mine don't have a Westfield.

Priya Brahmhatt-Patel: No, exactly, but that is the point. It is high footfall, but of those consumers we know we are not reaching through traditional channels.

Neil Kenward: We know that energy debt charities often work in partnership with food banks, for example. We have visited food banks where there is an energy advisory officer helping the consumers who may not know where to go. Someone is right there to offer them advice.

Q398 **Melanie Onn:** Do you think that eight stops on a roadshow is sufficient to reach the communities around the whole of the country that might be experiencing—

Priya Brahmhatt-Patel: It is not in isolation. The roadshows are just a part of what we can do as a regulator directly to reach out to consumers. The strength is working with Citizens Advice or other consumer groups that have mandates to act on behalf of those consumers. Citizens Advice has a statutory duty to do that. On some of these things it is better for us to work in partnership with those that we know can reach them in a better way than we can.

Neil Kenward: It is a broad ecosystem of which we are just one part.

Q399 **Melanie Onn:** Utilita has provided us with some evidence, which says that "the regulator's current approach to regulation overly focuses on prescriptive processes rather than consumer outcomes." I am interested to know whether you think that is the case and why it is wrong if you disagree. It continues: "The regular approach of identifying a problem too late, being as vocal as possible to show activity, and then taking a combative approach to penalising suppliers is not conducive to trust, collaboration, or better customer outcomes." Where are they wrong? Is there any element of that that you think is a fair assessment and you are working to improve, acknowledging that there are always areas to improve?

Neil Kenward: I would acknowledge areas to improve, for sure. I think that there is a valid critique that some of our rules now are very prescriptive and very detailed and can be quite hard for suppliers to follow, adhere to or whatever. We consulted last year on moving towards a more outcomes-based form of regulation that focuses on what consumers really need and what they really want, being clear on the metrics for that, us monitoring that closely, and then we can hold suppliers to account in a different way that gives the suppliers perhaps a little more autonomy but they still have to deliver ideally even better standards for consumers. On the latter point around how we hold



suppliers to account, I am unapologetic about the fact that we are sometimes robust in protecting consumers.

Priya Brahmhatt-Patel: On the visibility, doing this just to show that we are saying and doing something rather than it actually resulting in something, I think the satisfaction figures show that where we have had to be prescriptive—and customer service is one of those areas where we probably have had to be prescriptive, like making sure you pick up your phone to a customer within a certain time—satisfaction levels were 74% back in January 2025 and they are tracking upwards. Sometimes a level of prescription might be necessary to drive those results. We speak to consumer groups and charities and we also speak to trade bodies that represent the sector and suppliers. Part of that conversation is that we want to free things up: “You have to work with us to make sure that you are still delivering on the outcomes for all consumers.” As Neil said, a lot of our market reforms work is around how we have a more outcomes-based system rather than being overly prescriptive.

Q400 **Mike Reader:** I just want to clarify something with Ian. I think you said 40% of adults have experienced misinformation and deepfakes, but only 4% experienced misinformation and deepfakes related to climate and energy. Is that right?

Ian Macrae: Yes, that is right. It is annual research that we do.

Q401 **Mike Reader:** That is about 2 million people in the UK. Given Ofgem’s responsibility for protecting consumers, what are you doing to protect people who receive misinformation and deepfakes about climate and energy, which is in your remit? Can you give us specific things you are doing in that area?

Priya Brahmhatt-Patel: It is for the Government to set the climate policy. Where we talk about misinformation and disinformation, we do it within the remit of protecting consumers and making sure that that is how we are talking to them.

Q402 **Mike Reader:** What do you do? What specific things has Ofgem put in place to protect consumers from misinformation and deepfakes in the online space?

Priya Brahmhatt-Patel: On misinformation, we make sure that any information we put out there, whether it is through the media, our website or our consultations, is factual, clear and transparent. One of the benefits of large language models coming into the fray is, rather than SEO for search, LLMs use GEO. When you google something, you get an AI summary up front. We find that the LLMs are using information from organisations like Ofgem—public sector organisations, where you know the information is trusted and we are operating within a set of rules in statute. Those models are searching based on information we are providing versus, say, searching media. I guess what I am saying is that if we are providing the factual information and one of the first things consumers find when there is a lot of misinformation out there is that—



Q403 Mike Reader: The protection for consumers from misinformation—2 million people, which roughly works out as 4% of the adult population—is making sure that your own information is correct, but are you doing anything specifically to tackle deepfakes and misinformation in the online space?

Priya Brahmhatt-Patel: If we are specifically tagged—if Ofgem’s name comes up—we will go back to correct that misinformation, or if we see something in the media that is not true, we will make sure we are rebutting it. We will not be actively policing all conversations around this, but where we are alerted and flagged to it, yes, we will correct it.

Q404 Mike Reader: Is that because it is out of your remit as a regulator?

Neil Kenward: It is not part of our statutory duties to play that role.

Q405 Mike Reader: To protect consumers?

Neil Kenward: Protecting consumers is at the heart of our duties, and we focus our communications on our activities, our regulatory role and the consumer protections and consumer education around those critical issues. We are always up for considering where we should be doing more. We have, for example, begun a new consumer survey to understand consumer attitudes towards net zero, their attitude to adopting heat pumps and EVs, for example, and their experience of that, and any barriers that are holding them back. We are soon to publish the results of the first of those and that very much informs how we take our regulatory approach forward.

Q406 Mike Reader: To clarify, because this inquiry is about building support for the energy transition, we have one regulator that waits for a complaint before it investigates and a second regulator that does not regulate or support consumers in the online space apart from the information that you have rightly described that you put out. Do you think there is a gap here in regulation and protection of consumers? It is a question for both organisations, that no one is protecting consumers online from the growing threat of misinformation and deepfakes in this space and particularly in the climate discussion. I will start with Ofgem and then am keen to hear from Ofcom.

Priya Brahmhatt-Patel: I think there is a bigger policy question here as well. If that is what a regulator is now intended to become, that is a bigger question for those to whom we are accountable to consider. Within the remit that we have at the moment, anything to do with Ofgem and our regulation—

Chair: I am sorry to interrupt you, but it sounds as if you are accepting Mike’s question.

Neil Kenward: But in the same way that consumer advice is an ecosystem, this is also an ecosystem and we focus on where we think we can add most value. We have limited resources. We will focus on the communications around our decisions and protecting consumers in their energy consumption. We are getting more and more into the net zero



space in reflection of our net zero duty and there may be opportunities to do more in this space going forward.

Ian Macrae: From my point of view, is misinformation online a problem? Of course it is. Our research tells us that that is the case. Are the regulatory tools there to address it? Partly, but it is a really complicated picture. We have not spoken at all about freedom of expression. It is there on the first page—in the first paragraph, actually—of the Online Safety Act that as well as protecting users from harms, it is our duty to ensure that users' rights to freedom of expression are protected. When we are looking at misinformation, that is the lens that we are looking through. I might come back to that point.

I think it is unlikely that we will be able to stop people accessing misinformation online. It is really important that trusted, credible news sources are available online and have prominence, but the good news is that people have much higher trust when they are accessing a news organisation they know and recognise, particularly a public service broadcaster. Their trust in that information is much higher than when they access news from unproven sources on social media.

Q407 **Lizzi Collinge:** I want to go back to the idea of where information comes from—the sources. You said that search engines that use large language models are pulling from your sources. How do you know that? How are you testing that? It is quite clear that in other arenas, LLMs, even if they link to a source, do not necessarily accurately reflect what is on that source and can just invent things. How do you test and know that that is the case? Further, younger people may not use text-based search engines but may use other platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and things like that. Do you do any testing of what information is within your remit, for example if people search for energy bills or energy suppliers?

Priya Brahmhatt-Patel: We have analytics behind our website that will help us understand who is searching for what, where, and how much search is being derived from consumers that are organically coming to the website versus those that are being directed through other sources.

On large language models, it is a new area where we have recently discovered that this is happening—that these models are finding our information. Whenever that information is found, there is always a link that directs to the page of the website that it has got it from, so it may misinterpret in its summary—

Q408 **Lizzi Collinge:** That is true but, with the greatest respect, let me give you an example. I was looking up to see if I could buy paracetamol in a supermarket in Germany. The large language model summary linked to a website and the summary said, "Yes, you can." The truth is no, you can't, and that is not what the link said either, so I am just pushing you a bit on that.

Priya Brahmhatt-Patel: I think it is fair and, as I said, it is still an area that we are trying to understand more. If it means that we need to be clearer in the way we produce the information, we can act upon that.



