

Environmental Audit Committee

Oral evidence: Sustainable Development Goals in the UK, HC 596

Tuesday 17 January 2017

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Members present: Mary Creagh (Chair); Peter Aldous; Peter Heaton-Jones; Caroline Lucas; Kerry McCarthy; John Mc Nally; Scott Mann; Joan Ryan.

Questions 146 - 252

Witnesses

James Wharton MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for International Development, Chris Skidmore MP, Minister for the Constitution, Cabinet Office, Gwen Hines, Director, International Relations Division, DFID

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Department for International Development](#)



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Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: James Wharton, Chris Skidmore and Gwen Hines.

Q146 **Chair:** I am delighted to welcome today Gwen Hines, Director for the International Relations Division at DFID, James Wharton, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at DFID, and Chris Skidmore, Parliamentary Secretary at the Cabinet Office. Welcome to you all and good morning. I suppose the first question is why are you here and not the Secretaries of State. James, would you like to start?

James Wharton: I would be delighted to start with that question, thank you, Madam Chairman.

I think it is purely for diary reasons. It is undoubtedly the case that the Secretary of State for DFID in particular has overall responsibility for oversight of the sustainable development goals. That responsibility sits with our Department. The challenge that exists, of course, is that DFID is primarily an outward-looking Department. We have relatively few, if any, domestic levers, so we work closely with the Cabinet Office to ensure that the goals and those objectives are incorporated throughout Government structures—I am sure that is something we will go on to talk about—within the single departmental plans from the Cabinet Office.

Q147 **Chair:** We were explicit as a Committee that we would accommodate this session around the Secretary of State's diary and we were told by DFID officials that the Secretary of State wanted you to lead on the inquiry.

James Wharton: I am delighted to be given the opportunity to do so. I am happy to—

Q148 **Chair:** Does that mean that she is not leading on the sustainable—

James Wharton: The Secretary of State ultimately is responsible for DFID's role in overseeing the sustainable development goals but, as you will appreciate, as is very commonly the case in Government Departments, junior Ministers take on a number of roles and do a lot of the work that goes with responsibilities that ultimately lie with the Secretary of State. That is one of the things that I do and I am very pleased to be here to talk about it to the Committee today.

Q149 **Chair:** We are delighted to have you, but we are very disappointed that your boss and yours, Mr Skidmore, is not here either. When the International Development Committee did its inquiry into the sustainable development goals, both Oliver Letwin and Justine Greening appeared in front of that Committee. Given that the former Prime Minister, David Cameron, was so important to the development and negotiation of these goals at international level, it is extremely disappointing to see that when they come to be applied in our own country it is somehow not a Secretary of State/Cabinet level matter.



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Chris Skidmore: I do not think the Government would agree with that statement. The UK still remains at the forefront of ensuring that the SDG plan remains firmly in place. The PM restated her commitment to SDGs in her speech to the UN, as I am sure the Committee is aware, on 20 September. She also mentioned them in an article she wrote on modern slavery on 30 July. There is a concerted effort and a joined-up effort between the Cabinet Office and DFID where the Cabinet Office plays a supporting role in ensuring that the domestic implementation across Government Departments of the SDGs is taking place, and I hope that my presence here will in some way ensure that you will be happy with the performance of the Cabinet Office in that regard.

Q150 **Chair:** Do you not see any incongruity that an outward-looking Department that has expertise in the delivery of in-country programmes and working with partners externally overseas has responsibility for what is essentially the domestic implementation? Is not the Cabinet Office a better place for that implementation to lie?

Chris Skidmore: I think, as DFID stated in its evidence to the Committee, the Department is well placed to oversee the agenda in its entirety, having played a key role in negotiating the SDGs in the first place. The Secretary of State for DFID has significant credibility on this issue and has impact across Government. DFID is effectively working with other Departments building on successful cross-Government co-ordination that took place in order to ensure that we established the agenda for the 2030 negotiations and the SDGs in the first place. I think it is right and it would look odd if somehow this space was vacated by DFID.

Q151 **Chair:** What about the fact that the SDGs are not mentioned under any DFID Minister's responsibilities on the DFID website, Mr Wharton?

James Wharton: I do not have a particular view as to what is on the DFID website. The reality is that it is the responsibility of the Secretary of State for DFID and I would echo what—

Q152 **Chair:** But it is not listed under her responsibilities.

James Wharton: I would echo what Minister Skidmore has said. DFID carries a huge amount of the implementation of the work we do across the world to help the world reach these goals. The truth is that there is also a domestic agenda, and that has to flow through every Department of Government. That is why DFID is the lead on this. We have a very significant amount of work to do and we contribute significantly to it, but working with the Cabinet Office and, indeed, every Government Department through their single departmental plans is how we are going to implement it domestically in the UK. That seems an entirely sensible way of doing it.

It is the case that this rests with the Secretary of State. I have no strong view or sight of what may or may not be on the DFID website, but I am very happy to take that away and ensure that it accurately reflects the



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responsibilities that the Secretary of State has in so far as it is able to do so. You will appreciate that those responsibilities are very broad. Not everything can be listed. I take away your point that this is something that should be. I did not know it wasn't.

Q153 Chair: Well, broad responsibilities—but they are not there. DFID has no experience of working across the UK Government, does it, internally in terms of getting other Government Departments to deliver what it wants to do?

James Wharton: No, that is not true. It has huge experience of working across other Government Departments. We work with other Government Departments all the time. If you look at any of our in-country programmes—I am going to South Sudan in a few weeks—we are working closely with the Ministry of Defence; we are working closely with the Foreign Office; we are working closely with No. 10; we are working closely with the Treasury. All of these Departments come together to deliver Government policy, to deliver what we want to do to improve the lives for people on the ground.

Q154 Chair: That is totally different, with respect.

James Wharton: It is an example of working across other Government Departments.

Q155 Chair: Fine, but there is a world of difference between the normal business of Government in other countries like South Sudan—I wish you every success with your visit there; I visited in 2012 and things have become considerably worse since then—in terms of UK Government policy overseas compared with UK Government policy here at home. That is the difference, surely, is it not?

James Wharton: I think there is certainly a difference, but that is why the Cabinet Office is so closely involved in the work we are doing to ensure the goals are implemented and written throughout Government policy for all Government Departments. It is why the Minister for the Constitution is here beside me today, I suspect. You are right; DFID is the lead Department. The Secretary of State ultimately has responsibility, but we need to work with other Government Departments, and one of the key tools that we use for that is the power and influence that the Cabinet Office has. I think that is the right way to do it.

Q156 Chair: What is the Prime Minister's commitment to the sustainable development goals?

James Wharton: The Prime Minister has reaffirmed the UK's commitment and her commitment to the sustainable development goals. Minister Skidmore mentioned specifically the speech in which she said it earlier. I do not have the exact reference in my notes, but this remains a commitment of the Government. We are continuing to deliver and ensure that this is part of departmental plans and part of Government policy, both domestically and abroad.



Q157 **Chair:** Mr Skidmore, what is the Prime Minister's speech? Can you just remind us of that?

Chris Skidmore: I am sure you will be aware of the contents of the speech on 20 September, and the officials will be able to provide you with that text. Obviously, mention of SDGs was made twice by the Prime Minister, first in the opening paragraph of her speech to say that we are committed to implementing the SDGs and, secondly, at the end of her speech when she mentioned it in relation to modern slavery. In particular, she was taking a domestic context and expanding out to an international context, which underlines the priorities of ensuring that DFID is well placed to ensure that domestic policies such as ending modern slavery in a domestic context can be applied internationally as well.

Q158 **Chair:** Where was that speech given?

Chris Skidmore: 20 September.

Chair: Where?

Chris Skidmore: The UN in New York.

Chair: Okay, so again to an outward-facing audience at the United Nations General Assembly it has been said. Not once has the Prime Minister mentioned the sustainable development goals in the UK context. Do you think with the—

Chris Skidmore: That is untrue as well, because on 30 July she wrote an article in *The Daily Telegraph* stating that the sustainable development goals were important for delivering on modern slavery.

Q159 **Chair:** So, one article in the seven months that she has been Prime Minister? We have had one domestic article from the Prime Minister on SDGs?

Chris Skidmore: No, and a very important speech to the United Nations in New York.

Q160 **Chair:** Yes, which was widely covered here at home. I am not sure that that was the case, but with the debate surrounding Brexit and the future of our country's relationship with the European Union do you think that the SDGs are going to get the band width from either the Prime Minister or from both of your Secretaries of State?

Chris Skidmore: I think when we look at the issue of Brexit it highlights the actual approach we have taken to implementing the SDGs and the SDPs and why it is so important to have that flexibility. SDPs will be refreshed annually. You have mentioned one SDP already, but there is a refresh taking place at the moment whereby SDPs will be published by the end of April, and we intend to ensure that SDGs are fully referenced in all SDPs in every Department. Individual Departments will then be held accountable for their SDPs through their annual reports and accounts, which will be published in July 2017.



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Q161 **Chair:** We will come on to the SDPs, but my question is: do your Secretaries of State have the headspace to deal with this? That is my question, not will it appear in a—

Chris Skidmore: That is why I think when you look at the programme of mainstreaming it is important that we ensure that the SDGs are placed at the forefront of the policy agendas within the SDPs, which are the most important documents. The Department is referenced against their progress. Mainstreaming that work of the SDGs in the SDPs will ensure that Departments will not push this agenda to one side, which I think is incredibly important. That reflects, then, the UN resolution on SDG section 78, which states, "The Government should build on existing planning instruments as appropriate". It is ensuring that, by building on the existing planning instruments such as the SDPs, the importance of SDGs is put right up there on the agenda.

Q162 **Peter Aldous:** It is good to see you both here this morning. In this policy area, in both what you might call the previous Conservative Government from 2015 to 2016 and the previous Coalition Government from 2010 to 2015, the right hon. Member for West Dorset played a very important role as a sounding board, co-ordinating policy and ensuring that policy was implemented. Who has taken on that role now that he is no longer in Government?

