

Energy Security and Net Zero Committee

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

Wednesday 4 February 2026

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 4 February 2026.

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Bill Esterson (Chair); Lizzi Collinge; Graeme Downie; Wera Hobhouse; Mike Reader; Bradley Thomas; Claire Young.

Questions 480-579

Witnesses

I: Judicaelle Hammond, Director of Policy and Advice, Country Land and Business Association; Professor Neil Morisetti, Professor of Climate and Resource Security, University College London; and Dr Marina Romanello, Executive Director, Lancet Countdown & Associate Professor, Institute for Global Health, University College London.

II: Ryan McLaughlin, Director of Net Zero Strategy, Department for Energy Security and Net Zero; and Katie White, Minister for Climate, Department for Energy Security and Net Zero.

Written evidence from witnesses:

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

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Judicaelle Hammond, Professor Neil Morisetti and Dr Marina Romanello.

Chair: Welcome to this afternoon's sitting of the Energy Security and Net Zero Committee. This is our final session on building support for the energy transition. Welcome, panel No. 1. Please introduce yourselves.

Judicaelle Hammond: Hello. I am Judicaelle Hammond. I am the director of policy and advice at the Country Land and Business Association, also known as the CLA. We represent more than 20,000 members in England and Wales who operate and own rural land-based businesses.

Professor Morisetti: Good afternoon. I am Neil Morisetti, former sailor, former diplomat and now professor of climate and resource security at University College London, although the views I will give this afternoon are very much my own, based on my experience, including as the Government's climate and energy security envoy and then the Foreign Secretary's special representative for climate change.

Dr Romanello: Hello. My name is Marina Romanello. I am an associate professor at University College London. I am also executive director at Lancet Countdown on health and climate change, and a member of the Climate Change Committee adaptation committee. I, too, will be speaking in a personal capacity.

Q480 **Chair:** Thank you all. I will start the questions by asking about defence. Neil, this is your time to demonstrate your experience and the breadth of roles that you have had in the past. We have been listening to NATO and various security analysts, and they are all saying the same things: energy security is a serious challenge internationally, let alone for this country. What is your view of the role of fossil fuels, and of the balance that should be struck between our reliance on oil and gas on the one hand, and renewables on the other, when it comes to national security?

Professor Morisetti: NATO is right to highlight the risks for the military in the sense of fossil fuels. Many of those risks apply to civil society as well. That said, the military will be dependent on fossil fuels for some time to come. The battery-powered tank might come one day, but it is a long way away. The military needs to take action to reduce the risks, as does society as a whole.

In both instances, there is a need for an energy strategy—one that looks at how much energy we use, whether fuel or power, and at the nature and types we use, recognising that if we are going to be using fossil fuels, we have to acknowledge that we are vulnerable, in the sense that our supply chain might be at risk or there is price volatility, depending on what is happening, because it is a frangible commodity. In a world of a lot of global insecurity, the price will vary markedly, as we have seen in the past.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

At the same time, we have to think about whether we have the right technology as we move forward. If we are moving forward with renewables, we have to acknowledge that they are not without risk, in the same way as we have geopolitical risks with fossil fuels—where they come from and the fact that the price is affected by what is going on all around the world. Certain critical minerals and rare earths are required for renewable energy, and we need to understand that that has constraints. Those can be recognised. In the past, China has restricted exports of a certain nature and that sort of thing. That has to be part of the consideration.

Whatever it is—whether fossil fuels, critical minerals or renewables—we also need to be sure of stability in the regions that we are going to obtain them from. We need to look at our supply chain. If we look at the impact of a changing climate, areas of the world most affected tend to be in the equatorial belt, which is where the world's trade routes run and where the supply lines are for much of the fossil fuels that we use in the UK military and elsewhere. That is where they come from.

Q481 Chair: Thank you very much. Going back to your point about tanks, which is also true for fighter aircraft and plenty else that the military relies on, one piece of evidence we have had said that we should absolutely prioritise liquid fuels for military use. Do you agree with that? Do you agree that, if we are moving to renewables in the energy transition, during that transition liquid fuels should be prioritised for the military first, and renewables provided elsewhere?

Professor Morisetti: Ultimately, if you need to use your military for a war of national survival, they need the kit and equipment to enable them to do that, so in that sense, yes.

That does not mean that the military cannot move away from the use of fossil fuels and find alternatives. We saw it during the campaign in Afghanistan, where there was a move away from large fossil fuel convoys to, where appropriate, making use of renewables. Solar panels were used to charge batteries right up at the frontline by the US Marine Corps.

UK military in the UK needs power, and can get it from solar, from wind from the estate and from elsewhere. It is a combination. Yes, certain bits will need fossil fuel, but you can try to reduce the amount of fossil fuel you use, not only through using power generated from renewable energy, but through energy efficiency.

Historically, while Richard Branson was taxiing his aircraft on one engine, the Royal Air Force was taxiing it on four engines. They could come down to one engine for taxiing, which would use less fuel. Historically, every piece of kit that arrived had a diesel generator, so we had a row of diesel generators running on a third of a load. You can cut that down to a third of those generators running on a full load. We need a change in behaviour patterns as well, to reduce the demand.

Q482 Chair: The North sea now has a mixture of oil and gas and wind. What is



HOUSE OF COMMONS

the security threat—whether from drones, submarines or other things—to oil and gas installations, or to wind turbines and wind farms?

Professor Morisetti: We have seen in Ukraine that Putin has targeted energy, be that big power stations, energy generation or whatever. There is no reason to believe that an adversary would not do that if we were in that sort of conflict. There is a risk in our grids, from cyber and from elsewhere. We need to ensure that they are resilient, and we need to be alert to that risk. There is perhaps a degree of complacency, although people are progressively becoming more alert to the fact that we need to be more secure, to think about undersea cables, pipelines and so on.

Q483 **Chair:** What should the Government be doing that they are not already to make the case that there is a security dividend in moving away from oil and gas and towards renewables? You mentioned Ukraine; should we be drawing on their example?

Professor Morisetti: I think the Government should be making it clear that a traditional fossil fuel energy posture has a number of risks associated with it, and alternatives can be used—renewable energy and so on. But there are certain prerequisites to doing so, again, whether in the security context or in the wider society piece. The kit and people who can fit the kit have got to be available, and those who operate it need to understand how to use it most effectively.

Chair: Thank you very much.

Q484 **Lizzi Collinge:** I am interested in how farmers and the agricultural sector are plugged into this transition. We know that farming puts out a lot of methane and nitrous oxide—a bit less of carbon, in terms of percentages. Judicaelle, are the Government's current policies successfully incorporating farmers into the energy transition? What are the barriers to farmers and agricultural businesses picking up those new technologies?

Judicaelle Hammond: My members are at the forefront—on the frontline, if you like—of climate change, and are solution providers. In terms of being at the forefront, there is the weather, which has been increasingly unpredictable. We have had too much water and too little water, and that has had an impact on yields. That will continue to be the case.

DEFRA is running a programme of decarbonisation of food production, including primary production and methane—so, we are talking about ruminants here—but that is not the be all and end all, not least because of the issue of food waste, which produces carbon emissions as well, that needs to be addressed.

In terms of providing solutions, there is of course forestry and other ways of capturing carbon from the atmosphere, which a lot of my members are already into and interested in. In terms of the energy transition, there is a great deal of interest in leasing land for solar and wind, and in businesses playing their part by putting solar panels on their roofs, switching to electric machinery—I will respond to your question about barriers in a



HOUSE OF COMMONS

minute—and installing heat pumps in the cottages or tourism accommodation that they have, which many of them have done.

In terms of barriers, the cost of electric machinery is an issue, and access to charging for that machinery is a really big issue, which is partly due to access to the grid. We know that the grid needs modernising, and in rural areas, for villages at the end of the grid, the grid has potentially not been touched since the 1930s. That is an issue. A lot of my members in the east of the country find themselves to be unwitting, and in some cases unwilling, infrastructure hosts, in the sense that while they themselves may not have renewable energy on their patch, they will be bisected by cabling routes and pylons that are taking energy from offshore wind turbines and bringing it back into the cities, particularly in the south-east.

Q485 Lizzi Collinge: Can I ask you about a specific technology? I have a constituency-based business that does anaerobic digestion and burning of methane. What are your thoughts on that technology and its use?

Judicaelle Hammond: Anaerobic digestion certainly has a role to play, because it enables the capture of methane, and it transforms what would be waste product back into something that can be used as a nutrient source, instead of manufactured nutrient sources, some of which will come from countries with which we no longer have friendly relations. It is really important to have a look at that and ensure that the technology evolves and becomes more efficient and effective. Biomethane into the gas grid is something that my members are talking about a lot as well, as are methane-powered tractors, which are not very common but are being done.

Q486 Lizzi Collinge: Finally, I am wondering about the cultural elements around farming and agriculture, and the wider discussion around climate change. As one of my farmers put it to me, “These bloody vegans are blaming us for everything.” What would you say to that? Are there cultural barriers, and if so, how do we tackle them?

Judicaelle Hammond: I think that looking at climate change on its own is probably reductive, and that means that you are not taking into account biodiversity issues both ways—it does not go one way—trade issues, and food security. I do not only mean food self-sufficiency, although we might come back to that. There are technologies that will improve emissions in the farming industry, but there is no one way, and there is not a single silver bullet.

Q487 Mike Reader: Judicaelle, I will stick with you. Is it fair to say that climate change is having a major impact on food production in the UK?

Judicaelle Hammond: Yes, I think you can already say that. Look at the prevalence of flooding in any one year. We had members who had gone into agreement with the Environment Agency so that their fields would be used as floodplains. That was on the basis of a flood likelihood of one in 100. They have been flooded pretty much every year in the last five.

Q488 Mike Reader: Given the prevalence of the impact on food security and



HOUSE OF COMMONS

food production, why are the CLA and the NFU not more prominent in their campaigning on the climate crisis?

Judicaelle Hammond: I can't answer for other organisations, but we certainly have been responding to every consultation on the subject. We are delighted to be in front of this Committee, because we have made links with DESNZ. We want to continue doing that, because DEFRA is not the only Government Department with the levers and we think that this is really important.

Q489 **Mike Reader:** Is it fair to say, therefore, that changes to taxation on farmers is a much bigger issue than climate change? That was a political issue that drew out the farming community en masse, but we do not see that same level of concern from the farming community about climate.

Judicaelle Hammond: I think that taxation is a different matter, because there was a very brutal change with an impact that could not have been foreseen or mitigated. The changes at the last Budget will help. In terms of climate change, this has been on the agenda for the CLA for at least a decade. Spooling back to 2016 and the Brexit vote, and what has happened since, we are on the record as favouring a system of public payments for public goods, for example.

