

Scottish Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: [Storm Arwen](#), HC 1024

Tuesday 18 January 2022

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 18 January 2022.

[Watch the meeting](#)

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

Questions 1 - 84

Witnesses

[I](#): Jim Savege, Chief Executive, Aberdeenshire Council; Mark Rough, Director of Customer Operations, SSEN; Peter Farrer, Chief Operating Officer, Scottish Water; Guy Jefferson, Chief Operating Officer, Scottish Power Energy Networks.

[II](#): Rt Hon Kwasi Kwarteng MP, Secretary of State, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy; Mark Prouse, Deputy Director, Energy Development and Resilience Department, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy.



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Jim Savege, Mark Rough, Peter Farrer and Guy Jefferson.

Q1 Chair: Welcome to the Scottish Affairs Committee for this one-off session into Storm Arwen and some of the issues, implications and difficulties that presented. We have four guests with us this morning, and I am going to let them introduce themselves and tell us who they represent.

Peter Farrer: Hello, I am Peter Farrer. I am the chief operating officer for Scottish Water.

Guy Jefferson: Good morning. My name is Guy Jefferson. I am the chief operating officer for SP Energy Networks.

Mark Rough: Good morning. My name is Mark Rough. I am the director of operations for SSEN Distribution.

Jim Savege: Good morning. My name is Jim Savege. I am the chief executive of Aberdeenshire Council.

Q2 Chair: Thank you ever so much for those very concise and short introductions. To kick things off, could you help the Committee by telling us exactly the damage that was done by the storm? I know we have heard things like “once in 100 years” and “unprecedented event”. In the shortest possible way, could you tell us exactly how different this storm was, the difficulties that it presented to you as organisations and what the impact was?

Mark Rough: In relation to the weather itself, we prepared in advance of the weather event. That started on the Monday. The biggest challenge for us was that, having mobilised staff on the Wednesday and into Thursday based on the original weather forecast, we expected somewhere in the region of 60 to 100 HV faults. On the Friday during the actual storm itself, the weather forecast changed and a red warning was issued at around 10.30 am on Friday. This changed things quite significantly in terms of the challenges around the windspeed but also the duration of that windspeed. In SSEN’s patch, we suffered over five hours of hurricane-force winds, those over 75 miles an hour, and over 19 hours of wind above 60 miles an hour.

In terms of damage, we had over 700 high-voltage faults and trips on the network and over 1,000 points of damage across all voltages on our network. In terms of getting to the damage, on the Saturday we took stock of the situation. We suffered some real challenges around access to our assets due to fallen trees. Everybody knows—it has been reported widely within the press—the sheer volume of trees that were taken down due to the windspeed and due to flying debris, which included sheds, trampolines and various other things. There were also snow gates that had to be closed due to the weather.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

At a high level, those were the types of issues that we were faced with. On top of that, communications then became very difficult. There were some prolonged access issues on the back of that.

Q3 Chair: I am grateful. Mr Jefferson, was that roughly your experience? We have heard, of course, that this was a storm that came in from a very different perspective. It came from the north-east. The prevailing weather conditions at the time were quite unusual. In your response, could you also tell us what you learned from previous storm events and how prepared you were for this?

Guy Jefferson: I absolutely agree that Arwen was very different for a number of reasons. Mark has alluded to a number of those, which I will not repeat. While only 5% of our customers across central Scotland were affected, we recognise, and apologise to, those customers who were impacted, especially the 5,000 who were without power for a number of days in the tail.

The Met Office report that was issued shortly after the storm recognised that this was probably the worst storm that we have had since 1953. We do not hold records back to 1953, but we had a comparable storm in 1998, which had 100 mile an hour winds and a duration of nine to 12 hours, and which impacted the majority of our area. In that case, there were 230,000 customers affected in our patch in central Scotland. Storm Arwen affected 95,000 customers.

Therein lie some of the lessons that we have learned from the past. We have significantly invested in our overhead line network, especially high-voltage main lines. If I could use the metaphor of roads, these are the A roads that cover the country. We have invested significantly over the last 20 years in that area. That has proven to give dividends, in that the amount of damage to that A road network was significantly less.

Unfortunately, we have not invested so much in what we would call the B roads, the spur lines off those HV lines. While we have maintained them well, the investment we have been allowed in that area has been relatively small. That is where we saw significant devastation due to, particularly, the tree damage and windborne debris damage to which Mark alluded.

Q4 Chair: We knew that a storm was coming and there were the usual warnings that we are given, but then it changed quite dramatically to this red warning, with a risk of life if you head outdoors. How much time did you have to recalibrate? When did you discover that this was going to be such a damaging and significant event? How, then, did you respond when you knew the exact scale of this?

Mark Rough: The exact time the red weather warning came through was 10.38 am on Friday. The first faults that we had from Arwen were at about 1.30 pm in north-east Fife, literally three hours since that red forecast.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Interestingly, prior to that the storm looked like what we might call a normal storm, in that the gusts that were being forecast by the Met Office and our own weather forecaster were up to 70 miles an hour. That was very similar to Barra. If you remember, Barra came through the next week. The 75 mile an hour winds were very similar to Barra. In that situation, that is what we got. We delivered all our customers back on supply within 12 hours of that storm. That is what we were preparing for until the last three hours.

When that forecast changed, we sought to mobilise as many resources as we could—internal resources, back office and field resources, and the contract partners that we work with—as quickly as possible. Because of that quick action, we were able to deploy and increase our field resource and back office resource over the course of the weekend. We quadrupled the amount of staff and people that we had available to respond to the storm. As you suggest, three hours is not a long time to mobilise a fairly large resource. We required extra resource in order to deal with that situation.

Q5 Chair: Mr Farrer, I know there will be detailed questions for you about Scottish Water. I just want to end my opening questions by asking Mr Savege about the local authority response. Aberdeenshire was one of the centre points of all the damage that was done here. Is there a case that maybe the military could have been called in earlier, when you recognised the scale of the damage?

Jim Savege: To complement what Mr Jefferson has been saying, we are quite used to inclement weather and bad weather events in the north-east of Scotland and Aberdeenshire. Our communities are used to working their way through, be it from a couple of hours' to a couple of days' worth of effects. What was so unprecedented here was the extent of impact across so many of our communities across Aberdeenshire and the duration of that incident. In the end, it kept on running for 13 days.

We had a phenomenal response from our communities, who looked after their friends, their families and their neighbours, which is a strength of the area. We had over 1,000 volunteers from across all of the emergency responders who were out supporting people in terms of the work that was being done to help people in those early days.

We were making a consideration of whether to call for additional capacity right from the outset. We met three times on the Friday once the weather warning came in. On the Saturday, we certainly had mutual aid coming from Police Scotland and from other agencies into the area for the weekend. In simple terms, we had to use all that capacity before we would be able to have a successful request for military aid. We do have a military liaison officer, who is part of our local resilience partnership and was part of the decision-making as to whether it would be the right time to have a successful request made.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

That request went in on the Wednesday and that capacity came in on the Thursday. That reflected the ongoing extent of the event that we were dealing with and the unknown timescales, which we were still dealing with at that point in terms of resolution and the restoration of power to so many communities. To finish, it was compounded by the loss of mobile connectivity, water and power all at the same time, which made it a very unusual event.

Chair: Before I pass on, it is worth saying just how much we appreciate the effort that was made by all of you and all of your organisations to get people reconnected. As Mr Rough knows, I was at the operations centre at SSEN in Perth to see the scale of the operation. We are all very grateful for the efforts that you have made.

Q6 **John Lamont:** Good morning to the witnesses. My first question is going to be directed to Mr Jefferson, Mr Rough and Mr Farrer. Can you tell me how long it took to get properties and homes restored to power and water supply? Perhaps you could tell me what the general view was, but also tell me when the last property was reconnected.

Guy Jefferson: Good morning, John. From our perspective, we managed to restore 86% of our customers within 24 hours, and we were supplying 94% within 48 hours. The remaining 5,500 that were off supply after Sunday evening took a further four days to restore. We restored everybody that we had detail on by overnight on the Thursday. There were a couple of people who went through on to the Friday either because we did not know about them and they contacted us post Thursday night, or we thought we had them back on and in actuality they were still off. That was very much a small handful on the Friday.

As I said before, the issue in terms of that long tail of four days was the devastation that we saw in what we call our HV spurs, which are the B roads, to use that metaphor of the road network. Neither we and our staff, nor a lot of our customers whom we have spoken to, have seen such devastation with regard to the tree damage in particular that caused that problem. That is the reason why it took so long to get those customers back on in the tail.

Mark Rough: SSEN Distribution had 135,000 customers off at the peak of the storm on the Friday. By Sunday at 4 o'clock we had restored supply to 100,000 of those customers. Over the next few days, we continued to reduce those numbers. On the Friday we still had 1,200 customers off in the afternoon, and the last 30 customers were restored on Sunday morning.

Q7 **John Lamont:** To be clear, when you say "Friday" you mean a week after the storm.

Mark Rough: Yes, that is correct.

Q8 **John Lamont:** Mr Farrer, in terms of the water supply, what was your position?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Peter Farrer: Power supplies were lost to Scottish Water assets that supplied about 1.5 million customers. Fortunately we had proactively turned on our emergency generators prior to the event happening, which protected the majority of the 1.5 million customers all the way through this.

The biggest impact was Saturday morning. There was a maximum of 17,000 customers impacted. That reduced down to less than 5,000 by the end of the day. On the second day it was down to less than 500, and all customers were back in between 48 and 72 hours.

