

Scottish Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: [COP26: delivering a successful COP26 in Glasgow, HC 784](#)

Monday 25 October 2021, Glasgow

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[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Pete Wishart (Chair); Mhairi Black; Andrew Bowie; Deidre Brock; Wendy Chamberlain; Sally-Ann Hart; John Lamont; Douglas Ross.

Questions 63 - 116

Witnesses

[I](#): Janice Fisher, Joint Chair, Greater Glasgow Hoteliers Association; Dr Kat Jones, COP26 Project Manager, Stop Climate Chaos Scotland; Colin Edgar, Head of Communication and Strategic Partnerships, Glasgow City Council; and Councillor Susan Aitken, Leader, Glasgow City Council.



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Janice Fisher, Dr Kat Jones, Colin Edgar and Councillor Susan Aitken.

Q63 **Chair:** Welcome to the Scottish Affairs Committee from the lovely environment of the Royal Concert Hall here in Glasgow. We are here today to look at some of the preparations for COP26, which we know is only a week away. We are all thoroughly looking forward to it.

We are delighted to be joined today a panel who will introduce themselves shortly and joined belatedly by Glasgow City Council Leader Councillor Susan Aitken. We will go from you, Councillor Aitken, and then if each of you could just please introduce yourself and say who you represent.

Councillor Aitken: I am the Leader of Glasgow City Council.

Colin Edgar: I am head of communication at Glasgow City Council and the council's senior responsible officer for COP.

Dr Jones: I work for Stop Climate Chaos Scotland and I have been the lead on COP, organising on the logistics side.

Janice Fisher: I am the Co-Chair of the Greater Glasgow Hoteliers Association.

Q64 **Chair:** I am grateful. Thank you very much. I think you have already learned about pressing those little buttons in the middle to make sure that your microphones are active. Could you please turn them off if you are not going to be speaking?

Let me get things started. Councillor Aitken, could you tell the Committee where we are and if your expectations about the planning and preparations for a huge event such as this have been met? In your response, could you tell us how well you feel you have been supported by the Scottish and UK Governments in your efforts to be sure that Glasgow plays the host to this big conference?

Councillor Aitken: The operational side of things is more my officer colleagues' responsibility and my colleague Colin Edgar will be able to update you on the detail.

The verdict from the COP26 board within the council, which met last week, was that we are ready but with caveats. The caveats are mainly technical. Some of them have already been resolved. They are being ticked off. None of them was massive. None of them was enough to cause panic. In my time in this job, I certainly have not been involved with an event of this size and scale but then nobody has in Scotland, or even in the UK, so we are all on a learning curve.

There are always last-minute issues with big events. The added layer of the pandemic has clearly complicated things and I am sure that is a theme that you will hear more about, but we believe that we are in a good place. Glasgow is very good at hosting big events. I would say we



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are the best city in the UK at doing so. We are one of the best in the world. A couple of years ago, we got an award for being the best events and festival city in the world. Our conventions bureau, which has done a lot of the work, has won best conventions bureau in the UK some 13 years running.

Colleagues, like Colin Edgar and others in the council, have experience of the Commonwealth Games and the Glasgow 2018 European Championships. Colleagues at the SEC, which is a world-class venue and a big part of the reason why Glasgow was chosen as the host city, are also highly experienced. There is a great deal of experience and very strong partnerships in the city to deliver an event like this. I would say that relations between the council and the UK Government, which has been the main relationship for planning, have been very good and positive.

There are still some minor details to work through this week but nothing overwhelming. Relationships with the Scottish Government are also good. Just last week, along with some officer colleagues, I attended a tripartite session specifically on public health with the UK Government in London, ourselves in Glasgow City Chambers, and a team in St Andrew's House from the Scottish Government, and NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, which was very much focused on partnership delivery and response to any issues that might emerge around public health.

Chair: Thank you very much for that. Given the short time available, I will pass straight on to my colleague John Lamont.

Q65 John Lamont: Thank you and good morning. Councillor Aitken, I would be grateful if your answers could be a bit shorter because we are all quite keen to ask questions in the time available to us.

Can I ask you about rubbish and graffiti? There has been quite a lot of coverage in the press about the condition of the city ahead of COP. Can you give us an assessment of how you think the city is currently looking?

Councillor Aitken: We are recovering from the impact of the pandemic on our services at pace now. It has been extremely challenging. It has been a challenge that all cities have faced globally. While public services generally have been impacted by the pandemic, cleansing services in particular have been very strongly impacted. Glasgow has not been the worst-impacted city in Scotland or the UK but perhaps because of COP there has been a particular focus on us. We have an operational plan in place. It is moving at pace. I will very quickly run through some of the key points of that.

There is an overarching environmental plan for the entire city to recover from the impact of Covid. Some services had to be withdrawn because of staff absences in particular but we also had to manage public health impacts among our existing staff. Staff and services are now all back in place and we have been catching up. Graffiti is a good example. That was one service that had to go by the wayside throughout the period of the pandemic because our focus was on domestic refuse. As you might



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imagine, domestic refuse was the number one priority but the removal of graffiti is now back on track. The initial focus has been on removing homophobic and racist graffiti. A lot of work has been done in the COP zones in the past few weeks. It has been very challenging because of reoffending. There is no question that vandalism has increased over the period of the pandemic and that is something that we are having to deal with. Over and above the work that we have been doing just to get our services back for the whole city, we have worked an additional 12,000 hours on the programme to prepare the city for COP.

I will not go into any more detail because I am conscious of time, but one example from a number of interventions that have been put in place is that 150 new litter bins are being deployed.

Q66 John Lamont: I spent four happy years at Glasgow University and I went for a walk yesterday when I arrived here, just to see the condition of the city, and I have pictures on my phone of refuse and tyres lying around on the riverside, walking towards the venue. Coming in on the train at Garrowhill I could see piles of rubbish lying by bins. Do you have any sense of embarrassment that the international world is going to be looking at Glasgow and Scotland and this is the condition of Glasgow city?

Councillor Aitken: I am never embarrassed about Glasgow. I am occasionally frustrated by some—

John Lamont: Sorry—not embarrassed by Glasgow. Do you feel any sense of embarrassment, personally, that you have allowed the city to fall into this state of disrepair and condition?

Councillor Aitken: That is entirely gratuitous. I have explained the very serious challenges that have faced this city, along with others. I was in London a couple of weeks ago for the first time since the start of the pandemic. I have to say that I had a phone full of pictures of rubbish as well.

John Lamont: Glasgow is hosting COP26; London is not.

Councillor Aitken: Indeed, and London is the capital of the United Kingdom and hosts people from the world all the time. The impact on Edinburgh, according to Keep Scotland Beautiful, by these issues during the pandemic was even worse but I don't recall anyone saying Edinburgh should be embarrassed to have the festival. We are working to address the very serious challenges and impact caused by the pandemic, as are other cities globally.

We were never going to be able to recover overnight from the impact on the city's services. I believe we are making considerable progress. We are working round the clock to address those issues, particularly in the COP zones in the city, but actually right across the city. I want to be absolutely clear that our services are not just for VIPs coming to Glasgow. We are not working to have our services recover from that impact of Covid just because Joe Biden is coming to town. We are doing it for our citizens because our services are for them, first and foremost.



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No, I am not embarrassed. I am confident that the visitors coming to Glasgow will see, as they always see, an incredibly vibrant, diverse and welcoming urban space.

Chair: I am very conscious of time and I know we want to have you away by half-past.

Q67 **Deidre Brock:** Welcome, Susan. It is good to see you here today. Thank you very much for making time for us.