If it is that the model is up front just looking at the first three paragraphs of a press release to get the information, we need to make sure that we are using the information in the right way. It is an area where we need to work with experts who can help advise us in better ways to make sure that information is available. At this stage we have established that it is happening and we have to make sure that the information that we are providing is factual, correct and transparent. However, I think that there is more that we need to look into to make it as useful as possible and avoid the kinds of inaccuracies that you are describing. There is a bigger system behind it that we might not have direct control over, so we will have to work within those kinds of trade-offs, I guess.

Q409 Lizzi Collinge: You raised something interesting there about whether there is an ability to game—to ensure that the large language models pick up information, in the way that there used to be ways to game websites by using key search terms to ensure that they appeared at the top of Google. Sorry—YouTube and TikTok.

Priya Brahmhatt-Patel: YouTube and TikTok. So your question was—

Lizzi Collinge: Do you look at them, and at what will come up if consumers search for the sorts of things that you provide information and protection about?

Priya Brahmhatt-Patel: We are not active on YouTube or TikTok at the moment, so if people search for things on there, that would not be our content. They might find content from other groups or organisations where we are being discussed. On YouTube, that might result in recent media interviews we might have done or one of our charities might have been prominent about us. We check it in that sense, in terms of whether we have been found because we are on other places, but because we do not put content on there, we do not expect to see stuff that we are generating on there.

Q410 Lizzi Collinge: But do you look at it to see what comes up?

Priya Brahmhatt-Patel: Yes.

Q411 Graeme Downie: As somebody who worked in communications for 15 to 20 years, I understand some of the challenges you face. However, we have received evidence from Grantham Institute's policy and communications director, who said: "Ofgem has been dismal in the current debate. At the moment you cannot find on its website a breakdown of electricity bill costs. The most recent figure it has on its website is from August 2021 and yet it has been a major source of public dispute and debate." How do you respond to that specifically? More generally, do you think that Ofgem has the credibility to act on behalf of consumers when it comes to electricity bills and that consumers will see you as a trusted source and not part of what is, as you have rightly described, a very complex energy market?

Neil Kenward: First, recognising that we are in a world in which levels of trust have generally declined, we are a relatively well-trusted source;



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63% of the public have trust in Ofgem as a source of information. That is important and we try to utilise that effectively.

We have begun to publish more information on energy bills. We used to do a regular state of the market report. We have restarted it and last April we published the first in the new series. It includes a detailed breakdown of energy bills and how those have changed over time. It includes comparisons of UK bills with those in other countries. It includes a lot of the sort of useful market information that will help consumers, commentators and others.

Q412 Graeme Downie: Do you do any work to help consumers specifically understand the different components that make up their energy bills? I am not sure about everybody else, but quite often you just look at the bit at the bottom and it has gone up or it has gone down. You do not necessarily know why or who to blame. Is there work that you can do? What work are you already doing in that space and what more can be done?

Priya Brahmhatt-Patel: We overhauled our website in the last part of last year because consumers were finding it hard to find that information. Under the price cap section of the website, we have an explanation of what information a bill will have on it, but it is broad. Different suppliers have different bills and it is incumbent on suppliers to make sure that they are clear about what is on their bill and how consumers can understand the information on it, because they will have different approaches.

Q413 Graeme Downie: Do you have a role in that as well? Do you have a role in working with the companies but also working with consumers to tell them, "This is the level of transparency that you should expect from your energy supplier as to what makes up the bills"? Is that part of your role?

Priya Brahmhatt-Patel: That is definitely part of that key licence condition that suppliers have to adhere to, which is very much about the bill and the clarity of information that should be on it for their consumers.

Q414 Graeme Downie: I understand that it is difficult being a regulator, but do you feel you are proactive enough with the energy companies to make sure that they are being very clear about what they are doing, and that when something changes—if the Government makes a policy change—that must be reflected on energy bills and their components? Do you do that proactively or do you see it much more as a facilitation role? I think there is a need, which has been highlighted before, for consumers to see regulators as their champion as much as anything else, and not part of a very opaque system.

Priya Brahmhatt-Patel: I think that we are clear about what should be on a bill and that is available. At relevant points in time, the Energy Aware campaign will make sure that we put out content that refreshes things like that. A price cap happens every quarter; we will make sure we put content out that lets people understand what their rights are and what they need to know.



I would class the consumer champion role as something like Citizens Advice. You may know that we are being reviewed at the moment. One of the things that could be considered is whether there is more that we should be doing as a regulator to be more directly in touch with consumers to tell them about their information and their rights outside of the other actors in the market—suppliers, for instance—who have licence conditions that oblige them to provide the right information.

I will go back to something I said before. Where is the consumer going to go first to get the information they need? We are finding that they are coming to us because they want to know who their supplier is. That supplier will give them the information they need about their bill because there will be things on it related to their usage that we would not necessarily have information about. If it is not clear on the bill how much electricity they are using compared with how much gas, the supplier can do something about that. We would not be able to act on behalf of the consumer to do that. Our role is making sure the consumer is getting what they need from the person or organisation that is able to provide it. There is probably space for us to consider whether we do more, but, again, if that benefits the consumer.

- Q415 **Graeme Downie:** What you are describing is almost verging on an ombudsman role, where you are saying that you will act more collectively. I am not saying that is a bad thing but it does again feel that there is a gap there where consumers cannot fully understand a complex energy market and where Ofgem, along with Ofcom, would have a role in making sure that it is done. I think that is picking up Mike's point. Is that fair?

Priya Brahmhatt-Patel: I think that is fair.

- Q416 **Graeme Downie:** Looking again at the changes coming down the line and the long-term transition investments that are being made, how does Ofgem quantify that investment in benefits? Is that something that could be made available to consumers in a more accessible form? Again, we might talk about it here and say that it is great that we are investing in this or that and it is good for bills in the long term. Do consumers understand that? What is your role in that and what role do suppliers have?

Neil Kenward: On the big regulatory decisions that we are responsible for, for example the network price controls, we are very clear in our communications: "This is the decision we have taken, these are the investments that will follow from that, this is the cost of them, this is how and when that is likely to turn up on people's energy bills, and these are the benefits that consumers should get in the short, medium and long run from that spend."

- Q417 **Graeme Downie:** You say you are very good at that and that is fine. How do you make sure that the companies are communicating that? As you say, that is where people will go for their information.



Neil Kenward: I would not necessarily expect a supplier to explain at a granular level that, “Out of your bill, this particular line is investing in this particular asset.” That much information could even over-complicate a bill for people. It is important that consumers can find that information if they want to. That is why we are publishing more information in that space. Other bodies also publish information that consumers can go to.

Priya Brahmhatt-Patel: The key place that people will find that kind of information is the quarterly price cap announcement, where there is a breakdown of what the cap is made up of.

Q418 **Graeme Downie:** Consumers will not read that. They will see the price cap moving and changing. Again, this is about helping people to understand how the price cap is got to. They will just see their energy bill going up or down.

Priya Brahmhatt-Patel: That is why I think if we are doing a quarterly price cap, it is incumbent upon us to be visible, to be out there on the media, to make sure that the people consumers go to—for example, Martin Lewis. Even though we know we will probably get a very hard time, we have proactively made sure to go on there and answer direct consumer questions, because we know he is a key point, especially on energy, and consumers are looking to him to provide that advice. How can we make sure that he understands what we are doing? He will go into the cap, what makes up what part of the cap, ask us difficult questions about how we decide what costs go where. We have to work with the media, broadcasters, our own channels to disseminate the information that is available but, as you say, consumers will not necessarily go to it. How do we make sure we are reaching them through the largest channel and reach that we can?

Chair: Thank you. I will end the session there, because we have had quite a long time with you, we are late, and we have two people waiting very patiently in the room for the next panel. Thank you all very much for your evidence today. There are some further questions that we will write to you about, and you have all suggested things that you will send us. Thank you again.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Chris Stark CBE and Ben Golding.

Q419 **Chair:** Welcome to the second panel of this afternoon’s Energy Security and Net Zero Committee hearing in our inquiry into building the case for the energy transition. Would you briefly introduce yourselves, please?

Ben Golding: I am Ben Golding, director of the Clean Power 2030 unit at the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero.

Chris Stark: I am Chris Stark. I head up the clean power mission for the Government.



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Q420 **Chair:** Thank you very much for joining us and for being so patient, given just how late we are now. How well do you think the clean energy superpower mission is being communicated?

Chris Stark: There are obviously always things that one could do to improve communication, but we are one of the most frontline policies of this Government, with a Minister who talks regularly about it as Secretary of State, and we continue to have lots of success in pursuing the mission, including particularly today. Today is an important day for us. We have some important results about how much new offshore wind we are able to bring on to the system over the course of the next few years, which keeps it high in the news.