Q9 **John Lamont:** Mr Jefferson, my next few questions are going to be directed at you. Thank you, first of all, for all of your engagement with me and my colleagues in the Scottish Borders during the first few days after the storm. I know I was very grateful for that, as were my constituents. I also pay tribute to the community groups of farmers and all the other groups that were supporting customers and my constituents across the Borders who were without power.

One of the biggest criticisms that I have been getting from residents in the Borders and your customers has been the inaccurate estimations in terms of when power was going to be restored, which was a particular issue for vulnerable people, who were making decisions based on the frankly false information that you were giving them. I will use my parents as an example. I was with them on Friday evening when the storm hit. The power went out. We then got a message very quickly by text to say that they would be reconnected within a couple of hours. That was in the early part of Friday evening. They were not reconnected until Sunday evening.

Now, there were many, many other examples of people far more vulnerable than my parents who were without power, heat and hot food for a long period of time. They would have made different decisions had you been communicating more accurate information. In my parents' case, they would have come to my house in Coldstream, where there was power, heat and hot food, which they were unable to get at their home in Duns.

I just wondered how you felt about that communication. Could it have been improved? What lessons have you learned to ensure that vulnerable people can get more accurate information to make more informed decisions? Ultimately, that will improve their welfare and their chances of getting through the aftermath of the storm in a better place than maybe some of them were after Storm Arwen.

Guy Jefferson: Thank you, John. I know we covered this as well when we spoke during the storm. To answer up front, we are disappointed that some customers received inaccurate restoration times. This is part of our own internal review and also the review we have ongoing with BEIS and Ofgem. It is one of the aspects that we are looking very hard at.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

In terms of the wider context of this, as I said before, we had 88% of our customers on within 24 hours and 95% on within 48 hours. In general, those customers received an accurate restoration time. There are exceptions to that within that group, but we felt that we communicated relatively well with that group in particular.

I would agree with you that in the tail, as we call it, after Sunday evening there were multiple restoration times given to customers. We were definitely guilty of being overambitious with some of those. We had the best intentions with regard to giving a restoration time, but recognised the difficulty it might cause for people looking to try to make alternative arrangements, especially if they think they may be off for more than one or two days.

We recognise that and will build that into our review. In the past, we have tried to play a little safer with regard to restoration times. Sometimes we pushed them out to 48 hours and got people back on a lot more quickly than that. That has left us open to the criticism that people are concerned that they have been away from their home for longer than they needed to be and that, if we had a more accurate restoration time in terms of when we believed people would come back on, we should be giving them that. That is something that we receive on a daily basis from customers from day to day. They want accuracy, but, even if we believe that we might be longer than we originally expect, we should go with the shorter timescale where we believe there is a good chance of getting customers back on.

While I have to agree with you that the tail could be better, we are working through that. We will seek to learn lessons from that and put improvements in place through the reviews that we are currently undertaking.

Q10 John Lamont: Thank you. I am grateful for that response. Mr Savege, I do not want to neglect you. There has been some criticism about the speed of the response from the Scottish Government, not least within the Scottish Parliament. The storm hit Friday evening. When was your first contact from a Scottish Government official or a Minister?

Jim Savege: My recollection would be that contact was made during the Saturday and through into the Sunday. There would have been a conversation for us to be apprising Ministers through the resilience partnership in terms of how we were progressing. We certainly then had face-to-face contact with Ministers early the following week in terms of presence on the ground as well.

We had particular cause for engagement with the Scottish Government in terms of the issues we had with mobile coverage and connectivity. We found that to be beneficial to get more of an update coming through from the operators there to get some clarity on when we could expect that connection, which was hampering both communities and early responders.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

- Q11 **John Lamont:** Some of the other witnesses earlier in evidence suggested that three hours before the storm hit there was an indication that it was going to be a very, very significant event. There was no contact from the Scottish Government in that period.

Jim Savege: The response in terms of dealing with weather like this is very much a local matter. As colleagues have said, we got the indication that we were moving to a red weather warning. Within half an hour, the local resilience partnership had met. All the different agencies locally, including mine as the council, increased our capacity in terms of staff being available in terms of roads and care. We closed vaccination centres and schools early that day, and we got ourselves prepared and ready to be able to deal with things.

It is really down to that local response. That is our primary focus. We would then engage with other agencies subsequent to the event, depending on what the need is.

- Q12 **John Lamont:** I am not clear from that response whether you think you needed the Scottish Government's support or not. Was the localised response in Aberdeenshire sufficient? Was there no need for national Government support?

Jim Savege: I am saying that the starting point has to be about boots on the ground in terms of local agencies and partners dealing with matters. As I said, we did then have cause to ask for more governmental engagement in terms of dealing with some utility providers. That is the approach. It is always about being local first in terms of the capacity and approach that we have in dealing with incidents.

- Q13 **John Lamont:** Could you possibly write to the Committee with the exact timetable in terms of the contact you had from the Scottish Government and the support that you were provided in the immediate hours and days after the impact of the storm, please?

Jim Savege: Of course, yes.

- Q14 **Andrew Bowie:** Good morning, everyone. Thank you very much, gentlemen, for joining us this morning. I would like to start by echoing the comments of the Chair and thanking everyone in all of your organisations for everything that they did on the ground in what was an incredible difficult week not least across vast swathes of my constituency, which was incredibly badly hit.

I would like to make special mention of the thousands of volunteers and staff at Aberdeenshire Council, who went above and beyond to support communities, and Scottish Water. I was informed of the loss of water supply in Braemar very early on the Monday morning. I was on the phone to Scottish Water at about 8.30 am, and by 9.30 am I was informed that there were trucks on route to Braemar with water. That speaks volumes.

On the Friday, I had the pleasure of meeting engineers at SSN. In incredibly adverse conditions, they were going above and beyond to try



HOUSE OF COMMONS

to reconnect people who by that stage had been out of power for seven days. Thank you very much to all of your people in all of your organisations for what you did in what was an incredibly difficult week.

But there are criticisms and concerns from constituents. To echo what John was asking of Scottish Power, the same question has to be asked of SSEN. While I know your men and women on the ground were doing incredible things to get people connected, there were issues of communication and issues of false hope given to residents across Aberdeenshire. The recurring theme seemed to be 6.00 pm; 6.00 pm the next day was when they were expecting to be reconnected. I do not doubt that that informed some of the responses of the council and other agencies to the situation when they were being informed by you that this would be when most people were being reconnected.

What action are you taking to ensure that, should we ever be in this position again, we are not going to see residents given false hope and taking decisions to stay put when they might have gone and sought shelter, warm food and heating elsewhere, had they not been given that false hope of reconnection at 6.00 pm the next day?

Mark Rough: Very similar to Guy's response, although we were in a position where we had restored supplies on Sunday afternoon to around 100,000 customers, at that point we realised that we had multiple damages across the network and, as I said earlier, some really challenging conditions in terms of getting access.

The result of this was that we had three helicopters on hire on the Sunday, but there was inclement weather and poor visibility. The fact that we could not get access to a lot of the network meant that we could not clearly determine the magnitude of the damage itself, as did the multiple locations. What that led to, along with communication issues, was a delay in communication back to our control centre from our field staff in relation to the extent of the damage.

That was compounded by access but, as the Member correctly said, we also had some real challenges around communication because of the mobile masts and some landlines that were down. Operatives on the ground had to travel some distance to be able to relay information. This improved at the start of the week, when we managed to get helicopters in the air.

There were situations where we had multiple damage. We had made it clear on Sunday and conveyed to the Deputy First Minister that it would be a multi-day event. Our original expectation was that we would have all customers or the majority of customers on by the Wednesday night. We stated that on the Sunday, but, as we got into Tuesday, we realised that there would be some pockets of customers who would be off into the weekend.

In terms of learning, we have started an internal review in relation to how we convey estimated restoration times and we get that information



from the field. We are also keen to get views from stakeholders and to liaise with the mobile technology companies to see how we can improve [Inaudible] and then provide that information.

- Q15 **Andrew Bowie:** Thank you very much, Mr Rough. Mr Savege, I completely agree with you that the response from local communities across Aberdeenshire was outstanding. We had Nicola Sedgwick, for example, at the garage at Glenkindie delivering hundreds of hot meals and the Fife Arms in Braemar opening its doors to the entire local community.

Are you happy with the speed and the preparedness of the response from an Aberdeenshire Council point of view? What could be done better, should we be in this situation again?

Jim Savege: As the conversation has reflected, it was an emergent experience and understanding in terms of what the resolution times were going to be. We went from 100,000 people being without connection on Saturday morning through to 60,000 in the afternoon, and it was changing every day in terms of when the resolution time was going to be. As you have reflected, the foundation of resilience is for communities, friends and families to look after themselves, complemented by emergency responders.

In terms of preparedness, I am content with the working arrangements that we have in place and the plans and approaches, and yet this was an unprecedented scale of incident that we had to deal with, with so many communities all across Aberdeenshire affected. As soon as we got more information in terms of what the resolution times were for the different utilities being connected, we continued to step up the activity we were putting in place. On Sunday, for example, we chose to close all schools, all vaccination centres and some of our health and care facilities. Once we had checked them all in terms of their suitability for operation, we also chose to open up 13 of our leisure facilities for communities to access. By the close of Monday we had 17 rest centres open to provide food and facilities as well.