On October 17, *The Scotsman* reported that public bodies and Government agencies were getting a UK Government COP26 dividend. Most of that nearly £100 million seemed in fact to be compensation for the costs of staging the conference and for all the extra work for health and emergency services, such as Police Scotland, Public Health Scotland and Transport Scotland, for example, who are going to have to deal with the nearly 30,000 extra visitors who are expected in Glasgow. It was suggested in that article, though, that Glasgow City Council was not covered by that agreement. Is that still the case?

Councillor Aitken: We have an agreement on full cost recovery with the UK Government. Colin will be able to give more detail, but certainly in the most recent briefings I have had, which were from just the end of last week, we were on track to match the budget that we had predicted. Particularly around the use of other venues in the city—which is considerable as you might imagine—there have been some emerging costs, which have not been finally agreed yet but we are working to sign off agreements on those just now. We fully expect to have full cost recovery. Obviously, the city is not in a position to carry the cost of an event that is a UK Government-hosted event.

In terms of wider legacy, certainly we have done—I as leader of the city have done—a great deal of work to make sure that Glasgow is ready to benefit from being the host city of COP. I would very much welcome a commitment from the UK Government to work with us on some of the sustainability projects that we have identified, which are exemplars that would lead the way in the UK. We have not finalised that yet but it is something that I have put very much on the agenda with Alok Sharma in my discussions with him.

Q68 **Deidre Brock:** A colleague, Alison Tullis, raised the issue of businesses not having yet received compensation for disruption to business over the period of this next fortnight, which they had been assured of by the President Designate. Are you aware of what is happening with that?

Councillor Aitken: I would have to defer to my colleague on that, on the operational side.

Deidre Brock: That is fine. I can maybe ask Mr Edgar later. Thank you.

Q69 **Wendy Chamberlain:** I saw an article in *The Guardian* on Saturday where a local business was quoted as saying, "We are well informed but we still don't know what is going to happen". Given that we are looking at bus and rail strikes, for example, what is the council doing in these last



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days to make sure that the information that businesses have is giving them the confidence to do what needs to be done?

Councillor Aitken: Our Get Ready Glasgow website is receiving a large number of visitors, both businesses and citizens. That brand is well known in the city. It has been used twice before, first for the Commonwealth Games. We have also hosted a number of seminars for businesses jointly with our chamber of commerce, Police Scotland and other partners. They have been very well attended.

It is fair to say that none of us knows exactly quite what is going to happen because we have never hosted an event of this scale and size before. We can plan as much as possible but, crucially, what we have in place are responses to things. That is the important part. Things that we did not predict will emerge because it is impossible to predict everything. The key is to make that we have the partnerships, structures and systems in place to respond to unexpected things.

Q70 **Wendy Chamberlain:** You are confident in the flexibility of your planning.

Councillor Aitken: Absolutely we are confident in the flexibility of our planning. Our very strong message to businesses has been that undoubtedly there is going to be disruption. There is no point in pretending otherwise. Of course, there is going to be disruption in the city but we are very much open for business. We have done everything within our power to make sure that we are open for business as a city.

Strikes unfortunately are beyond our remit as a city council. I have no doubt that you will have seen from news coverage that the Scottish Government are working very hard to try to find an agreement with the RMT. I hope that it is not too late for that to happen, but these are national issues. What we will do is put whatever measures we can put in place to mitigate the impact of any strikes on either the event or just generally on how the city is running, as we would do in a normal time as well.

Q71 **Wendy Chamberlain:** Given that obviously a big part of COP is about sustainability, is it disappointing for you that at a national level we have not been able to reach an agreement on public transport from a strike perspective?

Councillor Aitken: Of course it is disappointing. I would much rather there wasn't possibly a public transport strike. I am not going to give in yet to the assumption that it will definitely happen but, yes, it will be very disappointing. Scotland's railway and bus services have had a lot of investment to decarbonise them, to make them genuinely sustainable modes of transport. It would be good if the delegates to COP and the visitors were able to experience them and I hope that that will still be the case.

Q72 **Andrew Bowie:** Good morning, Councillor, and thank you for joining us. Next week, 30,000 people descending on Glasgow obviously presents a



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huge opportunity for the hospitality sector but also a huge challenge. Added to that is the challenge that the hospitality sector faces of enforcing the new vaccine passport scheme but delegates to the conference will not be required to have the vaccine passport. Given the difficulties of enforcement anyway, what discussions have you had with the hospitality sector in Glasgow to support them over the coming weeks in differentiating between COP delegates, who do not need the vaccine passport, and ordinary Glaswegians who do? What support will be given to the sector for them to go about their business?

Councillor Aitken: On the direct issues of support I will defer to operational colleagues. Discussions about these aspects have been going for a number of months among the partnerships in the city. The public health protocols in place for delegates go further than the public health protocols for local people. That is something that we were absolutely adamant about from the outset. For example, had we been at a point where Glaswegians were not able to drink alcohol with a meal, there could not be a situation where delegates could do so.

Delegates have to go further. There is daily testing. There will still be one metre distancing in the venue. Our environmental health teams have been working closely with all the hospitality venues and will continue to do so. Glasgow had probably a greater economic impact from Covid than anywhere else in Scotland or, indeed, anywhere else outside of London, and that is ongoing.

The work that our hospitality venues did to get themselves into the right place to support the economic recovery and reopening of the city even before COP was superb. They did a fantastic job. I think they are very well prepared. Undoubtedly there still will be challenges. People are coming from all over the world. The communication of the protocols has been very strict but we can probably assume that there will be some people who do not adhere to them. However, our venues have had a lot of experience of dealing with that over the past few months. The delegates are their delegates, so we are looking to the UN to enforce very strongly but our environmental health team are the eyes and ears of what is happening on the ground and will be supporting the venues throughout the city.

Andrew Bowie: Thank you, Councillor. I will come back to vaccine passports later on.

Q73 **Douglas Ross:** Councillor, you mentioned in response to the Chair that Glasgow is ready for COP bar some technical issues. Is it technical issues that the bins are overflowing, that there are rats in the streets and some of your employees have been taken to hospital while they have been collecting that rubbish? Are those the technical issues you mean?

Councillor Aitken: No, and again I would say that is completely gratuitous.

Douglas Ross: Sorry, but that is happening, though, isn't it?

Councillor Aitken: No.



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Douglas Ross: So your employees have not been taken to hospital while they have been collecting rubbish? There are no bins overflowing? There are no rats in the streets in Glasgow? You have just said that is incorrect.

Councillor Aitken: I have already described at some length the issues and challenges that we as a city, in common with cities right across these islands and indeed right across the world, have experienced as a result of the pandemic.

Q74 **Douglas Ross:** Is that happening or not? Just be clear. The Chair is understandably very strict. You have told us in evidence to a parliamentary committee that that is not happening. You said in response to me, "No". So, have your employees been taken to hospital while they have been collecting rubbish? Are there overflowing bins? Are there rats in the streets?

Chair: Order. Just a minute.

Councillor Aitken: There was, I think, one, possibly two at most, small incidents—health and safety incidents—and an employee was taken to hospital, as a precaution, for what was a very minor contact with a rat. I have to say that it is not unheard of, and it has not been unheard of for decades, that our cleansing employees occasionally experience rats.

It is also not unique to Glasgow. It is something that is happening right across the UK. All cities have rats. There is evidence just now that there has been an increase of about 25% in the rat population during the pandemic. All cities are struggling with this right now. You could look at the headlines of any local paper and find similar issues.