Q490 **Mike Reader:** Is that one of the challenges we face in building support for the energy transition? Has it been such an issue for such a long time that people are a bit blind to it or used to talking about it?

Judicaelle Hammond: Actually, I think awareness has improved over time, because of the increasing volatility of the weather.

Professor Morisetti: As a member of the north Dorset farming community, I know that people are much more aware. You go out in your fields—this month, they were just as wet as they were last year. Are we going to see a prolonged drought in the summer and the impact that had, in my instance, on dairy? The challenge with understanding the impact of a changing climate is that it is a strategic, long-term issue, and we live in a very short-term, tactical society where our attention is much more immediate.

Maybe some of the language being used is not appropriate. If we were to all write down what we thought we meant by net zero, I suspect that we would get a variety of views. Similarly, people are talking about 2050, but most people's horizons are nowhere near 2050. It is about trying to bring that conversation—that narrative—back to something that is more relevant to the immediacy of today, whether it is in the context of health, food security, energy security or national security. In order to get that traction, the Government need to put more effort into those bits that allow us to enjoy our lifestyle.

Q491 **Mike Reader:** One of the biggest objections is to the action that the Government will take in addressing energy security in our country through onshore wind, onshore solar and expanding and putting resilience into the transition network. From my inbox, the biggest argument against all those



things is that it impacts on food security. Have the public got a mixed message? They know that food security is important and that climate change is massively impacting on food security, but the public perceive that the actions we are taking to address the impact of climate and energy resilience are actually impacting food security as well. How do we get that consensus?

Judicaelle Hammond: Can we just debunk the myth that solar in particular—because it does require land, at least at the moment—is impacting food security? First, it takes only 0.1% of all land in the UK at present. Even if we increased it fivefold, as I think the Climate Change Committee recommended, it would still be not very much. What is known as the best and most versatile land, which is what you can think of in terms of producing vegetables and arable, is already protected under the planning system.

Q492 **Mike Reader:** Why do you think that the public don't recognise that? I am sorry that my colleague Bradley has left, because his big attack on the Government is that the transition to net zero is impacting on food security. I am sure that he and other Opposition Members make that point time and again in debates on food security. Why isn't that fact, even if it is coming from an authoritative figure such as the CLA, being recognised in the political and public sphere?

Judicaelle Hammond: I think that there is a tendency to simplify debates, and that probably is part of it. There is an issue feeding that narrative when you see the scale of some of the energy infrastructure. First of all, it does not look like the landscape that people have grown into. My view sometimes, and I will say this in public, is: would you prefer a nuclear power installation? But there are issues around geopolitics and safety, as Neil was saying, with having very big installations. It is entirely a matter of economics and the grid, so there are things that we can do about it, in order to change the narrative.

Professor Morisetti: Historically, power has been generated in the midlands and the north and transmitted to the south. What we are seeing now is a roll-out of renewable power generation across the country, and some people are reacting negatively to that. There is an issue, perhaps, to do with economies of scale and investment, but the size of some of these solar farms is disproportionate to the local demand, so maybe more thought needs to be given to the concept of microgrids that are joined together. But the reality is that our power generation system is ancient and pretty tired, and it needs to be replaced. You would not replace it with the same as you had before—you would try to move forward with the technology—and it is the same with our grid, but that story has to be told, and Governments have to be prepared to tell it.

Q493 **Chair:** We are fairly tight for time today, but I have one follow-up before we move on. On the point about solar farms, I see across the country people raising concerns about a loss of food-producing land. How much of a problem is it really?

Judicaelle Hammond: At the moment, it is not a big problem. As I said, the best-grade food production land is already protected under the planning system. Unfortunately, you can only put solar panels where there is enough sunshine, where there is a grid connection and where the land is relatively flat or at least accessible, so you are constrained. As Neil was saying, it would be much better if that was closer to the centres of population, but sometimes that is just not possible.

Q494 **Chair:** No, and we have been told that even if all the solar that is planned is built, there will still be 10 times more land covered by golf courses than by solar panels.

Judicaelle Hammond: That is correct.

Mike Reader: Build the solar on golf courses?

Chair: You don't necessarily have to answer that question, so I will bring in Wera Hobhouse at this point.

Q495 **Wera Hobhouse:** We now come to the climate impacts on workforce health and productivity. Dr Romanello, how exposed is the UK population to climate-related health and productivity risks?

Dr Romanello: We have very good data that the UK's population is actually quite vulnerable to climate change. There is sometimes a generalised belief that the UK is fairly protected from climate change, and that is not true, based on the evidence. The UK has a highly vulnerable population, mainly because it has a population that is rapidly ageing and also has a high burden of non-communicable diseases, which increases vulnerability to climate-based impacts, including heat exposure, which is rapidly growing in the UK.

In terms of labour capacity and labour productivity, we know that heat exposure limits people's capacity to work, and this will particularly affect those sectors of work in which workers are highly exposed to the elements. That includes the agricultural sector and the construction sector, which is an important sector for the UK's economy that will bear a disproportionate burden of the loss of labour capacity associated with heat exposure.

To give you some numbers, which we have produced through an analysis from the Lancet Countdown, we estimate that in 2024, we lost about 5.16 million labour hours in the UK, which is an increase of about 71% from the '90s. This is because of direct heat exposure on a worker population that is increasing, but mostly because of the higher exposure to temperatures that physiologically restrict labour capacity and labour safety hours. To give a global comparison, in monetary terms, that is equivalent to a loss of about \$103 million in 2024, and as I said, over 70% of these losses will be borne by the construction sector, although the agricultural sector is also being disproportionately affected.

We are seeing an increased number of days of heatwave, which are particularly harmful for outdoor workers. I am talking about labour



HOUSE OF COMMONS

productivity loss, but it is also important to note that aside from the labour output there is a huge health risk to those workers, particularly those who need personal protective equipment in their labour. We see particularly worrying reductions in labour capacity in the health sector. Wards have had to restrict their supply of care during heatwaves, because of overwhelming demand and reduced labour capacity because of the absence of healthcare workers during heatwaves.

The rapid increase in heatwave days will increasingly put pressure on our agricultural, healthcare and construction workers, and those in any other exposed sector. To give you a sense of what that looks like, we estimate that 88% of the days of heatwave that people were exposed to on average in 2024 were caused by human-induced climate change. In other words, 88% of the average of almost seven days of heatwave exposure per person would not have occurred were it not climate change.

The worrying thing is that the extremes of heat are expected to keep on increasing. We are already committed to rising temperatures here in the UK, and we expect to see much more exposure to heatwaves, with days of temperatures over 40° now about 20 times more likely than in the 1960s, and a chance of about 50:50 of exceeding that 40° threshold again. I should remind everyone that in 2022 that led to wards being closed across the country, because of the overwhelming healthcare demand and labour absenteeism in the healthcare sector.

Q496 Wera Hobhouse: You mentioned sectors and groups that are particularly exposed. What about regions, or is the data not specific enough?

Dr Romanello: We have data on exposure and vulnerability to heat across the UK. Obviously, the parts of the UK that are most exposed to health-threatening temperatures are in the south of the UK, mostly in England, the south and south-east of England being particularly vulnerable, because it has an older population and higher intrinsic vulnerability. Mortality during extremes of heat is particularly acute in that part of the country.

So far, Scotland, Northern Ireland and even Wales are not as affected as England. The vast majority of the deaths still occur in England. UKHSA estimates, I think over the past year, an average of more than 2,000 excess deaths during heatwave days in England alone. The vast majority of the heatwave mortality in the UK is in England.

Q497 Wera Hobhouse: Should some specific health metrics become mandatory and be published by the Government or the NHS, to highlight the risks?

Dr Romanello: I certainly think so. It is worth noting that there have been a lot of advances in starting to measure the health impact. The UKHSA is now regularly monitoring excess deaths during heatwave days, and it publishes the data. We have less accurate evidence for other types of the health impacts of climate change, namely the change in climate-related morbidity—the demand for healthcare is much less consistently reported. We also have less reporting of other types of adverse health impacts, or at least reports in relation to climate drivers—for example,



HOUSE OF COMMONS

respiratory acute illness, chronic lack of access to essential healthcare during heatwaves, or even infectious disease surveillance, which is increasing in the UK. We definitely need to build more awareness so that the population are aware that such risks are emerging or established, so that they can take better action.

Plenty of studies have been done on how aware the population is of the risks and how well this is being communicated by the Government. We consistently see through surveys that people generally understand that climate change poses risks, but by and large people do not self-identify as vulnerable. That means that while people acknowledge the risks of heat exposure, they think the risks are borne by someone else and not by themselves. That means that although the Government might put forward heat and health alerts, people are not able to respond to them effectively, because they do not self-identify as the people who should be taking action in response to the alerts. There is a lot that we should be doing on building awareness and better communicating—better informing the public about the threats they face—and then on empowering action.

Wera Hobhouse: Should the Government be more proactive in linking it to climate change, rather than saying, “There’s a heatwave, so please do something”? We need to protect people’s health, but is there also a political message to say, “If we don’t do anything about climate change, these risks increase”? Should the Government, the NHS and other public institutions be more proactive in linking the health risks to climate change?

Dr Romanello: I absolutely think so, for two reasons. First, the public deserve honest information from the Government. The public need to be told frankly what the risks are. Climate change is an existential risk to many people, so they need to be aware of the threat we are facing and to know that the health harms that they and their family members are facing are due to human-induced climate change that we need to respond to. From the point of view of being truthful, in terms of how the Government is communicating, I think there is an absolute responsibility for the Government to communicate better.

On the other hand, we have really good studies, including by Niheer Dasandi, who has led some of the studies here in the UK, about the importance of building awareness among the public of the links between climate change and health, because that makes climate change personal and because it is in people’s self-interest to gain awareness of the threats.

Studies show that when people are instructed on, or when we communicate, the health dimensions of climate change, they are much more likely to support climate action, to want to take action and to take climate change more seriously. There are some studies from the US on the more climate-sceptic parts of the community that show they are much more likely to engage with and support mitigation action when they understand the co-benefits to health, or how beneficial it would be in reducing the health risks but also delivering health co-benefits in the form of healthier air or healthier diets, or more sustainable agricultural systems.

There is enough evidence to understand that the public need to be able to make the links in order to know how to respond, and how to do so in their own self-interest, a lot better than they are.

Q498 Lizzi Collinge: I want to pick up on something you said about people not thinking that heat risks apply to them. We know that you can mitigate some of the health impacts of heat through behavioural change. Do you think that people in the UK know how to change their behaviour or environment, and are they doing it?

Dr Romanello: I think there is more awareness now, and we are seeing that, with the UKHSA heat and health alerts, awareness has increased and behaviour has changed. The UKHSA has done an evaluation of the heat and health alerts, and they have seen that the expected mortality decreased after that alert was established. What we are also seeing is that there is—

Q499 Lizzi Collinge: I'm sorry—is that because of the impact on services and how they behave, or on individuals?