If we had known more about the duration and scale of the event we were going to be dealing with, we would have likely stepped up our response earlier, but one has to be able to plan and deal with what one knows at the time. We were meeting three times a day and constantly reviewing and upgrading our activity and our response.

- Q16 **Andrew Bowie:** One of the points—it is not a criticism—that is repeatedly made to me by local councillors is that communication from the centre could have been better to the communities that they were helping on the ground at the time. Is that something that you would look into, should we be in this position again?

Councillors in Upper Deeside, for example, said that they were being given information post an event happening and were not being brought into the discussion to try to influence decisions when they were the ones



on the ground talking to communities and to community councils in village halls and all the rest of it. Is that something that you would look at improving, should this ever happen again?

Jim Savege: Communication is absolutely one of the points that we have brought out from the lessons learned that we have done so far. We have a very good working relationship with the local media channels and have made extensive use of that access, including radio broadcasts. What gets missed is, to your point, that there was a lot of on-the-ground face-to-face communication with communities. That was significant in terms of the reach that we have. Local councillors play an important role in providing support for their local communities. They are an invaluable part of the team in long incidents like this. Most certainly, part of our review and our improvement work will be to see how we can communicate more.

This was particularly difficult, given the impact there was on mobile telephony. That hampered everyone across the board in terms of both response and communication. The question will be to what the extent we provide additional resilience to deal with that sort of circumstance again and what sort of different issues we have to try to factor into our forward-looking plans. Your point is most certainly going to be part of my work.

Q17 **Andrew Bowie:** Can I just make a quick point on co-ordination as well? The food vans provided by SSEN and the respite centres opened across Aberdeenshire by the council were very welcome, but there was at some points a slight irony that some communities had no respite centre whereas, for example, in Aboyne you had an SSEN van in the car park giving hot food and hot food being given out by the council across the road at the Victory Hall.

Could the co-ordination of the delivery of support for communities be improved? I am hearing very much from people on the ground that that is something that could be looked at, should we have to deal with this again.

Jim Savege: It goes to your point in terms of being proactive in order to try to use whatever provision we can. We had a very dynamic reality where different communities were being reconnected throughout the day. That could mean that the facility you have just put in place then feels to be no longer needed, because of that connection having taken place. We were constantly reviewing with SSEN and with communities who was doing what. Where we found that there was a connection coming back in, we moved that facility and capacity onwards.

You will appreciate that it takes time to ramp up food preparation and a facility to be able to have that. It is not something that we can change in a matter of minutes. There will have been cases in which we were making provision that was then no longer needed, but I far prefer to be in that



HOUSE OF COMMONS

situation of over-provision than not meeting the needs of a community at that point in time.

To your very point, the foundation we worked on was the community helping themselves, which is absolutely a strength and asset of Aberdeenshire. We worked very closely to understand where that was happening to look in terms of how we could complement and add to that.

Q18 Andrew Bowie: I have a very quick question about the MACA request. How quick was the response from the UK Government when you put in that MACA request?

Jim Savege: We had the in-principle agreement probably within the space of a number of hours. We had been talking about whether we needed that additional capacity since the Sunday of the event. As I said, the military liaison officer was part of that decision-making process. We thought it was pretty clear we needed that on the Tuesday. The request went in on the Wednesday; the teams mobilised and they were on the ground at 9 o'clock on Thursday morning.

There can be a lot of focus on military aid coming in. It is important that we do not overlook the immense efforts of communities, the coastguard, Police Scotland, local authorities and other volunteers, all of whom put in thousands of staff into the area from Saturday morning. That was added to by the military aid coming in. That was primarily to do the welfare checks that we were carrying out, which was based on the vulnerable list of customers that SSEN had. There was a very particular purpose and task that we wanted the additional capacity for in terms of the scale of deployment across the whole of Aberdeenshire.

Q19 Andrew Bowie: You were quite impressed; you were quite pleased with the speed of response from the UK Government when the request finally went in.

Jim Savege: In simple terms, yes. Military colleagues are part of the local resilience partnership. They are there as a standing member of that facility. We work well with them. We know each other well. As I said, it was a joint decision in terms of the timing and the approach that we used to put that request in.

Q20 Andrew Bowie: Jim, were you at all disappointed that it took until five days after the event for the Scottish Government to acknowledge the scale of the disaster that hit Aberdeenshire?

Jim Savege: I am not sure that is a question I will answer. Thank you very much for the opportunity, though.

Q21 Mhairi Black: Thanks to our witnesses not just for being here today but for all the support that you were able to provide during that trying time. If I could focus particularly on the Friday when the warning went from amber to red, I believe Mr Jefferson told us that it was 10.38 am, to be exact. Mr Savege, you have already answered most of my questions as to



HOUSE OF COMMONS

how the council responded on that day.

Turning to the other three witnesses, could each of you explain exactly, on that day, once the red warning came in, what plans your organisations put into action?

Peter Farrer: I mentioned earlier that we have some fairly robust contingency plans. As soon as we know a storm is coming, we look at putting emergency generators on to our assets. These are fixed generators, but we run our assets on the generator because, from previous events that we have had, we know there is an impact from power outages. This is a means of keeping the works going without any interruption and without having to send our people out to about 100 assets during the heat of the storm.

That really served us well, as I mentioned earlier. There were 1.5 million customers who were protected all the way through this. They were running on emergency generation, as the power supplies were off. We did that on the yellow warning, before the red warning came. We would do that as a matter of course on a yellow warning. We did not have to do anything much different. We only had to take cognisance of the fact that, with a red warning, there was a real danger to staff being out. From a health and safety perspective, the emergency team that we had in place all the way through this, from a number of days before it, took the call that we would not send our people out in the thick of the storm for safety reasons. That was absolutely the right thing to do.

Mark Rough: Similarly, in relation to preparation, we had already stood up some of the sub-offices around the patch, particularly across Moray, Aberdeenshire and Perthshire. As the storm progressed, we did start to redirect some of the staff that had been mobilised to the west of Scotland, bearing in mind that the original forecast indicated that the Western Isles and the north-west of Scotland were to be hit hardest. It was only in the latter stages that it changed.

We also put a request into the NEWSAC forum for additional staff to be mobilised, albeit that other DNOs were suffering similar problems. We had already engaged with PDG Helicopters and had secured its services, albeit that we were restricted in what we could do in terms of using them the next day. We did have to stand down staff at various periods in the evening due to the ongoing risk. Safety is paramount to us as an organisation for both our customers and our employees. As the night progressed, we carried on with remote restoration, which helped to restore the 100,000 customers that we talked about between that evening and the Saturday afternoon.

Guy Jefferson: I will briefly drop something in that is helpful to Mr Bowie's line of questioning. We recognise the challenges that Jim talked about and the real difficulties. This was a huge test; certainly in my memory it was the biggest test we have had in terms of co-ordination



between local authorities and power companies. We did well between the two of us, but we could do better.

On that basis, we have commissioned Charles Hendry, ex-Energy Minister, to chair an independent panel to look at what happened in rural communities and hopefully bring out learnings that we can put in place so that, when this does happen again, we can be better prepared and make sure we have taken account of all the learnings we have had the opportunity to see throughout this storm. Apologies, I just thought that was worth interjecting.

Mhairi Black: Thank you.

Guy Jefferson: In terms of the red warning, I will not repeat what the guys have said. It was very similar. I have said already that we mobilised to call in further resource for the weekend, and managed to contact and bring in a lot of extra staff and contractors. For those who might not know what the NEWSAC is, it is a mutual sharing operation among the UK network operators, where we agree to share our resources in light of storms. In usual circumstances only one area of the country gets hit, and we are able to call on sister companies to provide overhead line resources—engineers, etc.

Another very unusual thing about this storm was that it hit the whole of the UK. The ability to share resource was very limited. In SP Energy Networks, we have a sister organisation in north Wales and north-west England, Manweb. They were hit as badly as central Scotland, so we could not really call on resources from them either, which again was very unusual. When we saw the red warning, we did mobilise a number of teams up from our Manweb area into Scotland that evening, who were able to arrive first thing on Saturday and start to work. That was another huge difficulty and difference that Arwen provided, which was a great challenge not only to us but to SSEN.

Q22 **Mhairi Black:** To be honest, most of you have answered my next question about staffing, so I will move on to my last question. In what ways did Storm Arwen differ from the ways that you would prepare for usual storms? For example, if there is a storm with westerly winds, would that have a different impact?

Mark Rough: I would be happy to answer from SSEN's point of view. The biggest difference was the change in the forecast. We had tracked the forecast from the Monday, as I said earlier. We had mobilised resources from the south of England. We made that request on the Wednesday; they travelled up on the Thursday. That was based on well-proven models that we have in place.

That was borne out when Storm Barra came through. Guy touched on this earlier. When Storm Barra came through, the model we had in place was absolutely spot on in terms of what was predicted. The issue was the change in forecast during the storm itself to such a magnitude on the



east side of our patch. We have 780,000 customers and 500,000 of those are in Aberdeenshire and Tayside. That is exactly where the weather tracked through.

Jim Savege: The extent and scale of the event was unprecedented. We are more used to dealing with incidents that are more discrete in terms of geography. Having communities across the whole of Aberdeenshire impacted made it a far bigger challenge in terms of deploying resources and activity. Even in the last Sunday where we had our final 39 people being connected, that was anybody from just outside Fraserburgh through to just outside Braemar.

