

Environmental Audit Committee

Oral evidence: Sustainable Development Goals in the UK follow-up, HC 1491

Tuesday 23 October 2018

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 23 October 2018.

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Mary Creagh (Chair); Zac Goldsmith; James Gray; Caroline Lucas; Kerry McCarthy; Anna McMorrin; John McNally; Dr Matthew Offord; Alex Sobel.

Questions 1 - 112

Witnesses

I: Kath Dalmeny, Chief Executive, Sustain, on behalf of End Hunger UK, Lindsay Boswell, Chief Executive, FareShare, Anna Taylor, Executive Director, The Food Foundation, Adam Smith, The Real Junk Food Project, and Iain Bell, Deputy National Statistician, Office for National Statistics.

II: Oliver Dowden CBE MP, Minister for Implementation, Cabinet Office, David Rutley MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Food and Animal Welfare, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Rt Hon Lord Bates, Department for International Development, and Justin Tomlinson MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Family Support, Housing and Child Maintenance, Department for Work and Pensions.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [End Hunger UK - written evidence](#) | [PDF version](#) ( 144 KB) 
- [The Food Foundation - written evidence](#) | [PDF version](#) ( 103 KB) 
- [Office for National Statistics - written evidence](#) | [PDF version](#) ( 116 KB) 
- [Department for International Development - written evidence](#) | [PDF version](#) ( 115 KB) 

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Kath Dalmeny, Lindsay Boswell, Anna Taylor, Adam Smith and Iain Bell.

Q1 Chair: I call the Committee to attention and ask guests and witnesses to make sure that their mobile phones are switched off. I welcome you all to this hearing today into the sustainable development goals in the UK. This is a one-off session that follows up from the Committee's inquiry into the sustainable development goals in the UK that we conducted in the last Parliament and reported in March 2017 just before the general election.

We have issued this call for evidence to look at views on how to achieve goal 2, which is about ending hunger and improving nutrition and food security in this country. I am delighted to welcome such a distinguished panel here today. Can I ask you to introduce yourselves from my left, please, starting with Kath?

Kath Dalmeny: My name is Kath Dalmeny. I am Chief Executive of Sustain, which is a national alliance of food and farming organisations. In particular we work on food poverty, working with 50 or so local food-poverty partnerships around the country in different towns, cities and rural areas, looking to take practical action to reduce food poverty and to end hunger. We also run a project on national policy called the Right to Food, which is looking at how legislative action could help to tackle the root causes of that food poverty and hunger.

Iain Bell: I am Iain Bell. I am Deputy National Statistician at the Office for National Statistics. I have responsibility for the international measurement of sustainable development goals.

Anna Taylor: Good morning, everyone. I am Anna Taylor, Executive Director of the Food Foundation. We are an independent think tank working on food policy.

Adam Smith: My name is Adam Smith and I am the founder of The Real Junk Food Project.

Lindsay Boswell: My name is Lindsay Boswell and I am the Chief Executive of FareShare, a charitable redistribution network.

Chair: Thank you, all. You are all very welcome here today.

We have been informed that an estimated 3 million people in the UK may be undernourished and that the UK's food insecurity is among the worst in Europe, particularly for children. How is it that in the fifth richest country in the world we still have people who are hungry? Kath, do you want to start?

Kath Dalmeny: That is a very good question. It is something that keeps us awake at night, frankly, that, as you say, a wealthy country like the UK could have so many people experiencing hunger and food poverty and not knowing where their next meal comes from or, as the phrase goes,



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being one paycheque away from falling into food crisis; is quite shocking. I think it is partly because we have not taken this issue seriously. We have done it in a piecemeal fashion so far and there is no real strategic approach to tackling the root causes of food poverty and hunger in a so-called advanced economy.

We have been looking into how you would be able to take a strategic approach, in a way to turn it on its head, to not look just at the problems but what would it look like if our country did care about fixing food insecurity. We look to the UN's Right to Food guidance on this. They are looking across the world at countries and states that are addressing food poverty in a systemic kind of way. These are the key indicators of a country that would be doing something about it. We would be measuring food insecurity, we would be identifying the solutions systematically, we would be adopting a strategy, allocating responsibilities and accountability, legislating for change and then monitoring progress and ensuring effective redress.

I am particularly agitated about the idea that we know a lot of the solutions have been working on those for the past few decades but we do not seem to be able to keep up the momentum on them. We will bring in a policy—for example, free school meals—and then it will go out again. It is like a long game of hokey-cokey that individual Administrations will not see the place of a very important piece of work within that overall strategic goal of making sure that people do not face food insecurity.

If we were to allocate responsibilities and accountability, it would be across Government. It would not just be about where we might traditionally think, in the Department of Health, in DEFRA, thinking about food supply, thinking about health outcomes. For example, bodies like Ofgem and Ofwat are able to address the poverty premium that means that basic essential services are more expensive to people living on a low income, who therefore have less money available at the end of the week in order to buy food. As I am sure my other colleagues will testify, it is generally the food budget in a household that gets squeezed first when other costs are high, and boy-oh-boy other costs are very high at the moment, for example housing. We would be able to secure people's food and ability to eat well and enjoy good health if we also looked at housing costs in this country.

There are other institutions as well that could take more profound action. For example, Ofsted could do a better job of inspecting food standards in school and ensuring that those who are eligible for free school meals are receiving them. That is a really significant way that we can help households to manage their budgets well and to intervene with children. There are holiday hunger projects as well, which I am sure my colleagues will refer to.

What about the NHS improvement body? That could be looking at the implementation of standards for hospital meals and, in the broader remit



of the Health and Social Care Committee now, care-home meals? These are significant moments in people's lives where institutions could step up to ensure that people are fed well. We have been tracking, for example, at local-authority level provision of meals on wheels, social care-type arrangements for food for the housebound, people who are particularly vulnerable. Unfortunately, during the austerity period a lot of meals on wheels services have been cut—a very, very significant proportion across the whole country. We have looked at that in more detail in London, and I can provide more figures for the Committee. It is a basic part of the safety net that those meals on wheels should be available for sometimes a very small minority in a population, but people who are very, very vulnerable and would show up in any deprivation indices as being people who need to be helped.

That is not being measured and therefore goes quiet and people fall off the map. It is those kinds of things where there is a clear possibility for intervention. An individual body may be playing a role in helping to tackle food insecurity, and that service may be cut, may be reduced, may be no longer monitored, become deprioritised in budgets and gradually, gradually the safety net on food starts to fall away.

To sum up, we have not taken seriously maximising household income. We have not taken seriously championing the solutions and letting the individual institutions that could be responsible and accountable understand what role they play, and celebrate when they do play that role—for example, introducing a living wage. How fantastic it is that our country has done that: creating some floor standards for people who are in work. They are not quite high enough to cover the basic costs of living, but we can work on that. We should then monitor that progress systematically so that the hokey-cokey of those policies coming in and out does not happen over time.

Q2 Chair: Thank you. Ms Taylor, your background is in international development. Do you think we do it better overseas than we do it at home?

Anna Taylor: That is a good question. I think certainly the UK has quite a strong track record in tackling undernutrition and food insecurity, particularly in crisis situations overseas. Perhaps one of the shortfalls of the single departmental plans at the moment with respect to how the SDGs are covered means that significant areas can fall between stools and there is not a comprehensive overview of all elements of the SDGs across those plans. If we take food insecurity in the UK and look at how the Government is reporting on that within the single departmental plans, you see quite a strong response on childhood obesity and quite a strong response on directions of travel on sustainable agriculture, but food insecurity and food poverty is absent in terms of laying out what the Government is going to do in this area.

Building on your question, there is certainly a lot of opportunity for us to think a bit more carefully about joining up our experience on international



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development with what is happening in the UK. I think we quite quickly get to a point where we think it is poor countries over there that are experiencing undernutrition and what we typically call malnutrition, and the UK context is seen as dramatically different from that. The benefit of the SDGs is that they put all countries together around these common problems. After all, most countries of the world experience some form of malnutrition. It looks a little bit different in different places, of course, but the opportunities for genuinely learning from one another are huge. We are at the moment helping to facilitate a partnership between Birmingham City Council and Pune Municipal Corporation in India around nutrition policies to tackle all forms of malnutrition.

What is interesting is if you take officials between countries, and elected members, there is a very genuine conversation about, "You are doing it—we did not think to do it like that," or, "We did it like that 30 years ago and somehow we do not do it anymore. Why don't we?" You have a genuine opportunity for learning from one another. I think we should be joining up the dots. The SDGs create a perfect framework for doing that, and food insecurity in the UK has completely fallen through the cracks at the moment.

Q3 Chair: Thank you. Of course, of the single departmental plans, only DfID's plan mentioned hunger.

Anna Taylor: Exactly, yes.

Chair: We have heard about the NHS and we have heard about education.

Anna Taylor: DEFRA at the moment does not focus on this area. There is a question as to who is ultimately responsible for it. As Kath mentioned, this is a cross-departmental responsibility but at the end of the day, unless somebody is a nominated lead, nothing is going to happen. The key question is who is responsible for reporting on food insecurity in the UK in the SDG framework. At the moment that question is unanswered.

Q4 Chair: Mr Bell, we are at the bottom in Europe for the percentage of children under 15 living in a severely food-insecure household. Can you tell us a little bit about those statistics and how they are measured?