Naturally, in the first 18 months, Ben and I and the team back in the Department have focused hard on the industry discussion and the communication with industry, because we knew we needed to ensure that the infrastructure that needed to be built by 2030 would be there. The next phase needs to be much more about communicating to people the benefits of this transition, and there I think we can accept that there is more to do.

Q421 **Chair:** You said there is a Minister who is communicating. You have also said that this is fundamental to the Government's plans. A Minister—but it is all of the Government's plans. This touches multiple Departments. It is at the heart of so much of what the Government do. Is there a gap here where other Departments and Ministers need to do more?

Chris Stark: I am certainly not here to criticise other parts of the Government, but I will note that you are correct to say that, by and large, the mission, as we describe it usually, is largely seen as the Department's mission, and the success of it is to see it in lots of different ways.

The most notable part of the mission that I feel does not get enough emphasis is its impact on the economy more widely. To take today's announcement, for example, of 8.4 GW of offshore wind, we are often talking gigawatts but what does that mean in reality? Well, it means £22 billion of new investment into this economy, and with it we estimate 7,000 jobs, and that is a conservative estimate. That is something that I would like to see other parts of the Government discuss more freely and more openly as a core part of the Government's strategy overall and, in particular, a core part of the country's growth strategy.

The exciting thing is that we are able to have this discussion today. I am able to tell you this today because it has had the support of the Treasury and the Chancellor. The budget for offshore wind was extended to allow that announcement to happen, and that auction to be a success, and therefore this is something that we should be celebrating right across Government.

Q422 **Chair:** How well do you think the public understands the plan?



Chris Stark: We have not done any specific evidence gathering on how people perceive the plan. There is lots of polling out there, and the Department does some of its own gathering of information on more general themes about the energy transition and on net zero. We see regularly that the populace is supportive of what we are trying to do to clean up the energy system, supportive of what needs to be done on climate, aware of the impacts of the climate change risks and wants to see action.

It is an interesting question—and one I do not have a direct answer to—whether we should do that specifically for the clean power plan. As I mentioned, our primary work in the first 18 months has been focused more on industry, to make sure that we got to where we need to, as I speak to you today.

Q423 **Chair:** When Mission Control was established, there was an announcement that described its task as to “turbocharge the government’s mission” and “speed up the connection of new power infrastructure to the grid, and cleaner, cheaper power to people’s homes and businesses”. What is your score of your achievements so far?

Chris Stark: It must be a year since we came to see you last, and I feel that in that year we have not wasted a single day. It has been tremendous to see the progress that has happened over the last 12 months, and that is the product of 18 months of hard work. I know I have mentioned a few times today’s announcement, but it really is important. If you want to build a clean power system in this country quickly—and I think we should for all sorts of reasons, notably energy security as well as climate—the very best technology to bring on is offshore wind. The success we have had today is that that keeps us on track for what we spelled out as our ambition in the clean power action plan, which was published about 14 months ago now. That seems to me a tremendous success, and I feel very good about what we have done.

Part of the job that I have, and that Ben has, is constantly to agitate about the things that are not happening as quickly as we would like them to. In a sense I need to remove that hat when I talk to you today, because when you stand back from it, and particularly when you speak to industry, they are regularly impressed by what is happening and feel the momentum that we have created by giving it such a sharp focus. There are lots of things that I wish we could have done quicker, lots of things that we still have to do, but I feel pretty good about where we are on this mission.

Q424 **Chair:** Some of the reporting ahead of today’s announcement suggested that if the auction round had not gone as well as it did, that would have jeopardised the achievement of Clean Power 2030, but that still leaves the challenges around building the grid, which I just mentioned. There is also some reporting about the reordering of connection queues still being problematic, and then the installation of the clean sources of power, which obviously today is not insignificant. Are you on course to deliver clean power by 2030?



Chris Stark: I think we are on course. Let me count the ways in which I think it. It is not just about the announcement of 8.4 GW of offshore wind. What we have done over the last 18 months is, first of all, spell out very clearly the ambition that we had for 2030, and then—and this is, I think, the expression of the mission—put policy around that in the best way that we could to make it happen. Look at the things that have been implemented over the course of the 18 months. You have mentioned some of them.

We have consented new energy infrastructure at an astonishing pace, and much of that has come through the Secretary of State himself. We have, as you said, reformed the decrepit connection queue that we were blighted by in this country, which was actually preventing development, not just in the energy sector, but right across the economy. We have removed thousands of zombie projects from that queue to free us up to do generation and new storage, but also new prisons, new schools and new house building. That is being implemented at an astonishing pace with the support of NESO. We now have a green light from Ofgem for what I think is genuinely a once-in-a-generation transmission build that will facilitate the new generation and storage that we want to have on the system. That happened before the end of the year. The best expression of the design changes that we have made to the policy environment is the announcement today. We have made changes to the contracts for difference to allow us to procure the generation that we think we need alongside all of the work I have just spoken about. That has also been a success.

Are we perfectly on track? To be honest with you, we need to wait to see some further results from the next auction round. We still have the onshore results to come in the next few weeks, but I feel very positive about where we are today.

Q425 **Chair:** In passing, you mentioned new house building. We await the new regulations on the new homes standard, which must be a frustration.

Chris Stark: My role before joining Government was in the Climate Change Committee and we used to talk regularly about the importance of those regulations. It is very important that we see them implemented as quickly as possible.

Q426 **Chair:** It is an example of where other parts of Government are perhaps not acting as fast as you need them to.

Chris Stark: It doesn't directly influence the work that Ben and I do, but it will have an indirect benefit because we will see an impact from those regulations on the electricity system that we are building, and the more clean power we can provide to the new homes the better.

Q427 **Chair:** This will be the third time I mention the grid and building the grid. You have not directly answered using those words. Where are we on building the grid that we need for 2030?



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Chris Stark: We are in a pretty good place. I think it is important to say, though, that we recognise that there are two very important projects when it comes to building the grid that at present are not on the right timetable. Standing back from this, that should not be a surprise to us or to this Committee, because we have published our ambition to bring forward those projects more quickly. What has been achieved in the last year is that those projects are now in the planning system, so they are being assessed.

Q428 **Chair:** Could you just remind us what they are?

Chris Stark: Yes, of course. The big projects are Norwich to Tilbury and the Sea Link project, which goes with it—these things are linked. They are presently on a 2031 timetable. The importance of those projects is that they facilitate the clean power that we want to see built up and down the country, of course, particularly on the east coast and particularly in Scotland. The other importance is on the consumer side: if we are able to connect those projects more quickly, we will relieve what we call a constraint in the system, which incurs costs that consumers are having to bear at the moment and should not.

A big part of what we are doing in the clean power unit and in the Department is our bit to try to support a rapid assessment in the right and proper way of those projects, given the importance to the energy system, and we are in the middle of that now.

Ben Golding: Those projects are incredibly important. I will just add, because I think it is worth saying this in context, that they are two of 88 projects that we need done across the grid for 2030. The other 86 are all currently on track and expected to be delivered by 2030. Those two are critical. They will make a material difference to constraints, but it is worth seeing them in the context of the whole system.

Q429 **Chair:** They will make a material difference. Does that mean we are really talking about Clean Power 2031?

Ben Golding: Not necessarily, no, because they are part of a much wider picture, but they will certainly help. When I say material difference, it is that constraints point—they will make a big difference to constraint costs in 2030. The faster we can bring them forward, the more we can drive down those costs, which is an important part of the story.

Chris Stark: I will give a bit more colour on this since we are talking about it. You probably did ask me that question last year, but if you had asked me that question and I had given a thoughtful answer to it, I probably would have said that one of the key issues that we were worrying about at that point was the supply chain for those projects. Did we have the cables ordered? Were there the people in the places that they need to be to deliver them? If you speak to the three transmission owners—the TOs as we refer to them—they will all tell you now that the supply chain issues are in good shape. That has come because they are clear that we want to see these projects delivered and that the regulator would support those projects. We are moving on with them, but we will



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be very focused on ensuring that we have projects delivered on time and, if possible, ahead of schedule.

Q430 **Chair:** And on storage, generally—long-duration and short-duration storage—is everything on track?

Chris Stark: There is a slightly artificial divide between storage and long-duration storage, which is on us. We made that distinction, and the distinction we talked about was eight hours. In the plan that we published we talked about the need for batteries at a much larger scale. You will see in the remaining queue of projects to connect to the grid probably an oversupply of batteries, so that tells me that we are in decent shape for batteries as long as they can fully enter the market and make a return.