It was really diverse in terms of scale and nature, which was compounded by that lack of communication infrastructure and the mobile infrastructure going down at the same time. It was the multiple events that you were dealing with over such a scale that made it so unprecedented in nature and more challenging than other events.

Q23 **Sally-Ann Hart:** Good morning to our witnesses. It was Mr Farrer who spoke about generators being put in place to ensure people could still get water. Generators are important or were important in the response to the storm. How many generators did Scottish Water put in place? How many were provided in response to Storm Arwen?

Peter Farrer: Based on previous events that we have had and learnings from that, we purchased a significant stock of mobile generators for events like this. To give you specifics, in advance of the storm coming, we put 58 of our water treatment works, which served 1.5 million customers, on to emergency generation. They stayed on that all the way through.

During the event, we then deployed another 30 mobile generators to water pumping stations, which are local distribution pumping stations that pump the water from tanks in our distribution network to customers. We used about 90 generators altogether.

Q24 **Sally-Ann Hart:** Mr Rough, how many generators did SSEN provide?

Mark Rough: We had around 110 generators of different sizes available across the network. Our approach, as we normally would do it, is to take a more strategic view in terms of restoration. We would continue to focus on restoring supplies to villages and towns through the reestablishment of main connections as well as using generation in strategic locations. To answer your question, around 107 were connected, disconnected and reconnected as and when we needed them across the number of days that people were off.

Q25 **Sally-Ann Hart:** Are you saying that the focus was on restoring supplies? When you look at the response to the 2013 winter storm, SSEN supplied 280 generators. For Storm Arwen, SSEN supplied 110. Can you explain why you supplied fewer generators for Storm Arwen than you did for the 2013 winter storm?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Mark Rough: We look at each storm as it occurs. If you look at what actually happened within Storm Arwen, we had a very fragmented network. As I said earlier, the access to locations was poor as well. Our focus was to restore as many supplies as quickly as we possibly could for obvious reasons. The resource effort that was put in was focused on main supplies into primary substations, which supply towns and villages.

Ultimately, given that we had so many points of damage, over 1,000, the fragmented nature of the network meant that the connectivity for generation resulted in far fewer customers being restored through generation as opposed to when you have more connectivity on the network. That is the approach that we took based on the actual state of the network at the time and the multiple points of location. That is the generation that we had employed.

We would have been able to gain more generation from our contract partners, if required; however, our focus was heavily on restoration through repairs.

Q26 **Sally-Ann Hart:** You are really saying that more generators would not have helped. Is that what you are saying?

Mark Rough: Yes, the diversion of resources from repairs to connecting generators in more locations for far fewer customer restorations would not have helped in this situation.

Q27 **Sally-Ann Hart:** Mr Jefferson, how many generators did Scottish Power provide?

Guy Jefferson: We had 261 generators connected at peak through the event, as Mark said. We circulated those through as customers were re-connected to the main line and utilised them again where appropriate. That is network-connected generators. We also had about 100 small 3 kVA generators, which are ones that are very mobile that we can provide for vulnerable customers who are off for a short period of time so they can use basic facilities like cooking and small heating facilities. We had about 350 in total.

Q28 **Sally-Ann Hart:** Did you have enough generators and resources available to get generators quickly enough to places most in need? How did you prioritise where those generators went?

Guy Jefferson: Yes, I believe we had the balance right. In terms of generator deployment, our strategy is to use generators from the very start of an event. We have a generator deployment resource in every district of our operation. There are six districts in the central Scotland patch; each district has a generator management resource and a vulnerability co-ordinator, who works very closely with that generator deployment resource. At the very start, when we get calls through from electrically dependent customers, for example, we will get that information into the district, into the field, and, if appropriate, we will



deploy a generator immediately. At the start of the storm and in its initial stages, that is the priority for generation.

As we move through the storm, opportunities present that allow us to get large chunks of customers back on or big load back on with generators. We can use a 500 kVA generator, which quite a large one. If there is a large industrial customer, for example, that we can get back on supply with that one deployment, we will do that during the course of the event, especially if the damage to the line that is supplying that customer is large.

Towards the end, when there are single customers off supply, the amount of effort, work and reconstruction required for an overhead line is huge. It is sensible to deploy a generator to get that customer back on. That accelerates towards the end of a restoration process. That is our strategy and we believe we had the balance right in terms of the number of generators that we had to deliver that strategy.

Q29 Sally-Ann Hart: Mr Rough, how did you prioritise the distribution of generators?

Mark Rough: I can give you one example. If we take Upper Deeside, the Aboyne, Ballater and Braemar area, we had significant damage in that area to all voltages. We were in a situation where we were waiting for the transmission circuits to be repaired. We also had repairs underway on our own main supplies into each of the primary substations, which are the main hubs for supplying those towns and villages.

We took a three-pronged approach there. As well as mobilising on these repairs, we had mobilised HV generation to Aboyne, Ballater and Braemar. While repairs were underway, we connected these sets. In the meantime, because of the repairs being completed, we managed to get supplies back on there. We then managed to redirect two of the generators and then disconnect one after some time, once we had co-ordinated supplies with the local welfare arrangements. These are the types of dynamic situations that we are faced with. As the situation changes, we change our decisions and divert the actual plant itself.

Q30 Sally-Ann Hart: Mr Farrer, how did you prioritise the distribution of generators? Did you have enough? Did you have enough resources to get them where they were needed?

Peter Farrer: Yes, we did have enough generators available to us. As I said, that was a learning from a previous event. My colleagues mentioned this earlier, but this was the widest impact that I have ever known in terms of power outages and the duration was the longest lasting. One of the things we have learned from that is that we need to have more resources available to deploy the generators. We faced some issues where the generators were hooked up, but, because the event had gone on for such a while, there were tanks emptying and airlocks happening in



HOUSE OF COMMONS

the water system. It takes quite a bit of technical competency to push these out of the system.

The learning for us is to make sure we have more skilled resource available for the deployment of generators. To answer your question, we had enough generators available to us.

Q31 Deidre Brock: Good morning, gentlemen. Thank you and your staff, and indeed all the volunteers and all the communities, who did some amazing work in such difficult conditions. It is very much appreciated. I want to give my heartfelt thanks to them all.

We have all heard some quite distressing accounts from people who suffered considerable hardship as a result of the storm and the outages. There were a number of elderly people and people who were in other ways vulnerable who suffered that hardship. Mr Rough and Mr Jefferson, SEN and Scottish Power operate customer priority lists. I wondered if you could give us an assessment of how effectively those worked in that situation.

Mark Rough: From an SEN perspective, we sent out 119,000 proactive texts in advance of the storm occurring and made numerous calls to the priority service register customers who were most vulnerable. As the storm progressed, there were a couple of learning points that came from that. We have a good register of those customers. We have good procedures in terms of reviewing our process and making sure the actual lists are appropriate and accurate.

One thing we found—I am sure Jim will back me up on this—was that the classification of priority customers for us differs slightly from the classification that the local authority may have. The format in which we keep them in terms of lists and data is slightly different between the local authority and the power company. The learning point—I am talking after having discussed this with Jim—would be to look at the classification and the format in which we keep the data.

Jim Savage: From a council and a health and care point of view, we have a focus on vulnerable people who we provide a service to in the main. We will have an immediate check on those people, as we did through the Saturday and the Sunday, to make sure they are okay.

As Mr Rough referred to, the utility companies have a list and a schedule of people who self-declare as being vulnerable, which is quite a different criterion. Accepting that, as a partnership, we chose to do a welfare check on 8,000 of those residents to make sure they were okay, in addition to what was happening at a community level. There were three aspects there: first, what we do as a statutory organisation; secondly, what private companies do from a utility point of view; and, thirdly, what communities do to help each other. There is a combination of all of that intelligence and information that we think we need to do more work on and ask, "How does that come together better in the future?"



HOUSE OF COMMONS

The other important point there is that vulnerability will change over time as well. There were many people who were potentially okay for a couple of days, but by day five or day six their situation or circumstance had changed. That is an active process whereby we have to work very closely with communities to ask, "Who has now changed in terms of their needs? How do we respond to that?"

That is one of our big learning areas, to see whether we can end up, as best we can, with a single schedule that people can access appropriately, with consideration for people's confidentiality as well. If someone is receiving health and care support from the council, for example, they may or may not want their community to know that as well. We just have some sensitivities to navigate in terms of who knows what and how we keep that active and dynamic through these events.

Q32 Deidre Brock: That is a work programme that you will actively take forward. Who will be leading on that? Will it be a joint programme?

Jim Savege: That is happening now. It is being led by the local resilience partnership. All of the different agencies are involved there, including the utility companies. That is police, fire, health, the council, the coastguard, the military and the utility companies. Everyone involved is doing that work as we speak.

Deidre Brock: That is good to hear. Mr Jefferson, did you want to add anything?

Guy Jefferson: I will not repeat a lot of the things that colleagues have said. I want to add a couple of things. Our customer service processes, including vulnerability, are accredited through a British Standard. We have that independently verified. We have 2 million connected customers in the central belt of Scotland, of whom 700,000 are now on our PSR. That has increased by 300,000 over the last three years. We have put significant effort into understanding who our vulnerable customers are and making sure they are on our priority services register.

During the event, our call platform automatically interfaces with that PSR so we can prioritise the vulnerable customers who are phoning in. We train our agents specifically to work with vulnerable customers so they can establish their needs very clearly and register that on the system. To go back to one of my previous responses, if, for example, they are electrically dependent and they require a generator, we need to be very careful to capture that information properly, make sure it gets to the field and support those customers properly.