Iain Bell: They come through from our UN survey that is done on their Food Insecurity Experience Scale. It is measured using a sample survey of households. It covers Northern Ireland, England and Wales. The last one was done in 2015 and is about to be updated shortly.

Q5 Chair: It has been done in 2018? When will those results be published?

Iain Bell: It should be soon. It is published by the UN so I do not have the exact date. I will get to the Committee with the date.

Chair: It is not a question of UK Ministers having them?



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Iain Bell: No.

Q6 **Chair:** It is a UN survey. Is it done through UNICEF?

Iain Bell: I do not know exactly.

Anna Taylor: It is the Food and Agriculture Organization.

Chair: FAO.

Anna Taylor: It was published in September, the 2017 data, but it is published as a three-year rolling average so you do not have a single-year figure. It is in an FAO report online published in September.

Q7 **Chair:** What has the trend been? Have we been at the bottom for a while or have we been close to the bottom and have now hit the bottom?

Iain Bell: The data I have says the data point in 2015 was 9.7%. I do not have the 2017 data to hand here.

Chair: Would you have a look at those figures?

Iain Bell: I will get back to you with the figures and write to the Committee with them.

Q8 **Chair:** You do not have a measurement for stunting. In your evidence you talked to us and said you had identified a form of indicator—a potential data source—that needs further work. Who is that and how do you measure stunting? How does that work?

Iain Bell: We are working with the National Childhood Measurement Programme, which is run through local authorities and through NHS Digital. The National Childhood Measurement Programme runs in reception and year 6 through schools and it covers all children in local authority and academy schools. It is supervised and takes place with nurses for selected pupils who are invited in to be representative. They measure height, weight and so on against expected progress for different countries. That enables it to be worked on. We are currently working with NHS Digital about how we can utilise the data collected through the National Childhood Measurement Programme.

Q9 **Chair:** Was that not the obvious place to start on stunting?

Iain Bell: Yes, it was. It took a while to get there. Yes, that is where we are looking.

Q10 **Chair:** Why did it take a while to get there? We have these reports that come out telling us 10% of four and five-year-olds are obese. We know these facts already; this is not a secret.

Iain Bell: Yes. I think the focus of the SDGs and how we prioritise our work against them is that, where the data source and the measure was there, we have reported and got it online quickly. It is the obvious place to look. This now leaves us with gaps. We are currently reporting 155 of the 232 indicators, and we have identified and are making progress on



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22. With the remainder, we are working through the data sources. The challenge of it and why it has taken so long is that the focus on stunting has come through the sustainable development goals—they created the focus to create this indicator.

Q11 **Chair:** Can you let us know which of the indicators you do not have the measurements for at the moment, please? That would be of interest to the Committee.

Iain Bell: Yes. It is all reported on our national reporting platform, every indicator—which is available and which is not.

Chair: Does that mean we have to go through the platform?

Iain Bell: No, I will send you the list as well.

Chair: You can make it easy for us.

Iain Bell: Yes, that is fine.

Q12 **Chair:** That would be great. Mr Smith, do you think enough is being done to support the vulnerable to ensure no one is left behind in ending hunger?

Adam Smith: To support the vulnerable, yes, I do. I think there is enough being done. The problem in this country is that there is a hidden bracket of people who are suffering.

I have a four-year-old son and I spoke to him last week about coming here and speaking about ending hunger. He turned around to me and said, "But I am always hungry, Daddy". It made me realise what he was talking about and I realised he was right, he is always hungry. I can never feed him, and I run social supermarkets and pay-as-you-feel cafés across the country.

Straight after that I received a message. If you do not mind, I can read it out to you. It epitomises what he said. This person wishes to remain anonymous. She mentioned it on social media. She said, "I just wanted to thank you for the kindness supermarket in Wakefield", which is a social supermarket that we have just opened. She said, "Your hard work and kindness has meant that my family has been able to eat for the past few days. I am a teacher, which is a good job and I enjoy it. However, my wage has stayed the same for a decade while my cost of living has risen and risen. It has reached a point where I have had to make a choice between shopping or getting myself and my son to school. As we do not get benefits, we cannot access foodbanks but we can access your service. I just wanted to let you know what a difference you are making to people's lives. Please do not message my message publicly because I would be worried about people realising and judging us for it".

We come across a lot of people who fit into that bracket who are forgotten about in this country—people who are suffering right now, who are actually going hungry, who are working, not in receipt of benefits,



and cannot access foodbanks. They are the people who are really going hungry. The people who you see who are vulnerable and poor and in need who can access foodbanks and can go to places where churches and third-sector organisations are can get access to food. There is a lot of access in this country to food; there is a lot of work being done to make sure that people can access it. It is the ones who are not getting access that are a real problem right now in this country and I think that is going to increase more and more over the next year.

Chair: There is this hidden in plain sight—

Adam Smith: Absolutely. I represent a lot of those people because I come into contact with them on a daily basis. Because we have this inclusive nature of people getting access to food from us, we are getting these messages all the time from people, saying, “I cannot access these services. I am not in receipt of benefits and I work very, very hard”. The weather is about to change on us, people are going to have to choose between heating their own homes and going out and getting food. These are honest, decent people who are going out and working. They are the people that are being missed in this country.

I said to my chair of trustees last week that if we want to end hunger we need to stop feeding the poor; we need to start feeding everybody and making sure that everybody has the human right to have access to this food. That is what needs to happen. We waste so much of it in this country that we could feed everybody with just the waste alone, let alone the food that is being produced to feed people.

Q13 **Chair:** Your woman there, the teacher, mentions the stigma that is associated with not being able to afford food.

Adam Smith: People are embarrassed. People are embarrassed to admit it. That is the problem. We should not be embarrassed, but people should not be in a situation where they cannot afford to feed their own children, while they are going to work and earning an honest living.

Q14 **Chair:** Thank you. Mr Boswell, what do you think are the greatest challenges with food insecurity that you anticipate in the future? Is Brexit going to be an issue?

Lindsay Boswell: There are two questions there and I am going to duck the second one for a moment. Addressing the first issue, it is an issue now and it is an issue that is going to be ongoing. FareShare currently supports in excess of 10,000 frontline organisations that are providing a safety net for people who are vulnerable.

Please burst the bubble about foodbanks above your heads, because these are mental health facilities, domestic violence refuges, and organisations that provide a safety net for all of the forms of vulnerability that we have as human beings: addiction, drugs, alcohol and so on. What we are hearing time and time again—because those organisations are turning to us to supply them with surplus food because their funding has



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been dramatically cut. There is a piece of joined-up work and thinking that needs to be done around the impact and the implications of cuts to local authority funding and that then having a dramatic impact on what are really, really cost-effective and highly efficient frontline service provision organisations that I think are the bread and butter of the social care and social provision that takes place on our high street.

Through the measures that we have in place in terms of trying to work out what are the needs of those organisations, we are finding more and more that are really, really struggling to provide any form of service. One in five of them, for example, say that if we cease supplying them with food, they would go out of business. Their operating margins are that tight.

In terms of the question on Brexit, Chair, there are bigger brains than mine that know what Brexit is going to do to the food system in the UK.

Chair: I would not be too sure about that. I wouldn't put money on it, to be honest.

Lindsay Boswell: That is the answer, then, I suspect. I am not sure.

Q15 **Chair:** You are supplied with excess food by a number of leading supermarkets and yet not one of them wanted to appear before our panel today. Why do you think that is?

Lindsay Boswell: I think principally because we all tend to use the word "supermarket" as a shortcut for the food industry and the supermarkets themselves feel massively under the cosh. I am not going to name any particular one, but because of that cosh and because of the pressure that Committees like this have put on the supermarkets, most of them are now beginning to do a good job of sorting out their own direct surplus, ie the back of the store.

Q16 **Chair:** Are there any that you think have still got to make the Damascene conversion?

Lindsay Boswell: No, I think they all get and see it. Some of them have started a bit slower than others but that is probably a reflection of the state that their business was in at the time that this became an issue.

The real issue is the supply chain. Clearly the supermarkets are the number one influence on that supply chain, so there is much more they can do, but WRAP and DEFRA figures show that less than 1% of surplus food is at retail. That makes economic sense. The vast majority of it sits in the supply chain. By the supply chain I mean the factories, the manufacturers, the packinghouses, right back to the farm gate. Those businesses find that it is a lot more expensive to keep that food fit for human consumption, keep any surpluses they have fit for human consumption, and then divert it into social care.

Q17 **Chair:** Do any other witnesses care to say anything about the future



threats to food security before we move on?

Kath Dalmeny: I wouldn't mind coming in on the supermarket point. It is interesting that when we talk about supermarkets in the context of food poverty we often talk about the food surplus, but of course supermarkets can do a lot as well to make food more affordable and available. For example, the Co-op—other supermarkets are available—makes deliberate efforts to continue trading in low-income areas, whereas some supermarkets will not trade in those areas and will be analysing the demographic.

We work with some local authorities that make special efforts to work with the kinds of shops that will continue providing healthy food in their areas, also looking at other retail formats like markets, which are affordable. These take a special effort by local authorities to make sure that they can thrive and remain in areas, whether it is through planning policy or preferential tax relief on fruit and vegetable shops, for example—treating them a bit like pharmacies. We make special efforts to make sure pharmacies are available to all communities, yet we do not do that with shops selling decent, healthy food.