Chris Skidmore: I think it is important when we look at SDGs that this is bigger than one individual personality. We have to reflect a departmental infrastructure and planning process that will ensure that whatever transition process takes place, if one individual stands down from a ministerial role, the sustainable development goals are in themselves sustainable. That ensures that, when we look at the SDP process that we will come on to talk about, the Cabinet Office has a co-ordinating role. It ensures that Treasury is there also because the SDPs have to be closely worked out together with the Minister for the Cabinet Office and also the Chief Secretary of Treasury, but ultimately obviously DFID is taking the lead in ensuring that the sustainable development goals are raised to a profile that matches their importance.

Q163 **Peter Aldous:** So the commitment is still there to absolutely driving through these policies and enforcing them even if there is not one senior member of the Cabinet responsible?

Chris Skidmore: You will see that commitment reflected in the publication of the refreshed SDPs, which across every single Government Department will ensure that each Department is then held accountable for progress in their respective areas.

James Wharton: The Cabinet responsibility lies with the Secretary of State for International Development. It is absolutely the case, as you point out, that the right hon. Member for West Dorset took a particular interest and was key to crafting the way in which this is now being done through the mechanism of the SDPs, which will then be reflected in



annual accounts through the reporting mechanisms that are available, but this remains the responsibility of a Cabinet-level Minister and the Secretary of State in my Department.

Q164 Peter Heaton-Jones: Thank you for being here this morning. We are not obsessed with process on this Committee, but I am going to ask a couple more process questions. I just want to get down to the practical procedural bit as to how exactly this is going to work. We are told that DFID has oversight of ensuring that Government Departments are implementing the SDGs with support from the Cabinet Office, but what does that mean in practice? Let us say a Department comes forward with an SDP that fails sufficiently to take account of what we would hope the Government's view of the SDGs would be. Draw me a route map of who goes back to that Department and hands back their homework and says, "No, this isn't good enough".

Chris Skidmore: On the SDP process, which is currently being undertaken—the refresh that will see the publication of departmental SDPs by the end of April this year—those negotiations are in place. It is almost a triage system by which you have the MCO and the Chief Secretary of the Treasury analysing draft documents and ensuring that SDGs relevant to that Department are met. SDPs are where the Departments set out their priorities. They set out measures of progress and success, and I think it is important that we come on to those measures of progress. They set out also timetables for delivering on manifesto responsibilities and for managing and improving delivery of core business, so clear timetables will be set out in the SDPs of the steps they are taking to deliver SDG commitments. Obviously, a refresh of the SDP process will take place annually, taking into account mitigating circumstances, and that flexibility is important, but it ensures that that framework can be readdressed and reassessed. It will also be reassessed through the annual reports so that Committees like yourselves can take Departments to task for whether they have matched their commitments.

Q165 Peter Heaton-Jones: I just want to be clear, though. Let's use a specific example. A draft single departmental plan arrives on either your desk or Mr Wharton's desk or someone else's desk in DFID or the Cabinet Office. It is clearly lacking. Who picks up the phone and says, "This is not good enough. Go away and do it again"? Does anyone have the authority to do that when you might be talking to the Treasury, for instance, whose plan might be found lacking? Is that really going to work in practice? Mr Wharton, do you want to take that one?

James Wharton: The SDPs ultimately lie with the Cabinet Office working with the Departments with Treasury oversight. The authority comes from the Prime Minister's commitment to the sustainable development goals, the Secretary of State for DFID having Cabinet responsibility for it. I think the scenario you paint is one in which there would be disagreement or conflict about the way in which this was written into an SDP. My experience of these processes is that is unlikely. Most Departments will work together to try to reach an agreed document with agreed



measurable milestones as to what they want to do and what they want to deliver. Ultimately, were that to happen, it would be scaled up to Secretary of State level, and I suppose in theory it could be scaled up to Prime Ministerial level if there was real disagreement that could not be resolved. I would be very surprised if it reached that position over the SDPs and the content of them.

Q166 Peter Heaton-Jones: I do not seek to create conflict where none exists, of course. However, with the greatest respect to the Secretary of State at the Department for International Development, is there sufficient authority vested in that position for that Secretary of State to go back to, say, the Chancellor and say, "Sorry, this isn't good enough. The Treasury is not taking sufficient account of the SDGs"?

Chris Skidmore: The Chief Secretary of the Treasury plays an intimate part in the SDP process. He will be working with the MCO, and that is where you will have Treasury involvement at that particular level.

James Wharton: If we take it out of the Treasury context—a hypothetical example with another Department, say, that is not as involved in that way—yes, I think there is. Again, you have Secretary of State-level oversight and responsibility and that responsibility comes from the Prime Minister, who has restated both domestically and internationally the Government's commitment to the SDGs. The mechanism by which we are going to deliver that includes in no small part this integration into the single departmental plans of what is going to have to be done by each Department. I do not think you could get much greater authority than that which flows from the Prime Minister on issues such as this.

Q167 Peter Heaton-Jones: Okay, so let us now look at the optics of this, at the public perception of this. We have DFID taking oversight with support from the Cabinet Office. Treasury, as everyone knows, is the primary Department of Government that tends to lead most things, and then you say No. 10, of course; the Prime Minister has overall authority. That to any outsider trying to look in and get a clear handle on how this is working looks a bit messy, doesn't it? Why don't we have a very clear statement from the Government, "Here is one person who is responsible for ensuring that the UK does what it is supposed to do in following the SDGs"? That is lacking at the moment, isn't it?

James Wharton: I do not think it is. That is the Secretary of State for the Department for International Development. That is where that responsibility lies. That is a Cabinet-level responsibility. It is the case that much of that work, and these are global development goals, is encapsulated in the work that the Department for International Development does, but as we have already discussed there is, of course, a very important domestic side to this. That is the involvement of the Cabinet Office and, indeed, all Government Departments, all of which will have that commitment in their departmental plans, which govern what they do and govern how what they do is reported in their accounts, which



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are integral in the work that they will do taking forward the Government's agenda. That is why that mechanism is there. When you are dealing with something that is this broad in scale, there are always going to be multiple Departments that need to be involved in not just the day-to-day implementation but the oversight and delivery of it, and I think this is a sensible way to do that.

Q168 Peter Heaton-Jones: Clearly, all Departments have to be involved, because when they are putting together their SDPs the SDGs are going to be integral to those, so we understand that. The frustration is, and the International Development Committee has said this very clearly, that we do not seem to be giving a clear signal that we are absolutely on board with the sustainable development goals, because the process just seems a little bit muddy.

James Wharton: I hear what you say. I do not agree. I do not know what clearer signal there can be than every Government Department writing this into its plans and it being—

Q169 Peter Heaton-Jones: Well, only two have so far, haven't they?

James Wharton: That is a process that is ongoing and, as the Minister said, by April they expect the SDPs to be updated, with Cabinet-level oversight. I think if you appointed another Cabinet-level Minister, then you would simply have the same argument in reverse about whether they could have the international dimension that is so important in Britain's role in delivering on these goals. I am not persuaded by the argument, but I respect your right to make it.

Q170 Chair: I want to follow up on this. You have talked about the Treasury's role and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury's role in signing off these single departmental plans. We did a report into the Treasury with the same Chief Secretary who signed off a budget that got rid of all the progress that had been made towards low-carbon homes, which cancelled the carbon capture and storage programme, which is vital to the low-carbon energy future of this country, and also changed the policies on waste. We have looked into the Treasury's approach to sustainability and reported back on that. In any conflict between the Chief Secretary's duty to save money and to manage the Government finances properly, how do you think your Secretary of State, Mr Wharton, who is responsible for the delivery of this, will resolve that conflict? Do you think that the DFID Secretary of State will be able to overrule the Chief Secretary to the Treasury in the publication around those single departmental plans?

James Wharton: I do not think it is a matter of one Secretary of State overruling another, and I would take issue with some of the statements with which you opened that question. For example, the zero-carbon homes policy where the Government made very significant strides on reducing the carbon footprint of new-build homes, and what was then proposed to take it to the next level to deliver zero-carbon included a large offsetting scheme that was effectively a tax on new homes that



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would be used to offset carbon because it was no longer cost-efficient to deliver zero-carbon homes. I had some involvement with that in my previous role as a DCLG Minister, so I think we have to be careful in how we characterise decisions that Government take.

The reality is that there will be agreement in the departmental plans about what Departments need to achieve and measurable outcomes that they can agree to deliver on the sustainable development goals, but ultimately Departments will then make the individual policy decisions in the way that they already do. The idea is not that this gives the Secretary of State for the Department for International Development a roving brief by which individual policy decisions are overruled on a cross-departmental basis. The idea is that every Department works together to deliver the goals, recognising that they will still have to make individual policy decisions for a range of reasons. It engrains in the approach that the Department takes the need to reach the goals and for the Department to make its contribution to it. That is not the same as saying that every single policy decision will be determined simply by looking at this one criterion. There will be a range of criteria, as every decision in Government involves, which Secretaries of State will have to take into account.

No, I do not expect to see the Secretary of State for DFID overruling individual policy decisions, but I would expect to see Departments giving due attention to the sustainable development goals in the policy decisions they make. That should be reported on in their annual reports and they should be held to account for that through their single departmental plans.

Q171 **Chair:** If these Departments are to refresh, in your words, their single departmental plans they need to know what the overarching strategy is. When will your Secretary of State publish the national implementation strategy?

James Wharton: I do not have a date for that to be done, and I think as—

Q172 **Chair:** How can the Departments know what the Government policy is if that national implementation strategy has not been written and sent to them?

James Wharton: Let us be clear. A commitment to the sustainable development goals is ingrained in the work done by every Department in line with the recommendations the UN itself has made as to how this should be done. It is going to be mainstreamed throughout what Government do. That is not the same as to say you need one single centralised plan that will dictate to Government Departments what they should do in every area that touches on these goals, which are so broad and wide-reaching. I think that the approach—

Q173 **Chair:** Your Secretary of State has said that she will publish a national



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implementation plan setting out a clear narrative to the goals, both internationally and domestically—key principles, flagship initiatives and expected results. Surely the Departments need to be in possession of that national implementation plan before they start setting out how they are going to meet it.