I agree with Jim that all customers become vulnerable after two or three days off supply. Again, we made sure that all customers received the same support in terms of accommodation offers and requests for hot food, etc, after 48 hours.

Q33 Deidre Brock: I want to move on very quickly to a question about the 105 number. Clearly, people were experiencing considerable delays in



HOUSE OF COMMONS

getting through to it, understandably, because of the mobile network being down, but those who could get through were still having to wait for some time. Can you just tell us a little bit about the challenges of that 105 line that were experienced and, crucially, what measures you are putting in place to try to address those problems?

Mark Rough: This ties in with one of the earlier learning points that we touched on. We found that where we had most of the issues with the 105 number in terms of the duration of time to get through to our customer contact centre correlates with some of the challenges that we had on estimated restoration times. What you find is that, once you have stated an estimated restoration time, if a customer expects to be on by 18.00, for example, they will then look to phone in to the customer contact centre for an update.

It goes back to that key point about learning for us. As part of an internal review, we will be focusing on how we get more accurate estimated restoration times through during periods of faults when we have multi-day events.

Q34 **Douglas Ross:** For brevity, I will keep my questions as short as I can. I echo everything that has been said in commendation of the efforts of you and your teams. Mr Savege, first of all, did Aberdeenshire Council claim any Bellwin funding or apply to the Bellwin scheme as a result of Storm Arwen?

Jim Savege: Bellwin is still live as a process. We are still going through and working out our final costs. We have not put a claim in at this point in time.

Q35 **Douglas Ross:** Do you expect to?

Jim Savege: If we pass a threshold, we will do. The last time I looked at the figures, we were still under the threshold. The local authority has to pay the first £1 million. At the point I saw it, it was £860,000. We still have a lot of work to do to get through to the final reconciliation of costs.

Q36 **Douglas Ross:** We need to look at this further, as a Committee. It was announced on 1 December to quite significant fanfare by the Deputy First Minister. I was a councillor for 10 years in neighbouring Moray Council. During many flood events, often the Bellwin scheme is seen as being this support that rushes in to help, but, as you have articulated, it is actually quite complex and there is quite a significant burden on the local authority before you can even access some of that money.

Mr Savege, you mentioned the police. I understand that the police are not here to answer this, but Chief Superintendent George Macdonald announced on 28 November that a decision had been taken the previous day to declare a major incident. I know that in neighbouring Moray the council was often informed when major incidents were declared. Were you involved in that decision to declare a major incident?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Jim Savege: Yes. The decision was one that was made by police colleagues, but it was also made in consultation with the local resilience partnership, which all the responders were there and a part of. That decision gives an indication that we will likely need additional resources and capacity from outside the area, the illustration being that we immediately got additional Police Scotland officers coming up into the area from a number of other parts of the country to provide additional support into the area.

Q37 **Douglas Ross:** In the absence of Chief Superintendent Macdonald or anyone else from Police Scotland, why was the decision taken not to publicly announce that until the following day? Normally when a major incident is declared, you want the public to know that.

Jim Savege: I do not have an answer in terms of the communication there. I would reflect that the scale of event that we were dealing with was quite evident to everyone involved. In terms of the general public, many communities were clearly impacted and affected. What they experienced was support coming in around them as quickly as it was made available.

Q38 **Douglas Ross:** I would agree with that, Mr Savege. I am sorry to cut you off, but you will know we are short of time. If it was so self-evident, though, why was there a need to put out the press release on 28 November when the decision had been taken, self-evidently, the day before?

If I can move to Mr Farrer from Scottish Water, Moray was thankfully not nearly as badly affected by Storm Arwen as neighbouring Aberdeenshire Council. However, there were some cases, particularly with Scottish Water. I have one of the emails in front of me that I received on Monday 29 November from the chair of the community association in Archiestown. They were left without water for 52 hours by the time they got in touch with me and other local elected representatives. I just want to very briefly read out some of the comments that they were making to me as MP for Moray.

"As a village, we have had no water for 52 hours and counting. While this is understandable because of Storm Arwen, it is not acceptable that there has been a lack of communication from Scottish Water and a lack of support from them. Archiestown currently has two inches of snow and freezing temperatures. The lack of water is now having considerable impact on the community, many of whom are elderly. Bottled water was provided in Aberlour, five miles away, which is not easy to get to from Archiestown, and 52 hours into this crisis that bottled water in Aberlour had run out".

How do you respond to communities such as Archiestown, who felt really let down by Scottish Water? When they got in touch with me as MP and other politicians, we were able to resolve that issue very quickly, with you and your colleagues' help. Why did it take the intervention of politicians to help this community who had been suffering for so long?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Peter Farrer: There are always improvements that we can make to communications in circumstances like this. It has been talked about throughout the course of this. In the particular case to which you referred, you received that contact from Angus Holmes on the Sunday evening. There was bottled water dropped off at the town hall within an hour of Angus Holmes sending that communication to you. By first thing the next morning, the pumping station was back up and running again. We had that all in hand.

Yes, it took a while to get to that, because we put water out in the local community, but this smaller community was a bit too far away. As I said, we did receive contact separately from Angus Holmes. We responded to that and had water dropped off at the town hall within an hour of that contact.

Q39 **Douglas Ross:** I have said that when people got involved it was excellent and the response was very good. The concern is that it took politicians and the chairman of Archiestown Village Council getting in touch. That community had been suffering for quite some time before those emails started going.

Peter Farrer: As I said, there are learnings that we can take from that. We did not have any problems with customers contacting us through our contact centre. Throughout, because we had so few customers impacted, we only received 1,800 calls to our call centre over the four days that this was impacting. Any customer who was calling us could get through, and we were responding.

We delivered 126,000 litres of water to customers in any communities that were out for a length of time. On the Monday morning, Archiestown got deliveries of water to the actual houses. We delivered bottled water directly to 500 properties. That was all done through our contact centre. We did not have any issues with people getting through to the contact centre.

Q40 **Douglas Ross:** Thank you. I appreciate that. My final question is to Mr Rough. You detailed at the start of this evidence session how people were put in various places in anticipation of the effects of Storm Arwen. In hindsight, were any of your engineers in the wrong locations after the storm had passed and therefore had trouble getting to the most affected areas?

Mark Rough: We had mobilised some staff to the Western Isles mid-week based on the original forecast. While I would not say they were in the wrong place, we did pull back that resource from the Western Isles. We also drew in resources from the west coast, Shetland and Orkney to assist.

Q41 **Douglas Ross:** It is fair to say that some people were in the islands, which were not as badly affected by Storm Arwen as parts of the mainland, and there were difficulties in getting them back, because travel



was then disrupted both on the ferries and in the air. That is what has been reported to me, but I had not seen it anywhere. You have confirmed that to an extent.

Mark Rough: No, not at all. I would not say we had problems getting them back. It is about timing—

Q42 **Douglas Ross:** There were no issues getting people into the air on planes or on the sea with ferries, given the weather conditions.

Mark Rough: Given the timing of the storm itself and the magnitude of the high winds from late afternoon into the evening, there would be no ferries running during that time. From memory, the staff who came back from the Western Isles came back on the Saturday afternoon, with additional resources from Shetland on Saturday afternoon.

Douglas Ross: You could write to the Committee and say exactly where your staff were, where they had to be pulled from and any difficulties that your colleagues raised that you maybe cannot quite recall at this moment. Thank you.

Chair: Thank you, gentlemen. We have the Secretary of State in just now. Thank you very much for your attendance today at short notice. Once again, all of us on this Committee would very much like to thank you for all the efforts you have made in making sure that people were reconnected and looked after in the course of what was a very difficult period for so many of our constituents. Thank you.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Kwasi Kwarteng and Mark Prouse.

Chair: Secretary of State, thank you ever so much for coming along. We are delighted to have you with us. It is the first time we have had you on the Scottish Affairs Committee. Hopefully it will not be the last.

Kwasi Kwarteng: Yes, it is the first time I have had the honour of your interrogation.

Chair: Believe me: the honour is all ours. Thank you for coming along. We will just get straight to it, because I know that your time is very tight and there are a number of questions that we have to ask. We are grateful that we have some of your time this morning. Is it okay if we just get started?

Kwasi Kwarteng: Yes, absolutely.

Q43 **Chair:** Maybe you could start by describing to us what the UK Government's response to the storm was. When you knew there were going to be difficulties, how quickly were you prepared? Just tell us the range of things that you did.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Kwasi Kwarteng: We need to make this very clear. This was an unprecedented 100 mile an hour storm. Something like that had not been seen in 15 years, so it was an extreme event. In any extreme event, you have to take at least a couple of days to see what the full extent of the damage was. Once we had worked that out, we acted with a great deal of speed. I contacted the network distribution companies, the DNOs, not only in Scotland; we had a couple of DNOs in England as well. I went up to Durham. My colleague Minister Hands went up to Aberdeenshire. We rapidly co-ordinated a response across the DNOs and local resilience fora.

We can get into the detail of the questions and the military involvement, which I know people are interested in. I just need to be very clear that the military response is a function of the local resilience fora asking. We do not live in a country where the central Government, the UK Government, deploy troops without a request from the local resilience fora, which would go in the first instance to my colleague the Secretary of State in the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

Q44 **Chair:** We will want to get into the deployment of the military. There will be questions on that, but we are all grateful to Minister Hands. He came to my constituency; I know he came to colleagues' constituencies. His visit was very much welcome, very useful and constructive.