There are other things like reformulation of foods to make sure that the cheapest meals can have a decent amount of vegetables in them. I commend the work of the Food Foundation on this. You can talk perhaps more about looking at the whole food supply and ask how could we make the cheaper food healthier, rather than assuming that cheap food will end up being the lowest quality.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed. Alex.

Q18 **Alex Sobel:** Moving on to look more holistically at the interlocking issues of food insecurity, poor nutrition and obesity, if we are going to tackle malnutrition, should we not be tackling these together, and is enough being done to combat these issues in the UK? Maybe, Kath, you might want to start with that.

Kath Dalmeny: Absolutely. Can you repeat the question back?

Alex Sobel: Looking at food insecurity, poor nutrition, malnutrition and obesity together, is enough being done and are we tackling those issues together or are we looking at them quite separately?

Kath Dalmeny: The simple answer is no. At the same time there are pockets of really good practice going on with people taking a joined-up approach to that. There has been quite a lot of interesting work happening at local level—at city, town or rural area—where groups of people are getting together with the involvement of public health, the involvement of the local authority, the involvement of planning departments, the involvement of the schools and also the community groups to ask what can we do together that will make the whole environment more conducive to good health. That might be some work on physical exercise but it will also be work on good food that is then



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accessible to everybody. There is some commendable work going on in several cities and towns around the UK where that kind of approach is happening. I think possibly Anna will also have a view on that.

Anna Taylor: It is a hugely important point that you have put your finger on—obesity on the one hand and hunger and food insecurity here. There are largely two different communities talking about them. Certainly there is not a joined-up conversation in Government about them. We know that there is a big socioeconomic differential for obesity. As you know, there is double the rate in the poorest areas compared to the richest areas among children.

When you look at prices, unhealthy calories are three times cheaper than healthy calories, so it is not surprising that these things go hand in hand and that it is quite possible for a household to be facing frequent bouts of what we might call food insecurity, struggling to put food on the table and also be experiencing high rates of obesity, because that uncertainty around where you get your food from creates not only a set of unhealthy habits and a lot of mental health problems that go with that, but also a reliance on the very cheapest forms of food that we know are the least nutritious, typically.

These two things do go very much hand in hand. At the moment we have had the Government's childhood obesity plan, the second edition of that, which has made some really bold steps forward, at least that are under consultation at the moment. They have set an ambition to try to tackle inequality and childhood obesity but have not set a target for how they are going to do that.

At the moment the policy instruments that are at the Government's disposal for dealing with this joining up of the problem are pretty few and far between. There is Healthy Start, which is talked about, which is a voucher scheme for those on a low income, providing fruit, vegetables and milk. There is a huge opportunity to expand that scheme, to think about potentially what could the Agriculture Bill do, for example, to stimulate demand for fruit and vegetables and have some of these nice win-win situations where we are supporting British growers of fruit and vegetables and tackling dietary inequalities and helping the NHS all at once. There are real opportunities for much more creative programmes in that area where we can try to not grind down prices even more for farmers but think about how we might create incentives for people who are struggling with money to get the healthy stuff into their shopping baskets.

There are lots of opportunities to do more of that and I think the Agriculture Bill creates a great potential framework if it were to think about public health as one of the public goods that it strives for. At the moment that is missing and I know a number of people are trying to get an amendment along those lines and I would certainly support that.



Kath Dalmeny: I would add my support to that. The lack of public health as an outcome from the Agriculture Bill is of great concern.

I also want to point out as a final point that there have been some really smart policy moves, such as the sugary drinks tax, or the soft-drinks industry levy, to ask how we can fund some of the work that needs to happen. Traditionally, quite a lot of this work happens on a charitable basis to try to help people get access to better fruit and veg, but it is a much bigger systemic problem.

The idea that we can shift money from one part of the economy that is causing damage into a healthier outlet, which is to use the money raised from that sugary drinks tax levy to do things like breakfast clubs in schools, helping some of the low-income children—it has been interesting to see a shift in an approach to this, at scale as well, rather than doing a piecemeal approach that has characterised the past.

Q19 Alex Sobel: If you do not do the things you have outlined, what do you think the consequences are for public health in this country, lifespan and those sorts of issues?

Kath Dalmeny: Pretty dire. I do not want to be a harbinger of doom, but if we were to continue on the trends without intervention on obesity, we are looking at similar rates of obesity to the US perhaps and looking at diabetes rates going up. The ONS has done some really helpful work, as has the National Audit Office, on projecting costs to the NHS, for example from diabetes type 2, which is very much diet related. They are scary numbers. That is a technical term, obviously. The idea that we should not stem the flow of that diabetes-inducing diet coming into the population has very serious consequences for people's lifespan, for their enjoyment of a healthy life, for the age of onset of debilitating disease and for costs to the NHS. Sometimes that is the winning argument. I do not like to start with that because it is about people's life expectancy and quality of life as well.

Anna Taylor: If children are experiencing obesity in childhood, that goes with a whole set of disadvantages in terms of how—particularly girls when they get into the workplace—they struggle to have more productive employment compared to those who are less obese. It tracks right through their lives in terms of the impact that it has.

We know from evidence in Canada that food insecurity in childhood also has really dramatic health consequences. Adults who have been food insecure as children experience a whole raft of health consequences when they grow up. Even things like suicide rates in early adulthood are much higher for adults who have been food insecure as children. These things track with people unless they are dealt with early. We know that early intervention is really, really critical for stemming that intergenerational cycle.

Q20 Alex Sobel: Adam, the teacher you were talking about earlier and people



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like her are obviously working long hours with a high-stress existence and have very little disposable income. Are they buying these high-calorie, low-nutrition meals? When they come to your projects, are they presenting with health issues because of lack of healthy food and those kinds of things?

Adam Smith: We do not measure people when they come in; you know the project very well. We only ask for a postcode and number of people when they come. That is not my issue. I am not here to stop poverty or feed poor people; I am here to stop food waste. That is our angle—it is completely environmental—but you see the issues and you see the problems.

I can give you a great example. When the sugar tax came in I was called by a lady who told us that there were a couple of thousand bottles of Coca-Cola going to waste and could we come and collect them. We turned up to a warehouse and there were 60 tonnes of soft drinks. They had opened up a warehouse and displayed all the zero-sugar drinks on some supermarket shelves so somebody could take a picture of them to see what they would look like within a supermarket. There were 60 tonnes of them. It took me and my colleagues nearly two weeks to shift these, using a vehicle, back to our sharehouse, and we had crowds of people turning up, crowds and crowds. There were people fighting over the red Coca-Cola. There were wholesalers coming to us telling us they would only take the red Coca-Cola from us because they knew they could sell it, it was a prime product.

We know when we have chocolate, when we have Nando's chicken that we intercept or we have soft drinks, people will queue up for this stuff, so I think a lot of it is about the education side of things. Obviously we go into schools. We do not teach children about what to eat; we try to encourage them to make informed decisions about what to eat and what they are putting into their bodies and what impact it has on them, but also what impact it has on our environment as well.

It is very, very hard, because we have gone into schools where we have taken milkshakes in and children will start screaming at milkshakes, but we take windfall apples in—for example, last year I went into a school and a boy called Callum, eight years old, asked, "What is windfall apples?" I had to explain to him about falling off a tree, collecting them, putting them in this crate. He told me that he thought apples came out of plastic bags. He did not know they grew on trees. This is the problem now. Young people, the next generation, do not have that relationship with their food.

There is an illusion of choice within the food industry. We have a very paradoxical food industry. We have hunger alongside waste alongside more and more supermarkets opening. There was a report on the BBC this morning that said that 70% of food outlets in Rotherham are now fast food and takeaways. There is this illusion of choice. Supermarkets have crowded out the market. We know especially in Leeds—there is a



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corner you can stand on and Sainsbury's has just opened another Sainsbury's across the road. Why they need two Sainsbury's across the road from each other I have no idea. Planning permission needs to answer a few questions because of that.

There are more and more supermarkets than ever before. There is a road in Wakefield where I have just opened up where there is a drive-through Greggs, a drive-through KFC and a drive-through Starbucks now on the same road next to each other. Where do people go to eat healthily? Where do people go to have decent, nutritional food? You cannot any more. It has been saturated by the big players in the industry that control far too much of the market. I understand and respect that people cannot necessarily eat healthily and they do not have the education of what they are putting into their bodies at the same time. There needs to be a two-pronged attack to make sure that we can tackle that.

Q21 Alex Sobel: After you we have four Ministers coming from four different Departments who, effectively, should be able to tackle this. What do you think we should ask them, particularly in relation to how the food industry and the supermarkets operate? France and Italy have passed quite different sorts of laws that had have had some effect. What do you think we should be doing in the UK? You mentioned planning. What else should we be asking the four Ministers?

Adam Smith: If we did what was done in France in the UK, I think the foodbank sector would absolutely crumble. We would not be able to take it all. Where would it go? Who would we feed with it? We struggle to feed everybody as it is. Through the FareShare models, there are plenty of other charities and foodbanks trying to feed people.

There is a foodbank in Wakefield, St Catherine's, that I am sure you are aware of. I spoke to the manager there and the running cost is around £50,000 a year to run this foodbank. With Universal Credit coming in and what is happening with Brexit, the increase of people using the service is a huge burden on the industry. They do not have the capacity to store this food; they do not have the capacity to cover their running costs, to get vehicles to go out and collect this food.