Dr Romanello: On everything. It has to be to do with individuals as well, because with heat impacts there is a lot to do with attitudes towards seeking care, and being able to identify risks is very important for healthcare-seeking behaviour. Being able to protect yourself will reduce the burden of disease and mortality in the population across the UK at a large scale.

There is definitely more awareness, but there is still evidence from surveys that have been rolled out that we are not effectively reaching the most vulnerable communities. There is also evidence about the loss of effectiveness of the heat alert once it has been repeatedly put out. There is a reduction in the effectiveness over time. It is unclear why that is—whether it is that people respond to the first alert but then kind of lose awareness of the risk, or think it is not such a big deal as they thought at the beginning—but there is something to be done about accurately communicating the extent of the risk and being much more targeted about who needs to respond and how, to make sure that people can self-identify properly, because that is a big problem we are facing.

There have been some studies in the healthcare sector that show that even that sector is not adequately responding to heat and health alerts, because sometimes they are issued but the response measures are not entirely clear.

Q500 Lizzi Collinge: We have heard other evidence that says that messages about climate change come best from people who are already trusted. Given that the level of trust in the NHS is very high, do you think it would be wise to use the NHS to roll out messages, not just about health but about the climate change that is causing health damage?

Dr Romanello: I would not say that we have to use the NHS for the purpose. I think the NHS has a responsibility to again communicate effectively and accurately the health threats that people are facing, and



those threats are coming from climate change and will continue to grow because of climate change. The NHS has a huge responsibility in being able to first raise the alarm on the threats that the NHS itself, in its provision of service, will continue to face, but also in the community, and how our whole epidemiological profile will change because of climate change.

Secondly, the NHS is the first line of defence against the health threats of climate change. It will bear the burden of disease increasing with climate change, and will have to increase healthcare provision and change its healthcare delivery pathways as a result of climate change. So the NHS has to adapt much faster to climate change. It now has in place an adaptation plan, which is evolving, but we need to ensure that the NHS is strong enough, and that requires political and public support.

Q501 Wera Hobhouse: Could you spell out the most notable health co-benefits of transitioning to low-carbon technologies?

Dr Romanello: There are a number. In the UK we estimate about 28,000 premature deaths coming from human sources, 55% of which come from fossil fuel burning, so you could avoid them directly by phasing out fossil fuels. We are talking about thousands of deaths among the most vulnerable parts of the population. The transport sector is the biggest single contributor, with about 10,000 deaths from road transport. We know how to reduce those deaths, which disproportionately affect urban populations.

Chair: Lizzi, do you have any more questions on the impact of climate change on the NHS?

Q502 Lizzi Collinge: The witness covered the impact on not just people but the systems of the NHS in earlier answers. To be clear, we talked about ward closures and so on, and the impact of increased demand; would any other system impacts of climate change on the NHS, whether in respect of infrastructure or otherwise, impact its ability to provide care?

Dr Romanello: For sure. Flooding is a clear example—we have seen the disruption of services due to floods—and the supply chain is also of concern, because we have a very vulnerable supply chain. It is a global supply chain, so we need to take that into account.

Q503 Lizzi Collinge: Some of the research we saw talked about IT failures and the ability of systems to cope.

Dr Romanello: Yes, we had IT failures. The whole NHS estate is at risk from climate change. It is a very frail estate. In general it is an old estate, so a high percentage of the NHS estate is at risk of heat stress, and that is not being addressed currently. You need to retrofit that estate to make sure that wards are still safe for the patients living within them. Heat stress also delays the discharge of patients, so it increases the pressure on healthcare provision from the inside and the outside. We have heard that 90% of nurses thought they had operational heat strain that impaired their

performance, and 20% reported heat-related absenteeism in a regular year. We are already seeing those stresses.

We should not forget about social care, which is perhaps much more difficult to tackle because it is decentralised and largely delivered through private sector providers. Also, during 2022 we saw a huge number of deaths among the elderly populations within care homes, because the care homes did not realise how vulnerable the UK is to overheating. There is a lot to do there in terms of working with the private sector and in public-private partnerships in terms of advancing care for those patients.

Professor Morisetti: May I add something, Chair? If you look at all the risks to our prosperity and wellbeing, some of them fall into the traditional box: state-on-state conflict, non-state actors fighting states, and this sort of thing. Others sit in a more trans-boundary, transnational space: pandemics, organised crime and so on. The challenge with climate change is that it permeates everything at once. If Governments are to address it, the Northcote-Trevelyan model of government is not the right one. We have this stovepipe approach to things—we have to at least push them on their side, if not go much more horizontal.

We also have to bring in the whole of society, because the whole of society has responsibilities; it cannot be just the Government. The Government can set the conditions and framework, but society has a role to play in all this. Until we can get a narrative that says, “Actually, this is all of our responsibility and it is not going to go away,” we are not going to make progress on addressing many of the issues—it is the same for infrastructure, defence and other sectors—in the most joined-up and cost-effective fashion to deliver the results we are looking for.

Q504 **Chair:** That is very interesting. The Government had a mission approach to climate and a number of other matters, but we do not hear so much about that these days. Is that the sort of thing you are thinking about?

Professor Morisetti: Yes. You have to bring all the actors together. Then you start to understand the co-benefits. If you remove fossil fuels from the transport sector, air quality improves, there are fewer premature births and fewer deaths from respiratory issues, there is more money to be spent on other health issues that are apparent, and that sort of thing.

Q505 **Chair:** So your point is that it is about communicating the co-benefits as widely as possible?

Professor Morisetti: And it has to be in language that is understood in the pub, or the equivalent. If it is not, it doesn’t go anywhere.

Judicaelle Hammond: It is important not to forget that an awful lot of the conversation is now happening on social media. Unfortunately, very few people will read all your research; they will be looking for a titbit. How do the Government and parliamentarians deal with that? That is way above my pay grade, but we are thinking about that as an organisation.

Q506 **Chair:** What is the CLA doing to improve the use of social media? We

might find it quite useful.

Judicaelle Hammond: We are on social media. I cannot remember what prompted it, but there was a discussion about solar panels on farmland, and we were out there saying, “No, this isn’t a problem. We need solar panels for transition. They have co-benefits in terms of the viability of farming because they provide an alternative source of income.” It is important that the data, which has to come from Government, the NHS and people who are trusted, seeps into social media as well. I had another point but I cannot remember it—sorry.

Dr Romanello: To that point, we have studies that show that people engage a lot better with the actions needed to tackle climate change when they understand what there is to gain and the co-benefits of better employment, better health determinants and so on.

To give you a sense of that, going back to the discussion about the agricultural sector, in the UK about 30% of the agriculture-related greenhouse gas emissions come from red meat and dairy production. The excess consumption of red meat and dairy is also associated with roughly 50,000 excess deaths every year. We generally eat really unhealthily. Moving towards healthier diets could bring huge co-benefits in terms of mitigating emissions from healthier agricultural sector production. That does not mean we should all go vegan tomorrow; it means that we need to start eating healthier and have healthier food systems.

Going back to the issue of the NHS and the integration of these threats, Greener NHS and the NHS commitment to net zero marked an important milestone. They came from the responsibility of the NHS to ensure that we reduce the threats to people’s health and wellbeing from climate change. That should be celebrated as a huge achievement of the UK.

Chair: We will not go into ultra-processed foods and how bad they are for you.

Mike Reader: Are brown bread and baked beans ultra-processed?

Lizzi Collinge: It’s not quite as simple as that.

Q507 **Chair:** That has sparked something; I am not quite sure what. Neil, coming back to defence matters, how much are climate-driven changes such as water scarcity and resource competition affecting future conflicts and security predictions?

Professor Morisetti: The impact of a changing climate has security implications. I touched on the different natures of the conflicts that we see today, and the fact that climate change cuts across them. If you look at where it has had its greatest effect so far, while it is a global issue, on the equatorial belt you see far more impact than elsewhere. That is frequently in countries that do not necessarily have the resilience and capacity to look after their citizens, and they have suffered food shortages, health issues and demographic challenges. In those parts of the world, people are faced with two choices. One is that they move, but most people do not

want to move; the vast majority move within their country, but may move from rural to urban areas because of the results of prolonged failed harvests, for example, which can exacerbate existing tensions.

The UNDP says that about 10% to 15% move beyond the boundary. We saw in 2015, when there was a movement of population from Syria as a result of a drought, the impact and destabilising effect it has on European politics. Others cannot move, and they are susceptible to be recruited by the likes of Boko Haram, AQ, Al-Shabaab and others, and we then see increased instability and tension in those parts of the world. As I mentioned earlier, those parts of the world are where the world's trade routes run as well, and it starts to impact on interest, so it becomes a global problem.

I would not rule it out, but it is unlikely that there will be a war that is a direct result of climate change, but you can see climate change acting as a stress or threat multiplier, or even a catalyst for conflict, because it is the straw that breaks the camel's back, for want of a better way of putting it.

Q508 **Chair:** How should we prepare for the consequences of such conflict?

Professor Morisetti: Like with any threat, you need a picture. We need to build up a picture of what is going on, so we need to draw on sources, some of which are traditional sources of gaining a picture from within the security community—and I mean that in its widest sense, not just from defence but academia and elsewhere. You need to be able to interpret that picture, understand what it is telling you, and determine what the potential threats to UK interests are—or to European or NATO interests, depending on which community you are thinking about. You need to then determine where your priorities are for action. The trouble is, we quite often look at things like food security from a domestic perspective and ask whether we have enough food to feed our population or where we are going to get it if we do not. Actually, we should also be looking at what is happening to grain harvests; as a result of weather, is there a drop in a grain harvest? Going back 15 years, with the 2010 Russian heatwave, we saw the grain harvest down and less exported. That in itself would not have been a problem, except that it was very wet in Canada and Australia, so their harvests were down, the price of wheat and thus bread went up, and that was one of the catalysts for the Arab spring. We need to look at all of those factors, as well as at direct UK interests. We also need to look at weaponisation. The war in Ukraine stopped grain harvests being exported; what is the consequence of that for global stability?

Dr Romanello: From the health perspective, there are good studies that have started to link climate change, health and conflict. That underscores the importance of supporting local communities to reduce the push factor for migration and the drivers of conflict, with climate change being a threat amplifier. The work of FCDO in that sense is hugely important, and their work in support of foreign aid is super-important to reduce the risk of conflict and migration and to make situations safer abroad.