We are still uncertain about the UK's response in terms of calling COBRA. Was COBRA called, given the scale of the storm? An Urgent Question was asked in Parliament, but this was left very uncertain. What was the situation with COBRA? Did you meet?

Kwasi Kwarteng: No, we did not meet. The storm happened on the Saturday. We had to see where we were on the Monday. On the Tuesday, we then started engaging with other stakeholders, particularly the DNOs, to see what their issues were. We had some communication issues with some of the DNOs, because in some very early instances they were underplaying the extent of the damage. We interrogated that and then they co-operated very closely with us.

Q45 **Chair:** Would you expect COBRA to be called, given that this was an unprecedented storm? We heard that this was the worst storm that has hit the UK since the 1950s.

Kwasi Kwarteng: Yes, it was very bad.

Chair: If there was another event like this, there was a red warning and the same sort of prevailing conditions were in place, do you expect in the future that COBRA would be called?

Kwasi Kwarteng: It is very finely balanced. If you look at the bald numbers, in Scotland, for instance, SSE has 700,000 customers; Scottish Power has 2 million customers. There are 2.7 million customers. The number of people who were affected was 200,000, which is clearly a lot less than 10%. Of the 200,000, 92% were back on power within 48 hours and 70% within 24 hours.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

That does not mean the people who were longer affected and disrupted for longer did not have a terrible time. I do not resile from acknowledging that. COBRA generally is called when there is perhaps a wider impact. It is a finely balanced decision.

- Q46 **Chair:** I just wondered why that was not explained properly during the Urgent Question, but thank you for clarifying that. Lastly from me, there has been huge damage. A million trees in Scotland are down and communities were impacted right throughout the night. What sort of financial support are the UK Government prepared to supply, whether that is the Scottish Government or local authorities in Scotland and England? Can you maybe just give us a sense of what you are going to be doing?

Kwasi Kwarteng: What I am about to say is not a Scotland-focused response, but, within the context of Ofgem, there was a means by which, if people were disrupted, if they did not have a power source for more than 12 hours, they were entitled to £70 a day. There was a cap to that in terms of £700 being the utmost limit that you could receive. I was keen that they lifted the cap and I am very pleased that Ofgem did that. There is a way in which people who have been disrupted for an appreciably long time can get compensation. I am hopeful that people will use that mechanism.

- Q47 **Chair:** As we know, SSEN—we spoke to them in the earlier session—did provide resources, whether that be accommodation or hot food.

Kwasi Kwarteng: They did.

Chair: That was at their expense. Could they expect, therefore, to be compensated for that type of expense?

Kwasi Kwarteng: These companies are well resourced and successful. As Energy Minister, I looked at how we regulate their asset base and the returns that they are allowed. They are profitable companies and, as I have always said from the Dispatch Box, I am very reluctant to use taxpayers' money to support well-funded and successful companies.

- Q48 **Chair:** Before I move on, maybe you could write to the Committee on the support that has been given by the UK Government and the resource that has been allocated to the Scottish Government and local authorities, if that is okay.

Kwasi Kwarteng: I can write a letter to you. I am not prepared to disclose all of this. I just want to say on record that I have spoken a lot to my Scottish colleagues in Edinburgh and I feel we have co-operated very well on this.

- Q49 **John Lamont:** Good morning. It is very good to see you. Just continuing the theme the Chair has started, in the Scottish Parliament there has been some criticism of the speed at which the Scottish Government reacted to the storm. I wondered if you could detail what discussions and



HOUSE OF COMMONS

dialogue you had with the Scottish Government and when that started. The storm hit on Friday evening. At what point did you have contact with the Scottish Government?

Kwasi Kwarteng: As I recall it—I would have to check the record—we spoke on Tuesday. In the interests of full disclosure, I have to say that we have regular meetings. There happened to be a meeting scheduled with counterparts in Edinburgh and this did come up, certainly, in that discussion.

I know people have said that Governments have reacted slowly, but there is generally a period where you do not really know how serious the impact is. You have to see what the full impact of the storm is before you can make a response. There is a co-ordinating effort. We have this plan, NEWSAC, where engineers were essentially loaned across the UK. You can only do that once you have a full measure of understanding of what the damage has been, which can take a day or two.

Q50 **John Lamont:** On another point, I met some constituents last week at one of my surgeries who are involved in the timber sector. There have been a huge number of trees fallen. There is a bit of an issue in terms of the capacity that industry has to deal with the fallen trees. Are there any measures being put in place by the UK Government to deal with those concerns or ensure that the fallen timber is able to be dealt with? My understanding is that there is only a short window of about six months to deal with the wood.

Kwasi Kwarteng: As I have said earlier, these distribution network operators are profitable businesses. They are successfully run businesses on the whole. They are regulated, of course, by Ofgem. One would expect them to maintain their infrastructure. It is not the business of Government, necessarily, to make sure they have a timber supply. That has not been raised with me by the companies. Of course, I take your point very seriously.

Q51 **John Lamont:** It is not by the companies; it is by the timber sector. It is people who are growing trees, felling them and then supplying housebuilders and others. There is a huge quantity of fallen trees. It is not the power suppliers; it is not the network suppliers. It is the timber industry, which is now struggling to deal with the fallen trees.

Kwasi Kwarteng: That is slightly out of the scope of this conversation. That is something I will be happy to take up with you. I was focused on the actual infrastructure, for which the DNOs, in this case SSE and Scottish Power, are responsible.

Q52 **Andrew Bowie:** Good morning, Secretary of State. I have two quick questions. First, on the mobile communications networks, I know that is not in your direct purview as the Secretary of State for BEIS. One of the huge issues that people found during this event was the fact that they had been moved from the traditional copper wire telephone networks on to BT's digital voice. When broadband communications collapsed as the



HOUSE OF COMMONS

power went out, they were unable to get through. As well as Ofgem looking at the role of the power companies and the reaction to what happened, might Ofcom have a role in looking at the mobile communications network and how individuals who are left without power for days might be able to report that and get through to the emergency services?

Kwasi Kwarteng: You are absolutely right. I talked about the timescale in terms of ascertaining what the damage was, but, once you have done that, you have to communicate that. We had a big problem with some of the DNOs in terms of their ability to process communications. Customers were in a really bad way and found it very difficult to contact their DNOs. This was a northern English problem particularly. The DNOs in Scotland actually did a pretty good job by comparison.

The communication was a big problem in this. This is something that colleagues in DCMS should certainly be looking at.

- Q53 **Andrew Bowie:** Briefly on the deployment of the military, I was lucky enough to bump into a group of marines from 45 Commando in Banchory, who were doing great work on the Friday, going around and knocking on doors et cetera. You have already said that this country is not in the business of deploying troops when they are not requested. Could a more proactive stance have been taken by the UK Government in offering that assistance and making clear that the assistance was there, if it was necessary? Could that have been done earlier in the process?

Kwasi Kwarteng: We can always look at ways in which we could have reacted more quickly. As you have said, in terms of requests for military assistance, there has to be a request. There is no central mind directing the military as and when. Frankly, we rely on local resilience and local information.

Could it have been done a day earlier? I am not sure, but it is always a judgment call in these things. You can always act more quickly and with more expedition. Given where we were in the moment, it was a reasonable response.

- Q54 **Andrew Bowie:** Are you happy with the liaison and the working between the Scottish and UK Governments and with local councils?

Kwasi Kwarteng: From a personal point of view, I have been in BEIS now for two and a half years. In my former role as Energy Minister, I was dealing with offshore wind, carbon capture and a whole range of projects, which I know that people across Scotland have a huge interest in. I had very regular contact with Ministers. I have been around so long that some of them have moved on. I always try to be very engaged with colleagues across the border.

- Q55 **Sally-Ann Hart:** Good morning, Secretary of State. Just looking at the investment into the energy network in Scotland, how much investment is currently made into improving energy infrastructure resilience across



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Scotland?

Kwasi Kwarteng: If you look at where the DNOs have been, you can look at the last five years. That is something like £1.35 billion, as I remember. Those are the two DNOs. Across the next five years, we are expecting £1.73 billion. That is an uplift of 28%. Clearly, the amount that is going in is increasing. I would like to mention the fact that, if you look per head of population, the amount that is invested in Scotland is more than the equivalent amount in England and Wales. The DNOs in Scotland are well capitalised and they are making investments that are going to enhance infrastructure.

Q56 **Sally-Ann Hart:** Why is the investment more in Scotland than for the rest of the UK?

Kwasi Kwarteng: It is largely a consequence of the fact that the companies, the DNOs, are in a very strong position. For a large part of southern England, the infrastructure challenge is less immediate. If you look at the north of England and Scotland, as we saw in the storm, a lot of that infrastructure is exposed to extreme weather events, not just to Storm Arwen but to 40 or 50 mile an hour events. If you look at London, for example, a lot of that infrastructure is underground. The capital investment has been made and there is an ongoing maintenance capex requirement, but the investment requirement is perhaps less intense.

Q57 **Sally-Ann Hart:** We saw with Storm Arwen that it was a very serious storm. The wind direction came from a different direction than normally anticipated, so the complexity of response was probably unanticipated. Is this a sign of things to come? Is investment in infrastructure resilience in Scotland going to be able to keep pace with climate change?

Kwasi Kwarteng: Climate change is real. All of us here accept that. It would take someone fairly foolhardy or someone omniscient to say exactly how that will affect infrastructure over the next 10 years. Clearly, we have to build a more resilient system. That is one of the things that I want to do, which is why it is really important that we learn the lessons from Storm Arwen.