The policies for supermarkets in order to get access to food is completely different for every single supermarket. You will have people like Morrisons, for example, and you can go to the back door and get food. You have Tesco, for example, that I have spent five years working with and I still have not intercepted anything from Tesco in five years. Despite feeding nearly 12 million people worldwide and stocking 5,000 tonnes of food, I have yet to walk into a Tesco because they have policies and then they have third parties who are also part of that policy who are making it harder and harder for people to get access to that food as well.

Like I said about the law in France, if that were to happen and it said outright, "You have to donate all the surplus food", a lot of foodbanks and charities and people like us would completely go under.



Q22 **Alex Sobel:** What should we do?

Adam Smith: It is the infrastructure. We need to support the infrastructure to do it. I believe there is enough food out there to feed everybody. We need to make it accessible. We need to open up the distribution so that more people can have access to it. It is very streamlined and narrowed at the moment. There are too many people involved in making decisions about what is happening and I think it needs to be opened up and we need to have a collaborative conversation around the table where we all come together and share ideas and share policies and ways that we all work together to see if we can tackle this. I feel like there are too many different approaches on how to tackle it and it is not joined up.

Chair: I am going to ask Lindsay to come in there, thank you.

Lindsay Boswell: What I would suggest you consider asking the Ministers next is about what my colleagues on my right have said in response to the previous questions: they highlighted that the issues are joined up. The links between obesity, health, educational attainment and so on are all interdependent. If you have four Ministers who between them should be able to solve the problems, then the important word there is "between them". As somebody in the voluntary sector, I would say we need some joined-up Government. It is a joined-up approach to deal with a joined-up interdependent set of issues.

It is not, "This is what my Government Department is dealing with and that is what we are measured on and I am not concerned with what is happening in a parallel universe in another Government Department". Health, education, public health, DEFRA, communities, environment, are all interdependent. There needs to be some kind of joined-up approach, very much along the lines that this Committee has called for in the past.

Q23 **Caroline Lucas:** I want to explore a bit more about the tax system and whether you think changes to the tax system are part of the solution. You have given the example of the fizzy drinks tax and so forth, but do we risk hurting more of the people we are trying to support by using it? Is it too blunt an instrument or do you see there is still a role for other initiatives for using tax as an incentive or as a framework to shift choices?

Anna Taylor: I will have a go first. I think we can definitely do more with a range of fiscal measures, tax being one of them. The key goal, as I see it, is how we genuinely address the imbalance that we have in terms of what we have on offer. At the moment the offer is skewed heavily in favour of us making unhealthy choices. We do not have a genuine choice; it is stacked against us. The key question is how we can use fiscal measures and the other range of policy things at our disposal to shift that balance so that the healthier choice is the easier choice.

That might be taxes at the consumer end, but likewise where do we try to recoup money for the public purse or put a subsidy in, or use other



ways of investing higher up the supply chain to redress that balance? It requires a careful look right the way along the supply chain at all of those policy intervention points, of which there are many, right through from planning and taxes—a whole raft of things. We have charted out in one of our reports where those intervention points are. We need to think strategically about how we use them to put the balance of prices in the basket in favour of us making those right choices and therefore making a healthier diet more accessible for everybody.

Chair: Thank you. We are going to leave it there; we need to move on.

Q24 **John McNally:** My questions are about how we go about measuring food insecurity and malnutrition. I need to delve into that a wee bit more. End Hunger UK has called for a recognised survey tool within existing nationwide studies of the best way to obtain a true picture of the number of people who are living in household poverty. The Patients Association has also called for the development of a definition of undernutrition, which includes both underweight and overweight individuals, and an assessment tool for identifying it.

I listened to that report this morning, I think it was on 5 Live earlier on. I was quite surprised at the contradictions that were going on. Rotherham was mentioned and the growth of takeaways was scary and seemed to fly in the face of what we generally believe. My question was to Iain initially. What needs to be done to ensure that the current statistics provided by the ONS are adequate for understanding food insecurity and malnutrition?

Iain Bell: My feeling is malnutrition would be in a slightly better position than food insecurity in terms of the data availability and reporting. The malnutrition data, as we discussed earlier, are available through both the National Diet and Nutrition Survey and also through the National Childhood Measurement Programme. They give us a decent amount of data around both malnutrition and undernourishment and also going to the other end towards obesity.

However, on food insecurity the main source currently used is, as discussed earlier, from the UN Food and Agriculture Organization. What we are getting in the UK, and Kath almost referred to it earlier, is a confused set of requirements, which we need to work together. For some users, the US, for example, it is a different suite of questions from the Food Insecurity Experience Scale, which does not just cover adults, it also covers childhood.

What we are doing at the moment is working with colleagues around the table and wider colleagues across Government to get to the bottom of what is the requirement for the data on food insecurity. Then we can go about setting the best way of measuring it. In order to do that, we are going to need administrative data from HMRC and DWP to make sure we have the full set. Whether we end up on the Food Insecurity Experience Scale or the US set of questions, I believe we will need some changes to



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our household surveys. I can assure the Committee we will make any necessary changes once we have clarity of requirement. In summary, the steps are to get clarity on the agreed requirement among all users, working together on what it is, and then to get the right measurement in place in order to do it, so that we are not just reliant on the UN.

Kath Dalmeny: You can have confidence that this technical detail can be sorted out. We are all very happy to help the system make the best possible measurement. What concerns me is the lack of political will to make that happen. We are part of the End Hunger UK Alliance, and thank you so much for bringing that up. There has been a Bill before Parliament, a private member's Bill championed by Emma Lewell-Buck MP, trying to get this measurement taken seriously. There is a lack of political will to say we should go and find out if there is a problem, because if we find that, then we know how to fix it. We have all kinds of suites of things that could come on board, but even not to go and look is part of the problem.

Iain Bell: Can I reassure you there, though? The role of the Office for National Statistics is to provide evidence for a wide range of users not just Government. Therefore, if there is a combined user need covering political parties, the third sector and others, it is our job to go out and measure this.

Kath Dalmeny: You are hired. You are absolutely hired.

Iain Bell: What we are currently doing is working through what the best approach is and getting that commonality of agreement across Government Departments and yourselves about what it is that is wanted.

Kath Dalmeny: I suppose I wanted to express our dismay at—not you; you have been very helpful—the idea that Parliament has resisted the idea of bringing in this measurement, which to me is the very basic, first step before you even get into the solutions and allocating responsibilities. This feels like a journey that we have been blocked at the first step.

Anna Taylor: There are 160-odd MPs who are supporting the Bill across parties, so there is quite a lot of parliamentary interest. This has been an ongoing discussion with Government for a while about introducing a measurement and it is a critical first step. If we are going to have a Government response to food insecurity in the UK, we have to know what the scale of the problem is and have a regular measurement so we can track the effects of policy choices. That is a prerequisite to doing a good job in terms of implementing the SDGs. I would see that as being an urgent priority now.

Q25 **John McNally:** You carried out a comprehensive evaluation of the performances on sustainable development goals. Could you elaborate on the key lessons that you learned from that evaluation?

Anna Taylor: Are you referring to the UKSSD report?



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Q26 **John McNally:** The Food Foundation's comprehensive evaluation for goal 2.

Anna Taylor: Yes. We contributed to the coalition report on UK progress on implementation of the SDGs and reported specifically on obesity, food insecurity and sustainable agriculture, the three headings that come under SDG2. Food security is, as I said, the big gap—the area where we urgently need to make progress. We have done some of our own analysis of Government data, looking at disposal incomes, DWP data, and also the cost of a healthy diet, which has been costed through work commissioned by Public Health England. We found that if you are in the bottom 20% of the income spectrum, you have to spend 42% of your after-housing disposable income on food to be able to afford the Eat Well Guide, the Government guidance. That is before you have paid for everything else apart from housing.

John McNally: Nearly half.

Anna Taylor: Yes, exactly. The extent to which this issue is pressing for millions of people in Britain is huge. We cannot wait any longer for a measurement and getting on with this. We need to start making progress, because every child that goes through their first five years of life experiencing this is another lost opportunity. We need to get on with it.

Q27 **John McNally:** This was mentioned earlier on but I would like to bring in the devolved nations. I know BAPEN had an inquiry in NHS Scotland. It had made quite significant changes in the NHS over a five-year period of staff awareness and how they addressed malnutrition. A nutritional screening practice on organisations of nutritional support services was carried out. Could you comment on what lessons we could learn from that across the UK, because it seemed to be quite positive about the way they are going about things? I do not know a lot about this but I would like to hear your opinion. Maybe Lindsay would like to take it first.

Lindsay Boswell: Thank you for that. I think there is a huge amount that the Westminster Government can learn from the Scottish Government in terms of its approach to tackling poverty measuring, mapping and being bold and brave enough to do proactive intervention as well. It is a phrase that Government does not like to hear but we need a bit more nanny state. I would absolutely recommend that the Committee spend some time having a look at some of the policies and talking to some colleagues in Edinburgh and finding out what their approach is, what they find is working and also what they probably wish they had done more of. I think Scotland is an absolute beacon in this area.

Q28 **John McNally:** Thank you. My wife is a health visitor and I listen to what she tells me. It is incredible what you learn by listening to the practical day-to-day life, as Adam demonstrated earlier on. It is not a particular set of people. Sometimes we have a picture of the type of person it is and it is not that. I am happy with that, Mary, thank you.