The other thing, which I have to say is one of the most exciting bits of the story overall, is long-duration—as we defined it, eight hours-plus—storage. Colleagues in Ofgem supporting us here with what they call a cap and a floor essentially limits some of the risk to the projects by giving a cap and a floor to the returns that they can make. They have run a window, as they call it, to look for projects to receive that cap and floor using the capacity numbers that we published in our clean power action plan to guide it, and that has been oversubscribed. That is a process that was designed to focus on pumped storage hydro but has revealed a set of other technologies that can also provide similar system benefits, and that is exciting.

These are really good things to have on the system as we build out a bigger and bigger renewables fleet because they will be able to store vast amounts of energy so we can consume them when the wind is not blowing or the sun is not shining.

Q431 **Chair:** Is it fair to say that the certainty of the plan and the speed at which things are going on is making a difference in ensuring that the supply chain is coming together and the delivery is easier because of that degree of commitment?

Chris Stark: Yes, I think there is a virtuous circle here. The supply chain's belief that the Government are committed leads them to be more committed themselves, and we saw that particularly today with the offshore wind announcement. Those of you who have been following this may know that the new process for procuring offshore wind with the contract for difference is that we name a budget, as we call it, for the next allocation round, then we have a process of running the auction, and if the bids for that auction go outside of the agreed budget, we get to see the bid stack, as we call it, and extend the budget if there is good value for money for the consumer. We did that last year with this new approach to offshore wind.

The industry were unsure that we would be able to extend that budget because, of course, it must be agreed across Government. The fact that we have extended the budget to pay for offshore wind—I have been doing calls with developers all day, some of them unsuccessful in the



auction—has been reported back to me as a huge statement of commitment from this Government to the sector. It is a really interesting example of what I was referring to where our express preference to support the sector and others in this clean power transition is being heard. It is making the UK an interesting place to come if you are an investor and making the investors that are already here more confident about making their investments.

Q432 Chair: In today's exchanges in the Chamber, Claire Coutinho mentioned gas-fired power stations. She says that the same number—the same capacity—will be built, whether it is under the current Government's plan or under her alternative, and that that affects the claims about how much cheaper wind is than gas. Does she have a point?

Chris Stark: I find it difficult to understand that point. When we talk about 2030 we are talking about the system we want to build for the 2030s and 2040s. A really important bit of context there—and this harks back to my old role in the Climate Change Committee—is that we are expecting to have a much bigger demand for electricity in this country that must be satisfied with new generation, and therefore the question is how is it satisfied. We want to make that as cheap as possible, have it as decarbonised as possible and build as much British industry around the technologies that we deploy as possible. It seems to me that on each of those metrics offshore wind provides the best possible way forward—wind also, given our resources onshore.

The comparison of new gas to offshore wind is an entirely valid one, so we have published today some new evidence on the cost of generation, which shows you that a gas plant would be perhaps £140 per megawatt-hour compared with the £91 that we signed in the contract for AR7. I think that is a legitimate comparison and it is because we are anticipating a bigger power system in the future. That is a challenge for this country but is also a challenge that every other country in the world faces. We see growing power demand regularly in all developed economies, and it is coming to the UK now. We are in the middle of the turning point for that. After decades of falling electricity demand, we have seen a flattening and probably a slight increase in demand coming through now, and what is driving that is new demand for things such as electric vehicles, use of electricity for different sources, including heating and cooling in buildings, and electricity in industry.

That is coming and we should embrace it, because that story of electrification is a healthy story for the economy. We must satisfy demand, and doing so with something that is home grown with a good, strong industry behind it and is noticeably cheaper than the alternative of gas is the right way to do it.

Q433 Ms Billington: This session is called "Building support for the energy transition". As you will know, the Sea Link project has a direct impact on my constituents. Have you reflected on how we build support for the transition? My constituents will be adversely affected, without any clear



and direct benefit to the community in terms of either ownership or direct support for the energy transition themselves. They are basically told, "Well, yeah, you get a load of kit. It's going to be really ugly. We're going to build it on a nature reserve, destroy a seal colony, threaten significant amounts of natural environment, which could indeed help to mitigate against climate change, but don't worry, you'll get a bit off your bills at some point in the future."

Ben Golding: We probably should not comment on the individual project, although I absolutely take the point—

Ms Billington: Well, it did come up.

Ben Golding: It did.

Ms Billington: And to be clear, it is supposed to be part of the Clean Power 2030 project and, by your own admission, Chris, it is not going to be ready until 2031 now. When I saw that it was on the schedule to be completed in December 2030 I thought that was a bit of an eye-watering level of ambition bearing in mind the scale of it. On top of that, the fact is that we are expecting, because of the nature of the regulation, that these places could be dug up again within 10 or 20 years. Can you see why we might have a situation where the structure and strategy of our clean energy mission is militating against building support for the transition?

Ben Golding: Yes, in some cases. I would not want to minimise the impact on communities—there are some real difficulties and people feel this. I have been up to Lincolnshire and to other parts of the east coast to visit people and heard directly from people who feel very strongly about these projects and the impact they have on them. One of the very interesting things is it is not just the projects themselves; it is the process around them and what they describe as the life admin of having these things built near them, so there is something about how we make that easier.

The point about nature is very important as well. We are really keen to understand how we can make sure that these things have an overall nature-positive impact. They can if they are built in the right way. There is inevitably a trade-off in some areas where there is a need for this infrastructure, which will help drive down people's bills and help with the energy transition and local impacts, but I completely recognise those are real and they are felt very strongly.

Q434 **Ms Billington:** The admin thing is the case for all building projects. If you are at the beginning of your life or you think you might be able to move on, that might be one thing. If you are not and this is the way you will see out your days, with trucks at the end of the road, that is another thing. This is the case for all national infrastructure projects. The fact that this will damage nature when supposedly part of the purpose of tackling climate change is for us to protect nature seems to be an irony that is lost on the Department.



There is no obligation at the moment—you pointed it out—for there to be some nature-positive obligations around these projects. That militates against any support that you might get from the community, who love their natural environment. On top of that, there is no obligation under the clean power mission at the moment for the developers of these pieces of infrastructure to support the host community to get any direct benefit from the energy infrastructure that they are putting in. In Victorian times it was poor people that put up with the consequences of fossil fuel dirty pollution. Now I do not want it to be the situation where communities, simply because we are rich in the resources of renewable energy for whatever reason, end up being told to suck it up.

Can you give me an example of how the Department might mitigate some of these challenges or put some obligations on the developers, who otherwise are just going to say, “Yes, I’m really sorry you’ve got trucks coming along, but you’ll get a fiver off your bills in 20 years’ time”?

Ben Golding: First, there is that—I do not want to overstate the fiver off the bills in 20 years’ time. We have consulted on—

Ms Billington: The specifics are not the point. It is the generalities of the inconvenience, which we have acknowledged, but particularly the issue of nature protection and specific energy benefit for a community that will be disrupted for decades, possibly again, because of the way that our regulatory system works—and somebody basically just shrugs. I do not think that is good enough. I do not yet have an answer from the Department that satisfactorily meets the concerns of my community, particularly when there is no acknowledgement of the fact that they should be able to benefit from the energy transition because of the kind of disruption that they are going through.

Ben Golding: I absolutely hear that and I am very happy to write with the detail of some of that. There are opportunities for us to go further on nature and I absolutely acknowledge that. We are advised by something called the Clean Power 2030 Advisory Commission and we have on that someone called Craig Bennett, who is our expert in this. He advises us and acts as a nature champion for the project. He is very clear that we could do more on many of these projects to still build them, but in a way that is much more in tune with nature. For instance, he talks about things such as using very long vertical infrastructure as wildlife corridors, which we can do. There is a lot more we can probably do in that space and we are very happy to keep pressing on that.

Q435 **Ms Billington:** And community benefit for large infrastructure projects?

Ben Golding: The Department has consulted on community benefit. We have a policy and I am happy to write with the detail.

Q436 **Ms Billington:** That does not cover large infrastructure projects such as this. It is only basically about energy generation rather than about transmission, and that is my point. It would be good to see that the Department acknowledges that transmission infrastructure also requires



some kind of community benefit for the people who host it.

Ben Golding: Noted.

Chair: We wait to hear back from you in more detail on that. You mentioned you had been to Lincolnshire. As it happens, the next questions are from Melanie Onn, who is an MP in Lincolnshire.

Q437 **Melanie Onn:** I can imagine what you were in Lincolnshire discussing. Chris Stark, would you describe yourself as a zealot?

Chris Stark: My wife might call me many things, but I am not sure she has ever called me that. I have been described as a zealot. I regard myself as entirely non-zealot about the issues that I work on, but others have different views.