Also, in terms of when migration does happen, the risks to the local population—both the migrant population and the home population of the country of destination—are worth taking care of. There is an increased suitability to the transmission of infectious diseases that we are starting to import from abroad. The UK is becoming more suitable for diseases like Dengue, and it will eventually become suitable for diseases like malaria. We need to prepare the NHS and our health system to deal with a migrant population that has a completely different burden of disease and epidemiological profile from the one that we have at home.

Professor Morisetti: There is no security solution to climate change. It is no good deploying a squadron of tanks or something. The answer lies in the soft-power element—aid and that sort of thing—and building capacity and resilience in those countries so that they can cope with the challenges their citizens are facing. That needs to be factored into the equation, as much as the immediate threats.

Judicaelle Hammond: To add to what Marina said, part of the difficulty that we have with looking at the transition, particularly in terms of energy, is that we are not looking wide enough. I don't know whether you have had evidence from Professor Tim Lang. He has done a recent report for Government on food security and resilience, which talked about what the population, Government and the food supply chain more widely would do if there were several different risks eventuating at the same time, which is really important.

The second thing is about diseases. It does not stop with human diseases; we have exactly the same sorts of risks in agriculture in terms of pests and diseases moving where the climate is moving. Monitoring, surveillance and preparing are also important from that perspective.

Q509 **Graeme Downie:** Professor Morisetti, in your introduction after answering the Chair's first question, you talked about Russia attacking Ukrainian energy infrastructure as a weak point. We saw the UK sign up to the Hamburg declaration in January, which covers a range of energy security issues, and is a sign of international co-operation. Where do you think the priorities should be inside the Hamburg declaration for where we should focus that collaboration with allies, around the North sea coast essentially?

Professor Morisetti: There is a physical piece, in the sense of 100 GW of principally wind power. We may want to look at other areas of technology, particularly tidal. The wind may or may not blow, the sun may or may not shine, but the tide comes in and out twice a day. That's a certainty. There is that sort of the thing. So, the technological advance is together. There is also the piece of a willingness to share power. Because one of the things in the Hamburg agreement is that, through interconnectors, this offshore wind farm can supply more than one nation.

There is an understanding that we are better off working together to make power, which has been done for donkey's years. We have been sharing power with the French, depending on priorities, demands and timings, for many years. That collaborative approach will be challenging. At the end of

the day, energy security is national security. Few nations are going to abdicate responsibility for that, because the chances are that the Government would find themselves out of office pretty quickly.

Q510 Graeme Downie: On that point about interconnectors and renewables, the challenges came up in a previous evidence session. If it is sunny in the south-east of England, the odds are it is sunny in the north-west of France. At what point do we say, "We can or can't share, because we have got our own as well"? Where is that balance, in terms of thinking about the North sea?

Professor Morisetti: There is scope in the sense that it may be sunny in the south of England, it may not be in Scandinavia and vice versa. We also need to look for storage. At the end of the day, you are never going to get over the real challenge if you have not got that storage capacity as well for the power that cannot be used. Once you start to store it and use it later, you start to counter the narrative that we had to turn the turbines off and pay everyone lots of money, which comes as a negative for renewable energy.

Q511 Graeme Downie: In terms of the more physical and cyber-security elements that are covered in the Hamburg declaration, where do you see the line for them? How close should that co-operation be? We have got something like the joint expeditionary force that covers physical security in the High North. Are you almost asking for a physical security force or cyber-security force that protects North sea assets, particularly if you are talking about more collaboration in terms of generation?

Professor Morisetti: I think there has to be. It is unlikely that one nation is going to do it. There has to be some form of agreement. We recognise that this is vulnerable to cyber—grids in particular are vulnerable—and that we are going to have to work together. But it is in all our interests to do so, because we all need this power at some point.

Q512 Graeme Downie: Recently, I was speaking to someone in Scotland who is involved in energy generation in the north-east offshore. They said, "If a Russian submarine appears next to my installation, who do I phone?"

Professor Morisetti: The answer is that you need some grey surface vessels around to distract and ensure that that Russian sub does not pop up.

Q513 Graeme Downie: In an increasingly fractured world, can you see something—I'm not suggesting the Hamburg declaration—but some kind of security force and collaboration coming out of that that is cyber and physical?

Professor Morisetti: Whether it is physical or cyber, we can sign up to all these agreements, but we have got to deliver on those agreements. We have got to build wind farms and generate that power. There needs to be effective deterrence to stop that Russian submarine appearing. We need kit, and people trained to use that kit and be prepared to forward deploy that kit, whether that is a Norwegian, British, French warship or whatever, in order to deter activity by potential adversaries.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q514 **Graeme Downie:** And that is done quite informally at the moment, or done between militaries.

Professor Morisetti: It is done between militaries, but most European militaries are too small. If I cast my mind back to my youth, when there were 30 or 40 ships in the Fishery Protection Squadron out in the North sea—

Q515 **Graeme Downie:** You are saying there would be merit in formalising that kind of arrangement, as part of energy security in the most physical sense.

Professor Morisetti: In its wider sense, yes. NATO, or whichever grouping it is, should have that more formal agreement.

Q516 **Chair:** How quickly should we be expanding our military?

Professor Morisetti: There is the view that we are at war already. It is a warm war. We need to have effective deterrents. We need to have the ability to demonstrate presence. Although today's warships, today's tanks and today's aircraft are much more capable than their predecessors, they can be in only one place at one time. Therefore, I do think we need to expand our military.

Q517 **Chair:** Are the Government going fast enough?

Professor Morisetti: No. That is a personal view. There is lots of noise, but part of it is about—this is, in a sense, what all of this discussion is about—narrative. If you don't have the right narrative to explain to the public, it is very hard. If the public can see that there is food in the supermarket and petrol in the petrol station, and they can go on holiday and so on, what is the threat?

Q518 **Graeme Downie:** Can I jump in briefly, Chair? As you know, this is one of my pet projects.

Professor Morisetti: Sorry, I am on my bandwagon.

Graeme Downie: I will be joining you on it in a second. Is that also the case when we are telling a narrative about the threats that are caused by or that precipitate climate change, rather than just describing a climate change narrative? In the same way as we say, "Why is renewable energy important? Because it brings your bills down," there is an element of the communication and the narrative stepping back from talking about climate change and saying, "This is about security."

Professor Morisetti: This is about national security, which, in my book, is about prosperity and wellbeing—the things that allow us to do what we want to do. All of those are at risk today, and there are various actions that we have to take to mitigate and reduce those risks. Some of them are in the health world, and some of them are in the farming world, but there is also a hard power piece.

Q519 **Graeme Downie:** There is a risk that if we do not tackle this, food prices will increase and health crises will increase, partly precipitating climate



change, because we have not deterred effectively and told that story.

Professor Morisetti: Yes, and everybody says, “Oh, don’t worry. It is all in the docks in Rotterdam.” But hang on: that is being said in French, German, Dutch and everything else—we are all trying to get the same thing.

Q520 Mike Reader: I will pick up on that, then go back to talking about renewables. Would a stronger link in the Government narrative between defence and the need for an energy transition help build better consensus for the investment that we need to make in our energy sector?

Professor Morisetti: I think there needs to be a link in the sense of security and resilience, and we need to define security, which includes defence but is not just defence.

Q521 Mike Reader: Judicaelle, we have data from DEFRA that shows that there has been uptake of renewables on around a third of farms, but almost all of that is solar. Most farms are not exploring wind or biodigestion—anaerobic digestion—and so on. Why do you think that is?

Judicaelle Hammond: For wind, until fairly recently, there was a ban on onshore wind, which of course meant that that project basically stopped dead. We are now seeing an industry coming back to life on that one.

For solar, the price of the technology has gone down massively. It is a well-established technology and it is becoming more and more affordable. It is fairly easy to set up and it can be taken out as well, which is the other point that I forgot to mention last time. If you put solar panels on a field, you can take them off again and you can graze in between—you can even do that. I think that is why we have seen the uptake that we have in solar versus the others. I should say that I have members in Yorkshire who remind me of hydro, which we don’t talk nearly enough about—and in Scotland even more so.

Q522 Mike Reader: There are direct incentives for installing solar from DEFRA that do not exist for some of those other technologies. Could the Government do more to incentivise those other technologies beyond solar?

Judicaelle Hammond: Probably, although—I will remain quite general—I think there was an issue with solar where, basically, subsidies made things more rather than less expensive. I would not want to push for something that has the same impact. Straight subsidies always have a negative impact on markets. Maybe things like soft loans, at zero or very low interest rates, would be a better bet. Or something like the Government being the supplier of last resort, etc. I think there is something about better co-ordination of projects. As I have said before, the problem with solar panels is that unless you have a very small array, you need either a battery array to take the energy when it is not being used, or a good connection to the grid and then a good transmission grid to take it elsewhere. That is an issue that needs to be addressed. It absolutely can be addressed, but at the moment we have members who are caught in the crossfire of that infrastructure.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q523 Mike Reader: Did this form part of your evidence into the Batters review—in terms of profitability? A large argument for installing renewables, beyond the green issue, is that you can reduce your costs, so do you think that the Batters review was clear enough on the profitability benefits of investing in green technology?

Judicaelle Hammond: We have members who have managed to manage the energy costs with solar panels and batteries, particularly when they have commercial properties that they let out to other businesses. We have members in Bedfordshire who have a small solar array that powers 20 or so businesses that operate on their site, including a brewery. So, it is doable. However, if you are looking at decarbonising half of a village or a street in the countryside, then there are issues about you having to become a licensed energy provider. We would love the Government to have a look at simplifying that, because it is stopping investment in decarbonisation.

Q524 Mike Reader: You picked my final question around what the technical, financial or policy barriers are that prevent farms from exploring renewables and exploring renewables beyond solar. It sounds like licensing is one of them.

Judicaelle Hammond: Planning is still an issue, and we are finding that some local authorities are, firstly, faster, and secondly, more likely to be sympathetic than others. It depends on what the community think is in it for them. Again, the Government have recently consulted on that in terms of reduced bills being the primary lever. There are other things that the Government probably ought to be thinking about, for example, in terms of improvement in local grids, and I mean really local. For example, can the whole street in a local area run heat pumps, have electric vehicles and have solar panels on their roofs? There are places where if you try and do that the copper will melt. It seems to me that that would be a really good way to bolster the community's resilience.

Q525 Claire Young: I talked to a local farmer recently about the barriers that you have already covered: planning, access to the grid and costs. He also mentioned access to advice. On anaerobic digesters specifically, he suggested that they are not suitable for the vast majority of farmers, and that it is more complex than most people realise. Do you want to comment on that?

Judicaelle Hammond: I am not sure that I can, to be honest. I am sure that there are areas where you would not want an anaerobic digester because what you have to feed it is not enough. Or you have to transport it too far. Indeed, that is part of the problem that we are having using animal waste at the moment: by and large, it is produced in the west of the country, and it is needed in the east where you have the big cereals. It is the same for an anaerobic digester, in the sense that the digester probably needs to be moved around. I think the problem is likely to be the feedstock and where that comes from.