Kath Dalmeny: Could I add something about the NHS? You have highlighted the work of the NHS itself, as the major employer in the UK and also as a place where people are receptive to messaging. There is an immense amount the NHS can do and it is starting to do it in terms of looking at it as if it is a healthy workplace, looking at the offer of food in the shops. The NHS standard contract to run a hospital now has in it measures so that the hospital administrators must show how they are improving food in the whole hospital. That is the nutritional content of meals for patients but also for the visitors and, importantly, for the staff, many of whom are themselves on a low income and suffering from other problems that Adam highlighted earlier.

It is a fantastic example of an institutional approach to intervention to ask what is the role of that influential, well-respected institution in the community. What buying power, leverage and procurement power does it have to change things? Once again, coming back to this idea, Lindsay very rightly talked about joined-upness. It is a generic term; it is a vision of doing things.

I think the NHS interventions illustrate it rather beautifully. If we had legislation in this country that supported the right to food, as Adam said, the right to decent food in this country, we would allocate responsibilities to different institutional bodies to say, "Could you do your bit of the pie?"—a very healthy pie, obviously; a low-fat, low-salt pie. Not only would we be measuring household food insecurity at a national level; we would also be asking them to report on indicators of success in improving the nutritional quality of the meals and in intervening to provide the educational opportunities, to provide the advice, to be a vehicle for Healthy Start vouchers—all the various realms of interventions that we know could contribute.

There is something about the fact that it takes action by lots of institutions that is part of the problem for tackling it. I have been working on this for 20 years. We tried to get a food justice Bill through Parliament a very long time ago, 20 years or so ago. The reason that people resisted it at the time was because so many people needed to act. It should now be our challenge to ask what it would look like if we were to enable a system where allocations of responsibilities and actions were put out, so that the NHS knows exactly what part it has to play, Ofgem knows what part it has to play, ONS knows what part it has to play and then we could all move together.

Chair: We are running very short of time. We have about seven minutes left. A very quick supplementary from Anna.

Q29 **Anna McMorris:** Very quickly on that point, Wales has already legislated for exactly this. We have the Well-being of Future Generations Act that links to the SDGs but also works across the whole of Government, holding public bodies to account. Do you think that is effective, in what way and do you think England should legislate in that way?



Kath Dalmeny: We look at it with absolute jealousy and would love there to be that kind of approach implemented across the whole of the UK. I look also to the inspiration of the Climate Change Committee that says we have national targets and we are holding policy to account dispassionately and saying, "How well are you going against that target by introducing these measures?"

That also helps with preventing regression. For example, we know that the Universal Credit system is now being paused—helpfully, so that we can fix the problems and make sure that people do not fall into hunger as a result of implementation—but what would it have been like if we had had somebody scrutinising it before it was rolled out so that those problems would not have emerged and there was some kind of test on policy on the way through?

Q30 **Dr Matthew Offord:** I want to know what action the ONS has taken to fill in the data gaps, particularly since this Committee's last report on the sustainable development goals?

Iain Bell: Since the last Committee on this, we have launched our national reporting platform. We launched it in November 2017 and it had 95 indicators; it now has 155, so we are making progress. Twenty-two are currently statistics-in-progress status, which basically means we have the source and the data are just being quality assured and readied to go live, and they will go live. On the remainder, at the time of the last report we had 10 indicators with no identified source at all. That is now down to six indicators, so we have found ways through for another four in order to do it.

Where the focus is now is a lot of it is on disaggregations as well. We launched our inclusive data action plan as part of this and we have programmes of work in order to tackle where the disaggregation gaps are in particular. I will mention two. One is a large programme of work to improve how we measure migration and population estimates in this country. At the moment we are relying on a survey that means we cannot give the disaggregations for migrant status necessary in the SDGs. The programme of work we will consult on later this year and it is due to deliver a new system for population and migration in 2020. Part of it will deliver the disaggregations for many of the migrant status required indicators.

Similarly, we have a programme of work to improve our finance data, which will help improve the income and wealth side, making more use of DWP and HMRC's data that does that side. The aim is that by 2020 we will have completed all the indicators and have full reporting for that stage.

Q31 **Dr Matthew Offord:** That is very comprehensive. How is the ONS particularly supporting the Government with the voluntary national review?



Iain Bell: We are working with both DfID and Cabinet Office, providing advice and support on the single departmental plans. The way the statistical system in the UK is set up is it is a Government statistical service where we have members not just in ONS but in each Department, bound by the same code of practice. Our job is to support the Government in measuring their chosen way forward for how they will choose to monitor the SDGs and we are playing a full role in how they do the national monitoring and the voluntary national reviews.

Q32 **Dr Matthew Offord:** Have you found you have enough resources to undertake all this work?

Iain Bell: Yes, at the moment we are sufficiently well resourced to do this.

Q33 **Chair:** When we spoke to you in 2016 you were on a bespoke programme of work for specific indicators. That was then scrapped. Do you think that has set back data progress?

Iain Bell: Where we are at the moment is we are looking at—there is a wholesale transformation we are undertaking as an office for how we produce data and statistics, looking to make better use of administrative data from across Government and the commercial sector. That is enabled by Parliament through the Digital Economy Act. That programme of work has kicked in and is starting to deliver things like the migration statistics work. My view is that the transformation we are on, which the SDGs are part of, is still going at full speed.

Q34 **Caroline Lucas:** What impact does the current level of awareness—or lack thereof—of the SDGs have on the UK's ability to combat hunger, malnutrition and the insecurity that we have been talking about? Perhaps to be slightly more heretical, can I check that we do still think that the SDGs have an important way to play in enhancing the UK's ability to address these things? When we have had inquiries in the past, we have concluded that the awareness generally in the country about the SDGs is shockingly low. I want to make sure we are barking up the right tree in the sense of how much is focusing on making the SDGs better known likely to be instrumental in helping us make progress on this agenda?

Anna Taylor: I think it is primarily important for accountability. It was interesting reading the feedback from Government to your last report, which talked a lot about what is in the curriculum that links to the SDG agenda. Of course there are important elements in there but they are not badged as, "We have set ourselves goals and we are trying to achieve them and here is how we are measuring them". It is that framework, essentially, of accountability and reporting progress that is really critical if the goals are going to make any difference to anything.

That is the first point. The second is that the goals create opportunities not only for a more coherent policy that we have talked a lot about today across Departments, but also, as I said earlier, for genuine international collaboration and learning from each other. The food system is global, it



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is driven by a relatively small number of very big actors, and all countries are dealing with the impact of the food system on their citizens. Surely we can do a better job by getting around the table and working out what a positive food system looks like that benefits not only the environment but also human health equitably in the future. That is a global challenge that we are not grasping. The SDGs create a framework for doing that. It is important that we talk about them in their own terms for those two reasons.

Q35 Caroline Lucas: Good, I am glad we are not barking up the wrong tree. Secondly, do you think the Government have improved awareness of the SDGs since we last looked a year ago and came to the conclusion that knowledge was shockingly low about them in the country? How have we done over the last year?

Lindsay Boswell: I do not think the Government have done anything in this area to drive the awareness of the sustainable development goals forward. In particular individual goals, business has done. In the SDG that I am most concerned with, 12.3, which is food waste, the business industry is exemplary. I think politicians and leaders across the country could take a leaf out of the food industry's book in terms of the seriousness and the business focus that it takes for that approach.

To back up Anna's observation, awareness and measurement against the SDGs by the leadership of UK plc are absolutely what is necessary. As a consumer, I do not think I need to have great awareness of the SDGs.

Q36 Caroline Lucas: Who else would you say does need to know?

Lindsay Boswell: The decision-makers, policy-makers, politicians, Government Departments. As this Committee pointed out, the weakness of the single individual departmental plans, with no bridging and pulling together of those, is a fundamental flaw.

Q37 Caroline Lucas: Do you see any opportunities to increase the awareness of the goals—any particular moments or key things that we could be using as an opportunity to raise awareness?

Lindsay Boswell: Within the individual goals, yes. Conceptually, as a collective, I am not aware of a particular time, moment or opportunity.

Caroline Lucas: Does anyone else want to say anything about progress towards goals and opportunities to increase awareness? Or would you like to—

Q38 Chair: Yes, I think we are going to have to leave it there. I can see at least two Ministers loitering with intent to give evidence and I hope they have been listening to some of the fantastic information that you have shared with us today. I would like to thank you all for travelling to be with us here today and I hope to catch up with the #Kindness supermarket in Wakefield very soon. Thank you all.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Oliver Dowden MP, David Rutley MP, Lord Bates and Justin Tomlinson MP.

Q39 Chair: I would like to call the Committee to order and ask members of the public and panellists to switch their mobile phones to silent. We have today's second hearing. We are blessed with an abundance of Ministers. I think we have set some sort of world record here today. Thank you all very much indeed for coming. This is a one-off session to follow up on the inquiry into the sustainable development goals in the UK, an inquiry conducted by this Committee in the last Parliament. We are going to be focusing on goal 2, which is ending hunger, achieving food security and improved nutrition. One of the problems with achieving this goal is that we need four of you here to answer it.

Perhaps I could begin by questioning Mr Tomlinson and Mr Rutley on the most recently available data, which suggests that 10% of the UK population is food insecure. That is 6 million people. In the fifth-richest country in the world that is a disgrace, is it not?