Q438 **Melanie Onn:** On generating confidence in the community, I wonder whether zealotry, or a sense of having blinkers on or not being sensitive to what I think is a change in public attitude, is a problem in terms of where the message carriers come from, from a Government perspective.

Chris Stark: Let me take this straight on, because I feel it. I have spent my career working on this topic and therefore I have accumulated quite a lot of knowledge about it, but it also makes you the carrier of a message that comes with that reputation of already having thought it through. It is a slightly odd thing, but we need many different approaches to make a success of a transition like this. It cannot just be framed as something that is good for the climate or indeed good for any of the other things that are associated with what we are trying to do here.

One of my frustrations is that we have not yet thought through how we present that message in a different way. We have been focused and running hard at this for 18 months. It is definitely an ambition that the Government have set that was framed around the climate objectives, but it turns out it meets many of the other objectives that this Government have set. I would like to see more voices out there talking about what we are doing here, because I think there are huge benefits from all sorts of other agendas.

Q439 **Melanie Onn:** You mentioned in your previous response home-grown energy. You were talking about it in the context of security—7,000 jobs, £22 billion-worth of investment—but much of it is not home grown. Our resources are home grown, some of the personnel is home grown, but much of it is not. Much of it is brought in from the Middle East or China. I regularly hear that the companies running these projects are not UK companies. I have a lot of time for Ørsted and RWE, yet they are not UK companies. How do we say to the public, given the disruption that their community might be facing, and the very lengthy process—we are talking about AR7 but that will be delivered in 20 years' time—that this is good for them and for the country?



Chris Stark: You are right. Everything you have said is correct. The important thing to say is that there is a lot of British content already in the things that have been done and the inward investors that have chosen to come here—you have mentioned a few of them—have substantial operations here. I will choose another: Siemens is a good example right across all the energy supply chain. If you go to Newcastle you will find people employed in a whole host of sectors in the energy transition who would not be here were it not for the policies that have been made by this Government and the ones before them.

The purpose of what we are trying to do is not to continue with the approach that was there before but to build in extra incentives for UK content, as we sometimes call it, to be established here. Tomorrow we will have the outcome of the clean industry bonus, which is largely for those companies that have been successful in the auction. That is designed to accelerate, top up and give a greater incentive to those companies to do more of their work in the UK. Without spoiling the surprise tomorrow, we are so excited with what we have seen through that policy, because we are able to see directly the multiples that we get from a little bit of support on top of the contract for difference to bring what would otherwise be imported technology or imported labour straight to the UK.

The other part is what we were discussing earlier: the amount of confidence that we are trying to transmit to that industry is also an attraction to do the work here rather than somewhere else. I have spent a long time in Hull recently. I have been back up and down to Hull.

Q440 **Melanie Onn:** Why have you not come to Grimsby?

Chris Stark: I will come to Grimsby. Let me give you that commitment.

Melanie Onn: Don't tell me about Hull!

Chris Stark: I am very happy to come to Grimsby. There is a huge swathe of the population in Hull that is now involved in the renewables sector and they work in it. I think it is a good story if we frame it in the right way. I would love to see more of it. It is perfectly possible for us to do that. The next wave of that is about the subcontractors that do not even think of themselves, sometimes, as working in the renewables sector. They might be working in the oil and gas sector right now. It is the ports and the infrastructure—

Q441 **Melanie Onn:** We have been saying that for a very long time now. I do not want to rain on your parade and I am very supportive. We have Siemens across the river in lovely Hull, and two big operations and maintenance bases in my constituency. I have long recognised that there is opportunity, but this is the same thing that has been said since the industrial strategy of 2017. It wears a little bit thin, and decarbonising the power supply is not the most interesting of titles for the general public, I'm sorry.



Chris Stark: I tend to agree.

Melanie Onn: I wonder if there is anything that says, "This is enough" or "This is the crux of the story" and is going to sell it—something that says that we are on a trajectory to great things in the future.

Chris Stark: I tell you what, have me back once we get the results from the clean industry bonus, because—

Melanie Onn: We'll get you back when we get 7,000 jobs.

Chris Stark: I will come across the river. But this is the point. We do not want to see a continuation of that, and I agree that it does wear thin unless you start to see the results of it. I think we will this time.

Q442 **Melanie Onn:** Okay. DESNZ has a public attitudes tracker, and the headline findings from summer last year say that in the short term 69% expect the transition to net zero to increase their living expenses, up from 65%, with only 7% saying that they expect a decrease. In the long term, 50% expected an increase in living expenses and 25% expected a decrease. It does not feel like the mission is connecting with the real lives and expectations of people in the country at the moment.

Chris Stark: No, and I think it is our job to make sure that it does. I mentioned earlier that inevitably when you try to do something as ambitious as this you must start with the things you know take longest. That has involved us focusing most on the infrastructure that we thought needed to be built. If you do not move quickly on that, you cannot tell a story of what we are trying to do by 2030.

I feel we can tell a better story about how this will impact positively on people's lives. It is partly about the jobs that I talked about up and down the country. I do think people care about getting stuff built, seeing Governments able to do that and seeing that investment that I talked about, but the really exciting stuff is once you have that cleaner power system that we are referring to. There are lots of opportunities for consumers to save more money through that, and that does not need to feel like a climate programme.

At the moment I have a bee in my own bonnet about the richest in society being the ones who benefit most from these technologies presently. If you can afford it, you can have the Tesla in the driveway, charge it at home very cheaply, solar panels on the roof, heat pump at home, a battery. That allows you to save a lot of money, and I would like to see those benefits pushed down to the people who can least afford them at the moment. That is a big part of what we expect to do in the next phase of this work and that turns it into a different sort of story—one that is not so disengaged from people.

Q443 **Melanie Onn:** Do you think the opportunity to become a net exporter of energy will help in the narrative with the general public?



Chris Stark: I do. I met with someone earlier and related a story of my own experience of being in Aberdeen in an electric car. The driver of that car was not very enamoured with the Secretary of State, I will be honest with you, but he was extremely pleased to have a car that he could charge for nothing and sometimes be paid to charge. We did not talk about climate change at all. It struck me that that was someone who was excited about this new opportunity that he had to, as we would say, technocratically engage with the energy market, but what does that really mean? It means that the driver of that car had an opportunity to charge his car up cheaply and he enjoyed driving it. There are more of those stories to come, and in a sense what we are trying to do is build the infrastructure to make that happen.

Q444 **Graeme Downie:** To pick up on some of what Melanie Onn was saying, there are certain words and terms that the Government use that mean absolutely nothing to anybody else or through repetition—"innovation", "sustainability"—at some point they lose all meaning. They are defined as a good thing but no one knows what they mean. Is the term "net zero" in danger of falling into the same trap—and, by extension, "just transition"? We use these phrases interchangeably and constantly. We think they are a good thing. If you said that to the person in Aberdeen they would either go, "I don't know what you are talking about" or "Oh, God, not that rubbish". Is that fair? How much of the language that we use affects how people see what this Government and others previously have attempted to do?

Chris Stark: You asked me about net zero. It is the thing that I am most closely associated with personally, as the leader of the team that first advised that it should be set as a target. Let me give you an answer to that question directly. Has it lost its currency? Yes, it has, and the reason for that is that it has taken on—it is very interesting when you hear it talked about now. It often has the word "agenda" at the end of it, so "net zero agenda". It is not an agenda, but that is what people associate it with now. It is a scientific target, and it is a very sensible one for this country to have. That need not be the way in which we brigade all the things that we are doing to achieve it. I fear it has lost its impact and its positive association. That does not mean that we need to abandon the pursuit of it, but we should think very carefully about the language that we use.

One of the very best things that I have ever participated in was something that this Parliament in a different time committed to do, which was a climate assembly, as we called it at the time—a very important participative process that six Select Committees in the Commons supported to understand what people in this country thought about how net zero should be achieved. I think the results of that still stand. It was an amazingly important thing to have done and had a lot of rich insight within it. You would find in some of the answers to those questions from the 106 people from across the country who were selected to participate in that that they are turned off by the language. They are excited about



some of the things that need to be done in pursuit of the climate objectives that this country has set, but often they do not hear that from their politicians or leaders in the private sector.

Q445 Graeme Downie: Do we need to stop talking about one overarching thing, net zero? Should we now just say, "We are making your energy bills cheaper"? Do the public care how we are doing it? Do we need to get beyond the climate idea? That is one of the purposes, obviously, but do the public just need to know we are doing a good thing and it is what we need to do, rather than being badgered about net zero? You hear private companies that say, "Our net zero agenda," and every time I hear a large company say that my eyes tend to roll somewhere to the back of my head because I know I am about to get a bunch of what used to be corporate social responsibility, which has evolved. Do we need one term or do we need multiple terms? I guess the end point of that is: does the Secretary of State need a new job title?