Q526 Claire Young: And on the broader question of advice?

Judicaelle Hammond: There are plenty of advisers. I would love to pick that up, and if they are CLBA members they can of course always come to us for free as part of their membership.

Q527 **Lizzi Collinge:** On anaerobic digesters, do the same barriers that you talked about apply when they are for generating electricity on site? Those are the ones that I have looked at most, and the idea was supposed to be that they used waste from that farm or a few farms locally and generated electricity. In response to a written question I put in about this, the Government said that there are no specific funding schemes for anaerobic digester sites that generate electricity. Do you have any comments on those two things—the technology and the funding of the capital costs?

Judicaelle Hammond: All I will say about the technology—because that is not my area of expertise—is that I am aware that they vary. What might work for a particular kind of farm might not work for another. Again, it depends. If you are producing electricity, are you using all of it, or do you have grid access?

On funding, yes, it would be great to have more, but then again there are financial pressures and we are well aware that the Government need to make decisions about priorities. It is always useful, but my question would be, in the big picture, where does that fit?

Q528 **Lizzi Collinge:** Where do you think it fits?

Judicaelle Hammond: I think it needs to be part of the general thinking that the Government are doing about energy and the spatial thinking. Are there areas where it is more difficult to have other types of renewable, where AD would be a great thing? Are there specific clusters where that energy could be used? You might have not just a farm, but heated glasshouses, for example, or a food processor or manufacturer using it. There needs to be more thinking at national and local level, with the new mayors and combined authorities, about where the need and demand are, and therefore where the market failing is.

Chair: Thank you. We really appreciate your evidence. All three of you were very good witnesses. Without doubt you will have things that you would like to add—Judicaelle, you have already said what you will follow up with, but if all three of you have things you want to follow up with, that is always very helpful for us in gathering our evidence, so please do so.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Katie White MP and Ryan McLaughlin.

Chair: Welcome back to this afternoon's sitting of the Energy Security and Net Zero Committee and our last session on building support for the energy transition. We are now taking evidence from the Department. Minister, you are very welcome; Ryan, will you introduce yourself first? After introductions we will start with questions.

Ryan McLaughlin: My name is Ryan McLaughlin. I am the director for net zero strategy in the Department.

Chair: Minister, will you tell us your departmental responsibilities?

Katie White: For sure. I am the Minister for Climate Action, since September. I am responsible for net zero strategy, the carbon budget, green finance and international climate change.

Q529 **Chair:** Thank you very much indeed for joining us. We have just had an excellent first panel, who have set the scene very nicely. We have gathered a lot of evidence on this topic, which is a crucial element of the Government's approach to the energy transition; without taking people with us is, it will be very difficult indeed. Minister, you said that our clean energy mission will only succeed if we take people with us. How well do you think you are doing in taking people with us?

Katie White: Thank you, Chair, for that question. If we look at the statistics, the polling numbers are, surprisingly—I say that as a Member of Parliament, because sometimes perception is different—incredibly high, in terms of the British public supporting taking action on climate change. We do regular assessments, but 79% of the public support taking action on tackling climate change. In this place, it sometimes feels as if it is not entirely reflective of that, but as I say, it is still a top issue for the public.

All of us can notice, however, that the political consensus that we have enjoyed over the past 20 years has come under strain, and some of the reporting has become more negative on some areas of that agenda. We need to be—and I am—mindful and aware of what is happening out there.

The Department has done some really good work since we came into office, and I pay tribute to my predecessor, Kerry McCarthy. We started off with the Secretary of State laying out an excellent plan for our clean energy mission. For me, the best communications follows a really good strategy, and we have an excellent strategy and plan.

We have done some great communication. Since I have come into the Department, I have been involved with the Net Zero Council, and we have launched our public participation plan. Is there more to do? Absolutely, and I am keen to work with colleagues and with the Department to make sure that we build on that.

Q530 **Chair:** Thank you, Minister, for your opening answer. We will explore the elements of what you just said in the next hour. We heard from Luke Tryl that your Department, to its credit, is the most effective Department in communicating what the Government are doing. However, we also heard from Luke Tryl, and from others in that session, that although people support climate action—you are quite right to quote the high figures of support for the transition, although calling it support for action on climate would perhaps be more accurate—when they are asked whether they are prepared to pay for it, or whether they think they will pay for it, attitudes change quite markedly. What is your answer to the challenge of people saying that they are not keen to pay if taking part in addressing climate



HOUSE OF COMMONS

change would cost them?

Katie White: If what you are saying, Chair, is that people want to tackle climate change and at the same time reduce their cost of living, I completely agree with you. People want both those things. We as a Government have to meet both of those needs: we need to make sure that we are leading the transition to a low-carbon Britain, at the same time as reducing our energy bills, which we know is one of the biggest issues for people up and down the country.

With that, we have to explain what we are doing and why we are doing it; for me, that means outlining the risks of inaction and what is happening now in our country, the opportunities of the shift and the benefits that will come, whether those are benefits to communities, health benefits—I think you have just talked to experts on that—or nature restoration benefits. We need to make sure that we explain all the reasons we are doing this, and what it is.

I will say a couple more things. I think we need to do a better job of explaining the shift in the energy system. We have been a purchaser of energy: we buy energy off other countries at large, and we have been taking commodities—it is a bit like renting a house. We are now shifting to a system where we are almost purchasing our own house; this is a downpayment on our future house. Once we have that up and running, we will be able to reap more of the benefits. We need to explain to the public that we are shifting our energy system, and that there is a downpayment on that.

Some people ask, “What are the choices in front of us?”. The choices in front of us are that we do nothing—in which case we will have a decaying grid that will not take advantage of industrial opportunities—that we set up a clean energy system with renewables, or we set up a fossil fuel-based system. Those are the three options. We are choosing to go for the clean energy system for multiple reasons: not only to tackle climate change, but because it is about British sovereignty, and we want to make sure that Britain is energy secure in the future. We must make sure to do those things—

Q531 **Chair:** Sorry to interrupt you, but do you think people have understood that that is what you are trying to do?

Katie White: I think there is absolutely more to do to make that clear.

Q532 **Chair:** Okay—you said that before. What will you do differently to get that message across?

Katie White: First, in terms of the risks and what is happening in our country at the moment, I think you just spoke to Neil Morisetti about what the risks are and what is happening in our country at the moment. Colleagues have been flooded—what is the impact of that? We need to make sure that people are aware of why we are taking action.

We are doing some of that ourselves but, as you will know well, MPs and Government are sadly not the most trusted sources of news, so we need to work with others to get that messaging out.

Q533 Chair: Who do you think should carry the message?

Katie White: I think it should be multiple message carriers. I am working with multiple message carriers. We work with the Net Zero Council, which was relaunched under the Secretary of State, and a great selection of individuals, from trade union leaders to corporate leaders to leaders of NGOs, within that. Each of them has a role to play in carrying that message. It is a huge opportunity, but it is also a very complex message. We need to make sure that we are using the right messengers with the right message to meet the right audience.

Q534 Chair: So we can expect to hear from all those different leaders making that case?

Katie White: Absolutely.

Q535 Chair: Good. I have one final question before I move on to the rest of the Committee; the electricity price has been the top issue raised with us, and I am sure it is the top issue raised with you. Given the investment that you have just outlined, and those three choices, how are you going to bring the electricity price down and how are you going to close the spark gap at the same time? The Budget has made a start on that, but the feedback is that it is nowhere near enough to ensure people take advantage of the warm homes plan, for example. What is available to you to do this in the short term, given that building up the renewables system is a multi-year project?

Katie White: You referred to some of the interventions we have already made. We have doubled the warm homes discount, so it is now available to 6 million people over the course of this winter. We will be taking, as you rightly mention, £150 off energy costs thanks to the announcements in the Budget. Obviously, we had the warm homes plan coming out last week, looking at that investment across the board. We have already started to make those strides.

We are working across the board to see how we can look at areas to reduce, but as you know, Chair, we need to decouple ourselves from the international fossil fuel market. We understand that energy costs are the biggest issue for consumers up and down the country and we need to make sure that we are listening and doing everything we can to meet that need. We have made significant interventions with the warm homes plan, a £15 billion investment and upgrade, and £150 off—

Q536 Chair: You just mentioned decoupling; is that going to happen?

Katie White: We are looking at all options—don't get me in trouble!

Chair: I am merely repeating back to you, Minister, what you have said; we will perhaps pursue that with the Secretary of State next week.

Q537 Graeme Downie: You mentioned in your introduction the importance of effective communications. What do you think the public think that net zero means?

Katie White: That is a great question. To be honest, I am not sure that most members of the public know what net zero means. It is a term that, in some ways, has become weaponised, but it is a policy term that is used as part of a long-term direction. Is it a useful term? It is something we have done to set the long-term trajectory, but what I am worried about day-to-day is how we meet our carbon budgets, how we move towards the transition, and how we make sure we are bringing communities with us.

I think it has very much narrowed the debate in this place, whereas I am interested in widening that debate again—some of us have been around the agenda for 20 years—around the risks and why we are doing this, whether that is around the Aviva reports on subsidence in our homes, flooding, or the lack of resilience in some of our systems, as well as around the transition and the opportunities. I spend very little of my time on that one term. It is useful in some contexts, but for the general public, it is less so.

Q538 Graeme Downie: You have just been describing some of the good actions you are taking and net zero was running through a lot of the things you were describing. If we want the public to engage with the agenda—I think you were right to point out that the motivation of individuals or businesses is around cost—would it not be more helpful to use phraseology in terms that directly relate to the Department and the initiative's purpose and outcome, rather than that policy term?

Katie White: If you are saying that the language should be more appropriate and accessible, I agree with that 100%. Language is very inaccessible in this debate and people do not know what the terms mean.

Q539 Graeme Downie: What might be better terms to use? Does the Secretary of State need a new title?

Katie White: I want to have a cleaner, greener, healthier, wealthier country, and I think this is the route to doing it. Any of those words, whether it is about a cleaner or healthier home or a cleaner or greener environment, are more the words that you and I would use around the dinner table. I certainly do not have a conversation using anything else. There are so many exciting things happening in this area, and I think this is somewhat a false debate. There are so many brilliant things that I want to do and that the Secretary of State is leading us to do—that is what we are spending our time on.

Q540 Graeme Downie: Ryan, is there something from a civil service point of view about those policy languages? That policy language is, of course, the right scientific term to use, but how do we make sure that the Department does not reflect that in its public communications, and that that language is kept for scientific or internal discussion?