We treat any health and safety issue with our employees extremely seriously. We treat them with an abundance of caution. In the incidents that happened, there were immediate reviews of PPE and whether the PPE was being deployed correctly at the time—whether we as a council had to operationally enhance the PPE that our operatives use. All that work was done. It is not something that has been repeated, to my knowledge. From the last briefing I got, I think there had been something like five reports of contact between cleansing operatives and—

Douglas Ross: I'm sorry but we need to move on.

Councillor Aitken: Well, no. I'm sorry but you made a number of allegations, Mr Ross. I think I am entitled to answer them comprehensively.

Douglas Ross: I am sorry, Councillor Aitken—

Chair: Order. What we do here is ask questions and our guests respond.

Douglas Ross: Thank you.

Chair: I think Councillor Aitken had finished. Now back to you, Mr Ross.

Q75 **Douglas Ross:** Thank you. People will be watching this and hearing Councillor Aitken saying on the one hand she takes all these issues seriously, yet apparently the person only had minor contact with a rat. I



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don't know how you go from minor to major contact with a rat but the person ended up in hospital. I would expect the leader of Glasgow City Council to take that more seriously. Can I move on to the issue—

Councillor Aitken: I just said that I take it extremely seriously.

Douglas Ross: You also said it was minor contact. Thank you, Councillor Aitken. We have to move on.

Councillor Aitken: The fact that they were taken to hospital was demonstrating an abundance of caution in response to that health and safety issue at work.

Q76 **Douglas Ross:** Councillor Aitken, do you regret any of your previous comments? You have been widely ridiculed across the United Kingdom for saying Glasgow only needs a spruce up; it is not actually filthy. Do you now, in hindsight, having made those comments and having seen what Glaswegians felt about those comments, regret them?

Councillor Aitken: No.

Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Councillor Aitken: Because I would never, ever, use the kind of language about this city that you are using right now.

Douglas Ross: I am not using these—

Councillor Aitken: I do not, in any way, shy away from the challenges that we face as a city, historic challenges that have been around for many, many years, many of them a legacy of our post-industrial past when the Thatcher Government walked away and abandoned and left in neglect communities right across the city, exacerbated by the pandemic.

Douglas Ross: Thank you. Councillor Aitken, you have answered the question.

Chair: Order. Again, we are going to try this. We will ask questions and answer them. Douglas, please, ask your question and let Councillor Aitken answer.

Q77 **Douglas Ross:** Thank you. I did get the answer. Councillor Aitken does not regret any of the comments she has made that have been widely ridiculed and That is shameful.

Can I ask what direct discussions you have had with the First Minister of Scotland? Understandably, this is a UK Government conference that has come here because of the UK Government but the local issues, the rubbish collection, the rail chaos, the potential for road chaos, are issues that are devolved to the Scottish Government and are the responsibility of the Cabinet SMP of the Scottish Government. What direct conversations have you had with the First Minister about these issues?

Councillor Aitken: I have been having regular conversations with a number of colleagues in the Scottish Government who have direct responsibility for those issues.



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Q78 Douglas Ross: Has the First Minister shown an interest and been involved?

Councillor Aitken: The First Minister has shown an interest and I have had fairly regular contact with her. We have already identified that the rail issues, for example, are national issues. They are not local issues. Our cleansing services are our local operational issues. I am sure you don't want to know this, but I have already touched on the extremely extensive work that has gone on and has been put in place to respond to the challenges that we face as a result of the pandemic, which all cities across the UK are facing, and we continue to do that.

I also have, for example, regular contact with Michael Matheson, who is the Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport in the Scottish Government. You correctly identify COP26 as a UK Government issue, a UK Government-hosted event, so any particular support that we require to host COP26 is a matter for the UK Government not the Scottish Government.

Q79 Douglas Ross: My final question. You mentioned other councils. Do you not think it is a bit sad that we now have a competition between two SNP-led councils in Scotland—Glasgow and Edinburgh—about which one is the dirtiest? That has been your argument now a number of times. Indeed, today you mentioned it in the evidence session. Is that not a sad reflection of where we are, that the two SNP-run councils in the biggest cities in Scotland are arguing between themselves about which is the dirtiest?

Councillor Aitken: I could easily also point to the Conservative-run Westminster Council in London, for example.

Douglas Ross: You are the leader of Glasgow City Council. You have used an analogy of Edinburgh City Council, which is also led by your party—

Councillor Aitken: Keep Scotland Beautiful did that work.

Douglas Ross: You repeated it at the Committee today.

Councillor Aitken: Yes, I did.

Douglas Ross: That is a competition in Scotland.

Councillor Aitken: I did so to make the point that it was gratuitous. I don't know if it is Mr Ross's habit when he is going round the country, either with the Scottish Affairs Select Committee or just on his own, to insult the places and the people in the places that he is attending or if he has just saved it up for Glaswegians. The point I am—

Douglas Ross: Sorry, Chair, I am not sure what that has to do with anything.

Chair: Order. We only have a few minutes left on this.

Councillor Aitken: This is not unique to Glasgow. What I reject entirely are suggestions that Glasgow is somehow particular in this—that it is



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peculiarly challenged in the relation to any of these things, which seems to be what Douglas Ross is suggesting.

Douglas Ross: It is incredible that Councillor Aitken does not realise what is going on.

Chair: Right. Order.

Douglas Ross: This is your responsibility.

Chair: Order. We have had enough of this. Thank you very much. It has been a useful exchange. Thank you.

Douglas Ross: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Councillor Aitken.

Chair: Sally-Ann Hart, now, with the last question for Councillor Aitken.

Q80 **Sally-Ann Hart:** Thank you, Chair, and good morning Councillor Aitken. I want to ask about public engagement and communications. We know that the UK Government and the Scottish Government have engaged with the public nationally. For example, we have the COP26 skills pack for schools in England and I presume in Scotland, but what communication and engagement have been done locally? Does Glasgow City Council have a responsibility to communicate with people locally?

Councillor Aitken: Certainly. We take that responsibility very seriously. The work that we have done has been very much complementary to and above and beyond what the UK Government have been doing. Our work has been much more focused on Glasgow, on what this means for the city and what the legacy will be for the city. We have done a number of things. We had a citizens' assembly specifically on COP26 and on climate change and what that means for the city. We took that report to committee last week. The really strong recommendations in the report were very much focused on a just transition being very important to citizens.

The work that we have done in schools has been quite brilliant. I don't want to say too much about it because it is being unveiled later this week and it is going to look absolutely fantastic. Just when I was heading over here, I bumped into the officer in our education department who has been leading on that work and she showed me a little video of children across the city singing a specially composed song for COP26, which was lovely. People will see that later this week.

We are doing work in communities. We have an artist in residence programme here in the city. We are using our artist in residence to engage directly with communities to try to get their sense of what climate change and the response to the climate emergency means for them in their local places.

As a city, we have been engaging at both local, national and international levels. Christiana Figueres, the former head of the UN climate agency, identified that Glasgow is a city in transition. We were a post-industrial city. We are now transitioning to decarbonise and address all the challenges that a post-industrial city has. That is something that has to



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be meaningful to our own citizens and residents, so that they understand our response and what climate action means for them in their day to day lives.

It has also had a very strong resonance with the international engagements that I have had, particularly with other city leaders around the world. Our engagement has happened at every level but our engagements with our own residents are always the most important and are the ones that will continue long after the COP circus has left town.

Chair: Thank you. I don't know if you have time for one last question from Mhairi Black.

Councillor Aitken: Yes.