James Wharton: I think that will be a two-way process. You have to do it in conjunction with the Departments. It is not for one Secretary of State to publish a plan that then every Department has to fall in line with. It is something that needs to evolve with the Departments through discussions with them about the contributions they are making, how that will work and what more they can do, to give a clear picture overall of the work the Government are doing in this area.

Gwen Hines: If I might come in on this one, it may be helpful to explain that the original SDPs were written while the international negotiations on the indicators relating to the goals and targets were still being held. That is why with the original SDPs there was a deliberate decision to wait for that process to play through. Obviously, the UK's Chief Statistician was chairing that process at the time and we played a really key role in that.

Now we have made a lot of progress on the international indicators, which is why it is very timely to look with the SDP refresh at how we integrate the global goals. In terms of the commitment to an action plan and a report on what the Government are doing both domestically and internationally, that is near finalisation.

Q174 **Chair:** When you say an "action plan" is that the implementation plan? I just want to be clear that we are talking about the same thing.

Gwen Hines: We are. What we promised was a report setting out what the Government are doing domestically and internationally in, as you say, a number of flagship initiatives. That process, you will appreciate, with the change in the Cabinet, took slightly longer than when it was originally promised by Minister Letwin, but it is near finalisation. As Minister Wharton said, we have worked very hard to make sure that is a cross-Government process and to have a lot of detailed negotiations. Notwithstanding the process at the Cabinet and ministerial level, there is also a director-level process across Whitehall; we regularly work together on issues like this, and have put that report together and we hope to be able to publish it soon, but I am not at this stage able to commit to a date because we are still finalising the details.

Q175 **Chair:** By Easter?

Gwen Hines: As I say, we are in the process of finalising it across Whitehall and we will, of course, consult with the Secretary of State in terms of the exact publication, but I can say soon.

Chair: Okay. Thank you. That is helpful.

Q176 **Kerry McCarthy:** I am yet to be reassured that the Government really



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grasp that the sustainable development goals are very different to the MDGs in that they are something that we need to be focusing on in this country. They are not primarily something that we are looking to support other countries in achieving, so I want to focus on the role of the Cabinet Office in this. You are Minister for the Constitution?

Chris Skidmore: That is correct.

Q177 **Kerry McCarthy:** But are the SDGs within your specific remit? I think you have been in post since last July, so what meetings have you had on this?

Chris Skidmore: July, that is correct. I provide support for the Minister for the Cabinet Office. The Minister for the Cabinet Office has been in extensive negotiations on the SDP process for this refresh. I have said the SDPs will be published at the end of April.

Q178 **Kerry McCarthy:** Yes, but the SDPs are much broader than the SDGs. What meetings have you had specifically on the sustainable development goals?

Chris Skidmore: What meetings have I had specifically as a Minister?

Kerry McCarthy: Yes. What meetings have you been involved in on the sustainable development goals?

Chris Skidmore: Apart from the meetings with my officials in preparation for this Committee, I have had no meetings, but I am here deputising for the MCO who agreed to come to the Committee on 6 December. There is documentation I think your officials have on that. I am here supporting DFID. DFID has provided Minister Wharton. It is right that I attend as Minister Wharton's equivalent.

Q179 **Kerry McCarthy:** Basically, you drew the short straw in terms of deputising? It is not specifically your role?

Chris Skidmore: The Cabinet Office provides a supporting function in order to ensure that the SDGs are implemented across Government. We take that very seriously. The MCO obviously replied to the Committee and you have that documentation—

Q180 **Chair:** MCO?

Chris Skidmore: MCO, Minister for the Cabinet Office, the right hon. Ben Gummer.

Q181 **Chair:** Okay, so he had agreed to come on 6 December?

Chris Skidmore: That is correct.

Chair: We were keen to accommodate the Secretary of State's diary, yes.



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Chris Skidmore: That is correct. I am not aware of those negotiations. I hope that my attendance today is sufficient, but obviously I have been attending in place of Mr Gummer.

Q182 **Kerry McCarthy:** Do you know what meetings he has had specifically on the sustainable development goals?

Chris Skidmore: I do not have that information to hand.

Q183 **Kerry McCarthy:** We have asked the Government about this before and they have frequently referred back to the manifesto, saying the Government's plans to meet the sustainable development goals can all be found in the manifesto, but the manifesto was published in April 2015. The goals were not agreed until later that year, in September. Do you think that is adequate as guidance for the Government's intentions?

Chris Skidmore: I think the manifesto provided an important platform and foundation for us to go into those negotiations to ensure that we led as the UK and that ambitious targets were set in the goal. Each country has to approach and implement its goals according to their own circumstances and priorities, but we believe that taking the manifesto and ensuring that it is reflected in the SDPs is the right way forward. Obviously, the manifesto commitments are broad but none the less they reflect on balance the 17 SDGs. Throughout the manifesto there are 544 manifesto commitments, and it is up to those individual Departments to take their manifesto commitments and to implement them, but we are very confident that all the recommendations of the SDGs are reflected in the manifesto and in the work of the Government going forward.

At the same time the manifesto is a five-year process across Government, but we are committed to ensuring that we have a wider forward view, which is why we have produced a 25-year environmental plan. We have signed up to waste reduction targets, the Courtauld Commitment—

Q184 **Kerry McCarthy:** Well, it has not appeared yet, has it?

Chris Skidmore: No, but we are producing it, the Courtauld Commitment of 2025. It is important that we look beyond the manifesto and we are doing so at the same time.

Q185 **Kerry McCarthy:** My concern is that it would be very easy for the Government to cherry pick things that they are already doing rather than use the sustainable development goals to drive progress in particular areas. We had a private session with representatives of the Colombian ambassador and someone who is very much involved in the development of the goals there, and they are doing phenomenal work and have a dedicated Minister. They were able to come up with concrete examples of policies that they have now introduced because of the sustainable development goals rather than things that they were going to do anyway. I am particularly asking about domestic policy. Can you give an indication of where the sustainable development goals have changed Government



policy?

Chris Skidmore: You are right that working closely with our international partners is the right thing to do—whether through the high-level political forum or the Agenda 2030 is a big issue on the G20 Development Working Group. When we look at the goals and their implementation across domestic policy, I cannot underline enough that it is obviously the responsibility of individual Departments to ensure through the SDP process that they are taking up the commitments that are laid out in the manifesto. The coverage of the goals is obviously not equal. When we look at it from a domestic perspective, some SDGs have greater coverage and impact than others in a UK context, in particular goals 1, 3, 4, 8 and 9. I am quite happy to send you documentation that shows where we feel that the SDGs reflect progress across our manifesto and are synonymous with that.

Gwen Hines: If I might add some specific examples, the approach when I sit in the UN meetings—and I also sit in the G20 where we are making a deliberate effort to focus on the Agenda 2030 and to share lessons of different countries' approaches to this—the general principle most people are taking is to mainstream these across their portfolio and across their Government work but also to then take targeted action on specific goals. One example of that is gender. The UK was very instrumental in setting up the UN Secretary-General's high-level panel on women's economic empowerment. It is the first such panel doing that. Justine Greening is on that panel, and I have the privilege to be her deputy. That was a specific call within the UN to say, "Here is a new issue that is in the SDGs. It was not in the MDGs. What do we need to do internationally? How do we boil down that huge agenda to think about what do we need to do differently?"

Q186 **Kerry McCarthy:** What I am asking about is what we are doing domestically. Can you give a particular example?

Gwen Hines: The report that was launched in September was a global agenda. Justine Greening has taken this on particularly in terms of the domestic side as the Minister for Women and Equalities as well as Secretary of State for Education and last week she hosted a meeting with a series of CEOs in the UK to look at how they were doing this themselves and how the Government could help them to do that within their work in the UK as well as internationally. That is an example of the kind of approach that others are talking about; best practice in the approach to these SDGs. That is one example and one issue.

Just to give you a context, remember that these are still relatively new and some require a whole new, different approach so work will be undertaken internationally and within the UK Government to understand where best we can add value. I think trying to do everything at the same time would be a mistake, but that is one issue on which the UK has shown real leadership, setting up the panel, and Justine Greening as



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Secretary of State is now taking that to look domestically at what can be done.

Q187 Chair: Can I ask you about hunger, Ministers? Neither your manifesto nor the single departmental plan so far mention the words “hunger”, “malnutrition”, “undernourished” or “malnourished”. We had reports last week that three elderly people a week are dying of hunger and thirst in UK hospitals. How do you intend to use these goals to tackle the problem of 1.3 million elderly people being undernourished in this country?

Chris Skidmore: So now we are having a reverse of the cherry-picking process that we were talking about just now. You are talking about goal 2, is that right, with the SDGs?

Chair: Ending hunger in all its forms. The people most likely to be hungry in this country are people aged over 75, the elderly. Yes, I am reverse cherry picking. I would like you to tell us what you are doing as a Minister to tackle hunger in this country in all its forms.

Chris Skidmore: Well, as a Minister for the Cabinet Office and Minister for the Constitution we take a cross-governmental approach to ensuring Departments are determined to implement their policies through their SDPs, that we have consistency and that the SDGs are embedded in the relevant Department. It is up to the relevant Department that covers the issues and it is more than one Department, of course, but we are looking at these issues.

When it comes to looking at the goal, which is to end hunger, achieve food security, improve nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture, obviously that is a wide goal. I am sure DFID can set out where we are in terms of some of the policy specifics. We have committed to publishing a food and farming plan when it comes to sustainable agriculture. We are also looking at the issue of childhood obesity. When it comes to elderly people, obviously there is a key issue of ensuring that we have a sustainable state pension and that we give greater security, choice and dignity in retirement for elderly people. You mentioned those over 65. The state pension is larger than it has ever been and we are determined to ensure that we protect the finances of elderly people.