Ryan McLaughlin: That is a really great point. As the Minister said, the net zero term has been helpful in setting legal targets and international



agreements, but it does not speak to the heart of the public. Over the past year, through our carbon budget plan, which is a very technical document, we put atop our document, “Unlocking the benefits of the green transition”, which talked about the co-benefits of how it actually impacts people’s lives. In December, the Minister published Energising Britain, our public participation plan to set out how we would engage. The communications campaigns that the Department have run do not mention net zero—that does not speak to people. We focus much more on the individual actions that people take, whether that is through our “warm and fuzzy” campaign at a national level right down to the micro-targeting that we do through our TikTok and other social media campaigns. We make an active decision not to use words that switch people off.

Q541 Graeme Downie: You mentioned that 79% of people support action on climate change. Is there any data further to that on what their motivation was for supporting action on climate? Was it saving the planet, lower bills, jobs or investment? I believe the statistic—it sounds right—but the motivation matters almost more than a quick answer from a company saying, “We support this.” It is almost hard not to support it.

Katie White: I think there are multiple motivations. The vast majority of the public understand that it is happening, not just because people have been talking about it for 20 years, but because they see it themselves. Whether it is an influx of ladybirds or wasps over the summer, people can see that things feel different. They have seen the flooding; we have now had extreme heatwaves in the UK; we have seen wildfires in Scotland and in San Francisco.

Q542 Graeme Downie: I am interested in the key motivation. Is it to stop the increase of forest fires and reduce the risk of flooding? A lot of that would come back to how the Department communicates.

Katie White: I think people have different motivations. I was trying to make the point that people understand it is an issue and want to act on it because they can see the trajectory and where it is heading. There is a lot of concern about energy security sovereignty and about children and grandchildren. People are motivated to leave a better legacy for their children and grandchildren. That is one of the motivations. We look at all these different elements, while, as the Chair said, making sure that we are meeting the need of today, which is reducing energy bills.

Q543 Graeme Downie: Finally, should we change the name of the Department? Would you like to?

Katie White: No. On the list of the things that I want to do, it is nowhere near my list of priorities, because it would take a lot of time and money, and I would rather spend that on talking to people around a table in a normal way and trying to communicate in different ways. There are so many great things that the Department is doing. It did a campaign with Big John of *The Sun*. It is meeting people, reducing their energy bills, reducing our emissions and setting us up for the future. I want to be spending time on that, to be honest.

Q544 Mike Reader: Ryan, does the Department maintain a risk register of some sort, looking at risks to the Department of not delivering on the energy transition?

Ryan McLaughlin: Yes. We monitor on two fronts. We monitor, along with our international colleagues, the impact of climate change on the UK and internationally, and we publish regularly—I think that we publish the latest greenhouse gas inventory statistics this week. The second bit of monitoring we do is regular monitoring of our progress against our current budgets.

Q545 Mike Reader: On that risk register, would we see the risk of the reduction in public consensus and buy-in to the energy transition? DESNZ's data shows that 41% of people now have a negative view, versus 22% with a positive view, of the Government's work on energy transition. Would we see that on the risk register, and where would it sit, in terms of the challenges to meeting the transition?

Ryan McLaughlin: It would sit in different places. Our public attitudes tracker, which the Minister quoted the 79% statistics from, has been a long-running source for us to understand how the public are responding. We also do reviews of individual policies and how impacted they are by public sentiment, and that feeds into our wider communications campaigns and strategies.

Q546 Mike Reader: It sounds like there is not a corporate risk register of the things that are impacting delivery, or does that corporate risk register exist for the Department, as a single thing that says what the risks are to you delivering on your responsibilities as a Department?

Ryan McLaughlin: We have risk registers for overall net zero transition. That is not departmental only, because the net zero transition impacts multiple different Departments. My team hold the risk registers and the monitoring for DEFRA, DFT and other Departments, and the Department has a series of risk registers as well. The public's perception of net zero impacts different policies in different ways. Part of the challenge here is that we are looking at a large macro change to society through our energy sources and use of electricity.

Q547 Mike Reader: The Department has recognised the challenge with public perception—you published the Energising Britain strategy—but it does not seem like this big risk to the transition is owned somewhere centrally. Or is that an unfair assessment?

Katie White: If I jump in, we are obviously monitoring in different ways and looking at where the different audiences are. The way I look at it is that there is a national debate at a country level, and then we have a community-constituency level and then a citizen-consumer level. Obviously, they all feed in and interrelate to each other, but we need to make sure that we are communicating at each of those levels. There are different risks attached, whether to different policies or at each of those levels.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Nationally, we have been making a pretty good argument. Citizens-wise, we are doing a lot of microtargeting and a lot of campaigns for citizens. Where we are looking to build, and this is part of Energising Britain and the local power plan, which will come out imminently, is in some of that community area, and I think that we will get more engagement there.

It is a really good point, and we will go back because we are also looking, as Ryan was saying, at the carbon budget and where we are in terms of the risk register on that, and at delivery within the carbon budget. That is slightly aside from all the departmental risks that you can raise to the Secretary of State.

Q548 Mike Reader: It is very positive to hear that the Department is holding a Government-wide view of risk. You just referenced the carbon budget and growth delivery plan, and that very clearly relies on other Departments. Do you see delivery of the clean energy mission being as big a priority to other Departments as it is for DESNZ? I will ask you, Minister.

Katie White: The clean energy mission is more in our gift than the carbon budget. To go through it, we have to be much clearer with DFT, DEFRA and other Government Departments that we are working with. Please chip in whenever you want, Ryan, but the clean energy mission is much more in the gift of the Department.

We do work really closely, and I am certainly working with other Government Departments, whether it is DBT or the Treasury, to look at where we can take advantage of those co-benefits, because, as we power up on this mission, we want to make sure that we are taking advantage of those co-benefits, whether it is in investment or UK manufacturing.

Q549 Mike Reader: I think that you are right that the clean energy mission sits with the Department, but the climate and carbon budget is cross-Government. Do you see as much priority given to that in other Departments as you do in yours, given that the plan you have just referenced talks about fuel and transport? The CCC report is very clear, that housing, transport and so on are the biggest risks to hitting net zero and our climate commitments, not energy at this stage, because we have done great work.

Katie White: I certainly feel I have strong support from my ministerial colleagues within other Departments. I work really closely with them, whether they are at DFT, DEFRA or MHCLG, and I have no reticence in saying that they feel as much commitment to this as I do. They feel it is cross-Government.

Mike Reader: That is positive to hear, thank you.

Ryan McLaughlin: We put in place some of the structures to ensure that that happens. The Secretary of State set up a mission board with key Secretaries of State and Ministers from other Departments to make sure that the whole Government are pushing towards the clean energy superpower mission, which, as I know he has told this Committee before, has two legs: delivering clean power by 2030 and accelerating to net zero.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

That pulls it together, and he regularly updates the Prime Minister. The fact that we delivered the carbon budget and gross delivery plan at the end of October with a Government logo on it, not a DESNZ logo, shows that the effort to deliver is a really cross-Government effort.

Q550 Chair: Before we move on, how well is the MHCLG communicating what is happening in housing? How well is the DFT communicating the benefits of electric vehicles, such as significantly lower driving costs?

Katie White: I feel very fortunate to have a Minister of State for Housing who I think previously sat in my job in Opposition, so has a strong personal commitment. As I say, I find ministerial colleagues incredibly helpful. We are looking forward to the future homes standards coming forward imminently.

Chair: Oh, do tell us—what do you know about the future homes standard?

Katie White: Hopefully, that will be soon. I feel very supported by my colleagues, including in other Departments where you might not expect as much—with the Department for Education, we are ensuring that climate is on the curriculum more and we will have the natural history GCSE.

Q551 Chair: As you mentioned the future homes standard, it must be very frustrating that we are 18 months into Government and we still have house builders getting planning consent under which they do not have to have energy-efficient homes from day one.

Katie White: I want us to move as fast as we can towards delivering on our target. I also want to make sure that we do things in a thoughtful way, and that we maximise the co-benefits for Britain. I have absolute faith in the Minister of State in MHCLG to do that.

Q552 Mike Reader: We read your Energising Britain strategy and the five principles of how the Government will work with people, communities and organisations: communicate, listen, enable, grow and collaborate. What metrics will you use to judge whether that is a success?

Katie White: I apologise—I was trying to make sure I remembered all five of those pillars. It is a test! I will tell you later about which lyrics from songs—but we can play that game later. What we have done with the Energising Britain report is we have looked at more—the call from the Climate Change Committee was for us to do more on this. A couple of other things which I reflected on when I came into this role: what is the Government's role here; and where can we best add value? In part, on that community element where I was saying that I think we can do more, there are so many incredible projects going on. I have been to Sheffield and south Wales, for example, where people are delivering within their communities, so how do we make sure we are shining a light on that?

Mike Reader: What are the metrics you will use to judge whether that strategy is successful?



Katie White: Generally on our communications strategies, we are looking at overall support, which you have referred to a couple of times, and making sure of support for our policies. That is a big collaboration, but we are making sure that our overall support is there adding to it. We are then looking at the different audiences, what actions are taken as a result—whether that is those campaigns or to do with Energising Britain—and the support within the different constituencies. I should probably say demographics rather than constituencies—whether that is youth or other different demographic constituencies. We are looking at that and at the positive perceptions online—I am sure we will come on to that—which have become an increasing challenge for us.

Q553 **Mike Reader:** Put yourself a year ahead, when you come back in to see us: if the public attitudes tracker says that attitudes are getting worse towards support, what actions do you think you would have to take?

Katie White: If in a year's time public attitudes are getting worse? I hope to goodness, I am not coming back with that. We are acting now. We are not waiting for that attitudes tracker to worsen. Things are changing constantly. The thing I have been really struck by is the amount of opportunities and positive stories that are out there. Last week, I went to the Vestas factory where we had intervened with a £20 million loan. It is an amazing onshore production factory. There is a huge amount of positivity going on, and I think we need to make sure we are maximising that, telling people that story, so that they know and feel some pride in Britain. Actually, the British story on this is good, and we should take some pride in that. I want us to do loads more, but we are already taking action. Also, however, as we are in an increasingly volatile geopolitical world, improving our resilience in terms of our energy, our food and our water security—all those elements are co-benefits of tackling climate change—puts us in a more resilient position. That is something we all need to consider.

Q554 **Mike Reader:** The participation strategy emphasises collaborating with local authorities. What specifically will you do with local authorities to get them bought in to what the Government want to achieve?

Katie White: Ryan, you go with Secretary of State to the mayoral group, don't you? We already have a local net zero delivery group that works with representatives not only of the LGA, but of councils across the country and of UK100 to look at actually what is happening. We are working through that as a delivery body, but we also have a group of different stakeholders. We have a stakeholder panel, which pulls together climate action outreach and various different stakeholder groups. It will work with us to make sure we can, as I say, celebrate what is actually going on and look at—from the other way—where there are barriers to action in terms of delivering on the crucial targets that we are all working towards.