Q81 **Mhairi Black:** Just a very quick question and I will ask more about it later. Through the homestay programme, we have seen Glaswegians open up their homes to delegates and so on. Have there been any lessons learned so that in the future, when Glasgow hosts events, we will not necessarily run into the same problems of having to ask people to open up their own homes?

Councillor Aitken: You are going to hear from our colleagues in the accommodation and hotel sector later. This was a unique situation. Ultimately, it was the responsibility of the UK Government to secure accommodation and I think lessons will have been learned at that level. We have had a lot of experience in doing it in Glasgow for previous events but this is a different kind of event.

I think there has been confusion about some of the people who are coming. Some of the media have been reporting that delegates have been looking for accommodation. Delegates have their accommodation. We need to be clear about that. Delegates from the Global South and from poorer countries have their accommodation paid for. The UN has paid for it. That is crucially important.

However, there are a lot of people coming—maybe to protest or just to take part in activism or in the big climate march on 6 November, for example—and they are perhaps different kinds of people from those who would usually come to Glasgow. They are not coming as tourists as maybe folk coming to the Commonwealth Games might.

The homestay programme is a different kind of response to a different kind of accommodation need. It will be tested, I think it is fair to say, and we will see how it goes. If it goes well, it might be something that the city could consider using in future for other kinds of events. Having said that, we will never host another COP. This one is once in a lifetime, absolutely unique, and probably for the UK, not just for Glasgow.

Chair: Thank you, Councillor Aitken, for joining us. I know it was at the last minute. I know that you are very busy but the Committee is very grateful to you for coming along. We will let you off to get on with running the city. Thank you for your attendance this morning.



Councillor Aitken: Thank you.

Q82 **Chair:** We can redistribute the microphones now and get the rest of the session underway. To you first, Mr Edgar, there were a number of issues that we touched on briefly with Councillor Aitken and perhaps you will be able to fill in some of the spaces that were left.

Most notable among them was about the support you had from the Governments—both UK and Scottish—to assist with the planning and designing of this conference and also some of the business support. I think we were starting to get to that. I will maybe let you explain to us where we are with that and tells us about any issues that you have identified.

Colin Edgar: One of the questions was about the budget and recovering the cost of delivering the event. There was a question about businesses being compensated and a question about engagement with the hospitality businesses on vaccine passports, and I can pick up on anything else after that.

On cost recovery, the Government have an approval process—spending approval board—which we speak to regularly. The spending that is approved, as of right now, is not at the same level as the expenditure that we expect to incur but I am relaxed about that. The Government have approached this in a spirit of partnership up until now and have not quibbled unnecessarily over expenditure. They want to see that we have actually spent the money that we are claiming from them, and that is perfectly reasonable. I expect that in the wash-up after the event, we might have spent slightly less than we budgeted before.

Chair: I am sure they will be glad to hear that.

Colin Edgar: Yes. I think we will come in there or thereabouts. I am pretty confident about that.

On businesses being compensated, the Government have been clear. We have run a series of business engagement sessions that have been attended by several hundred businesses. They have all been run online rather than in person, which is one of the reasons why we are spending less than we thought we would. The Government have been clear that businesses that are directly affected by being inside the outer security perimeter would be compensated. I have not heard directly that that is not happening. That does not mean that it definitely is, I just haven't heard that it is not. They have committed to it and they have committed to it in front of the businesses that asked about it.

On engaging hospitality businesses in connection with vaccine passports, the vaccine passport process has only been in force now for a week. I know that some businesses are not keen on it. My colleagues in environmental health report that businesses in Glasgow are ready for it. I have to say that businesses in Glasgow have been exceptionally good at following the rules all the way through the pandemic.



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We took an approach whereby, right at the start, we ranked every licensed business in the city by who we thought were the least likely to stick to the rules. We visited them in ascending order of expected compliance and there was very little non-compliance so I expect that this will be the same. Delegates will have accreditation that demonstrates that they are a delegate and therefore exempt. I don't know exactly how business is planning to deal with that but I can take some advice—if that is okay with the Chair—from colleagues and write to the Committee to set that out.

That is it, Chair.

Q83 Chair: Yes. Thank you for that. We will be very grateful if you could give us that information, because it is quite important in terms of overall planning for the next week.

One issue that seems to have emerged—we heard from Councillor Aitken about it—is to do with some of the unexpected things that might arise. I think the one that is most notable today is the number of cases, the concerns about the pandemic and the fact that there may be a spike as an outcome of this COP26. Has Glasgow City Council made any provisions? Are there any further mitigation features that you are planning to introduce and put in place while the event is going on? What is your assessment of a possibility of a further spike coming our way?

Colin Edgar: Certainly, that is something that everybody should be very cautious about. The leader of the council set out the rules that the Government and the UN are imposing on delegates. They are going to be very strict with them and they are very clear that they will de-badge them. That is the expression they use. For example, you are not allowed to move the chairs in the meeting rooms. That sort of thing.

It is true that 25,000 to 30,000 is a relatively big number of people but it is half a decent attendance at Ibrox. These are crowds that we are used to managing in the city, but that is not to downplay the risk.

The wider number of people coming in are people who are coming in to have their voices heard. They are coming in to protest and to make their views known. The UN regards that as an important part of the process and Dr Jones would also regard it as an extremely part of the process.

The climate march on 6 November is expected to be somewhere between 100,000 and 150,000. It sounds like a big number. Previous COPs have had marches of up to half a million or so. I think we will have far fewer people than you would expect coming because of the restrictions that are placed on travel and so forth. Colleagues in public health are thinking very hard about how to mitigate risk. Our colleagues in environmental health are doing a lot of work with restaurants and bars, the kinds of premises that people are going to be going to, to make sure they are on top of the Covid processes.

In terms of the legal restrictions on people, it is not open to the council to impose any new restrictions, but I am confident that the Governments



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working together have a plan for minimising the risk insofar as that is possible.

- Q84 **Chair:** If you feel you could help us with this, Dr Jones, have you any expectations about numbers coming? I know we have the big demonstration on 6 November and of course the UN has said that this is a democratic right for everybody to appear and be present if they want to. What do you anticipate in terms of numbers coming to the city?

Dr Jones: Since the pandemic became a big issue we have been encouraging people to mobilise close to where they live. It is not us at Stop Climate Chaos Scotland who are organising the march. It is the COP26 Coalition. They have made it clear that people should be organising marches in their own cities. There is to be a big march in London and there are other marches all over the place. I heard about one happening in Truro. There will be marches close to where people live. That is one of the reasons we are expecting the Glasgow march not to be so big.

We are also encouraging people not to travel to Glasgow unless they have confirmed accommodation. What Councillor Aitken said about all delegates having accommodation is not true. Thousands of delegates do not have accommodation because often these badges are not given out until a few weeks beforehand. Most of the accommodation was booked in Glasgow months and months ago. A lot of these delegations coming from far afield have to wait until they have the number of badges to book the accommodation and book the travel, and that has only been happening over the last couple of weeks.

We have had contacts from many delegates—many, many, and even official delegations from countries—who are not finding accommodation. This is definitely an accommodation crisis. To people travelling—perhaps 100,000 for the march—we are trying to get the message out there to travel if they can get to Glasgow and back in a day. If you live in Scotland or northern England, if you can travel back and forth in a day, or if you have accommodation, come and take part but otherwise, mobilise close to where you live.

- Q85 **Chair:** We should probably come to you, Ms Fisher, on some of the accommodation-related issues. Is it as bad as we are hearing? Is there nothing available in Glasgow? What is your advice to people who may be thinking about coming to the city as part of one of the demonstrations or fringe activities? Give us your view.