Q188 Chair: But what about the services for older people, the end of Meals on Wheels in this country essentially, for those elderly people who may have money but may not have the ability to cook a meal in their own home or to feed themselves during long spells or after hospital stays? What are you doing for them?

Chris Skidmore: I think we are coming on to the analysis and reporting and the metrics here, which I hope we will look at later in the discussion. I think it is clear that you are talking about the principle that the UK was so keen to ensure was embedded into the SDGs—the principle of “leave no one behind” that we championed during the negotiations. This Government will leave nobody behind.



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Q189 **Chair:** On that particular issue, this has been identified by other witnesses—

Chris Skidmore: I am not going to get into a debate about individual Departments' responsibilities; it is up to individual Departments. You are welcome to bring the relevant Departments to the Committee and look at their policies. I am here to talk about the implementation of a framework by which Government as a whole can ensure that the SDGs are established, and that is the supporting role that the Cabinet Office plays.

Q190 **Chair:** Your Department cannot just be about the process. Surely you have to be about the outcomes.

Chris Skidmore: These outcomes are obviously delivered through the SDPs, through the annual reports, and I hope that you will look closely at the annual reports of the relevant Departments that are talking about hunger. You as a Select Committee are welcome to take those Departments to task by inviting them to give evidence. There is also the issue of looking at the ONS as an individual statistical body and what evidence it reports back to the UN when looking at those global indicators, and that is obviously for other—

Q191 **Chair:** It has given evidence to us about the fact that we do not have enough action on this indicator. That is why we are asking you about this question.

Chris Skidmore: In terms of the indicators, obviously the ONS is going out to consultation shortly on new ways of creating those indicators in line with section 75 of the UN resolution. It is important that those indicators are created and it is also up to the ONS as an independent statistical body to ensure that it develops the best indicators possible. DFID has set out in detail in its evidence to the Committee what ONS is looking at doing in terms of establishing those statistical tools.

Q192 **Chair:** In the evidence to the Committee, the Government highlighted a number of specific achievements, including the fact that the UK population is connected to the public water and sewerage services, which is a great achievement but I would not say is an achievement of any Government in this or the last century. That has perhaps more to do with the great Victorian engineers like Bazalgette. It is great to highlight what is already embedded and assumed to be the case, but surely your job as Ministers is not to congratulate yourselves on the fact that in 1850 sewers were built in our great towns and cities but to look at the real problems like how to bring an end to violence in all its forms and hunger, particularly in that "invisibilised" elderly population, and to really shine a light on them. We are looking to both of your Departments to shine that light, but I am not getting a sensation that there is a grip here.

James Wharton: First, it is important to recognise the role that both DFID and the Cabinet Office have in respect of this, which is not to control what individual Departments do and to try to control the policy decisions made by Ministers in those Departments. What we want to



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ensure in this respect is that the framework is there and that appropriate attention is given to the sustainable development goals and for Departments to recognise their responsibilities to work towards the delivery of them.

The global nature of these goals means that the UK has already made significant achievements on many of them—quite rightly, for historical reasons—but that is none the less relevant in setting the context. It does not mean that the UK cannot go further and ought to look at tailoring its policy to ensure that where possible it does go further to meet some of these goals, and that is what we are incorporating in those departmental plans. That is what the Secretary of State will want to see delivered on by other Government Departments, but that is different to trying to say you have to implement this individual policy or solution.

It is one thing to recognise that there are challenges and whether the UK needs to go further if it is to meet these goals. That is, though, quite different from saying that an individual challenge should be met in this specific way. What we are doing is mainstreaming through Government's work the understanding that this needs to be done and that accountability for what actions are taken should be through the single departmental plans and the reporting processes that go with them.

Q193 Kerry McCarthy: Can I just come back to this? I think there is a real danger of complacency and just ticking a box and feeling that because we are better than developing countries on some of these indicators, we have met that target and we do not need to do any more work. If you look at the goals, you cannot say there is no poverty in the UK. You cannot say there is zero hunger. You cannot say there is overall good health and wellbeing, because there is so much more that could be done on public health. You have 10% of the NHS budget being spent on diabetes, for example. I think our frustration as a Committee is that the SDGs have raised the bar in terms of Government ambition, and we are not hearing from you that they are acting as a driver across Government in domestic policy to go further and do better.

Chris Skidmore: We are embedding them in the SDPs, and that is the highest form by which we could ensure that there is consistency across Government; they are taken incredibly seriously by Departments.

Q194 Kerry McCarthy: But you are embedding them in a very vague sense.

Chris Skidmore: By embedding them in the crucial and critical delivery mechanism of every single Government Department, we are placing SDGs at the core of those Departments' business and then, importantly, the process that exists already will ensure that they are held to account through the annual reports. I do not think I could be more clear that it is so critical that we use the existing infrastructure rather than establish some secondary tier of Government that is going to result in a proliferation of Government structures and reporting mechanisms. We must do this through the existing process so that the Departments know



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that through their SDPs, which they hold up as the Holy Grail by which they have to deliver Government policy, they are able to show progress on the SDGs.

Q195 **Kerry McCarthy:** Okay. All we are hearing is process rather than policy, but perhaps we will come back to that when you are a bit further down the line.

Chris Skidmore: The issue of progress relates to the reporting mechanisms, which we might be able to get on to when we look at the ONS, because then we will be able to show a staged progress.

Chair: This thread is prompted by some of the comments made by various academics and the ONS when they came to us.

Q196 **Scott Mann:** Good morning. First, on the data sets and the analysis against the data sets, the ONS has told us that it has three quarters of the information it needs. Could I ask each of you what your Government Departments are doing to ensure that we get the other 25% of the information so that we have some solid data? How is that going to be reviewed against the voluntary national review?

James Wharton: The ONS has received, I think, just under £6 million in the 2015 spending review, which goes towards its work in order to be able to accurately monitor this area. You will appreciate that I am not a statistician, but some of this is pretty complex stuff and there is a need to identify the sorts of measures that are both appropriate and accurate and will give it the information it needs.

I think it was due to consult on the relevance of the global indicators to the UK, which will inform that process, in November last year, but that was postponed and will take place this year to allow for greater engagement with stakeholders. I think the ONS is taking the right approach in ensuring proper, full engagement, in order to measure it and find out what indicators it needs in order to understand which of the global indicators are best applied to the UK and how they should be applied and measured. It has not concluded that consultation, so I think at this stage it is premature to say that we need specifically to measure additional things for the ONS. Of course, if it comes back to us at the end of this process and say that we need to look at certain areas that the Government are not currently looking at, then that is something that the Government would have to do.

Chris Skidmore: Obviously, ONS as an independent statistical body is planning on consulting on the relevant global indicators. You mentioned where we are with three quarters; it is that sort of hard-to-reach data that we need to be focusing on. I know that DFID has been working with the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data, which was launched over a year ago to meet the challenge of measuring the SDGs—that quarter that you talk about. DFID has also provided \$2 million to the Trust Fund for Statistical Capacity Building, but we need to ensure that we have provided ONS with the money it requested—the £5.8 million—



as part of the SR15 process specifically for the development, monitoring and reporting indicators for the SDGs on behalf of the UK. We welcome the fact that the ONS has stated specifically that the delay for this consultation is because it wants to consider fully all material it has received from stakeholders. Obviously, there is a great deal of interest in ensuring that all relevant stakeholders are part of this process, that we have provided the ONS with the budget it has requested as part of the SR15 process, that its statistical independence is respected, and that it is given the opportunity to develop those tools.

Gwen Hines: As others have said, we are doing a huge amount of work to support both the ONS and internationally to build better data. Obviously, one of the key principles agreed as part of the Agenda 2030, was this call for a data revolution. We are trying to do that both with traditional statistical methodologies but also through new mechanisms, including digital. DFID has a huge workstream on that, looking at the global level, but of course that will help all countries. We are also pushing very much on transparency because one of the challenges at the moment is that there are a lot of individual data sets, which, if we bring them together, will give us a much bigger picture.

You mentioned the national voluntary review. This is one of the decisions we are still discussing across Government. When is it right for the UK to put itself forward? We had the first high-level political forum in 2016 and we will obviously have one in July each year. We did not want to rush in to be the first, frankly, because we felt it was important to get a balance of developed and developing countries presenting. I sat and listened to a lot of those—a huge variety, frankly, in terms of what people are presenting—and that process will evolve over time. We are now looking at whether we should do it in 2018 or 2019.

Again, what we want to understand is which other countries are putting themselves forward, so that we are not dominating that discussion. Because when I talk to African Ministers, when I talk to Ministers in Asia, they are equally keen to be showcasing what they are doing as to be learning from best practice. As I say, within the G20 I sit in the development working group, which has a specific workstream on the global goals. We have agreed with that G20 group to look at how different countries are progressing the global goals, how people are tracking, and how we can learn with each other. We are making sure that we are not dominating that global discussion and we, as the UK, will come forward when we can add value.

Each year has a theme. In 2017 it is about eradicating poverty, promoting prosperity. Last year was “leave no one behind”. We still had a very visible UK presence. We talked about the Government’s new engagement strategy on “leave no one behind”, so we are very visible in those processes, but when we choose to put ourselves on the platform to do the national voluntary review is a decision we will take.



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Q197 Scott Mann: Is data sharing across Government a possibility for the 25% that we do not currently have statistical information on, to allow us to work out how we can deliver for that 25% against the 17 goals we have set?

Gwen Hines: That is exactly the job that the ONS is working on, and every Government Department has their own statisticians who work with the ONS. We have a chief statistician within DFID, who is working very closely with ONS to understand where those gaps are and the best way to track them. That process is in hand at the moment.

Q198 Chair: How will the data that Government have collected be measured alongside the business community and what they are doing?