Q58 **Sally-Ann Hart:** When you are saying that you want to build a more resilient system, what are the UK Government doing to ensure there is increased investment in the energy network resilience and that it is delivered? How can you encourage the energy sector itself to reinvest its profits into improved infrastructure resilience?

Kwasi Kwarteng: It is a great question. Immediately, in terms of legislation, we have an Energy Bill coming up. I have been in Parliament long enough to remember the last Energy Bill, which was in 2013. Should the next Energy Bill pass, which I am hopeful it will, before 2024, it will address a lot of those infrastructure investment issues.

As a Government MP, you will have voted for the Nuclear Energy (Financing) Bill. I know people around this table have different views on



HOUSE OF COMMONS

nuclear, but that is a classic example of passing legislation that has facilitated investment in key energy infrastructure, which will give us more security of supply. There are lots of things that we are doing to make sure we have a resilient energy system in terms of not just electricity distribution but generation.

Q59 Sally-Ann Hart: Should Ofgem regularly stress test the services provided by network operators rather than relying on the operators to carry out those tests themselves?

Kwasi Kwarteng: It is a very difficult thing for a regulator to stress test extreme weather. I do not see how Jonathan Brearley's team in Ofgem could have stress tested for Storm Arwen, for example. That was a once in 15 years event. As you say, the wind direction was not foreseen and had a massive impact.

It is difficult to see how Ofgem, with its resources, could stress test for extreme weather events. What Ofgem can and does do is look at the investment in terms of the infrastructure. While it cannot stress test for various weather scenarios, it can and does have a view on the investment in infrastructure. That is a key part of the regulator.

Q60 Mhairi Black: Thank you, Minister, for coming along and giving us your time. I have noticed that both Ofgem and the UK Government are completing reviews into how the network works. Having looked at the terms of reference, I just wanted to clarify whether both of these views will include the actions that Government took.

Kwasi Kwarteng: They should do. Mark, do you want to come in on that?

Chair: Yes, I should have said that we have Mr Prouse with us. He did not have an introduction.

Kwasi Kwarteng: I am really sorry about that. He is the real expert.

Mark Prouse: The Ofgem review will not. It will focus on the regulatory performance of the network operators, which is its remit. The Secretary of State's review will focus on the Government response as well and our interaction with network operators and local responders.

Q61 Mhairi Black: Minister, how prepared are the Government to implement changes, if failures are found to have occurred?

Kwasi Kwarteng: We are really focused on this. One of the things that I had to deal with immediately after I was made Energy Minister was the 9 August blackout. I do not know whether you remember this, but this was a time when a million commuters in the south-east were frozen, because there was an electricity outage.

We worked on a review on this. We held the train operators' feet to the fire; we made sure they had resilience. The outage was on 9 August. We had a review that was published in December. My sense is that it made a



huge impact in terms of resilience. I cannot promise that it will never happen again, but we are much better prepared for any eventuality of that kind. Having seen this with Storm Arwen and having done that with the power outage in 2019, I am confident that after the review we will be in a much better place. No system is fool-proof, but we will be in a much better place to respond to this sort of pressure.

Q62 Mhairi Black: I do not want to pre-empt the review, but is there anything that your instinct tells you that we can do better next time? In your experience, was there anything that you thought—

Kwasi Kwarteng: One of the things I am concerned about is the communication right at the start. There were clearly issues with the communication between customers and the DNOs. It was less of a problem in Scotland, I might add, than in parts of the north of England. There were also issues with the information that the companies—Mark may have a view on this—were directing to us, to officials and Ministers, earlier, as it were.

Mark Prouse: The key for both the Government to respond and for consumers to decide what to do in their personal circumstances is understanding how long the power cut will last. If you think your power will be out for two hours, you probably will not go anywhere. If you think it is going to be out for two weeks, you will probably relocate.

That is a clear area, as the Secretary of State has outlined, where we need to work with the industry to understand how we can manage the uncertainty and give clear, concise communications not just to vulnerable customers but to all customers, to allow them to prepare, and to local responders, to allow them to understand how to prioritise their welfare support accordingly.

Q63 Mhairi Black: To focus particularly on the issue of the significant amount of time that it took to reconnect many homes, are there any reflections that you have at this moment in time on that?

Kwasi Kwarteng: I have my own personal views on this. I am sorry; I was not in Scotland. Minister Hands and I divvied up the responsibilities. From what I could see in Durham, there is a question about generator capacity, reserve power and, when things get knocked out, how quickly we can get generators out. There are questions related to that. It was quite effective, but it was not universally effective.

Mark Prouse: As the Secretary of State said, there was a relatively small tail, but how long they had a power cut for was intolerable. We need to work with the industry and the regulator to reinforce the clear expectations that Ministers, MPs and society have on power restoration.

Kwasi Kwarteng: Just to add on that, in this day and age, in a country like ours, power outages of more than three days are unacceptable, really. We cannot sugar coat that. I apologise to everybody who endured that hardship. We could do a lot better. We have to think in terms of



HOUSE OF COMMONS

reserve generator capacity. That was one of the lessons we learned on 9 August in the south-east outages.

Q64 **Mhairi Black:** On a more technical point, are the Government still on track to publish their interim report on 3 February, with the full report expected at the end of March?

Mark Prouse: Yes, the Secretary of State has not had it yet, but he will be getting it in time. Subject to his approval, we are on track to publish.

Q65 **Mhairi Black:** As a final question, there has been lots of talk about this, and quite rightly so, over the last few years. If we look at this through the prism of climate change for a second, is there any concern that, due to climate change, storms like this might happen more regularly or be more likely to happen? Is that a concern for Government? If so, are there plans for investment?

Kwasi Kwarteng: We are very clear about our position on climate change and our commitment to net zero. There is quite a degree of consensus in the House on that. How we deal with that is a matter of political debate.

In my own experience, we had very drastic floods that affected my constituency in 2013-14. Those were once in 20 year events. We have had storms. As you know, we are discussing one today. We should be prepared for more extreme weather and I have said that. That is why we are bringing in legislation, trying to enhance our security of energy supply and dealing with eventualities as they may arise. We are aware that this is challenging.

Q66 **Mhairi Black:** Would you say that this is a serious consideration of Government? Are you recognising that there is an immediate problem? That storm might have been the worst in 20-odd years, but we might be in a position where five years from now we have had another two, for instance.

Kwasi Kwarteng: Are we in a position of alarm? No, we are not. We have a plan. We have long-term plans in terms of energy resilience, but we are aware that we have to be nimbler about dealing with extreme weather events.

Q67 **Chair:** If I could just expand on that a little, our colleagues on the BEIS Committee also looked at some of the issues and fallout from Storm Arwen. They received evidence from James Richardson from the National Infrastructure Commission. His evidence had some very helpful and pertinent advice. He said, "We will need more investment in resilience, because the pressures on the system from climate change are rising". Do you recognise these comments? Are you responding to these things?

Kwasi Kwarteng: Yes, we are. I have mentioned the Nuclear Energy (Financing) Bill, which we passed without any controversy. The House divided, but these were large majorities with cross-party support. That is



going to secure more baseload. We have upped our ambitions in offshore wind, so we are trying to get a diversity of power generation. We are looking at an Energy Bill that will enhance our resilience and the decarbonisation effort certainly across the power generation sector. All of this is about the net-zero target.

I am not saying that you are suggesting anything different, but we are fully aware of the challenge of climate change.

Q68 Chair: Given that we are looking at Storm Arwen, is this now a little more urgent after what we have experienced?

Kwasi Kwarteng: It has always been urgent. I was very upset to see the storm, but it was a very timely and tough reminder that we need to get on with this. I am very keen to push the decarbonisation programme.

Q69 Andrew Bowie: I have a very brief question, Secretary of State. Given that we are talking about resilience and the need to adapt how we react to the changing climate and the more extreme weather patterns we are seeing, is there a case to be made for a cross-Government multi-departmental review into resilience to deal with the situation? Already today we have talked about your own Department's role in dealing with things to do with energy supply; we have talked about DCMS and the telecommunications network. When inclement weather led to the tragic incident on the railway in my constituency just outside Stonehaven last year, the Department for Transport looked at how it reacted to that.

Should there be a pan-governmental review as to whether we have the resilience required, as a country, to deal with these more regular but more extreme weather events, which have such damaging consequences?

Kwasi Kwarteng: This is a top-line answer to your question, but all I can say is that as a consequence of the net-zero challenge—do not forget that many of you were in the House when we passed that legislation; it was only in the summer of 2019—we have been working much more across Government. One of the first recommendations of the CCC was to have a Cabinet sub-committee to look at net zero. We implemented that. That kicked off at the beginning of 2020, and I have attended all the meetings of that sub-committee. We also have the Climate Action Implementation Committee. Again, that is a cross-Whitehall sub-committee.

Net zero has forced us, as a Government, to think much more across the silos of Whitehall. Of course, when we talk about net zero, we talk about energy resilience.

Q70 Douglas Ross: Good afternoon, Secretary of State and Mr Prouse. Thank you for coming. I just want to pick up on a few points that have already been raised today. The Chair mentioned COBRA, but in your response you spoke about how quickly you got people together and started having discussions. Is there anything that would have been done differently if



HOUSE OF COMMONS

you had assembled COBRA?

Kwasi Kwarteng: No, I do not think so. COBRA has a certain resonance.