Janice Fisher: I can only speak on behalf of members of the hoteliers association. MCI was appointed as the accommodation provider, jointly by the UK Government and the UN. It had a mandate to secure 15,000 rooms on behalf of the UN so that they could be distributed across the piece. Within two miles of the exhibition centre, there are only 9,750 bedrooms of hotel accommodation available. Within 20 miles, that increases to 14,399.



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MCI only secured one-third of that accommodation because it was asked to secure accommodation in other parts of the country as well to encourage a range of offers—a range of pricing—and also Edinburgh is only 45 minutes from Glasgow. In Paris, for example, delegates were quite happy to move and take transport from accommodation that was an hour away from the venue. We have a range of offers for everyone.

The homestay network that Mhairi mentioned is a very important part of that—of course it is—but we also have other accommodation options such as Airbnb, which is very well known, and other types of accommodation of that ilk. I have also seen campsites available. I do take on board the fact that there perhaps isn't enough official accommodation within the campus itself to accommodate everyone. However, I would encourage anyone who wants to come. As Dr Jones has said, if it is safe to do so please do come. I am sure there will still be a lot of support online for people who want to take part in the event itself.

Chair: Thank you. I am grateful for that.

Q86 John Lamont: My question is to Colin Edgar. With a week to go, what is keeping you awake at night? What are you anxious about?

Colin Edgar: The short answer is everything. Last night I was worried about transport for this morning, but the transport network seems to be going okay. The thing I am nervous about is that there is going to be disruption for everyone who lives in the city and, for some people who live in the immediate vicinity, there is going to be serious disruption on a couple of days. That will be balanced out by an ambitious and deliverable deal, which will allow the city to position itself as the world leader in the modern businesses and technologies and investment that will come from that.

There is going to be an opportunity coming from this for the city to sell itself. That will have implications for jobs and education in the city in the medium and long term. What really keeps me awake is that we do not get the deal that allows the city to build on it. Every city in the world is going to be talking to investors and businesses in the next few years, saying, "We are the place to come to. We understand these new industries. We have the graduates. We have the people".

My hope is that Glasgow does not have to do that, because our name is going to be on the deal and everyone will know that. In the long term, the world needs a deal, but Glasgow needs a deal, and it not being worth the effort is the thing that makes me most nervous. Not because I don't think we will get there, but just because when you can imagine the things that can go wrong, that is at the top of my list.

Q87 John Lamont: We have already heard this morning about the possibility of industrial action and how that might impact the trains and other services. Do you have a plan B in place for if you have some sort of catastrophic fallout as a consequence of the industrial action? Do you have some sort of contingency plan to deal with that?



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Colin Edgar: If the traffic system collapses, for any reason, because of snow or something else, you don't have replacement traffic systems. I don't mean just in Glasgow. I mean anywhere. If the rail strike goes ahead, the fallback position has to be for people to take further steps to change how they travel.

There was a question about communication. The bulk of our communication work with citizens has been around giving them the tools they need to plan how their lives are going to change. The road closures are relatively limited but they have a big and wide impact. We have given people day-by-day maps that show which roads are closed, what the diversions are and what the active travel diversions are, but also which routes are going to be particularly busy. If there are no trains, they cannot be replaced. They are either there or they are not. We will need to say to people, "This is happening. If your plan was to leave the car and get on the train, you are going to have to come up with another plan. Here are some options. If it is a short journey, here are the active travel routes you might use. Here are the bus routes you might use". The bus network is not yet completely full but if the trains are not there, there is no way to replace them.

Q88 John Lamont: If the train strike goes ahead and there are queues of people at the station unable to get to work—long, long queues—what is the advice?

Colin Edgar: I would hope that if no trains are running, people will not go to the stations. We will try to make sure that people understand that a train strike is going ahead and there are no trains. We will try to communicate with people so that they understand, "Tomorrow is Tuesday. There is a train strike. Please don't go to the station". Our plan would be to communicate with people and ask them not to go.

Q89 Wendy Chamberlain: Good morning, witnesses. It is good to have you here. It is good to see you again, Mr Edgar.

One of the things that Councillor Aitken mentioned was the city's experience in dealing with major events. What lessons from 2014 and 2018 have you applied in your planning for COP?

Colin Edgar: I think I will probably talk about transport again. It is at the top of my mind today because today is the first day of the closures.

There was a perception that the transport plan around the London Olympics succeeded because they scared people out of the city. I don't know whether that is correct or not but it certainly is the perception. The chamber of commerce and the business community in Glasgow in this last decade have been very keen that we don't scare people out of the city in order to make it a success. That was pretty risky, going into 2014, because what the travel-demand planners tell you—they don't say, "Scare people out the city"—is that we need to encourage people not to come into the city, not just to re-mode and to take the bike instead of the car or to take a bus instead of the car, but to actively encourage people not to come.



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We were very forceful with the organising committee that that must not be the case. We had won that argument by the time the European Championships came round in 2018, but the risk is greater this time. We have stuck to the view that we are not trying to scare people out of the city but this is going to be a much bigger test than 2014 and 2018. What we learned was that people can change their behaviour. It is greatly to be hoped that they can change their behaviour on a bigger scale this time than they did in 2014. That was the biggest learning.

The second, I would say, concerns the volunteers. The volunteering scheme for the Commonwealth Games was much more like an employment-type process. We wanted to try to bring in people who were much further from the job market. In 2014 we ran a parallel volunteering scheme. For 2018—and we will do the same this year, and when it comes through to the World Cycling Championships in 2023—we ran a volunteering scheme with more-detailed KPIs about people who are from black and minority ethnic communities and from lower socio-economic communities to use it as a tool to get people closer to the job market. That has been successful.

Q90 **Wendy Chamberlain:** It is a different model.

Colin Edgar: Yes.

Wendy Chamberlain: My mum was a volunteer in 2014 so it is good to hear that.

One of the things that Councillor Aitken said—and you said it as well in response to John Lamont—was about disruption: the acknowledgement that COP is bringing disruption, and that the quid pro quo is that is the medium to longer-term offers. That sense of disruption is coming through quite strongly. What feeling are you getting from businesses? Are they recognising the opportunities or is there a degree of ambivalence?

Colin Edgar: I don't think there is ambivalence, no. Glaswegians are never ambivalent about anything. Every one of these events is a disaster until it happens and then it is not a disaster. The chamber of commerce is confident that simply having this many tens and hundreds of thousands of people in the city will be a boost to businesses in the city. It will certainly be a boost to the hotel and entertainment sectors.

The city's plans to grow on the back of this—our green investment portfolio, our Glasgow green deal—have been designed in concert with the chamber of commerce and the business community in the city. Like me, they are confident that a good deal is something that Glasgow can build on. A good deal is vital for all of us who live on this planet but, if I am going to be parochial for a second, it is something that Glasgow can build on.

Q91 **Wendy Chamberlain:** I am conscious that the majority of my questions are to Mr Edgar. I have one more and then I will move on.

On compensation, what we talked about was the fact that those businesses that were in the Blue Zone were being compensated and that



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you were confident that the UK Government were working constructively on it. To the Chair's question around the possibility of a Covid spike and, also, the impact on businesses outwith those zones, how confident are you that, if there are lost revenues, those businesses will be compensated?

Colin Edgar: As far as I am aware, there is no compensation scheme for businesses outside of the Blue Zone that are adversely affected, whether that is by the event itself or anything that flows from it. It is a question we are often asked around, say, the Commonwealth Games, and it is not something that we, or I think any city, tends to have.