Gwen Hines: The ONS looks at a whole range of data, obviously, both the private sector within Government and also civil society, and they are looking across the piece. They will have an input into the global monitoring, which is being led by the UN, and they will be feeding data back to the UN on how the UK is doing in terms of the global indicators. Then, as I said before, we are trying to take an approach of mainstreaming across the piece but also making targeted interventions where we have particular priorities and particular concerns, and that might lead us to new approaches to data. The ONS is fully capable of looking across the piece of all the different data sets available. We have, of course, a good partnership with business. They released the Commission on Sustainable Development data yesterday and that is something that DFID supported from the beginning, to make sure business also engages on the global goals.

Q199 Joan Ryan: Good morning. It sounds like everybody on the panel is aware of the importance of the role of the ONS and of the need for data collection to know where we start from, where the gaps are, and whether we are making any progress or not. Would that be true? Does everybody agree that is the role? Okay. So, why is it, then, that the ONS asked for £8.1 million to carry out its role and it was awarded £5.8 million, which is quite a bit below £6 million, I think, if you are working in a Department? That is £2.3 million less than it asked for.

Chris Skidmore: The figures you refer to: you have the £5.8 million that the Treasury matched, the ONS bid, the bid that takes place before the spending review, for which only Government money can be committed across that process to 2019-20 for £5.8 million. The Treasury matched that bid across the spending review. The £8.1 million figure extended beyond the SR, but the Government stand ready to assist the ONS should it request any further support. I cannot stress enough that allocations of money are matters for the Chancellor and Chief Secretary and individual settlement negotiations. Those details rest with the Treasury and the ONS, but I think that would help explain the discrepancy between the two figures. The £5.8 million figure was provided by the ONS for the spending review and was matched by the Treasury, and I think it is very important to make that distinction.



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Q200 **Joan Ryan:** We are still in the situation, then, that the Government decided the ONS could do the job with less money than originally asked for.

Chris Skidmore: No. I am not going to get into the details of the spending negotiations, that is between the Treasury and the ONS, but I understand that—

Joan Ryan: I think that is reasonably general as a question rather than detailed.

Chris Skidmore: The £5.8 million figure was what the ONS requested as part of the spending review. The only thing to be decided in Government is obviously across the spending review period and, therefore, across the spending review period to 2019-20 the £5.8 million that was requested by the ONS was granted by the Treasury. Therefore, that explains why we have matched what the ONS asked for across the spending review period.

Q201 **Joan Ryan:** I do not think that covers the point. I think the ONS received less money than it asked for.

Chris Skidmore: No. The ONS asked for £5.8 million over—

Q202 **Joan Ryan:** Are you saying that if the ONS feels it needs greater resource that you stand ready to—

Chris Skidmore: The Government are committed. There are negotiations between the Treasury and the ONS when it comes to looking at the spending review period across which Government spending is decided. That is a four-year period that ends in 2019-20. That is the £5.8 million that was agreed and signed off and it was a matched bid by the Treasury with the ONS. The Government stand ready to assist the ONS should it require further support, but obviously we respect its independence. The £8.1 million figure extended beyond the SR and was not possible to agree. You will have to ask the Treasury and the ONS for further details across those spending negotiations.

Q203 **Joan Ryan:** Is the ONS aware, then, that if it needs greater resource, the Government stands ready to meet that need?

Chris Skidmore: I can't comment, obviously, on the spending negotiations between the Treasury and the ONS, as I stated, but the £5.8 million figure was agreed and it was a matched bid by the Treasury with the ONS. I cannot be clearer on that point; the ONS received the money it requested in the spending review period.

Q204 **Chair:** It said it didn't, did it? I have just done a little bit of maths. If you asked for £8.1 million over five years, that works out at £1.6 million a year. I am happy to be corrected by anybody, so do feel free to jump in. For five years, it works out at £1.6 million a year. The allocation that it got, which was £5.8 million, was £1.2 million a year, so it received £400,000 less a year than it requested.



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Chris Skidmore: My point, which has not been taken on board, Chair, is that the £5.8 million was requested by the ONS over the spending review period and that £5.8 million over the spending review period was matched by the Treasury.

Q205 **Chair:** We heard evidence from the ONS that it bid for £8.1 million—

Chris Skidmore: Beyond the spending review period.

Chair: —for one year beyond the spending review period, to 2021, so it bid for a five-year period. You said it was allocated money for a four-year period. The calculation that I have just done shows that the ONS was bidding for £1.6 million a year and the settlement it received was £1.2 million a year.

Chris Skidmore: It was an agreed funding settlement between the ONS and the Treasury, and it was a matched bid as far as I am aware. A matched bid means that the Treasury—

Q206 **Chair:** Can you explain what a matched bid is?

Chris Skidmore: I am not part of those negotiations. I think the Committee may need to go back to the ONS to ask for further details of its spending settlement negotiations. I was not in the room for that, but I have been informed that the £5.8 million was accepted by the ONS and was a bid that was seen as reasonable by the ONS across the spending review period.

Q207 **Chair:** Are you saying that the ONS bid for £5.8 million? Is that what you are saying?

Chris Skidmore: I am sure the DFID officials can step in here to provide further details, but when it comes to looking at the spending negotiations, the £5.8 million, as I have been informed, is something that was agreed by the Treasury and the ONS. The allocation of moneys is a matter for the Chancellor and Chief Secretary. I have not been part of the negotiations, but in terms of where the Government stand, it is ready to assist ONS should it request further support.

Q208 **Chair:** Okay. Can you explain what a matched bid means?

Chris Skidmore: There was agreement between the ONS and the Treasury that £5.8 million would be acceptable across a four-year period. I understand that the Treasury matched the ONS bid to provide £5.8 million. That is the only information I can provide to this Committee.

Q209 **Chair:** The information that we have as a Committee is that the ONS bid for substantially more per year and had to settle—

Chris Skidmore: Not within the spending review period.

Q210 **Chair:** Yes, for a five-year period and then it received a settlement for a four-year period, but why has it been given £400,000 a year less?



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Chris Skidmore: That is a matter for the Treasury and the ONS and I am sure that the Committee will wish to, in the fullness of your report—

Q211 **Joan Ryan:** That is not very encouraging in terms of cross-departmental thinking, planning, knowledge. If there is a question that you cannot answer—

Chris Skidmore: No, it is simply that I—

Joan Ryan: I have not finished. If there is a question that you cannot answer, you immediately kick the ball back to the Department. It does not speak well of overview, cross-departmental—

Chris Skidmore: But you do understand that when you have a spending review process—

Joan Ryan: I do understand, yes, but I understand the point—

Chris Skidmore: —that the Treasury and the Chief Secretary are those around the table with the ONS. It is not the Cabinet Office responsibility to be part of the spending review process.

Q212 **Joan Ryan:** But it is not agreed, is it? The ONS asked for a certain amount of money and it was allocated less than it asked for. Therefore, it has to accept that. It is not necessarily agreed, as you put it. My question to you is: do you think it asked for more than it needed?

Chris Skidmore: As far as I am aware, or as far as I have been informed, the ONS received the £5.8 million across the spending review period; the Treasury matched the money that was asked for by the ONS across the spending review period.

Q213 **Joan Ryan:** We have just explained how, given the evidence we have had from ONS, it received less than it asked for—

Chris Skidmore: Outside of the spending review period.

Joan Ryan: —in the spending review period, when you work out the maths. So, do you think the ONS asked for more than it needed, and why would it do that?

Gwen Hines: If I might step in on this, obviously I am not party to those negotiations either and, as the Minister said, you would really need to check with ONS and Treasury. But in terms of doing the spending review bids and the process, which I have seen in my many years in the civil service, it is normal for any Department to submit a set of scenarios in its bids for the things they would do with different levels of resources, and then there is a negotiation with Treasury. Of course, there are all sorts of things that we could all do within our Departments, but there is also a fiscal constraint that we have to match, so it is quite normal for Departments to have that negotiation with Treasury. Obviously, ONS has a huge amount of things, not just the SDGs, so it will as a department have to prioritise and think about what it does with the resources it has. That is a very normal part of the Government spending process.



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Q214 Joan Ryan: The delay that we are experiencing in the consultation and the national indicators set, which is clearly quite serious given that we are not making the progress that others are making—we are not making the progress that some developing countries are making on the SDGs—this delay of a year, is quite a serious issue. Do you think the underfunding of the ONS work in this area, the not meeting the bid, which was quite specific—it outlined the areas where the money would be spent—do you think that delay is due to that underfunding? Do you think it indicates a lack of commitment from Government to put cash on the words?

Chris Skidmore: Not at all. I am sure you must have read the introduction to the ONS's consultation on this and it says, "We wanted to consider fully all material received from stakeholders". There was no suggestion from the ONS that there is any financial reason why the delay was to take place. On the contrary, the delay is taking place to ensure that we allow for the sustainable development goals to be aligned with other UK indicators of progress. I think it is right that if there is a pause, it has been requested by the ONS. It is not an enforced delay. If it is enforced, it is because of the attention that the whole process has received, and that is welcome.

Q215 Joan Ryan: It also makes it clear, doesn't it, that the amount of data that needs to be collected means it has to rely on unofficial as well as official sources, and that is going to be important to support the measurement of progress towards the goals, and that unofficial sources require an awful lot more work to ensure that those sources provide the quality of data that is required to ensure that data is reliable as a guide to your progress? That in itself is more costly in resource terms than relying on official data.

James Wharton: For clarity and to ensure the record is correct, my understanding is that the consultation was delayed from the very end of November—29 November—to the spring of this year. It is not a year's delay. I think it is important to be clear.

I am not a statistician, but the narrative that you set out is logical to me; that collecting data from unofficial sources may require additional resource, additional checking, to ensure that it is able to do what the ONS would want to do with it and stand up to the scrutiny that you would expect. Of course, it is not going to come as a complete surprise to the ONS that some data will come from unofficial sources. In fact, it is a good sign that it is drawing its net sufficiently widely to be able to paint an accurate picture of what is ultimately happening. That is entirely to be expected and would have been accounted for in the funding settlement agreed with Treasury.

Q216 Joan Ryan: You do realise that receiving in the end only £5.8 million means it also has to support its work on natural capital out of that sum of money?