Justin Tomlinson: There are a variety of stats you can look at. We know there are 1 million fewer people in absolute poverty since 2010 and 300,000 fewer children, and if you look at the definition of families who can afford a meal, it is now at 5.4% rather than the 10% figure that you have just quoted, which is almost half what it was five years ago.

There is still much more to do, which is why we are going that bit further to build on the record employment that recognises that families in workless households are four times more likely to be in poverty than those in work. While we rightly celebrate the 1,000 additional jobs a day, through the slow and steady rollout of UC we are looking to provide that personalised and tailored support to make sure that particularly the most vulnerable in society get that support, which is what I am responsible for within the DWP, to make sure they benefit from the growing economy.

Q40 Chair: We heard research by UNICEF last year that found that 20% of children under 15 live with a respondent who is moderately or severely food insecure. We are not talking about poverty, although of course the two things are connected. We are the bottom in Europe for percentages of children under 15 living in a severely food-insecure household, lower than Romania, Lithuania, Bulgaria and Slovakia—much poorer countries than we are—and we know that people living in the bottom two deciles, those with an income of under £15,000, are extremely food insecure. They would need to be spending 40% of their income on food in order to meet the Government's Eat Well diet guidelines. Universal Credit, which you mentioned, seems to be a driver of food insecurity, not a solution to food insecurity.

Justin Tomlinson: I will take the two things separately. On the first point about comparing us to our European neighbours, where we are now at 5.4% of families who cannot afford a typical meal—



Chair: That is 3 million people.

Justin Tomlinson: The European average is 7.9%. We have almost halved it in five years. There is still more to do. Those in poverty have seen a real-terms increase in income of £400 since 2010.

Specifically on the point of Universal Credit, we must not forget, first of all, that relatively small numbers are in the UC system. Under current estimates, next year we would only be looking to migrate roughly 10,000 people. It is still a relatively small proportion, but the key thing with UC—and this is why, if you talk to the work coaches on visits to Jobcentres, the staff are so enthusiastic about it—is that for the first time, you get a named, personalised work coach who can support you with your unique challenges and opportunities.

The legacy benefits that this is replacing were no panacea. You had to navigate six benefits and three different Government agencies. Frankly, you had to be a nuclear physicist. It was no surprise that over 700,000 families were missing out on an average of £285 per month. We all see this in our casework as individual constituency MPs; people, particularly the most vulnerable in society, missing out on the support they are entitled to get. Under Universal Credit, they will be able to get that personalised, tailored support, helping get the money to the most vulnerable people in society, which then leads into tackling the issues of food insecurity.

Q41 **Chair:** What I see from my constituency caseload is people waiting four weeks to receive their Universal Credit, and we have heard from one of our previous panel witnesses about people who are teachers in Wakefield, on low incomes, who have not had a pay rise in 10 years, who do not have access to foodbanks and were turning to so-called social supermarkets in order to feed their children. Universal Credit is forcing people into debt through the four-week wait and the evidence that we have suggests that we are one of the lowest—if not the lowest—performing, particularly on child poverty. What are you doing to work across Departments to look at, for example, the role of free school meals and the role of DEFRA in tackling hunger? Do you do any work with your Ministerial colleagues on tackling hunger?

Justin Tomlinson: Yes. We have various interministerial groups. We are looking to do partnership-working in a variety of different areas that are connected to what DWP delivers. From our primary position we are—

Q42 **Chair:** Is there one on food insecurity and hunger?

Justin Tomlinson: Well, we work across tackling this. That is why we have four of us here today. It goes beyond not just—

Q43 **Chair:** Who is responsible? Which of you is responsible for ending hunger in the UK? None of your single departmental plans mentioned it.

David Rutley: It is a cross-cutting Government responsibility.



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Q44 **Chair:** Who is accountable?

David Rutley: The Government is accountable and we are working on that. Clearly what the Minister is saying is that we need to work closely together to achieve those targets. We are very fortunate with the latest voluntary national response that we are going to be putting forward. That will help focus the minds and our efforts together. As far as SDG2 goes, in responding to that DEFRA will be taking the lead.

Q45 **Chair:** You are taking the lead? DEFRA does not mention hunger in its single departmental plan.

David Rutley: What it does do in its single departmental plan is reference SDG2 on at least three occasions. Clearly when we look at some of the actions that are being taken forward, particularly around the Agriculture Bill, which is referenced strongly in the SDP, that will help to address some of the issues we have been talking about over time.

Q46 **Chair:** When are you going to publish the results of the food security questions asked as part of the Food and You survey in 2018?

David Rutley: We are working on those different measures. My understanding is they will be available early next year but I can get back to you with the detail on that particular measure. As I think you heard in the previous session, there is a lot of work going on now on the different measures about food insecurity and we can talk about that in more detail.

Q47 **Chair:** Mr Dowden, Government is responsible. Are you accountable for 3 million food-insecure people in this country?

Oliver Dowden: As you well know, the approach that we decided to take as a Government was rather than having separate metrics for each of the sustainable development goals, we wanted to entrench them in everything that the Government did through our single departmental plans, which are the guiding principles for each Government Department. It fits in with the spending review process in terms of how many resources are allocated and they are reported on each year. If you take something like food security, it crosses lots of different aspects of Government.

Q48 **Chair:** Can I just stop you on the single departmental plans? When they were published after the election, two Departments mentioned the sustainable development goals. One was DfID, which is what we would expect, and the second one was HMRC. They were not mentioned across Government in any single departmental plan until this Committee wrote to the Cabinet Office and asked that they be included.

Oliver Dowden: We have an annualised process for looking at single departmental plans and we take on board comments from everyone. Of course—

Q49 **Chair:** You are saying that the SDGs are at the heart of it and yet they were only put into the single departmental plans because we raised it.



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Oliver Dowden: As you have seen, they are the centre of the single departmental plans. This is the approach we have taken, in line with what the UN recommended in section 78 of the resolution.

Q50 **Chair:** But they were an afterthought. You had to reverse-engineer them into your single departmental plans at the request of this Committee.

Oliver Dowden: Single departmental plans are reviewed every year by each Department. They are then subject to clearance by the Cabinet Office and the Treasury. It is perfectly normal for single departmental plans to change year by year and of course we will take on board the comments that are raised by people.

Q51 **Chair:** We raised the comments because we waited patiently after the election in 2017 for them to be published and then we went eagerly to them across all the different websites, dug down deep into them and found that just two, HMRC and DfID, mentioned the sustainable development goals. Is that not a failure of the Cabinet Office to put the global goals at the heart of everything the Government does, which is exactly what you are supposed to be doing?

Oliver Dowden: I think you have seen now that they are at the heart of what we are doing. If you look at the single departmental plans that have been published this year, they are at the heart of the single departmental plans.

Lord Bates: Also, if I could just come in on that point, Agenda 2030 was just published at the end of March 2017. That was a document that we consulted very widely on, as to how we were to go about implementing the SDGs domestically. Therefore, effectively, if you take a snapshot of the Agenda deciding that they were going to be fed through the single departmental plans, which was published in a policy document in March, then clearly in the workings of Government that is going to take a few months to work its way through the system. I very much support the fact that now you will get a very different picture on that.

Q52 **Chair:** Can I come back to Mr Tomlinson? Food insecurity is sexist. Women are more likely to be affected than men. At the moment women are more likely to live in food-insecure households than men, 10% compared to 6%. We have had evidence from the Young Women's Trust that women regularly admit missing meals to provide for their children, particularly young mothers aged 16 to 24. They are much more likely to be your claimants. What steps are you taking to tackle the sexism in the food insecurity system that you administer?

Justin Tomlinson: First of all, we welcome the fact there is record employment for women and that within the Universal Credit, with your individual work coach, they will tailor the support, which can predominantly focus around childcare. We have extended free childcare. You can claim up to 85% of childcare costs, compared to 70% under the legacy tax credits. We continue to look at not only getting people into work but then to be able to increase hours and increase earnings.



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Part of the UC approach is that within every Jobcentre there are partnership programmes put in place. There are support organisations, whether it is through the official Work and Health programme, the Employment Support Office or with support groups, who can provide that additional peer-to-peer support to help boost the opportunity for people to work.

Q53 Chair: The evidence we have had from the End Hunger UK Coalition said that where Universal Credit was rolled out, foodbanks and other food aid providers reported, and I quote, a “surge in the numbers of people pushed into greater debt, destitution and hunger as a result of delays, errors, a lack of flexibility and adequate support”, as well as that delays in receiving payments, debt and loan repayments and welfare benefit sanctions are a main driver in people turning to them for food assistance. Is that a picture you recognise?

Justin Tomlinson: I have spent a considerable amount of time meeting with the Trussell Trust not just as a Minister but as a constituency MP and prior to that as a councillor in my constituency, and the reasons why people turn to foodbanks are complex and varied. The key thing for us is that in some cases it could be that the individual is missing out on formal support. The priority for both myself and the Department is to make sure that we work as closely as we can with not just the foodbanks but with any support organisations who provide help for people in a sudden change of circumstances. Now, that could be financial. It could be bereavement, family breakdown or ill health.

The key is to get them into the formal support as quickly as possible, whether that is through a single point of contact in the Jobcentres who can provide expert advice, predominantly for the voluntary network of support that is available, or to do more outreach work to get there as quickly as possible. As I have already said, over 700,000 families, predominantly vulnerable people, were missing out on an average of £285 per month. The key bit with UC compared to the legacy benefits is that by having that personalised, named work coach we can make sure people get that individual support as quickly as possible.