Q92 **Wendy Chamberlain:** The Covid spike—if there is one—any thoughts on that?

Colin Edgar: I have heard some predictions from some medics over the last couple of days saying there will definitely be a spike. Both Governments are working with the NHS, with public health and with our environmental health teams, and have a robust plan in place, particularly for delegates, but also we still have some quite robust rules in place just in general in Scotland and we are confident that people can stick to them. Nobody can say that there will not be a spike and, if there is, we will need to manage it.

Q93 **Wendy Chamberlain:** Great. Thank you. My final question is to Ms Fisher on homestay.

My sister is hosting—and I am just checking this because I texted her earlier—a delegate from the charity project Protect Our Winters Europe and a student observer. Obviously there has been a good take-up of the scheme, but is it too late for Glaswegians to take up the offer of hosting somebody for a homestay? Dr Jones, if you want to come in first? Then I will come to Ms Fisher. The question was to Ms Fisher from the accommodation perspective, but, given that you said that delegates did not have accommodation, is that still something that you would want Glaswegians to take up?

Dr Jones: We organised the homestay network ourselves. This is not something that was organised by the city or by the businesses. This was organised by civil society, so I don't know if you want me to answer.

Wendy Chamberlain: That would be great; thank you.

Dr Jones: When we set up the homestay network, we did not anticipate the need for it to cater for everybody. We set it up because we know that for every COP there is a massive shortage of accommodation that people can afford. We really need this COP, more than any, to hear the voices of people from Global South countries, from young people and from organisations that do not have the capacity to pay the fees.

That was when we started setting it up, about two years ago. It has taken us two years to get to this point. That was what we had in our minds, that this would support civil society engagement in COP from those low-income organisations. What we found is that because nobody



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can find accommodation, it has become a platform for anyone looking for accommodation. We have been swamped. We have managed to get more than 1,000 hosts to sign up, which is amazing—it is really good—and that is rising by about 50 a day. It is so fantastic to hear that your sister is hosting.

It has been really good but the problem is that that is just not enough for the demand because the demand is almost infinite. Imagine: they are offering their homes as a place for people to stay at £10 a night max so there is infinite demand for accommodation at almost zero prices.

Wendy Chamberlain: Airbnb quotes £1,600.

Dr Jones: The way that it works is really that it is not just about a bed for the night. It is not about accommodation. It is about relationships. It is about connecting people in Scotland with people from other parts of the world who are travelling to COP to make a difference and making that longer-term relationship. I really hope that this kind of thing that you were talking about will be happening in homes across Glasgow, across Edinburgh and further afield as well, because if it is all across the central belt and these little relationships build up, perhaps over a bit of a chat, over coffee in the morning—"What's going on at COP today?"—perhaps there will be a little bit of help here and there.

We have heard of people who are helping their people find, or lending them, bikes, or helping them find the logistical things they need. That kind of relationship is not just about what happens when you exchange money, when it is, "I'll give you some money if you give me somewhere to stay". This is about, "We are going to spend some time together". I am really hoping that will become a legacy for Glasgow.

Wendy Chamberlain: That sounds really good. Ms Fisher, do you have anything to add before I go back to the Chair?

Janice Fisher: Only that I think the homestay idea is wonderful. As a Weegie, I might even do it myself, but I might have the day job to do as well.

It is important that the whole city takes part and I think homestay is a great example of that. Our ambitions should not be held back by the availability of registered hotel businesses. Accommodation can take many forms and, in that respect, I applaud the homestay scheme.

Wendy Chamberlain: Great. Glaswegians, sign up now. Thank you very much, Chair.

Q94 **Deidre Brock:** I think I am addressing this question to Dr Jones. The former Minister for Climate Change indicated in a letter to this Committee that the UK had secured a fair cancellation deal and reasonable room costs compared to the open market through its contract with MCI. What do think of that suggestion?

Dr Jones: I have not been involved at all in the official bookings so I don't know that at all. All I know is that there has not been enough



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space, but that is only an anecdote from the numbers of people who are coming to us via the homestay network.

Q95 Deidre Brock: All right. Thank you. Mr Edgar, you certainly have a lot to do with the Cabinet Office, who are of course organising this under President Designate Sharma. Can you tell us a little about your experiences and contacts with MCI?

Colin Edgar: MCI has largely been directly engaging with people who are seeking to book with them. We have not heard reports that people who are in the category of people who would be eligible to book that accommodation have not been able to get it, although Dr Jones indicated there were some people who had not. This morning was the first time I had heard that, so it would be something that it would be worth coming back to and having a look at. I had not heard about it. There is a category of people who are eligible to book through that process. I had not heard before this morning that people had been unable to do that.

Q96 Deidre Brock: Had you raised your concerns with the Cabinet Office? There were some reports earlier this year, quite some months ago, about things such as delegates being asked to book a minimum 12-night stay and pay their entire bill upfront. Is that something you had engaged with the Cabinet Office about?

Colin Edgar: We have had a range of discussions with both Governments about accommodation, particularly the support we can give to the homestay network and how we are going to support other people who are coming to the city. The key relationship is between MCI and the Cabinet Office. We have not been involved in the discussion. We have had discussions with MCI but it has a specific client group and we have not engaged with that client group.

Q97 Deidre Brock: You are not aware of any actions that the Cabinet Office has taken in response to the concerns about those upfront costs that were raised, as I mentioned, earlier this year? These are certainly things that delegates have raised with me that they say they have not experienced in previous COPs, so I am quite interested to hear about how people have responded to concerns that were quite clearly raised earlier this year. Ms Fisher, what are your thoughts on that?

Janice Fisher: With any large-scale event like this, it is normal for there to be slightly stricter terms and conditions around accommodation. For example, in Edinburgh during the festival, accommodation is at a premium, so it would be perfectly normal to have a 60-day cancellation term.

Q98 Deidre Brock: That would be what you would expect?

Janice Fisher: Absolutely.

Q99 Deidre Brock: That is unusual, then, the inference from previous articles in the press, that no sort of cancellation was going to be allowed.



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Janice Fisher: No, the cancellation terms and conditions and attrition are perfectly normal in any large-scale event that we would do. Even during the Commonwealth Games, it was similar. I think the difficulty, perhaps, was for some delegations in terms of making their commitment. As Dr Jones has alluded to, some tickets are not released until much nearer the time of the event, depending on who is coming, who is not coming and so on. For some delegations, at certain times because of the pandemic, it would have been hard to make that decision. I do believe it is just as a result of the circumstances that we find ourselves in.

Deidre Brock: It is difficult to know because we cannot see the terms and conditions. According to the response from the Minister, those are set by the hotels themselves and are not within Her Majesty's Government's control to influence. Anyway, thanks very much for that.

Q100 **Mhairi Black:** Thanks for coming along and giving us your time. We really appreciate it so far.

The first thing I want to do is delve a little deeper into the accommodation issues. Like the report that Deidre Brock has just mentioned, I think it was in *The Scotsman* that it said, after going through the official portal, delegates were being asked to pay something north of £800 where normally it would be £55 a night, for example. That was reported back in March. Colin, I will ask you first. You have said that you were not really aware of delegates not having access to any accommodation. Since those reports came out in March, I am presuming that you have looked into it. Have you found that nobody is suffering?

Colin Edgar: No, we haven't tried to look into that. As I say, the delegates are a very important client group. People being able to come here to take part in the negotiations is very important, but they are not our area of responsibility. We have to make sure the city is running and make sure the transport and traffic is there and understand that people are coming. We have not tried to insert ourselves into that discussion.