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Chris Skidmore: I don't think that is the case. I think if you went back to the ONS you would see that the work is being taken forward as part of other budgets as part of the SR15 process. The £5.8 million is specifically for the development, monitoring and reporting indicators for the UN SDGs on behalf of the UK. You may want clarity from the ONS on that point. The ONS work on natural capital estimates is being taken forward as part of other budgets, I think. If you ask the ONS for clarification on that, I think you will find that.

Q217 **Chair:** We did get clarity from the ONS.

Joan Ryan: Yes, we did ask them.

Chair: In a letter to us it said: "No money was received specifically for the development of natural capital estimates but this work was being taken forward as part of other budgets agreed as part of the SR15 process."

Chris Skidmore: Yes. It is being taken forward as part of other budgets, yes, so that answers the point.

Q218 **Chair:** But no money was specifically granted for a new task around natural capital.

Chris Skidmore: The point that Ms Ryan is making here is that the natural capital work is coming out of the £5.8 million, and that is simply not the case. You are conflating the two issues. When you look at the £5.8 million, that is specifically for the development, monitoring and reporting indicators for the UN SDGs. When it comes to the natural capital estimates, I am sorry, but the Chair has just undermined Ms Ryan's point. She is absolutely right; it comes from other budgets. It does not come from the £5.8 million.

Q219 **Chair:** In its letter to us, it said it had not received any specific settlement on natural capital, which is a new—

Chris Skidmore: The point Ms Ryan was making was that the £5.8 million included the natural capital estimates. That is simply not the case.

Chair: That is fine, but the £5.8 million does also include, "International work to support the statistical processes, continuing statistical support for the policy element, further analysis of existing data, monitoring of progress"—which is a duty that it has not currently had to do because it has never had to do this before—and, "working with NGOs to support their needs, and working with data scientists to fill in the gaps, which we have identified during this process". There are a significant number of new tasks that are being included and then it has had the natural capital work put on, which is going to have to be delivered out of existing budgets. I think that was the point that my Committee colleague was trying to make.

Q220 **Joan Ryan:** Could I finish? I want to come back to if it needs additional support. What additional support could the Government provide to help



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the ONS speed up its work on this issue? I think perhaps that is where we need to get to if we have these commitments.

Chris Skidmore: The ONS is an independent statistical body and we respect that independence. The Government stand ready to assist the ONS should it request further support.

Joan Ryan: I am sure it will be pleased to hear that; I think we are.

Chris Skidmore: Data is incredibly important, and we have talked about this data revolution. It is only by ensuring that we have credibility of data that we will be able to assess progress. With a different hat on in the Cabinet Office, I have been the Minister taking forward the Digital Economy Bill on issues of data sharing across Departments. We will see changes across the data piece in ways we cannot imagine now, which will ensure that we can come up with new metrics for the future. It is an incredibly exciting time to be a statistician.

Q221 **Joan Ryan:** I thought that we would have made greater progress on the 25% of missing information. All Departments in their single department plans might have also made greater progress much more quickly on including their work towards the SDGs had the ONS been able to do its work quicker, which I think would have been much more likely if its very considered bid had been met.

Gwen Hines: If I might respond on that one, just to underline the global process that is under way. It is not appropriate for the UK to develop a set of indicators in a vacuum. The chief statistician from the UK chaired the global process following the agreement on the global goals in September 2015 to develop the global indicators. That process took until the summer of 2016. The chair has now been handed over, but the UK remains very heavily engaged.

There are a number of issues. When heads of state agreed these goals and the targets, they did so knowing that there were a number of areas where we did not have indicators and we did not have data that we could easily measure. It was a deliberate decision to figure out what we actually want to track as opposed to what we can measure. There are a number of areas; for example, we as the UK pushed very hard to measure the quality of learning globally. It is not in the MDGs. That was about the number of kids in school. This Committee and others have previously said we should track quality, not just quantity. That is an issue we are now pursuing globally with UNESCO, with the UN, and with other bodies, to make sure we are developing indicators on the quality of learning. That is an area where we draw on the statisticians in the UK, but the indicator will be agreed globally and then the UK will track progress against it. It very much is an interlinked process and even if ONS was to speed ahead for the UK, without progress at the global level it does not really help us to track the SDGs.

Joan Ryan: I was not suggesting it was the whole reason. I was suggesting it was part of the reason, because it cannot be denied that we



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are not making the progress that we should be making and that we would wish to see the UK making.

Chair: Okay. I think we will move on. John, would you like to come in, particularly, maybe, on the housing side of your question? Would you like to ask about the gaps around that?

Q222 **John Mc Nally:** Yes, I would like to go back a wee bit to some earlier conversations. Following on from the manifesto theme that you were speaking about, we are all interested in the actions and the promises that are going on but particularly the actions that would benefit communities in general around the world globally and obviously in the UK. We touched earlier on on the promises, but I would like to get into a wee bit more depth. To what extent do you think that there are gaps between the promises and actions set out in your manifesto and the single development plans and the ambitions that are set out in the development goals? Gwen, would you like to go first with that one?

James Wharton: Shall I field that first? It is a little more political given the manifesto nature of part of the question.

The position that the Government have set out is that the sustainable development goals are going to be mainstreamed throughout policy and decision making in all Departments. I can speak about the effect of mainstreaming in DFID, but I cannot speak in detail on the effect in individual Government Departments of individual policies. Many of the ambitions that are set out in the manifesto will help us very significantly to achieve the sustainable development goals or to work towards them. That is the principal position that the Government come from. When you look at many of our manifesto commitments, some of them give us a very strong policy footing to move and make progress towards the sustainable development goals, which are, of course, a broader set of objectives.

I do not know what further you want me to say, whether you want me to go into specific areas. I am not able to speak for—

Q223 **John Mc Nally:** I would quite like to know a wee bit about the focus on cities and human settlements. You mentioned housing earlier. It is a good example of where a Government policy addresses select aspects of a goal or a target rather than the entire thing. There are gaps within there, as far as I can see, so that is the quality and the quantity that you mentioned earlier on as well.

James Wharton: You will appreciate that I am not the Housing and Planning Minister. I was a Minister in the Department for Communities and Local Government and I had responsibility for building regulations, which is why I was involved with the zero-carbon homes issue that I referred to earlier. I am not best placed to give detailed evidence of our housing and planning policy, but there are a number of things the Government have set out that they want to achieve: building 200,000 new starter homes for first-time buyers with 20% discount for under-40s,



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delivering 275,000 additional affordable homes by 2020, helping people get on the housing ladder and to get the homes that they need. We are investing £2.3 billion in a new housing infrastructure fund to support construction of new homes in areas where they are needed most, up to 100,000 new homes.

When we are talking about the need to put in place the practical measures that will help us work towards the sustainable development goals, these policy areas—many of which are covered in the manifesto and have come through the policies and the platform that Minister Skidmore and I stood on, with a number of colleagues in the Committee, at the election—will be a very significant contributor to the work that needs to be done to work towards those goals. That is the point the Government are making.

Q224 John Mc Nally: Are you saying that the quantity is matched by the quality of the housing in your manifesto?

James Wharton: You will have to take that up with the Housing Minister. I know what the Government's targets are. I know my experience of some of the very significant successes that this Government have been able to deliver, and indeed the previous Government led by Prime Minister Cameron, and the difference that that is making to the lives of my constituents. If you want to talk in detail about housing policy, I would suggest you need to talk to the Housing and Planning Minister.

What I can observe is that these manifesto commitments and the work that is being done in this area are contributing towards the work that we are doing as a country to move towards achieving the sustainable development goals. Of course, the framework that will both assess that and ensure that it continues to be the case is what we have been discussing earlier, ensuring that those goals are part of the single departmental plans, that the accountability is there through the annual reporting that takes place, that it is overseen at Cabinet level, and that it is given the priority that it ought to have, quite rightly, as has been set out by the Prime Minister.

Q225 John Mc Nally: It has been suggested to us here as well that there are gaps between the promises set out in the manifesto and the ambition set out in the sustainable development goals, not necessarily political, but we have heard that there are political silos within Whitehall as well. We have heard quite good information on that from very learned people in here. Would you agree? If that is so, how could we improve that? How could that issue be resolved?

James Wharton: Both issues are very likely to be pertinent points. The manifesto sets out the goals or the priorities of one term of Conservative Government. The sustainable development goals stretch far beyond the length of one term of Government, so we would not expect, though it would be very nice if we could, to have ticked all the boxes and achieved



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all of our targets for the sustainable development goals in one parliamentary term. None the less, the work that we are doing contributes to them.

Regarding the silos in and across Whitehall and Government Departments, I think this has been a challenge for all Governments of all colours throughout time. The question specifically regarding the SDGs is how we best overcome that by incorporating the need to recognise what the SDGs mean for individual Government Departments' policymaking in their departmental plans by pulling that all together and ensuring that it is properly reported on, measured and monitored. That is a very good mechanism. It is one of the things that the SDGs can help the UK with and can deliver as a good tool for policymaking in the UK to start to break down some of the silos that exist in all walks of life, including Government.

Q226 Chair: On the adequate housing side of things, we understand that it goes to 2030 and we understand that you do not control other Departments, but you are going to be responsible, between you, for the delivery of these ambitious goals. It is very highly political, is it not, because the focus on what gets looked at means that the single departmental plans will have to allocate money and resources to these things. We know that Shelter, for example, says that a third of rented homes in the UK do not meet the decent homes standard. If you as a Government are going to address adequate housing, the single departmental plan is going to have to look at and address and allocate resources to adequate and safe housing in the UK, is it not?

James Wharton: The argument that you set out is a logical one, taking those steps, but it is not for me to tell each Department what they need to do. What I would expect is that the Department pays proper attention to its SDP.

Q227 Chair: You are going to hold them to account, though, are you not? How do you intend to hold them to account? Are you going to publish an annual plan? How will we know whether we are meeting these goals? What is the plan for that?