Q555 **Mike Reader:** That is interesting—you just mentioned that there is a mayoral panel. Does Andrea Jenkyns attend the mayoral group?

Ryan McLaughlin: You have put me on the spot, so I will have to go to check on that. I do not know off the top of my head.

Q556 Mike Reader: That leads me to my next question on authorities that are sceptical of climate change. My local authority, West Northamptonshire council, which is run by reform, has banned the words “net zero”, and has banned training or any focus on it. It even withdrew great council projects from the wards, because they did not want the council recognised for the positive work that it had done on climate. How are you going to bring them on board with your participation strategy?

Katie White: That is an excellent question. My understanding is that, actually, in some areas—certainly in Hull—the experience has been slightly different. While some of the names might have been removed, some of the actions and support have continued. In the real world, is it taking climate change off the agenda? This is good for jobs, good for energy sovereignty and good for local authorities on multiple levels, so we are finding that in some ways people are supportive for different reasons. I do not really mind why people are supportive; I just want Britain to be greener, healthier, happier and wealthier.

Q557 Claire Young: Public support for renewable energy infrastructure and building out the electricity grid drops markedly if they are to be built in a local area. How do the Government intend to bridge that gap in support?

Katie White: That is an excellent question—absolutely. As the Chairman said, we can hold two views that might almost appear to be conflicting. We know that when local infrastructure is proposed, support can drop for some of it.

To go back to my answer about the community piece, that is an area that we have started work on, but we need to do more. We are clear in the Department that if the community is hosting energy infrastructure, it should get some of the benefits of that, so we have been working on community benefits. We will bring forward the local power plan imminently. It is hugely exciting; it is about how local groups can get involved, so we will see more of that. That is being done in collaboration with Great British Energy. We need to be clear about how we are supporting those communities.

I am interested in whether there are other methods of participatory engagement so we can explain to people what the benefits of this are. To go back to the public participation plan, we also need to make sure we are listening to genuine concerns. At the same time, we do need to build this infrastructure for our energy sovereignty in the long term.

Q558 Claire Young: You have mentioned local benefits, and obviously the clean power 2030 action plan states that “communities will see clearer links between local projects, and local benefits”. What do you mean by that? How will local communities see these benefits?

Katie White: The local power plan will come out imminently, so more will come on that. I am sure that when the Secretary of State appears, he can give you the detail on that, but it is imminent. On how that will work, in terms of local groups getting involved in energy, we have talked about having a direct community benefit. Ryan, do you want to talk about that?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Ryan McLaughlin: Last year, we published a working paper on community benefits and some of the shared ownership of low-carbon infrastructure. We have been gathering information on that, and we will set out our next steps in due course.

As the Minister said, it is really important that we bring people with us. As she said, the local power plan is coming out imminently. We have consistently worked on the electricity bill discounts, but we are also working at a place-based level, as well as on those national interventions. Great British Energy has a £10 million fund that is being invested with the mayors, and there is another £5 million Great British Energy fund with local communities. We have also created a series of net zero local hubs around the country to help bring in investment and support local authorities as they develop clean energy infrastructure.

The aim with that is to show, on a local level, that the benefits are real. Our evidence shows that, as you say, people support climate action at a high level, but that drops off a bit whenever it comes to specific transmission infrastructure. The way to build that back up is to explain to them the benefits of that and why it is being done, and take them on a journey. As the Minister said, there is more that we need to do with that, working alongside our partners in industry.

Q559 **Claire Young:** Can you explain a little more about those initiatives? You talked about the money that has gone to mayors and local community groups. Can you explain a little more about how that is being used? Specifically, how is that building support for the transition?

Katie White: We are a little hamstrung because the local power plan is coming out imminently. As I say, we recognise that we need to do more around community benefit. We have made it really clear that communities that host this infrastructure should directly benefit from it.

Q560 **Claire Young:** But you have already awarded money. You just set out that you have awarded money for initiatives.

Ryan McLaughlin: GBE—Great British Energy—has funding set aside from the spending review and the settlement to support this.

Q561 **Claire Young:** Set aside but not distributed? Sorry, I misheard you.

Ryan McLaughlin: I don't think it is all distributed yet. That is the process of the funding.

Katie White: Just to add a couple of things on that, DEFRA is looking at the land use plan, which will look at making sure land is used most effectively. That will include a line with the energy spatial strategy at the same time to try to make sure we think more holistically around land use. That is exactly what we need to be doing in order to make our country more resilient.

Q562 **Claire Young:** I know there is space for argument when it comes to land use, because agricultural land is graded 1 to 5, and category 3a is included in best and most versatile, but 3b is not—yet none of the maps clarify

what is 3a and what is 3b. Certainly in rural constituencies like mine, that is a source of argument when applications come forward. There are arguments about food security and reserving the best land for producing food.

Katie White: We absolutely need to make sure that food security is a key part of this Government's agenda. Clearly, that falls within DEFRA, but it is not an issue we are concerned about. In my communications, I did an interesting interview with Lord Deben, ex-chair of the Committee on Climate Change and also a farmer, who talked positively about solar farms and the temporary structure that they provide. Also, it was good to see Tom Bradshaw of the NFU saying it allows a diversification for farmers. Of course, we want to make sure that, as well as those positives, we support communities to look at those benefits.

Q563 Lizzi Collinge: I am interested in existing energy communities and how we use them to support the transition. We know the new energy system will have to be more distributed and go to sites where there has not been energy before. I live within a mile of a small wind farm, a huge substation and two nuclear power stations. How do we use existing sites best, for example, in nuclear? I think there is a very live conversation about that. Also, how do we use the experience of existing energy communities to build support for the energy transition in new energy communities?

Katie White: What a brilliant question. We have not really touched on nuclear. We are very fortunate to have Patrick Vallance as our nuclear Minister, who is doing a fabulous job of championing nuclear. We have a renaissance in nuclear. We are pushing on different fronts to make sure that, as part of our clean energy mix and also as part of our economic benefits, this is something where Britain leads the way and we have skills that we do not have anywhere else in the world. We need to make sure we are quite competitive in maintaining that advantage. We are very keen to make sure we do everything we can on nuclear.

Q564 Lizzi Collinge: Perhaps I could have a conversation with you later about the semi-urban population density criteria, because that is a barrier, but that is possibly not for today.

Katie White: I will look forward to that. In terms of the skills, you raise a really good point. We all want to learn from what has happened in the past when we have had energy transitions. We all know that the scars of those transitions are still on many communities up and down our country. We want to learn and not have any of those issues with this energy transition. We have the North sea plan that looks at how to transfer communities. It was explained to me that it is a bit like when people leave the military. We were having a bespoke job service. It is an end-to-end service to make sure we are not losing any of those skills—

Q565 Lizzi Collinge: Sorry, what I was trying to get at was that in communities that have not had energy before, we see support for the clean energy transition dropping when it looks as if stuff is going to be built there. Yet we have communities who already have a lot of infrastructure who do not care and are very happy with it. How do we use that to reassure and



HOUSE OF COMMONS

support those new communities with their legitimate and understandable concerns?

Katie White: That is a really good challenge. I was using the North sea as an example of where there will be energy systems still being used. It is a different form of energy. In Aberdeen it is whether it is going from oil to offshore wind and you have those pontoons side by side at the same time. It is how we can make sure that that transition is happening at the same time. I saw it the other day in a heat pump factory where we had boilers and heat pumps being produced. There was a training facility and it was five to eight days to train from one to the other, but they were both being produced at the same time. You could feel that transition.

Is there more we could do? Probably. It might be a great conversation for us to have to ensure we make use of that. I was in a meeting the other day and they said, "We almost need a corps for retired engineers." And I thought that was actually a great idea. But where are the ideas to make sure we do not lose any of those skills or even the unwritten community knowledge that might be needed? There might be more we can do. As I say, I have seen some great examples, but I am happy to have a further conversation. If you have ideas, please feed them in.

Q566 **Chair:** One of the recommendations the Committee made, in response to the national policy statements, was about community engagement and the importance of doing consultation well, but above all doing it early, as the best way of avoiding the growth of campaigns against the installation of new infrastructure. Has the Department picked up on those recommendations? Has the Department changed its approach in advocating—I know it is often the developers, rather than the Department—and encouraging those applying for consent?

Katie White: We are in a very active conversation at all times. We have a Government mission, but how to deliver that will be a co-creation to make sure we can do that. Ryan, I defer to you on whether there have been any practical differences, or whether it is a sentiment change, to the Chair's point on ensuring consultation with local communities is happening earlier to avoid the challenges we have seen happen so often.

Ryan McLaughlin: We are trying to learn the lessons from previous infrastructure builds, where there have been the issues you say, Mr Chairman. We are committed to working sensitively and strategically on the upgrades we need with the network companies, Ofgem and others. In terms of the timings for consultations, some of that is driven by the planning system and the processes that go through there, but certainly we are trying, from the top level where the Minister and I sit, to explain the rationale and the reason for why we are making the change, and make sure that feeds all the way down to the micro level and the specific level of the infrastructure builds and the infrastructure projects.

Q567 **Chair:** We now have an annual statement to Parliament on the state of climate and nature. Has it led to an increase in confidence and trust in the Government's action on climate change and accompanying plans for

nature restoration?

Katie White: I think climate change and biodiversity loss are two sides of the same coin. Many people have said that before, but clearly there is a strong integration—there is a symbiotic relationship, in many ways, between those two things. When we came into Government, there was a complaint from stakeholders that we were not working together closely enough. We were not taking advantage of the opportunity to make sure that policies on reducing emissions and nature restoration are working together hand in glove.

That was one of the reasons the previous Secretary of State for DEFRA came forward to make this statement. I think it was very welcome. We had a great turnout in the House, with lots of people speaking—I think the Chair spoke. We had a great turnout at that event. We are now looking at how to build on that. In the public participation plan, we looked at saying we would do more around that moment, whether it is in local communities or different events. We are exploring that at the moment. We are working closely with DEFRA, both internationally and domestically.

Q568 **Chair:** So it is early days, but you have recognised the challenge, and you are planning how you are going to improve engagement?

Katie White: Absolutely; but, as I say, I have already witnessed an improvement. That was under way before I joined the Department. There is definitely more to do, but I have already witnessed an improvement in us working collaboratively.

Q569 **Chair:** Moving on, we have been talking about reducing costs. Is there more that can be done? In the answer the Secretary of State gave to me in the last oral questions, he said flexibility in tariffs was an opportunity. Where are we with ensuring that that is available? That already helps with electric vehicle drivers. What is the plan to bring that forward as far and as fast as possible?