Chris Stark: That is certainly above my pay grade. At some point I suppose he will have one, but the importance of this is really clear to me. I think we should talk about the things we are doing rather than the pursuit of the overall goal. It is important to maintain our focus on that overall goal, but in a sense we are not going to win this argument if there is only one reason for doing all this, which is the achievement of a statutory target. It seems to me that is the least appealing reason to do this.

I will give you my own personal perception of this. We have been through a slightly weird period where net zero did take on a larger connotation than was ever intended under previous Governments. It was enough to put net zero as a tag on various programmes of work and see them supported by Government; we are well past that now.

Q446 Graeme Downie: The risk is that by calling it an agenda, we have made it a target and you can shoot it down. It is something you can use to undermine, as we have seen politically recently. The consensus around the need to tackle climate change and a warming planet has become—because it encompasses so many things, anything that is bad that happens now, we can say, "Oh, it's part of the net zero agenda".

Chris Stark: Yes, that is a risk, but I do not think it is a risk that we have fallen into directly. I do not think it is something that this Government have done. It is the way in which that topic of net zero is discussed.

Q447 Graeme Downie: How do we get out of that?

Chris Stark: Well, I think we approach it in the way that you suggested in your earlier question—we get down to looking at the things that we are doing that have a broad set of objectives, including net zero. The work that Ben and I do on clean power is as much about the energy security of this country as it is about the climate objectives of this country. It is



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definitely about the consumer impact for this country and it is also about the employment and industrial impacts that we can have in this country.

It so happens that we are also helping the climate by pursuing those things. It seems to me, with at least 15 years' experience of working on this, that most people care about climate change but they put it as a secondary concern to something prior to that. The things that we are doing right now across the economy—it is not just in the clean power programme—have a whole host of benefits that we could and should talk more about.

Q448 Ms Billington: Would you get rid of “Net Zero” from the Department’s title?

Chris Stark: If only to make it a Department that one could pronounce in an acronym more accurately. Perhaps that would be the best reason. Look, I think it is a Department that is focused on net zero, and that tells you something about the priority that the Government give to it. There is a very important part of my Department focused on the achievement of net zero, and the approach that we have to take across Government in running that essentially as a programme is done from the Department for Net Zero. I think that does mean something, but, frankly, you could call the Department anything you like. I think it is important that the work is done rather than that it is given the proper name of a Department.

Q449 Ms Billington: You are talking about building support for the transition; therefore, language matters. That is why I am asking you the question.

Chris Stark: If it helps you, my email address ends “energysecurity.gov.uk” and most people understand what that means. I often fall back on that when people ask me where I work, as the security guard did today. I say, “The Department of Energy Security”.

Q450 Wera Hobhouse: I probably also still call myself a zealot. I know you are not, but I am.

“Net-zero policies...are increasingly viewed as unaffordable, ineffective, or politically toxic”—not my words, but those of the Tony Blair Institute. Does the breakdown of what we are now calling the political consensus—we can even question whether there ever was a political consensus, but let’s say there was one that has now broken down—have the power to derail the whole plan, or at least delay it quite substantially?

Chris Stark: It worries me, as someone who has worked on this topic, that there has been a breakdown in the political consensus. Of course, we have a Government that has a majority and can do lots of things without political consensus, but in mainstream politics it does matter. As a civil servant, of course, I serve the Government, but I observe that that is more and more of a challenge.

Will it derail the programme? Well, not for us working on clean power. We have a whole host of reasons to want to see us deliver the things that we



have laid out as our ambitions, but it will only work if the transition continues into the 2030s and 2040s. Of course I worry about the consensus on this. I will go back to some of the evidence on this. All the evidence shows you that people in this country do care about climate change and about the achievement of net zero. On balance, they support it. We need to bring them more and more evidence of the success that we are having for a whole host of reasons, as reasons to further support that.

Q451 Wera Hobhouse: Does it affect the willingness of businesses to engage or make investments? Certain things are about sentiment, aren't they? Businesses need to feel that they are investing in the right thing at the right time.

Chris Stark: Yes. I have definitely seen sentiment drop off, and that is something else that concerns me. Most of the transition will be driven by private investment and we need our corporate community to support that. It probably goes back to some of the earlier questions. It was great to have such explicit support for net zero in the last five to 10 years, let's say. While it worries me that many of those corporates make less of their net zero commitments now than they used to, I am less worried as long as they are still making the investments that we require. That is, by and large, what we have seen on the energy side at least.

Ben Golding: I think it is worth coming back to what the evidence tells us about what the public actually think and what business sentiment actually is, and it is still quite positive. There is huge support for action on climate change; there is huge support for building renewables; there is huge support when you ask people, "Do you want renewables built nearby?"

Business talks less about net zero, and I think that is to a certain extent following what it sees as the thing that is talked about publicly, but Chris is right: all the evidence is that the investments are still being made at huge scale. We have seen over £60 billion of investments announced in the last year or so. The action is heading in the right direction. I do worry about the supporting rhetoric.

Q452 Wera Hobhouse: There is obviously also a global dimension to this. The US is signalling a walk away from net zero. Does that also affect business? We cannot really look at what we do here in the UK in total isolation. Does that global picture also have an effect on business willingness to invest?

Ben Golding: The global picture does. Obviously, the US will make its own decisions. If you look at the entirety of the global picture, investment in renewable energy, the speed of the roll-out of electric vehicles and other action on climate change is at record levels. The sentiment—the global consensus—absolutely matters, and there are lots of risks around that. Looking at a level below the noise, the action and the level of investment is going very well.



Q453 **Wera Hobhouse:** Would you say we are already so far down the road as businesses and communities that swinging back now would almost be—

Ben Golding: I would. I would frame it slightly differently, though: we are so far down the road that the economics have taken over. A lot of the reason why these investments are going ahead is not that people are for or against net zero, or for or against action on climate change. For a lot of businesses around the world, it is simply that the cost of a lot of the technologies has come down so much that it is simply economic sense to keep investing.

Q454 **Lizzi Collinge:** Our session is all about building support for the energy transition, and I want to talk about the cost of electricity as part of that. From the previous evidence that you have both given to the Committee, I will take it as read that you think making electricity cheaper is important. Evidence from others has talked about that in terms of support for the transition, but also the affordability of technology such as heat pumps. Do you think that is the most effective way to make sure that we complete the energy transition? What works best to build support for the energy transition? Is it simply cost incentives or is it the storytelling about climate change? Realistically, how quickly are my constituents going to see the benefits of the clean power mission?

Ben Golding: It is a complicated question. I think the answer is that there is a mix of things and it is different for different people. For some people, absolutely it is about the cost. All of the evidence is that moving to clean power will drive down wholesale costs of energy. That is the foundation for lower costs in the longer term. People need to feel it now and that is why we have action like the extra £150 off the average bill that was announced in the Budget. That is why you have the action to expand the warm home discount scheme to 6 million or so homes.

It is more than cost for some households. One of the things that is really interesting is that when people install things like heat pumps, levels of customer satisfaction reports are incredibly high. There is something about just about hearing from your neighbours or other people who have taken action. One of my previous roles, if we are doing previous roles, was running the Department's energy efficiency programmes. One thing that is interesting about that is that the decision to get people to take up energy efficiency measures in the home was often not anything to do with our website. They saw scaffolding go up on a next-door house and they heard people say, "Yes, it's warmer, it's more comfortable". There is something about hearing from your neighbours about the lived experience of it and about the satisfaction that this stuff works and makes you feel more comfortable.

Q455 **Lizzi Collinge:** Are there any lessons for the Government from that knowledge about how we talk about this?

Ben Golding: I think there are, and we have been learning them quite a lot. In the context of clean power, one of the things that will be more and



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more important is that where people will feel the benefit of this is not going to be about national programmes. It is not going to be about the statistics that say we have gone up another percentage point towards 95% clean power. It will be about people feeling this in their local area. It is when jobs are advertised down the road. It is when you see actions or when your next-door neighbour's son gets a job, when somebody installs a heat pump. More and more we are thinking quite a lot about how we engage in local areas, in more local communication strategies and more distributed strategies. We can learn quite a lot as we go along.

Q456 **Lizzi Collinge:** Chris, do you have any comments on the cost of electricity and its role in the energy transition?

Chris Stark: In the next phase of this, it is no surprise that we are completely laser focused on trying to extract as much value as we can for the consumer, and today's announcement actually is part of that. It is a really good outcome for the consumer. I think you will see more of that when we have the next set of announcements on renewables in the coming weeks. At the start of February we should get the onshore results and we have every reason to think that will be an even better story.