James Wharton: The Departments will publish their annual accounts, which will include information on their progress towards the SDGs because they are part of their single departmental plan. I think it is important to recognise that the SDGs, as you said yourself, go beyond the period of one Parliament. To expect every goal to be met by the end of one Parliament, would be a nice ambition but it is probably not a realistic one. We would expect to see mainstreamed throughout policy and decision making in that Department a recognition of what needs to be done to work towards those goals, and policies put in place that make progress in that direction.

That progress is being made in many ways by the things that we have committed to in our manifesto, which is why that has been referred to so



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frequently in this context. As new manifestos are written, as new Governments are elected, I would expect—given the cross-party political support for the SDGs—them to continue to influence policy making and decision making so that all Departments work towards delivering the goals as best they can. I am not sure what else I can add to that, though I am happy to push on further.

Q228 Chair: They will be accountable to you. Will they set out in those plans what their five-year look-ahead is? In order to make sure everybody is decently housed by 2030, will you expect to see in those single departmental plans what the interim target for 2020 is, and then another interim target in 2025, and another for 2030? Is that what we can expect to see through this process as we go forward?

James Wharton: I think we can expect to see some measurable outcomes. Whether they will take the specific example that you give in the specific policy area that you talk about, I do not know. Different policy areas will have different measurable outcomes and different things that they want to achieve. But I would expect to see measurability, and I would expect to see accountability, and indeed the regular publishing of that, complemented, of course, by the work that the Office for National Statistics will do in measuring our progress. I think there will be quite a significant amount of pretty robust data that will allow us to properly assess what progress is being made.

Q229 Chair: Over what time period as well?

James Wharton: It will vary from annual—when Departments produce their accounts, they will refer to their SDPs and the parts in them, which will include the SDGs and the work they have made—to the frequency with which the ONS will publish data on this matter. I think that we will find it will be different bits of data published at different frequencies, but there will be quite a significant amount of data available to inform us as to progress or otherwise, as it may be.

Q230 Chair: Will you as Minister be looking to see the timescale over which those goals will be achieved?

James Wharton: We would expect to see progress made within timescales. Whether that timescale in each individual case or policy area will extend to 2030, I could not commit to that specifically.

Q231 Chair: Obviously, 2030 is the end date, is it not?

James Wharton: Indeed.

Q232 Chair: So there is a timescale—

James Wharton: But each policy area is a part contributor towards the goals. It is impossible to forecast what Government policy will be five or 10 years hence. We do not know who Government might be in that timeframe. What we need to do is ensure that the architecture is in place, and the basic framework of Government is geared up as effectively as we



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can make it, to ensure that the policy decisions that are taken work towards that goal. To try to set out to clear a path across every policy area at this stage would be open to significant challenge, not least because I do not know whether I will still be in post in a matter of months, never mind a matter of years or decades. We have to be a little bit careful before we try to set an absolute, direct, firm policy path, because it will be subject to the vagaries of political reality.

Chair: That we are all subject to, Minister.

James Wharton: Indeed.

Q233 **Chair:** Obviously, for example, it is unlikely that the Government will set a target that will do anything to disturb the UK population's access to water and sewerage. Some goals will be more important than others.

James Wharton: That is true. I think that is reasonable. The point that I would want to make is that a significant amount of data will be available by which we will be able to monitor what is being done. It will not be straightforward to assess the end point for any one policy area in terms of its contribution to the SDGs. That is a long way in the future, and there will be other policies that come through. There is a very significant commitment to ensuring that data is available. The work the ONS will be doing will also complement that, and I have no doubt that we will have quite a lot of information available to us to identify where, were it to be the case, insufficient progress was being made. I am sure this Committee will take great interest in that.

Chair: I am sure we will.

Q234 **Peter Aldous:** One of the things that has become clear during the course of this inquiry is that outside large, international charities and large, international businesses there is very little awareness of these global goals. I am quite sure people on the Bristol or Stockton omnibuses, as they go about their work, are not talking about them. What role do you see for the Government in addressing this problem of awareness—boiling it down into society?

James Wharton: A very interesting question and challenge. If I may, I will split it into two parts. There will be those who follow these sorts of things, with whom we will need to communicate what we are doing, an understanding of what we are doing, the progress that is being made, and the importance that is being attached—the sort of people who will have been aware of the Prime Minister's speech to the UN, for example. There will then be a great number of people for whom this is not their main priority in their day-to-day lives, many of whom are represented by honourable Members here today, for whom this is quite an abstract concept. I think that it will come to more public prominence as it is more broadly discussed and mainstreamed throughout public policy. It will become one of the answers to, "Why are you doing that?" when you have a policy. It will be, "Because this is one of our commitments".



I know that through the work we do in DFID, in the “leave no one behind” agenda, when I look at some of the decisions that I take on business cases and on spending, you can see a very clear thread running through many of those business cases that is influenced by that agenda because DFID has adopted it. As the SDGs are implemented through single departmental plans and start to influence the direction that policy decisions take in those Departments, it will become part of, I would suspect and expect, that broader narrative. Why are we pursuing that particular policy? Because of the good outputs it will have for people and the good that it will do. Part of that is because it will also contribute towards our commitment under the sustainable development goals.

I think that in time the prominence will increase. That will in no small part be because of that mainstreaming, because it will touch so many different parts of Government policy that that will help it to seep into general consciousness. I am not sure that there are additional steps the Government should take in a PR sense, but there will, though, be opportunities when reports are published and when progress is made to highlight what is being done. I have yet to meet a politician of any colour who, when good progress is being made, will not want to shout about it, or, indeed, an Opposition politician of whatever colour who, when progress is not being made at quite the rate that might be expected, would resist the temptation to point that out as well.

Q235 Peter Aldous: Are you looking outside, at other countries, and what they are doing? I think if you look in Finland and Norway, they have quite good promotional campaigns. I think in Germany they are focusing on Bonn as a city of sustainable development. Much closer to home, I think you will find the Welsh Government have introduced legislation to ingrain it down into society. Are you looking at what those other countries are doing, what those examples are, and how we can best use them in this country?

James Wharton: The short answer is yes. I think that we play a key role, from Prime Minister Cameron’s leading role in the actual development of what the SDGs ultimately were to the role that we now play with our international partners and the discussions we have in global forums where we share ideas and share the routes that we are taking to implementation and share best practice. That does not mean we will necessarily want to adopt publicity-style campaigns that other Governments have chosen to do. But if it can be evidenced that there is good value in doing so, and it is a worthwhile thing to take part in, then I would not rule it out as a possibility in the future.

Q236 Peter Aldous: Have you looked at what the Finns, the Norwegians and the Germans have done and said, “Hang on, this may or may not be suitable to implement in Britain”?

James Wharton: The answer to that is both yes and no. The discussions take place and best practice is shared. As far as I am aware, a piece of work has not been formally commissioned by Government on what we



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should do in this area, but that does not mean we are unaware of it and it does not mean it is not a possibility in the future.

Q237 **Peter Aldous:** Do you have any plans to instigate that line of work?

James Wharton: At this time I do not, but if either my Secretary of State decides that she wants to do it—or indeed any other Minister decides they want to do it—or I am persuaded of the value of doing it, I would always be happy to look at it.

Q238 **Peter Aldous:** So you might take that message back to the Minister?

James Wharton: You have made it very clearly, thank you.

Q239 **Peter Aldous:** Thank you. Just looking at businesses, we heard some good examples from businesses; in particular I think it was Aviva, Hermès and PwC. They get it, but, of course, most people do not work for such large, global organisations. It is a question of how one engages SMEs or other business around the country. I think your Department, Minister, in its response to the International Development Committee said that the best way to get business to engage was to “take the goals on board” and to make “the business case for doing so”. Are you doing anything to facilitate and help them to do that?

James Wharton: I think it is part of the process of what all Government Departments will be expected to do in recognising both the commitments they have to the sustainable development goals and the route map for getting there. I think we are already seeing quite good engagement by business. I would accept that at the moment it tends to be the larger organisations that are engaged in this debate, as perhaps you might expect at this stage of a process. You may be well aware of the “sustainable development is good for UK business” letter that went to the Prime Minister, signed by quite a range of well-known brands and business organisations. I think that where there are opportunities to deliver policy that is more effective because it works with business or with organisations that have that reach into our community, Government Departments should, as a matter of course, always be looking to do that and having that engagement.

I think the additional layer or filter of colour that the SDGs add to that presents opportunities. It will be for individual Departments to look at how those policies can be delivered and what co-operation is best. I think we are already seeing very significant signs that businesses engaging in this area are recognising what it could mean for them and the positive things it could bring to them, but also the contribution that it could bring to broader policy making and delivery in order to achieve our shared ends.

Q240 **Kerry McCarthy:** Can I ask the Cabinet Office Minister, as a local MP for the area I am from, are you aware of the work of the Bristol SDG Alliance? Have you come across them?



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Chris Skidmore: No. I am a South Gloucestershire MP, so obviously the work in Bristol is—

Q241 **Kerry McCarthy:** Yes, but it is that city region. I thought you would say yes. Written evidence has been submitted to this inquiry by Bristol Green Capital Partnership and Bristol SDG Alliance that looks at how we can work across the city region. I appreciate that, although a lot of your constituents think they live in Bristol, and a lot of my constituents at the north end think they live in Kingswood, it is about the city region. I would recommend that, because it is looking at a city-wide approach and how we can work with stakeholders.

Chris Skidmore: Yes, I was impressed by the amount of evidence you had received as a Committee, so I will go away and have a read of that. In particular, obviously, with the metro Mayor we will need to look at how we, as city regions, can develop our own strategies.

Q242 **Kerry McCarthy:** Yes. I think they are working with both the universities. In particular, the Cabot Institute has taken a lead on that. It is not really a question as such, but I would urge the Minister to try to meet up with them, as I will be doing.

Chris Skidmore: As a proud Bristolian, Bristol has always led the way—green capital city of culture last year—and I hope that obviously it can lead and have its footprint on the sustainable goals.

Kerry McCarthy: So I think we can lead the way on the SDGs as well.

Chris Skidmore: I hope it will get a mention in the Committee's report as well.