Q101 **Mhairi Black:** All right. The homestay network, for instance, sounds like a genuinely good, civil, community-based idea, but as I am sure most will be aware, it is not necessarily for everyone. From what I have heard so far—and forgive me if I am putting words into your mouth, Dr Jones—it seems that the homestay network is now being used as a sticking plaster over issues with accommodation that have been running for some time. Is that correct or have I just put words in your mouth?

Dr Jones: What I will say is that we have had a huge interest in it. We have a waiting list, you might say, of around 3,000 people who have not yet found accommodation. Because we were getting so many people applying to be part of the homestay network or to stay who were not really in those groups that we had identified as priorities, we needed to keep places for indigenous people who were coming to Glasgow—Global South delegations—which do not book through these official channels because they cannot afford it. They would never go near the official hotel channels because we know they go sky high.



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We were trying to keep space free for these people, who do not book until a few weeks beforehand—perhaps two months beforehand maximum—because that is when the badges are allocated. People were not booking. You cannot book on the hope that you are going to get 10 badges and you actually only get three when you are travelling from the Pacific islands. These people book a month in advance, so we were trying to make sure there was space for those.

Of course, with all these people coming in, we have security contractors, we have translators, and we have businesses coming to take part in business events and things, who are trying to get accommodation in the homestay network. We sent out a message to the people to say, “You don’t have to book with the first person who gets in touch with you. You can wait and see who comes along”. Because this is about relationships, it is not just about a financial transaction: “Wait until you find someone who has something in common with you or your family, someone who fits the bill of what we are trying to do here”, which is support people who need this space to make their voice heard.

We do not want our network just accommodating people who are perhaps involved in roundabout things that are happening. We want it to be those people who are going to make a real difference. It is not for us to decide who gets a space; it is peer to peer. You decide who you want to accommodate.

Q102 Mhairi Black: When you have come across delegates, in particular, who have not been able to find accommodation yet, is there any point of contact to try to sort that? I am getting a sense that people are just scrambling on the ground, trying to find things where they are, rather than it being a cohesive, “Here is where you go. Here are the hotels that are already booked out. Here are your options”.

Dr Jones: For really important people—like a ministerial delegation that cannot find accommodation—I send them to the UK Government. They have an accommodations department, which takes that forward. If you are official, in the sense that you are supporting a Minister, you can find accommodation through the UK Government and presumably they are helping. If you are the 99% of people going to the COP even with a badge who are not in a ministerial delegation it is just wherever you can find it.

Q103 Mhairi Black: Thank you. Moving over to you, Janice, what is your view of the accommodation situation? Could you talk us through what has happened and, in some respects, what has not happened?

Janice Fisher: As I mentioned earlier, the number of bedrooms available within the campus and within the city itself is limited because COP, of its nature, is one of a kind. I certainly would not encourage the building of hotels just for the sake of one event. That is not sustainable.

MCI was chosen as the official accommodation provider. We invited it to an association meeting to share with us the different stakeholders that it would work on behalf of, and also to share with us the stakeholders that



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it did not work on behalf of. Then it was down to individual hotels to decide whether or not they were going to work with a partner or work on their own. MCI did not take up all the accommodation in the city to allow the market to do what it needs to do in that respect.

I did ask MCI because, as you know, it wanted to attend today but it has another engagement. The average rate that it was able to secure was £190.96 excluding VAT. It had rates ranging from £55 for a standard room, and the highest rate that it secured was £528. That was for a five-star boutique hotel suite. To achieve an average rate of £190 it has a wide variety of accommodation available, but it would say itself that it did not secure enough to satisfy the demand that was going to be required for the COP.

As Dr Jones said, not everyone will go through the official accommodation provider. If you don't mind, I am going to read this because there are a lot of acronyms and I might get them a bit mixed up. The practice for the COPs is that the UNFCCC will provide financial support for two delegates from all eligible parties, plus an additional delegate from least developed countries and small island developing states. Countries can also be eligible to receive financial support from the trust fund for participation in the negotiating process.

As Dr Jones said, if they are part of the official delegations, the UK Government will seek to find them accommodation that is suitable for them so that they can take part, but it certainly would not be enough for everyone.

Q104 Mhairi Black: Lastly then, in the event that COP happens and there are accommodation issues and people who are not able to attend purely because of that, do you think that accountability lies with MCI or with the Cabinet Office?

Janice Fisher: MCI is on instruction from the Cabinet Office.

Dr Jones: To add something there, we have been highlighting an extreme risk of people showing up in Glasgow without accommodation for many months now to the UK Government, the Scottish Government and Glasgow City Council. We have been trying to secure emergency accommodation in sports halls or other community halls and have managed to do that.

We have weekly meetings. We have arranged through a lot of effort to get together weekly meetings between Glasgow City Council, the UK Government and the Scottish Government on safety and security measures. That came from us as we demanded these meetings. Eventually, we have started having them weekly. At those we have talked about Covid, but at each meeting we always raise this issue that we believe that people are going to show up who do not have accommodation and there will be emergency situations.

Mhairi Black: This is to all the panel. Has—



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Chair: I don't think we are going to have time, Mhairi, sorry, because we really are running out, unless it is just—

- Q105 **Mhairi Black:** Just quickly, has there been anything to suggest to you that MCI or the Cabinet Office has been taking your concerns seriously and looking into the accommodation issues, for instance, with the official portal showing up that the price is higher than what you have just outlined there, Janice, higher than the £528?

Chair: Briefly, if you don't mind, Ms Fisher.

Janice Fisher: I am not aware of those conversations, sorry. I can't answer.

- Q106 **Douglas Ross:** Mr Edgar, you are head of communications with Glasgow City Council?

Colin Edgar: Yes.

- Q107 **Douglas Ross:** You are not the press secretary to the leader of the council; you represent all the political views of the council and represent the people of Glasgow?

Colin Edgar: Yes.

- Q108 **Douglas Ross:** Therefore, do you agree with the language that she has used about the state of Glasgow in numerous interviews?

Colin Edgar: Well, yes, there is a—

Douglas Ross: Therefore, it is not filthy and it just needs a spruce up? Representing the whole of Glasgow and the political views across the city chambers—

Colin Edgar: Yes, absolutely.

Douglas Ross: —would that be the language you would use?

Colin Edgar: You are inviting me to disagree with politicians and, if you will forgive me—

Douglas Ross: You could agree with us if we disagree with them.

Colin Edgar: —I will try to sidestep that. In terms of communicating with the city recently, my concern has been that an impression has grown that the city is uniquely dirty compared with other cities, and uniquely dirty compared with this city at earlier moments in time. Again, trying to sidestep politics, neither of those things is true. Glasgow is not the dirtiest city in the world or in the UK or even in Scotland. Again, I do not want to pick a fight with our sister city. Nor is Glasgow dirtier than it has ever been in the past. To be very glib, we had a binmen strike in 1975. We had the winter of discontent. There have been other times when the city has had problems with litter.

Douglas Ross: We have not been hosting world leaders and delegates from across the globe.



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Colin Edgar: Nobody is proud of Glasgow being nearly the dirtiest place in Scotland, but again I think an impression has been allowed to grow that world leaders will somehow be surprised when they come here. I don't believe that to be the case. I simply don't believe that. Very few world leaders are going to come here and think, "Good lord, this place is filthier than the place I left". I simply do not believe that.

Q109 **Douglas Ross:** That is almost the problem because I do not believe that will be the case either. As Councillor Aitken said, the bits they see will be spruced up. It is the people who live in Glasgow and have been living here for months and years, who have been living with this now for some time, who will see such a change to get it spruced up for the world leaders and then it will revert back to where it was before.