Katie White: It is a really good point. You talk about electric vehicles: we are now in a system where, if you are on the right tariffs and with the right technology, you can take advantage of those opportunities. We are exploring at pace how we can bring those opportunities and advantages to as many people as possible.

Q570 **Chair:** Okay. We only have 60% smart meter use. There is slightly higher take-up, but the Committee hears quite a lot that a worryingly high proportion of smart meters are not used effectively. How do more people take advantage of flexible tariffs if they cannot have access to smart meters?

Katie White: There are different elements. One is digital accessibility with some people more able to use the interface. As you say, we should be making sure that we have the technology in homes, but also that they have the right infrastructure and equipment. There are multiple levels to how we do that. We are looking at how to do that as quickly as possible because there are advantages for people who can access these things, and



HOUSE OF COMMONS

we want to ensure those for the communities and citizens that need them most.

Ryan McLaughlin: We continue to push the smart meter roll-out so that the infrastructure is in place. There is then a job above that—the intelligence and literacy layer—where we have to make it easier for people to access these technologies. As part of Energising Britain, we looked at how we could improve people’s carbon literacy and understand the impact of their actions. That helps drive people towards further investigating what energy tariff they are on and taking further action. It is a combination of both the infrastructure piece, where the smart meter roll-out is absolutely essential—and we need to up those numbers—but also the communications and empowerment pieces along with the digital divide that the Minister mentioned. Those are important for people to feel confident in taking advantage of the infrastructure when it is in place.

Q571 **Chair:** So we are going to see a big Government communication plan telling people how wonderful flexible tariffs are?

Katie White: As it stands, we obviously focus on our three campaigns: electric vehicles—I am sure you have seen that, but thankfully they did not ask me to do it; I do not know whether you have seen the hair option, but it is quite extravagant, shall we say—heat pumps and energy efficiency. They are targeted on areas where we really want to help people and increase uptake and roll-out as quickly as possible.

Q572 **Chair:** What are the communication channels for getting those across?

Katie White: A lot of these are micro-targeted. We are looking at different demographics. When looking at energy efficiency saving up £150 off your bills, we are going for more vulnerable groups, older people, people with young families and people with disabilities. We are looking at where we need to target those most effectively. The opportunity with the online space opening up is that you can micro-target much more.

Then we are working with content creators. I mentioned before Big John of *The Sun*, who some people may be familiar with. He is very passionate and has had a brilliant conversion rate with this. He has had over 1 million views on social media on his videos, and the conversion rate to action is over 40%, which is pretty incredible. We talked about having the right messengers to meet people and make sure that we are getting that conversion.

Q573 **Chair:** Yes—you might need a different messenger where I am an MP, but that is another story.

One reason people give for not wanting to take part in or support the energy transition is that, given the global nature of climate change—we are responsible for 0.87% of emissions—what is the point of taking action here? What are the Government doing to counter that narrative?

Katie White: People either believe that Britain is important and has an impact in the world or they do not. I am in the former camp; I think that Britain has an impact in the world. The impact of our behaviour is far



HOUSE OF COMMONS

greater than the amount of our emissions. We sit on the UN Security Council. When we introduced the Climate Change Act, tens of countries followed us. The consumption of our emissions goes way beyond the 1% and the impact of the City goes beyond 1% of our emissions. Our impact in the world is far greater than that. That is a massive opportunity for us that we should not be talking about, but acting on and taking advantage of as quickly as possible. There is a global race for a lot of these industries and opportunities, and I for one do not want us to lose out.

Q574 Graeme Downie: You have touched on a couple of these aspects throughout the session, Minister, but looking at some of the trust that Government do or do not carry when it comes to communications, there are two aspects. First, how much of trying to get people to engage and make different choices with energy transitions is about just giving them information versus balancing that with incentives—or, I guess, leading them to a conclusion is a different way of putting it?

Related to that, who are the other right people to work with in order to drive that forward? Is it industry? Where are the other partners, as well as the trusted messengers you mentioned? Where is that link between trying to incentivise—going back to horrible efforts of previous Governments—nudging? How do we nudge people in the right direction, and where do you see that balance between information right through to direct incentive?

Katie White: You make a really good point. One of the mistakes that has been made in the past is that there has been an assumption that almost people would start at low-level green action and then would work their way up. Most people are completely overwhelmed, have very limited time and want to know very quickly, “What is the one thing I can do to help and make sure I have played my part?” We need to be clear and targeted about what we are asking people to do and how we support them, whether that is around £3,750 off EVs, or the boiler upgrade scheme or heat pumps. Those two things are very tied together.

In terms of messengers, you are absolutely right that other people carry greater weight than, sadly, a Member of Parliament or the Government do. It is about different people and different voices. I always respected UK scientists, but since being in this job I am now completely in awe of them. UK science is leading the world and we have some of the most incredible people in our scientific community. They are obviously very trusted voices. The reason I so enjoy working with them is because they have the rigour, but they also have the curiosity to solve these puzzles. Scientists are a brilliant way of doing that; we are lucky to have a chief scientific adviser in Emily Shuckburgh, who has written Ladybird books on climate change. We have Patrick Vallance. We have a lot of scientists.

Business leaders are out there. We see some of them making a really passionate case and we meet with many of them to ask, “Can you get out there and talk practically about what the opportunities are for your consumers and why you are investing in this?”



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q575 Graeme Downie: That is a discussion I had in a session this morning, where there was a reluctance from some businesses in a particular area to get involved in what they saw as an increasingly politically difficult space. How do you encourage them to do exactly what you have said there and say, "The Government are investing in this, it is good for your business, but you need to help us show that it works"? How do you incentivise them to push past what they will see as a political element that they may be cautious of?

Katie White: I think there are some people who are peddling climate "misinformation" or are trying to make this an argument. The people who are peddling this are back-peddalling British interests, I would say, and I am curious as to why they are doing that. But the vast majority of people—certainly the business leaders I talk to—are very committed to this agenda because they know the science and they know the economic opportunities.

Q576 Graeme Downie: Are they willing to help or support the Government in saying to the public, "If you don't do this, your energy bills will be higher"?

Katie White: Yes. Some have come out and said—you will see some of them in the media—they are doing this for business reasons and because of their own concerns. We also work on the Net Zero Council and we have a number of business leaders on that. When some of them spoke, I wished I could have filmed them and put that out. I have started interviewing people and putting it up, because some of this is around people thinking, "What are you asking me?" If I am asking people to sign up to this target, or do that, all I want people to do is explain why they, as business leaders, are investing in this, and what they are concerned about in the future. Their concerns are very similar to my concerns, so we need to do more to get their voices out.

We are working on the Net Zero Council, which the Secretary of State co-chairs with the CEO of the Co-op, who is very vocal on this. She is very keen to be out. We have an array of business leaders from Aviva, Octopus Energy and SSE on that Net Zero Council. I have encouraged them, and each of them have come out at various moments. We did the climate growth budget delivery plan; they came out and did that. I want them to do more, and I will be encouraging them to do more because, frankly, this has to be a cross-society effort as much as anything.

Q577 Graeme Downie: I could not agree with you more. I think the other thing is, as someone who did comms for 15 or 20 years, sometimes the chief executive is not the best messenger.

Katie White: Totally.

Q578 Graeme Downie: The chief executive is not the best message carrier for something corporate; often it is someone much further down the list. I understand the value of a chief executive speaking out in a column in *The Times* or something.

Moving on from that, how do you get to someone? You mentioned the North sea and the north-east of Scotland before; how do you get to



HOUSE OF COMMONS

someone who is perhaps what you would call a high-information-level person, who is still sceptical because they are worried about their own job? What is the right level to speak to them at? They will probably not listen to Government either. How do we say to them, "Look, this is not only good for your career; we are securing your job," and get them to think more broadly? How do we get to that person, and what information can we use to speak to them? As you say, it has to be a whole society approach. The value of turning—if I can use that phrase—that individual who is high-information-sceptical into an advocate would be massive. How do we get to that group?

Katie White: My first answer is to listen. Often it is about listening to what people's genuine concerns are. Sometimes there are genuine concerns, and we should listen to those genuine concerns and make sure that we are meeting them. Otherwise, sometimes it is about reassurance. As you say, who is the right messenger? It will depend on the community. It will depend on the demographic of the individual. We are strange creatures, as humans, and we are influenced in different ways.

As I listen to the climate science, which is quite terrifying at times, I need to be looking at all the different ways of getting people's support and explaining why we are doing this. That is what we are doing. The right thing for your worker will depend on the demographics of the hour. We need to keep doing this, but we need to start by listening. This is not just about us talking; it is about making sure that we are genuinely listening. This is not something that can be done to people; we need to do it together. Actually, doing it together is where we will realise so many of the secondary benefits, which will be better for all of us.

I totally agree with you, by the way, about the right person, in terms of the CEO. We were at Vaillant last week and we had a group of apprentices with great energy and magnetism for the green jobs. The CEO was fabulous, but the apprentices stole the show.

Graeme Downie: Because they listen to each other. You listen to your peers.

Katie White: Exactly.

Q579 **Chair:** I was at Cavendish Nuclear on Friday. I met an apprentice and a graduate trainee, and they were incredible. They are the people who are sent out to advocate to the local community to recruit the next generation—well, the same generation, in their case—given the shortages in their sector, which is true right across the industry. The impact on the workforce of the key people in an organisation advocating is huge. This follows on from Graeme's question: is this a part of what you are trying to do with business leaders?

Katie White: Absolutely. I have thoroughly enjoyed being at this session because it is making me check all my ideas. Under this Government—I pay tribute to what the previous Government did; we should always take pride in what has happened—we have had far more active engagement from the unions. Whether that is about workforce planning or making sure that



HOUSE OF COMMONS

there is workforce engagement, unions are involved in every visit, every plan—everything. So we are making sure we do that. On workplace engagement, I totally agree with you, and in a past life did a lot more of it. Is there anything else we can say specifically, Ryan?

Ryan McLaughlin: I guess there are two things to say. You mentioned workforce engagement through the trade unions. When the Secretary of State came in, he asked me to set up the Office for Clean Energy Jobs, to build some of that engagement, so that is happening. Then, through the Net Zero Council, we set up a subgroup—which I know sounds really boring, but is led by Chris Hulatt from Octopus Investments—to look at public participation. Part of what they were looking at was the role of communications from businesses—it was mostly businesses at the time—to their customers, supply chains and workforce, so that we could start to give businesses more information.

What is holding a lot of businesses back—coming to the previous question—is the question of how much trust they can place in some of the information in the stats. We have tried to work through toolkits and with Broadway Initiative, the Aldersgate Group and others to make sure we have trusted sources of information that we can use and feed through the trade associations and others to get that message out, because I agree that it is really important.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed. We will come to a close there, at 10 past 5, as I promised. Thank you both very much for your evidence.