We have to keep making sure that we tell a good story that is widely understood, that is not just about the climate benefits and is much more about people feeling that we are on their side in what we are trying to do here. On top of that, it is an immense relief to me personally that the Budget happened a few weeks ago and that we were able to talk about taking £150 off bills, but if it ends there, that is not enough. We have a story that needs to play out over the course of this year and the ones after it about focusing on those who most need the support. We have done that, notably with things like the warm home discount.

As we go into the next phase of this, the new energy system that we have been discussing here in a Select Committee gives opportunities for people to save money in different ways. I would like to see those opportunities go to the people who most need them rather than those who are most able to afford the technologies that permit them. I think you will see that in the forthcoming warm homes plan too. These things are hard. We are trying to do as much of this as we can as quickly as possible, but I do not think we will be successful if all we do is focus on gigawatts. We have to get down to making lives better for people in this country as a result of all this.

Q457 **Chair:** Of course it is important that the poorest in society have support as a priority, but isn't it equally important—arguably more important—if we want to be able to deliver for the poorest that there is strong public support through the fact that there is a universal offer that delivers cheaper bills? Obviously, £150 in the Budget is a universal offer. Will we see more than that this year, as far as you are concerned?

Chris Stark: We have the warm homes plan coming, so there is more to say.



Q458 **Chair:** Will that go beyond the poorest in society?

Chris Stark: It is difficult for me to say too much about that because it is still in preparation, but the warm homes plan is focused on some of the issues—

Chair: It's all right, we won't tell anybody.

Chris Stark: They tend to watch, I have to say, to my cost.

Q459 **Ms Billington:** Almost everybody that we have taken evidence from in the cost of energy inquiry has said that the primary thing, if we want to be able to make sure that the transition happens as fast and as fairly as possible, is to make electricity cheaper. What recommendations do you have for energy market reform that would enable that to happen?

Ben Golding: We have taken the first step. Electricity cheaper relative to gas, or just cheaper in general?

Ms Billington: Just cheaper. Well, obviously also relative to gas, so forgive me for asking two questions in one.

Ben Golding: Well, let's separate the two. On cheaper relative to gas—and, actually, on cheaper in general—I think we have taken the first step with the action taken in the Budget, because some of that is moving some of the levy costs, particularly for the renewables obligation, to the Exchequer. That instantly not only reduces the total bill, but reduces electricity relative to gas, because it is all on the electricity bill.

More broadly on making electricity cheaper, I think it will be a mix of things. Clean power is part of that, because it absolutely drives down the wholesale cost. There is a challenge, in that there is a cost of paying for the infrastructure as we go along. It is a long-standing issue of how you get electricity cheaper in absolute terms, and if I had the answer to that, I would be delighted. But the shift to clean power; action directly on the bill, as we have taken; getting people more access to things like electric vehicles and batteries, which can be cheap and can be rolled out to poorer households, and now are being through some of the schemes; and people being able to engage with the energy system and with flexibility—that is how people can feel the benefits in their bills quite sharply.

Q460 **Mike Reader:** It is interesting that you mentioned batteries, because I understand from the press that batteries have been removed from the future homes standard, so let's see if that remains or not.

This question is to both of you, but perhaps to Chris Stark first. The last time you appeared before the Committee, you described Mission Control's controls environment as rudimentary. You described dashboards still being assembled and said that you did not have assurance arrangements in place. You also accepted that independent assurance would be needed. Have you now moved from that start-up phase into mature delivery? What independent assurance now exists to give Parliament confidence



that you are managing risks actively rather than just observing?

Chris Stark: I will take this up and Ben can chip in, but I am glad to say that things have moved on since we gave that evidence. Part of it actually was that the questions you asked moved things on more quickly. I am very happy to say that we have a fully functioning dashboard now and it has proved very useful to have it. The idea of being data-driven in this mission is absolutely at the core of what we are trying to do. To be honest with you, my main reflection on that is that this is something that other parts of Government could do as well. It is something to be learned from the fact that we have given it such a sharp focus.

There is a lot of data in energy that you can use, so I suppose we benefit from that, but we have also had the support of Ofgem and particularly NESO, which has a lot of really great data that it has been willing to share with us. The best expression of that has been the reforms that we have made to that connection queue that I spoke about earlier. What that gives us, essentially, as it reaches its conclusion now, is the set of projects that are happening across the country. That allows us to move into the next phase of actually kicking the tyres on those projects and trying to pick out the ones that we want to try to accelerate because they have the right potential. That is the work of the first part of this year.

On assurance, what we have said internally is that we cannot really make a full assessment of progress until we have had the full results of AR7. Once we have them, that will be the first opportunity to really stand back and look at it. I think we will want to do something that draws together what we have learned from that in the first half of this year as well, which will then be an invitation for further scrutiny of what we are doing here, but I am confident that we will have the data to support all of that and we have the arrangements in place to do it.

Q461 **Mike Reader:** At the previous session, you were very candid that there were obstacles that you had not yet stumbled across—I think they were the words you used—and from today's session and from the evidence, I think political consensus, and probably, in some cases, public support for the energy transition and net zero could be one or two of those. What is Mission Control doing differently to mitigate those risks, and particularly the risks to having public support for what you are doing and what the Government want to achieve?

Chris Stark: We have identified public support as something that we want to consider. The other step that we have taken is to put together an independent set of advisers who sit above all this in what we call the Clean Power 2030 Advisory Commission. We have just reappointed them. They were temporary appointments in the first phase; we now have a full set of appointments for the remainder of this Parliament—stellar appointments, really fantastic people. One of the things that that group has identified that it wants to consider is the public attitude towards what we are doing here.



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It is important for me to say to you here that I feel that we have only limited influence over that, because I think there is a broader topic that you are considering as part of this inquiry that needs to be considered along the way. The things I am particularly interested in are the things that you were referring to earlier about individual projects. We are always a bit cagey about individual projects when they are still being considered during the planning process. Once they are out of the planning process we can learn lots of lessons about how to do these things well with the energy companies that are developing these projects.

Q462 Ms Billington: My concern is that it will be too late for people involved in the particular project.

Chris Stark: I share that concern, but it is difficult for Ben or me or any of the officials involved in this to talk about specific projects while they are still being assessed by Ministers. That is a challenge and it is one of those obstacles that we refer to. There is a general need for us to step back and assess where we are 18 months in, and we will do that with the commission over the next few weeks.

Q463 Mike Reader: Affordability has repeatedly been identified as a decisive factor in public support. Chris, you acknowledged that Clean Power 2030 may leave bill payers no poorer rather than materially lower. Are you confident that that is enough to sustain public backing?

Chris Stark: I think we can move that up a notch. I feel confident that we can bring bills down and I am also confident that there are further opportunities for us to do even more of that. You will see us focus this year on those opportunities.

This draws together some of the other evidence that you have gathered today. It takes us into perhaps a different conception of what we mean by bill savings. We did an enormous amount of work last year leading to the announcement that was in the Budget, and we are very proud of that work. That is what results in £150 off your average bill. There are diminishing returns to continuing to do the very policy-driven work that does that. When you look at the energy system, there are costs that must be recovered. They are mostly legacy costs, but there are costs that must be recovered somewhere, either on the bill or from the taxpayer. That is fundamental.

There is perhaps a little bit more of that, so we can wring it out a bit further, but we move into a different phase. I have talked about the warm home discount, which is targeted support. I think there is more of that to come. Then we move into what is the most difficult thing to describe but probably the most exciting bit of all of this, which is what we commonly refer to as the flexibility of the power system: ensuring a flexible power system that gives you the opportunity to save money at different points of the year or the week or the day, and gives those opportunities to the people who could most do with that saving. The idea of a more flexible power system bringing those benefits is where I think



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we will find even bigger savings. My taxi driver friend is demonstrating just that—that these are real, tangible savings that come largely through technologies that facilitate that, and probably an element of policy and regulatory reform to facilitate that. That is exciting to me, because in the course of this year and beyond, that is what we can get focused on now.

Q464 Mike Reader: Last time, Chris, you said you would not do this job if you did not believe 2030 was achievable. Ben, is Clean Power 2030 still achievable?

Ben Golding: Clean Power 2030 is still achievable.

Mike Reader: And Chris?

Chris Stark: Absolutely. Still achievable.

Q465 Ms Billington: I would like to ask about communities and the clean power action plan, just to follow up a little bit on what I asked earlier. The action plan says that communities “will see clearer links between local projects, and local benefits”. We took a lot of evidence about community energy from NESO, National Grid, DNOs, SSEN and others. I realised after quite a lot of evidence that the conclusion was—ultimately, I got the answer from Matt Magill from NESO—that “the current system does not have the signals in place for community energy”. Do you agree?