There was much coverage about the way UC works in terms of paying in arrears. Now, the principle of that was to mirror how work is. When you enter work predominantly you would expect to be paid in arrears. What we were finding—and this was feedback from stakeholder groups—is that if you had been out of work for a long time and you suddenly find yourself going into work, having to deal with the challenges of that, particularly if you are low in confidence, and also then managing the fact that your money suddenly goes into arrears, it is far better to do that while you have the support of your work coach in terms of accessing advance payments so that you can get access to your benefits in advance, and getting the Universal Support that can look at what you are claiming and how you are doing your budgeting. I am very pleased, from my Ministerial position, that we have announced the changes to Universal



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Support with the Citizens Advice Bureau, an independent, well-respected organisation that will be present in all Jobcentres to provide that individual support to vulnerable claimants.

Q54 Chair: You talk about people who were not receiving the benefits they were entitled to but your Secretary of State has briefed the Cabinet on the fact that some families will be worse off. How many families and by how much?

Justin Tomlinson: We have put in place just over £3 billion of transitional protection so that nobody transferring from legacy benefits to UC will be worse off.

Q55 Chair: What about new claimants?

Justin Tomlinson: The principle of UC will be that anybody on UC for the first time will be better off for every extra hour they work, removing the cliff edges of 16 hours, 24 hours and 30 hours, and removing the effective tax rate of 90% for some claimants under tax credits. UC is dynamic, it responds in real time and it also avoids, under the old tax credit system, people having to be assessed annually, having been overpaid and having to try to find a way to repay the overpayment because the system was not responsive enough.

UC is supported by the work coaches. They are very enthusiastic about it. However, we are aware this is the single biggest change to welfare, which is why we are taking our time. We are looking at only migrating about 10,000 people next year on a test and learn process, and we have already made significant changes. In last year's Budget, rightly, we announced the removal of the seven-day waiting time. If you are transferring over from a legacy benefit and you are entitled to housing support, you get an additional no strings attached two weeks of housing benefit money to use.

We automatically—this was a major change and a key change—advise all claimants of the ability to have advance payments. Previously, what was happening was that you had to ask, but a lot of vulnerable people did not know that they existed so did not ask. That is what was causing people to unintentionally find themselves in financial difficulty. That is now automatically done. We continue to work very closely with stakeholder groups to get the feedback from their users and advice from their policy teams, and we will continue to make changes where we feel it will make a difference.

Q56 Chair: Can I come back to Minister Dowden? Food insecurity can impact on the attainment of other SDGs, for example in health. What steps are you taking across Government and with the NHS to, for example, make sure that food insecurity does not affect some of these vulnerable benefit claimants? Food insecurity can, for example, undermine HIV treatment and adherence, making medicine less effective, which undermines goal 3, which is to end the AIDS epidemic. Are you aware of that? Have you



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taken any action on that across Government?

Oliver Dowden: The way this process works is that each Department is responsible for all of the sustainable development goals. They all need to be aware of how they impact on the area that they are responsible for. If you take food insecurity, clearly that is going to be impacted a lot by DEFRA but it also, as you say, impacts on the Department of Health.

Q57 **Chair:** They do not mention it in their single departmental plan.

Oliver Dowden: The Department of Health, for example, have produced a cross-Government childhood obesity plan, which we reference in our summary of what Government Departments are doing to implement—

Q58 **Chair:** That is not food insecurity.

Oliver Dowden: If you look at goal 2, which is to end hunger, achieve food security, improve nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture, clearly it fits within that goal. The approach that we are taking is to say to each Department, "You have to step up and deliver on the sustainable development goals".

Q59 **Chair:** Which Department is responsible for ending food insecurity?

Oliver Dowden: Food insecurity cuts across a number of Departments. For example, internationally food security will principally be led by the Department for International Development. If we are talking about the farming sector and the ability of our domestic agricultural sector to deliver food, then that fits with DEFRA. If we are talking about individual people who are in situations of poverty and their ability to access food, that sits with the DWP, which is precisely why we have taken the approach of saying that all Departments are responsible for the delivery of the sustainable development goals.

Q60 **Chair:** Who is accountable? If everyone is responsible, who is accountable?

Oliver Dowden: As you know, first of all, Her Majesty's Government, the whole of Government, is responsible. In terms of the reporting mechanism there is the voluntary national review and as part of the voluntary national review we will assign to each of the goals a lead senior official. We are going through that process for each one of them. They will feed into this reporting process.

Q61 **Chair:** Why are they not lead Ministers? You cannot make civil servants accountable for your Government's delivery.

Oliver Dowden: Of course Ministers are responsible for their Departments but in terms of the practicalities of reporting into the review process it makes sense to have one official who is responsible for collating all those different pieces of information. The obvious Department where that would sit would be DEFRA for food insecurity but clearly that has to be subject to a cross-Government write-around and



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agreement process. I would work on the assumption that DEFRA would be the principal Department for—

Q62 Chair: I am interested that you are keen to make a civil servant accountable for each of the different goals but you are not keen to make a Minister accountable. Isn't that—

Oliver Dowden: Forgive me, you have misunderstood the point I am making or I have not explained it clearly enough. For the voluntary national review, as you know, the Government has to report on its progress towards each of the sustainable development goals. In order to facilitate that, it makes sense to have one person responsible for collating the different pieces of information. In terms of the delivery, clearly Ministers are accountable. In respect of food security, designing a new environmental land management scheme, that is DEFRA's responsibility and DEFRA Ministers are responsible for it. On obesity, DHSC are responsible and that would be the responsibility of DHSC Ministers.

Chair: I have understood it perfectly. I have read the Agriculture Bill and I sat in the debate on it. There was not one mention of food insecurity in the new land management part of the Bill; not one mention of it. If you are saying that they are accountable for it through the Agriculture Bill, that is invisible.

My point is that you are prepared to make civil servants accountable for bringing the goals together and presenting them to the United Nations in September next year, but you are not prepared to make a Minister, a single Minister—not four Ministers, not five Ministers; one Minister—accountable for each one of those goals so that the public, who do not know about these things, can hold them to account. We will leave it there.

Q63 John McNally: I would like to move on to the question of awareness of the sustainable development goals in the wider part of the UK, including businesses, institutions and so on. Basically the Government's response to the Committee in the previous report was that they recognised the importance of engaging businesses, they recognised the suggestion that Government would consider how best to promote the goals to businesses, and so on.

My first question to you is this. We have seen very little evidence that awareness of the SDGs has improved since our previous report and I wonder if you could explain what action your Departments have taken individually to increase awareness of the goals within the last 18 months. I am quite happy for anybody to answer it but particularly the DWP and DEFRA.

Lord Bates: Perhaps if I could just take it first. In that overarching area of engagement with business we have a few mechanisms for doing that. First of all, of course, at a UN level there is the UN Global Compact, which is a very effective network of businesses around the world and there is a very active UK part. They are currently undertaking a roadshow around



the UK. I think its next stop is Bristol. I attended when they came to London. They are going around the UK to highlight the fact that the global goals are about local business and they are doing a tremendous job.

The UK Stakeholders for Sustainable Development, which is another great group, has produced a report on measuring up, which Oliver Dowden and I attended the launch of in July under the auspices of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Sustainable Development Goals. That was a very good contribution to the work that is going into the voluntary national review.

There is a key role, without flagging up my whole Department, for my Secretary of State in Penny Mordaunt because of course the Secretary of State has a particular responsibility for leading on the sustainable development goals. She gave a passionate speech about that at the UN General Assembly, as did the Prime Minister, and also spoke just a couple of weeks ago to the CDC about the importance of the private sector engaging in that to impact investing and ensure we meet the private sector gap. She is also the Minister for Women and Equalities cross-Government and therefore again has a particular role in that. Those are just some of the ways in which we are trying to engage across Government, particularly with business and civil society, to ensure that they are aware of the goals and are playing their part in delivering the goals.

Justin Tomlinson: From a DWP perspective, while the Minister for Employment is primarily responsible for the delivery of UC, my role within DWP in part is to focus on representing vulnerable groups, which would then include issues such as food insecurity, and to make that a priority within the Department. I have only been a Minister in place for a relatively short time but specifically on the issue of UC and how it impacts on vulnerable consumers I have already met with the Trussell Trust, Crisis, Salvation Army, Gingerbread, Barnardo's, CPAG, Children's Society, Women's Aid, Refuge, Citizens Advice Bureau, Scope and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Q64 **John McNally:** There are quite a lot of them out there, are there not?

Justin Tomlinson: There are a lot of stakeholders out there and it is important that we take that on board. I have to say, objectively, that when I then speak to fellow Ministers they are receptive. We continue to make changes that are suggested by stakeholders, cross-party MPs and MPs from all different parties, raised through either Select Committees, individual meetings or in the numerous parliamentary debates we have had in recent times. That is why the rollout of UC is a slow process. It is going to be test and learn and we will continue to make those changes, but I am greatly encouraged that there are 1 million fewer people now in absolute poverty and the food insecurity measure of, "Can a family afford a meal?" has almost halved within five years.



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There is still more to do and that is why I highlighted the need to work closely with support organisations, including people such as the Trussell Trust. I am not precious. If people have good ideas on how we can help the most vulnerable in society get the support they should be getting, I want to do that, learning that lesson of legacy benefits where people were missing out on an average of £285 a month. We have seen that in our constituency casework, some of the most vulnerable people completely overwhelmed by a complex system. UC is designed to make sure all people get the right, appropriate support.