Q71 **Douglas Ross:** It does not change the decisions made or the people who can come in and give you advice.

Kwasi Kwarteng: No, I do not think so. Just for the record, I spoke to the Prime Minister on an active basis about this. He took a direct interest. I also spoke to colleagues in the Cabinet Office. We were co-ordinating and discussing things across Government in such a way that it would not have made much difference if we had had COBRA.

Q72 **Douglas Ross:** You and Mr Prouse were talking about information, communication and maybe timescales that were overambitious. That certainly came through in our questioning of the previous panel. We spoke to energy companies and Aberdeenshire Council. At what point did you start to have concerns? Is it just looking back now or was it day two, day four or day six?

Kwasi Kwarteng: No, it was at the time. As I remember—I have a timeline here—the storm was over the weekend, the Friday and the Saturday. On the Monday, which is the immediate day we were back, we were essentially looking at the evidence. On the Tuesday, I spoke to parliamentary colleagues who were in the north of England.

This is exactly how a Parliament should function. After looking at their constituents and seeing their need, MPs spoke directly to me as the Secretary of State responsible. An MP literally came to my parliamentary office and said, “We have a real issue here”. I made a few phone calls and, as a consequence of that, there was a UQ and we put in for a statement. Parliament is at its best when MPs are on the ground, representing their constituents and appealing directly to Ministers. Then Ministers can respond through statements in the House and by convening the DNOs, as I did on the Tuesday evening. We got Ministers visiting and seeing for themselves what the damage was. That was all within a few days. Yes, we could have done things a bit more quickly, but I think the response was reasonable.

Q73 **Douglas Ross:** You have understandably mentioned a lot about energy supplies and electricity being off. Our previous panel also had Scottish Water. Did constituents being without water come under your remit or is that Defra? Did you deal with it? Some of the water was off because they did not have electricity getting to the pumping stations.

Kwasi Kwarteng: It is all integrated, but of course the nature of Government is that different Departments have different responsibilities. Ofwat is clearly a Defra responsibility. Ofgem, in terms of the power generation, is a BEIS responsibility. It is an artificial distinction, like lots of things in life, but in terms of Government that is how it would be structured.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

- Q74 **Douglas Ross:** Finally, you said in response to Sally-Ann Hart that you want to build a more resilient system. What are your thoughts about underground cabling and the cost that would be involved?

Kwasi Kwarteng: It is a huge cost.

- Q75 **Douglas Ross:** Is it an answer, though? Is it not an answer because of the cost?

Kwasi Kwarteng: There is a reason why underground cabling works in very densely populated areas such as London and the south-east. You have 10 million people living in London in a relatively compact area. The capital investment required to have underground cabling makes sense, because you are hitting 10 million homes in quite a confined area.

If in Durham you were to do underground cabling, it would be much more expensive in terms of the amount of money that you needed to spend per household. There is a different calculation in terms of whether that makes sense. It is also about the nature of the terrain. I am not a geologist, but I understand the underground challenges in London are slightly easier than in a much hillier and much more sparsely populated area.

Those calculations are for the distribution network operators. It is not for central government to work out where the capital could best be deployed.

- Q76 **Douglas Ross:** Might those calculations change if, as Mhairi Black was suggesting, these storms become more frequent, and we have more red warnings and more communities without power for a week or more? Would that change the calculation sufficiently?

Kwasi Kwarteng: Yes, clearly it is an important consideration. I am not sure that going from where we are now to full underground cabling is the answer, but there is a way in which you could make the infrastructure more robust. I was told—it is a very vivid metaphor—that the wooden poles that connect the cables were bent like matchsticks. That was what one of the DNOs said to me. Surely there is a way that you can make those more robust without having to go to the full measure of underground cabling across a vast tract of quite hilly landscape.

- Q77 **Deidre Brock:** Good afternoon, Secretary of State and Mr Prouse. I just wanted to pick up on something you just said then in terms of your response in the early days of the crisis. You said, "We could have done things a bit more quickly, but I think the response was reasonable".

COBRA did not meet and clearly it was a major emergency situation. I know the Deputy First Minister of the Scottish Government chaired a meeting of the Scottish Government's resilience room on the impacts of Storm Arwen on the 28th, the 29th and perhaps after that. I am not sure, but I have those two dates at least.

Could you talk a little bit about the sorts of emergency meetings you were holding as a substitute for COBRA? What were the sorts of things that you were pulling together?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Kwasi Kwarteng: I spoke to the Prime Minister on a regular basis about this situation. I spoke to colleagues, MPs, who were affected. Certainly, Mr Bowie came to some of these meetings. This was all on the Monday or the Tuesday. I forget which dates the Monday and the Tuesday were; I think it was the 28th or the 29th. We had a statement, which I made in the House of Commons.

Before the statement, I had spoken directly to the CEOs of the four DNOs affected, the distribution network operators. I asked to call them that evening. I asked what the response was.

Q78 **Deidre Brock:** Do you mean on Friday the 25th?

Kwasi Kwarteng: No, I mean on the Tuesday. The storm was over the weekend. There is a question about whether we should have gone on the Monday or the Tuesday. I have been in Government long enough: you can always say, "In hindsight, we should have done things more quickly". I totally get that. That is why I said I thought it was a reasonable response. We had to find out the information; we had to see what was going on. We spoke to MPs directly and we acted.

Q79 **Deidre Brock:** Looking back, what else should you have done at that time?

Kwasi Kwarteng: As I said, it is a finely balanced call. You know Parliament well. To put in for a statement on a Monday, we would have had to do that on the Monday morning. On the Monday morning, clearly there had been a huge impact, but we did not know what the full extent of the impact was. We did not have the direct information from the DNOs as to the impact on the ground. I did not know how many of the poles had been blown over.

On the Tuesday, we did know those things. That is why we were much more focused. By the end of the week, as I have said, Minister Hands had visited the north-east. I had visited Durham. He had visited Scotland as well. We had a statement. We had the LRFs. We had engaged fully with them. I was speaking to them on a daily basis. We had mobilised the military.

I was just making a general point. Yes, you could say that we could have acted a bit sooner, but, as I said, I think it was a reasonable response given the information we had at the time.

Q80 **Chair:** I just have a couple of questions to end with. The Bellwin scheme seems to be the go-to Government scheme for local authorities to try to ensure that something is done to compensate them for this. Is it still fit for purpose? Bellwin goes back to the 1980s; I know it was reformed in the 1990s. Do we now need to review it and see if it is fit for purpose?

Kwasi Kwarteng: You know the scope of my Department. You will also know, as an experienced parliamentarian, that is probably a question better directed to local government.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q81 **Chair:** I am just interested in your views, given your experience in some of these issues. We have experienced this major storm; you talk about floods in your own constituency. Is it a bit clunky? Is it easy to access?

Kwasi Kwarteng: I think it works pretty well, but I am not going to stray beyond that. I have a very large Department and I am very focused on issues relating to BEIS. I am not going to entrench on local government response and all of that sort of stuff.

Q82 **Chair:** A lot of the discussion and conversation was about troop deployment. You are right: we saw the troops being deployed quite quickly once requested.

Kwasi Kwarteng: Yes, that was the point I was trying to make.

Q83 **Chair:** Aberdeenshire and Durham were the two areas. They were very much welcome. When the boots were on the ground, they made a real difference to some of the effort to make sure it was cleared up. Should the military, the Army particularly, be a bit more responsive? Initially, when this starts to emerge and it seems to be a very difficult and complicated situation that requires a lot of work and attention, should the Army be a bit more proactive in going to local authorities to ask, "Do you need our support with this?"

Kwasi Kwarteng: No, not at all. It is not the job of an army to deal with every civil contingency as it arises. We have a very good system, in which we rely on local knowledge and local responsibility. When the local resilience fora make a request, that request is acceded to. I would not want to live in a country where the military took decisions as to deployment willy-nilly. That does not make any sense. We have to rely on local intelligence. We are a democracy, not a military authority or an authoritarian Government.

Q84 **Chair:** Could Government not be saying to the military, "This is a massive major incident that requires a lot of attention and work; be ready and prepared for it"?

Kwasi Kwarteng: They are prepared. As the Secretary of State, I have seen that they did great work in terms of driving in the petrol forecourts situation, when we had a shortage. The principle of actually responding to requests from local people on the ground who know the conditions locally and the people locally is really important.

To add on your point about military deployment, I must be very clear that the military was not there to replace engineers. The NEWSAC scheme, where we share engineers and infrastructure expertise, worked really well. Where the military was very effective was in helping people locally on the ground to have access to food, to have access to clothing in some instances, to have warm drinks, to keep people warm and that sort of thing. They were not there in lieu of infrastructure engineers.

Chair: Well, we promised to get you out by 12.20 and we have managed



HOUSE OF COMMONS

to do that.

Kwasi Kwarteng: Mark, did you want to add to that?

Chair: Sorry, Mr Prouse, did you have anything to add?

Mark Prouse: No, the Secretary of State is absolutely right. To reiterate his point, the Army cannot just turn up and start doing things. It needs clear instructions and requests for support, exactly as the Secretary of State said, from those on the ground who are best informed. You do not want too many cooks, effectively.

Chair: Thank you, Secretary of State.

Kwasi Kwarteng: Thank you for your questions.

Chair: You are more than welcome to come back any time to the Scottish Affairs Committee.

Kwasi Kwarteng: Let us talk about energy next time. Let us talk about nuclear.

Chair: Thank you.