Chris Stark: I will step in. Ben is drawing breath.

Ben Golding: I am mulling.

Chris Stark: No. I think there is lots that can be done. We could do more, and we will shortly publish the local power plan that will give some colour to some of this. I started my career working in community energy projects in Scotland and I feel very passionate that there is more that can be done here.

Q466 Ms Billington: Okay, well there is an 8 GW—

Chris Stark: There is. We made that target—

Ms Billington: Is it an ambition, an aspiration, a goal, an objective, a target or a commitment?

Chris Stark: All of the above.

Q467 Ms Billington: If that is the case, why is there no obligation on NESO, DNOs, GB Energy or Ofgem to make that 8 GW target happen?

Chris Stark: I think this is on us. We have not done enough to characterise what that 8 GW means. We still stumble over basic concepts like local projects and community projects and whether that means the same thing.

Q468 Ms Billington: I have had quite a lot of faffing around from people claiming that they needed to define things and I was like, “Stop it. This has been going on since the 1970s.”



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Chris Stark: All of those numbers came through me personally and the 8 GW is a big number because I wanted to see ambition about this, and we have been a little slow on it. I think we are into the phase now where we should move more quickly on it.

Q469 **Ms Billington:** Will there be obligations on institutions, both private and public, to achieve that 8 GW target, and in what timeframe?

Chris Stark: There may be obligations. I am afraid I do not know what timeframe and I do not know what those obligations will be right now.

Q470 **Ms Billington:** Okay, so we will need to come back to you on that over time. Are you saying that the local power plan may include this?

Chris Stark: It will include some quite exciting stuff. It is coming together nicely and it is mainly about what Great British Energy itself will be able to contribute to this.

Q471 **Ms Billington:** Great British Energy talks about its community energy in a box, so it has an idea about how it might help, but it does not have any obligation to do this.

Chris Stark: No, they do not have an obligation to do it, and I question whether they need one, actually, because they have the capacity and the funding to do it.

Q472 **Ms Billington:** One person said to us that if they were told by Ofgem to do this, they would. We said, "If the Minister tells NESO to tell Ofgem to tell you to connect to a community energy company instead of EDF, that is what you would do," and the DNO said, "Yes, absolutely". That feels like a chain of command issue, doesn't it? At some point people are saying, "Oh no, not me, guv".

Chris Stark: It is hard to argue with the question you just asked me, because I think the premise of it is correct. I am also aware that we put a lot of obligations on a lot of people and it makes the energy system a very complex thing. I would rather that we were doing things because it was the obvious thing to do.

Q473 **Ms Billington:** If it is, as you say, an ambition, an aspiration, a goal, an objective, a target and a commitment, somebody has to do something and somebody has to be told to do it.

Chris Stark: Correct.

Ms Billington: We look forward to finding out who. Thank you.

Q474 **Chair:** We were in south Wales last year, and we heard from former steelworkers who, in spite of Ministers' very strong words about the transition being about decarbonisation not deindustrialisation, did not believe it. That has not been their experience. What is the answer to this? In building trust, what is your role in ensuring that the communities that have experienced deindustrialisation in the past, over quite a significant part of the country, are convinced that the energy transition is in their



interest?

Chris Stark: I live in a part of the country that has seen the impacts of deindustrialisation in the past, in the west of Scotland. We must absolutely avoid that in the coming transition, but let's just deal with the facts about the fossil fuel transition. Sadly, one of the things that you see when you look at the transition ahead—my old colleagues at the CCC have done the work on this—is that there is more employment, good employment, in the low-carbon sector in the future, but fossil-fuelled industries tend to be highly geographically specifically located, so you get this kind of contrast. Politicians and other people who talk about it, whether they are zealots or not, often refer to the fact that employment will go up and that this is something we should also look forward to, but the problem is that that will not be true for every part of the country unless we make it so.

It is really important, when we think about something like the clean power programme, given the vast sums of investment that are flowing through some of the things that we are trying to pull off here, that we are targeting support as much as we can to those communities that otherwise will see a negative impact on employment. We will be able to do some of that through the work that Ben and I are trying to do on clean power, notably through things like the clean industry bonus. If you are pushing investment to the parts of the country that you know would otherwise suffer, I think you can have a good story to tell. The place I have foremost in my mind when I talk about that is the north-east of Scotland. We have to make that right.

Q475 **Chair:** You have already offered to come back and talk about the clean energy bonus. I think we might be seeing you more than once a year at this rate. I asked you a bit before about the cross-Government co-ordination of this agenda. What is your role in co-ordinating policy and communication?

Ben Golding: There is an architecture behind this. This is one of the missions of Government. Various cross-Government groups talk about this, but I can give one or two examples because they are useful. For instance, DEFRA set up a new board that is overseeing all sorts of infrastructure. It co-ordinates all of the work that DEFRA's various arm's length bodies do on the environmental aspects of that infrastructure. I sit on that. It has regular discussions about energy, transport, all of the things where we cut across the different missions, the different action we need on infrastructure. That is one example. Lots of structures like that have been put in place to make sure that this is much more of a whole Government effort.

Q476 **Chair:** Okay. Give us a bit more.

Ben Golding: More flavour?

Chair: When you say "lots of"—



Ben Golding: There are the mission boards that have been in place from the outset. There are various other things like the infrastructure committees across Government. NISTA, one of the new bodies, brings together what was the IPA and other structures and does lots of co-ordination. It has a kind of pipeline across all infrastructure. It will get quite dull if I go down to lots of interdepartmental committees, but I want to reassure you that they are there and are building quite a lot of momentum now.

Q477 **Chair:** All right. As an example, there have been a number of high-profile announcements from the Department for Transport recently. Having listened to and read the statements made by Ministers, I find no reference to the energy transition or the element of decarbonisation of transport that it is supposed to include. What is going on there? It feels like there should be something, whether it is talking about roads and buses or even potholes. In the big rail announcement, I mentioned it in my question, but the Secretary of State did not raise the environmental aspects of improving our rail network. Why is more of that not happening?

Ben Golding: It is a fair critique. We don't always take the opportunities to see the links between these things and certainly not to draw them out in public announcements. They exist. For transport, the most obvious examples are road transport and all the efforts being made on electric vehicles, charging infrastructure and so forth. But you are right: in quite a lot of cases, we could possibly do more in communication to show the links and the opportunities across the different parts of Government. I take the criticism.

Q478 **Chair:** Behind the question is: what is your responsibility in this? Do you accept the premise that ultimately you have a responsibility?

Ben Golding: From a clean power point of view, I think our responsibility is to make sure that we are doing it the other way, and showing the opportunities from clean power for other types of infrastructure and for other parts of Government: we take action on this and we drive down costs and avoid the risk of fossil fuel price spikes, which could otherwise make things very difficult for other parts of Government and their objectives. I think we can absolutely do more to highlight the benefits of the clean power agenda for other parts of Government. It is harder to speak for what I could do to get other parts of Government to talk about us, although we will have a good go.

Chris Stark: I think we do all right on this. It would be really good if DFT had referred to the energy transition, but Government is incredibly complex. My experience, coming back into Government having been on the edge of it, is just how complex it is. We do our best on this, but given the prominence of the clean power mission—it is something the Prime Minister and the Chancellor speak about—we do well, and it does matter. I want to make the point that it is remarkable how much it matters.



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One of the very best things that happened to us on the clean power mission was inviting the Prime Minister to come to see us early on, because the importance he was attaching to it then was very obvious to all the parts of Whitehall. We are still living off that. At the Office for Investment, for example, a really important part of Government that welcomes investment to this country, it is one of the key things that they talk about with investors. That sort of stuff does matter. I am certain there is more that we could do on this. On the edge of Government, in my previous role, I used to think regularly that there was more that the Government could do to talk about the very good things they are doing in different ways.

Q479 **Chair:** I know I should not believe everything I read in the media, but there are plenty of reports that there are people in No. 10 and elsewhere in Government who are working against this agenda.

Chris Stark: If there are, I don't know them. I am going to use the word "scepticism". There is a scepticism about things that the Department produces. It is quite right that we have it, and we get a lot of scrutiny from No.10 and Treasury and other parts of Whitehall, which I welcome, frankly. There is not much evidence of us not succeeding in the things that we wanted to do. We have done so by convincing other parts of Whitehall and Government and industry that these are the right things to do. It is right that we are put through that test, frankly.

Chair: Thank you very much for your evidence and for staying with us this late. It is appreciated. That is the end of our session.