Colin Edgar: That is an interesting point. I would imagine that this is the case for all citizens. We did some research for the Commonwealth Games about tidying the city up, because the city was not in a good state when we were bidding to host the Commonwealth Games. We did some research and Glaswegians were very resistant to the idea of tidying the city in order to host the Commonwealth Games or in order to win the Commonwealth Games. We put in place a programme called Clean Glasgow, which was very successful. Scotland's cities will always be near the bottom in cleanliness rankings just because cities tend to be dirty. We did start to move up. We had always been at the bottom; Glasgow was always 32nd out of 32. We were never higher really than 30th or 29th or so, but we started to improve.

Context matters. It is not invented to say that the pandemic had an impact. There is a serious public health need to pick up the bins from outside people's houses and outside their back closes. When you cannot move people around efficiently, because they cannot all crowd into the cab of a refuse collection vehicle, or because people are isolating, or because they are genuinely ill, other things do slip. Yes, we were less quick at clearing up graffiti than we had previously been because we were collecting domestic waste. We were less quick at picking up fly-tipping because we were clearing up domestic waste.

I understand, and I do not want people to deny the reality of their own eyes, but these things do get measured. The people who measure these things say we are not uniquely dirty in time or in comparison with other cities. We are recycling more. We are receiving fewer reports of fly-tipping. That is not to suggest for one second that you cannot get your phone out, walk around the city and take some photographs of fly-tipping, because fly-tipping happens. Otherwise, you would not need to have a process for dealing with fly-tipping. Again, it is very important for me not to be political. I do not agree with those people who suggest that the city is uniquely dirty, either compared with ourselves in the past or with other cities today.

Q110 **Douglas Ross:** Dr Jones mentioned how people could be staying in Edinburgh and that that was less than an hour away, which was less than people had travelled during the Paris COP. That sounds okay, the 45-



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minute journey. If you are outwith Glasgow, you may be in Edinburgh. It is going to be absolutely useless if the roads are blocked and the trains are off. How worried are you about that? I know that you said some things keep you awake at night, but there is just no point people staying in Edinburgh if they are not going to be able to get into Glasgow.

Colin Edgar: If people cannot get the train from Edinburgh to Glasgow and the trains are cancelled, then they cannot get here. That is absolutely the case. I would suggest that that is why the unions have chosen to strike at this time, because trade unions will use their point of maximum industrial leverage. For the transport workers and for local government workers in general, because of course the local government negotiations are national, not local, although they are our employees—

Q111 **Douglas Ross:** It would just be an absolute disaster. People coming from all over the world think, “Right, we have accommodation for COP and we are only 45 minutes away” and they are not going to get in through the door.

Colin Edgar: It will be a serious problem for those people, if they have come from around the world and they are only 45 minutes away, if they cannot get a bus or an Uber. Yes, that is going to be a real problem for them.

Q112 **Douglas Ross:** Do you think they should be getting Ubers to come to a climate change conference?

Colin Edgar: That is another interesting point. Again, you do see a lot of discussion saying, “If these people really cared about the environment, they would not fly all the way here from Washington” and, “If the President Designate really cared about the environment, he would not be flying all the way around the world to carry out negotiations with people”.

I have to say that I reject that analysis because I think, while getting here is not an environmentally friendly thing to do if you have to fly here, and coming here by car from Edinburgh or Aberdeen or wherever else is not an environmentally friendly thing to do, we need this conference to work and people need to be here in person. Again, it is not the responsibility of Glasgow City Council, but I reject the superficial idea that Alok Sharma should not be flying around the world to negotiate and people should not drive here if they have to.

Q113 **Douglas Ross:** There is a slight difference between what the President Designate has done in the months leading up to COP and people having to travel to get here, and people in Scotland who are within an hour of the venue having to hire a car rather than use public transport, which we as a city and as a country should be able to lay on.

Colin Edgar: No, I agree with you. I was only making the point that if people have to drive through here from Edinburgh because of the strike, some people will say, “If they really cared about the environment they wouldn’t drive”. No, they need to get here to have these discussions. If they regrettably have to drive, then they still have to come here. It is important that they are here. That is my view.



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Q114 Douglas Ross: Dr Jones and Ms Fisher, you have both mentioned very clearly how previous experience with COP has shown that delegates continue to require accommodation up to very close to the start of the event. You are both nodding in agreement. Dr Jones, you said you had raised the extreme risk of a lack of accommodation for delegates—people with passes—with a number of organisations, including Glasgow City Council. You have done that on numerous occasions. Were you as shocked as I was, therefore, that the leader of the city council believes that every delegate has accommodation?

Dr Jones: What we were really raising was the risk that people would come as part of the march, for example. In the middle of COP there is usually an alternative summit called the people's summit, and this is when the most people come to Glasgow. That was the point we were raising. We think that people will show up. They do at other COPs. They bring perhaps a tent or they expect to sleep in some shelter somewhere, and they do not understand that we have a climate that is not friendly to people who are doing that. We know there are groups travelling from Spain, Italy, Germany and France, coming up on trains and things, and we are worried about that.

Q115 Douglas Ross: That is very legitimate, but there are also people who are not coming with a tent, who are coming with a delegate's badge on to get into the conference venue and who, in evidence to this session, the leader of the council hosting this event said have accommodation. Your evidence is contrary to that. You are saying that there are people who are delegates who will only get their accreditation a couple of weeks or days now before the event. They do not have accommodation yet, do they? These are not people who will be on the marches, these are people going into the various zones within the COP26 venues.

Dr Jones: All we know is the anecdotal things that we are seeing through the accommodation platform. There is no central point that people go to, that I am aware of, to raise this. Obviously, if they are very official—like the Government delegations—there are all these processes for paying for accommodation for certain people and finding accommodation, but the importance of COP for us as civil society is making sure that civil society has that place to take part. That is where the lack of accommodation is. It is in the civil society groups who do have a badge but have not booked yet and may be travelling from very far away.

Q116 Douglas Ross: That is outwith UK and Europe. This is worldwide, people coming here expecting to do what they believe is their civic duty, to make the case here in Glasgow, who will be expecting some form of accommodation and, based on your earlier evidence, could be sleeping in a gym hall.

Dr Jones: That these are different people. Nobody travels to COP with a badge and plans to sleep in a gym hall. That is for people who come on the march or come to take part—

Douglas Ross: They are delegates.



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Dr Jones: No, these would be the unofficial things around COP. There are perhaps 25,000 people who would have badges to go to COP—I am not sure of the exact number—and then we expect there to be many thousands more who come to Glasgow to take part in the march and alternative activities around COP, like the people's summit and other fringe events. These are the ones who we have been communicating with to say, "Only travel to Glasgow if you have accommodation" and to mobilise closer to where they live, to go to the London march or their local march. That is the worry we have.

It is about these people because they tend to want to be where the action is. Even if we communicate, "Please don't come unless you have accommodation", or, "Please mobilise closer to where you live", many people will still travel to Glasgow because they want to be here.

Chair: We have to wind up the session, so do you have any last questions, Douglas?

Douglas Ross: No, that is fine, Chair, thank you.

Chair: Thank you for that. That was a fantastic session. Thank you for your time this morning and obviously to Councillor Aitken, too, who has had to leave for other pressing business. For this formal part of our proceedings in Glasgow, we are grateful to you for turning up today. There are a couple of things outstanding that I am certain you will provide us with. I can see Mr Edgar nodding his head on that, so we will look forward to securing it.