Chair: Yes, to be continued.

Q243 **Caroline Lucas:** Following on from Peter to some extent about communication, I wanted to talk about participation. Participation is a strong thread that runs throughout the goals. I am sure you would agree that by increasing engagement with the goals you would increase your chances of achieving them and building momentum in terms of getting it done. I wanted to ask you about local government in particular, because they have shown a willingness to engage and contribute towards the SDGs. Are you interested in utilising the benefits local government could bring to helping you to meet that agenda, and how are you supporting local government to get involved?

James Wharton: It is a very good and relevant question that flows nicely from the comments about the Bristol metro Mayor, of course, previously.

Caroline Lucas: Indeed, seamless.

James Wharton: I leapt forward excitedly to try to answer this, but I am going to caveat it with the answers I gave earlier, in that ultimately this is a matter for local government Ministers and local government itself. The Department for Communities and Local Government will be



expected, like all Departments, to recognise the contribution it can make to the SDGs, and that will be written into its single departmental plan.

However, as a former DCLG Minister, it is immediately apparent to me the opportunities that will exist there. So much of our service delivery is done through local government. So much of the contribution that will need to be made towards a number of these goals, whether it is through the work that local government does on the environment through to some of the housing issues that we have already discussed that are delivered through local government mechanisms, to the opportunities that the new devolution in those areas that have signed up to deals under the Cities and Local Government Devolution Act will present, I think there is a huge scope for local government to play a role in this. They need to, and I am sure will, engage with it. But this is something that, in terms of the framework of delivery and work towards the SDGs that primarily I think we are here to discuss, underlines the importance of this being incorporated into individual Departments' plans and being mainstreamed through the policies that individual Departments are delivering. It would be quite difficult for any one individual to sit and identify every policy area in which this could be of benefit, but if it is given consideration as every policy area is taken forward, Departments like DCLG will, I am sure, identify the opportunities that things like the devolution agenda represent.

I think you are absolutely right, if we can push down support for this, going to the comments that were made earlier, so that it becomes part of people's ordinary, everyday lives, that gives it both the best chance for long-term sustainable success, but it also will throw up new opportunities for policy interventions or actions that we can take that will help us towards these goals, which may not have been apparent from Whitehall.

Q244 Caroline Lucas: I appreciate it is not your Department directly—and I also apologise for coming in late; you may have already covered this—but it worries me that everything feels very much like it is in its own silo. In terms of having a guiding mind that is connecting all of this, it does not feel like it is there. I am just interested; would the other Minister present happen to know what measures are being taken to involve local government, for example?

Chris Skidmore: I think when we look at presenting progress against the SDGs, local government and those metrics are obviously going to have a really important part to play in terms of transparency. Yes, there is a role for local government, and the Government will consider ways in which to involve local government.

Q245 Caroline Lucas: I am not trying to score points, but do you happen to know? I just wonder where the collective mind is that can see how the different bits, which I accept are happening under different Departments, are actually joined together in some kind of coherent perspective. I am sure you both agree, of course, that local government has a role to play, but are you aware, out of interest, what measures have already been



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taken by the Government to involve local authorities? It is pretty much a simple yes or no on that one.

Chris Skidmore: No, for myself.

James Wharton: If I might on that, I share the response of my ministerial colleague, but I think it is quite early in this process to try to answer that question. I think we would be doing this wrongly if we sat in Whitehall and said, "This is the template plan. That is what is going to happen". What we are putting in place are the structures that will allow all Departments to mainstream this throughout all of their thinking and policy decision making. We are then adding to that the accountability mechanisms that flow from it to ensure that they are working towards their goals and that this is working as a process.

That will be drawn together, and we talked a little bit before you arrived about the report that is already being produced by my Secretary of State in DFID, to be published on a date as yet undisclosed or determined, but in the not-too-distant future. That is still at an early stage, and I expect that process to evolve quite significantly and, indeed, in line with the devolution agenda in the local government context. The purpose of that agenda was to recognise that top down is not always the best way to deliver effective results or, indeed, effective policy formation for each area.

Q246 **Caroline Lucas:** There is a balance, is there not?

James Wharton: Yes, there is indeed.

Q247 **Caroline Lucas:** I do not think anyone is suggesting that anything should be top down, but I am just suggesting that there needs to be some method of ensuring that this bottom-up process in different Departments adds up.

James Wharton: If it offers some reassurance at this stage, a significant number of central Government policies, many of which have flowed from manifesto commitments, are feeding into the sustainable development goals and our work towards achieving them. It is being mainstreamed throughout every individual Government Department with their single departmental plans that they will give consideration to it. They will report annually to it in their accounts. The Secretary of State for DFID has responsibility for oversight of the overall delivery of this as part of the Government agenda. I think that allows us to have the central pulling together that you talk about, absolutely rightly, but also to maintain the flexibility to break down some of the silos in thinking that, again, have been discussed earlier by the Committee to allow people to be innovative and to engage with the broadest possible range of actors to work together towards the goals that are an important part of Government policy.

Q248 **Caroline Lucas:** Thank you. Moving on to business in particular, in response to the International Development Committee's report on the



SDGs you said that you were supportive of international benchmarks to promote sustainable and responsible business behaviour and that you might support them, providing there was evidence to show that they worked. I wondered what you were doing to amass the evidence to see whether or not they do indeed work.

Gwen Hines: I would be happy to say more about that. As the Minister mentioned, this report that came out yesterday from a number of different businesses is something that we have supported and encouraged from the beginning. We, of course, led a huge process in the UK, in the lead-up to the goals and the agreement of the goals, getting wide participation from business, from civil society, and from a huge range of people, and encouraged the same internationally. We have tried to maintain that momentum. We had regular discussions with the Business Commission about the work that they were doing, and the specific purpose of that was to make the business case and to begin to gather some evidence.

One of their conclusions is that there is plenty of evidence that this is good for business as well as good for the world, and they will do some outreach with their own networks. I also raised earlier the example specifically on gender, where DFID has been funding and helped to set up this UN high-level panel on women's economic empowerment. Being closely involved in that, I can say the report that was produced for September, again, was 90% about bringing together the evidence of what works. We divided it into the proven and the promising.

The stage now is very much saying to businesses that are interested, "What are you doing? What works? How can you reach out to others, including SMEs, to bring other people into it? Where do we have toolkits that help?" We also looked at things that might be more cost-effective or less cost-effective. We went on a trip to Ahmedabad to look at informal workers and people in slums—to look at that context, as well as the multinationals. We are doing a huge amount of outreach, but, as the Ministers have said, we are trying to take a mainstreaming approach and then targeting specific issues so we can draw that together.

I think if we try to do the 244 indicators all at once we risk taking a scattergun approach and we do not get further ahead. We are very keen to work with business. There is a huge amount of leadership in the UK; organisations such as Business Fights Poverty have been going for a long time and have fantastic networks and really good practice. The Secretary of State participated in their events at the UN General Assembly on exactly this issue, so we want to build on that.

Q249 **Caroline Lucas:** That is very encouraging. Just to go back to the issue of the international benchmarks, anyone can appreciate that you do not want 240 different benchmarks. But can I deduce from what you have said about the fact that you do think there is evidence that they can work that you—your Department, your Secretary of State—will be supporting a number of international benchmarks?



Gwen Hines: Yes. Sorry, I should have commented on that specific issue. There are a number of particular benchmarks that these kinds of research have shown work really well; for businesses, things like EDGE Certification and the UN women's economic empowerment principles. In this Commission, it talks a lot about the UN Global Compact and the principles there. Those are exactly the kinds of things we have supported from the beginning.

We are trying to encourage more companies to sign up to that, but also to share how they did it. If you are trying to encourage another company that is perhaps smaller and feeling the pressure to do that, what is the best way to do it? We are also encouraging people to make available peer-to-peer support and toolkits to do that. We do feel a race to the top, a little bit of pressure, is really helpful from that perspective.

Q250 **Chair:** Just on that, the report talks about market access and opening up opportunities of around \$12 trillion. Obviously, there has been a lot of talk in the papers and we will have more talk today about the potentials from free trade deals. What opportunities or threats do you think any future trade deals could have in terms of achieving the sustainable development goals either here at home in the UK or abroad, particularly if we end up in a situation where we move to a low regulation/low welfare model, as the Chancellor warned at the weekend?

James Wharton: I do not want to get drawn into commenting specifically on the Chancellor's comments at the weekend or what decisions Treasury might take. I am a firm believer that trade and economic development is a key way of improving people's lives, of lifting people out of poverty and doing it in a sustainable and long-term way. If the opportunity to sign our own free trade deals across the world is presented to us, as it appears it may well be following the process of Brexit over the next two or so years, I think those countries with which we make deals, provided those deals are fair and equitable—I have no reason to doubt that they would be, as both countries would want that to be the case—because of the additional wealth and economic activity that such trade deals can generate, will make a significant contribution to globally achieving the SDGs, lifting people out of poverty and improving their economic opportunity. Such deals would also improve the UK's standing in the world, both through the economic success that they could bring for us, but also through the influence that we have with those partners with whom we trade to share best practice and our values. Many countries would do well to adopt similar values to the UK. The closer our trading relations, the better placed we will be to ensure that we do everything we can to promote them.

Q251 **Chair:** You see no risk from a deregulatory environment at all?

James Wharton: It depends on what you deregulate. I think deregulation can be a good thing that drives growth and economic activity. At the same time, regulation is important, and it is important that you get that balance right. I have no doubt that the excellent



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Secretary of State for International Trade and the superb Chancellor that we have will get that balance exactly right in the interests of the UK and the countries with which we do future trade deals.

Q252 **Chair:** You have doubtless read our excellent report on the potential threat to the UK environment in terms of changes in agricultural practices and environmental practices and protections after we leave the EU?

James Wharton: No, I have not read your report, but I am sure that it is balanced and informative, and I look forward to doing so when the opportunity arises.

Chair: Excellent. Thank you very much indeed, Ministers. It has been very enlightening.