David Rutley: Just coming in on that from a DEFRA perspective, obviously we have the curriculum, we have Connecting Classrooms, which is a global learning programme that I think DfID are involved with, to help communicate the SDGs. DEFRA itself is working with Step Up to Serve in #iwill week, which goes on from 12 to 16 November. What that will do is to deliver an environment campaign in 2019. There is a launch event at Kew Gardens with 50 new young #iwill ambassadors. That is great on some of these environmental dimensions, which are critical for the SDGs more generally, but there is more to do. There is no question there is more to do in terms of raising awareness. When we look at issues like food waste and other issues, there is much more we can do. There is a ready and willing audience in younger people and we need to reach out to them more actively as well. I will take that challenge away and do more work within the DEFRA area but there is work ongoing, particularly on the environmental space.

Q65 **John McNally:** Can I just come back to your wee bit there on the national curriculum? You mentioned that there, did you?

David Rutley: I did.

Q66 **John McNally:** Seemingly, the national curriculum makes no mention of the sustainable development goals. How will the Government ensure that young people are engaged with these goals? That is an absolutely crucial point.

David Rutley: No, it is a good point.

Q67 **John McNally:** I know that in the Scottish schools' curriculum we have learning for sustainability. I wonder if that is something you could expand and how you propose to develop that within the schools.

David Rutley: Clearly many of the themes around the SDGs are included in the curriculum but what I will do is take that issue away, particularly about the curriculum and the SDGs.

Lord Bates: Yes. There are some specific references in the national curriculum, particularly in relation to geography, on the SDGs. Connecting Classrooms and Global Learning Partnerships supply learning resources on the SDGs for schools to use. Those are very widely used and they are done in partnership with the British Council. They are of a very good quality and standard. DHSC also has the SDG objectives, which



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are mentioned in its curriculum as well. I think all of us are here accepting that we have not finished everything. It is not the end of history; it is the beginning of a process towards 2030 which we are keen to learn on, develop and improve as we go forward.

Q68 Chair: I am confused because when we wrote to the Secretary of State for Education specifically about this topic, including the SDGs in the national curriculum, he said it was all delivered through the geography curriculum and there was no specific mention made. Are you saying that they are now specifically taught as SDGs through the curriculum? If so, should the Secretary of State not be aware?

Lord Bates: Is that not what the Secretary of State said? I am sorry, I have not seen the letter, but did he not say that it was taught through geography, which was the point I made?

Q69 Chair: He is saying basically that all of these themes are picked up in the geography curriculum, which obviously raises the question, "What happens to the children who do not take geography?" He said it is not mentioned as such. They are not mentioned as the SDGs. He is basically saying that if you are learning about flooding processes or coastal erosion in your geography GCSE—I happen to have someone very close to me who is learning about those processes, and he does not learn about the sustainable development goals and that he has a right not to grow up hungry.

Lord Bates: That was the reason why we launched the Global Learning Partnerships. That was a particular domestically focused agenda to raise awareness of the SDGs and, more than that, to supply good quality teaching materials to schools so that people could follow them.

Q70 Chair: When was that launched?

Lord Bates: I will have to come back to you on that.

Q71 Chair: When we went out to Birmingham and spoke to geography teachers and students, it was very clear that this was not being taught in the teacher training and was not something they were expected to teach. That was a little over a year, 18 months ago.

Oliver Dowden: The Global Learning Partnership is a three-year programme running from 2018 to 2021.

Q72 Chair: It has just launched?

Oliver Dowden: It should be just launching.

Chair: Thank you.

Q73 John McNally: I just wanted to ask one more on that point, please. Are any of the witnesses aware of any collaboration going on between the Westminster Government and the devolved Governments on these matters? It seems to me that we are trying to get some sort of general consensus that sustainable development goals are good practice, that



they are good for business and they are good for education. Is there collaboration going on between the Governments on this?

Lord Bates: I can certainly point to the one that I know of, which is the 16 October, when DfID are meeting with the devolved Administrations in Scotland as part of the Scottish SDG Network. There is a mid-year consultation on that. That process is ongoing through regular contact with the devolved Administrations because of course they have specific responsibility as to a number of areas that are key delivery objectives for the SDGs and reporting in the voluntary national review.

David Rutley: It is also important to highlight the work that is going on on child obesity. Clearly the DHSC have a major role there but we are working as DEFRA on that issue and so is the Treasury. There is cross-working and we have seen some step changes in terms of delivery against the child obesity issue, which obviously links in with the malnutrition debate as well.

Chair: Thank you. Can I just pause and welcome Members of the Belize Parliament, who are here to observe our Committee? We look forward to a good discussion with you at the end of the meeting. We have a quota of four Ministers here with us today. There will be a blue moon in the sky tonight because of that. Thank you.

Q74

Dr Matthew Offord: Mr Dowden, I am sure you remember that on 10 September you responded to my parliamentary question on the sustainable development goals. I asked you about reporting back and you said there is a mechanism for DfID, with the Cabinet Office, to track progress, based on reports from each of the Departments. It gave me a sense that there was no leadership. It was more Departments and civil servants reporting back. How does the Cabinet Office provide leadership to ensure the promotion of sustainable development goals? Could you confirm that you do remember my question?

Oliver Dowden: Of course. It is burnt on my heart. The approach we have taken, which I believe is consistent with the UN, is to try to entrench this into the activity of every Department, and rather than having a separate sustainable development goal reporting mechanism, we have one Government reporting mechanism, which is the single departmental plans. Single departmental plans are led by both the Cabinet Office and the Treasury. Each Department produces its single departmental plan and we scrutinise them as to whether we believe they are adequate, as does the Treasury, before they are finally signed off. In doing that, we have made clear to individual Departments that they need to take into account the sustainable development goals.

Through mechanisms such as the implementation unit, which reviews these, and reports to Ministers that we then review and sign off, we are asking the question of every Department, "Are you entrenching the sustainable development goals in your single departmental plans?" Then each year Departments have to report on their progress towards



delivering on their single departmental plans through their annual report and accounts, and indeed those annual reports and accounts are audited.

We have taken the choice to try to entrench it through everything the Government is doing. There is clearly—and I know some members of the Committee may well have this view—a different argument for saying we should have an entirely separate reporting structure for the sustainable development goals. I do not believe that is the right approach because it is challenging enough for a Government to ensure accountability and delivery of everything that it does across a whole wide range of Departments, arm's-length bodies and different interactions. It makes sense to have one single reporting mechanism. Secondly, it says the sustainable development goals are central to everything that the Government does. That is why we have entrenched it through the single departmental plans.

David Rutley: Just to build on that, which is from the centre, by looking at an individual Department, ahead of this Committee I asked officials to align the goals that are in the SDP for DEFRA—there is a public version that you can get on the website—with the SDGs. Today we have focused on two of the targets within SDG2. There are actually five, and then there are a whole load of indicators in among them. What is encouraging for you, I think, as a Committee, and also for me as a Minister, is that there is alignment between the goals that are set out in the SDP and in the SDGs as well. That will help drive work forward. For example, one of the SDG targets, 2.4, is sustainable food product production, and then SDP 2.5 is about the new environmental land management scheme, the LMS. SDG2 is referenced against it. Notwithstanding there is probably more to be done, that process is working at a departmental level. I have been scrutinising that at length over the last day or so.

Q75 Dr Matthew Offord: That is helpful. Going back to Mr Dowden, the Government's own Agenda 2030 progress report highlights a mishmash between the reporting of hunger and malnutrition abroad and hunger and malnutrition in the United Kingdom. Why this discrepancy, where you seem to treat it differently between the international and the domestic agenda?

Oliver Dowden: As you know, the sustainable development goals grew out of the Millennium Development Goals. The Millennium Development Goals were principally about overseas international development. This is now putting responsibility on all nations, including developed nations, to deliver on it. We are bringing together two sets of accountability and reporting, one internationally through DfID and one domestically through individual Departments. We are seeking to bring the two together in single departmental plans and through the review mechanism for individual departmental plans.

Q76 Dr Matthew Offord: It has not happened yet, though?



Oliver Dowden: It is an ongoing process. Perhaps I should have said this in response to earlier points as well, but the single departmental plans are produced every year. Of course it is a process of iteration for the Government as, first of all, we try to get the SDGs into single departmental plans—two years ago they were not in there at all—and secondly, how we continue to refine that process. I believe with the most recent annual single departmental plans, the sustainable development goals are clearly in there and we are working to entrench them even further. I hope with Minister Rutley's evidence he has demonstrated that DEFRA certainly takes it seriously and I believe that is the case across Government Departments.

Q77 **Kerry McCarthy:** Apologies for missing the first panel. I was in the Agriculture Bill Committee. What I think is lacking is any sense that the SDGs are driving Government policy and making the Government do things that they would not otherwise be doing. What I am hearing a lot of is picking on existing policies and shoehorning them in, saying, "That meets the SDG", whereas if you look at countries from Colombia to Finland to Nepal, they have strategies where they can tell you, "We would not be doing this were it not for the fact that we are trying to meet the SDGs". I am not hearing from you anything that suggests the SDGs are driving it. You are just going through existing policy and finding the places. "Oh, we can mention the SDGs there". Mr Rutley, perhaps you could say, in terms of the Agriculture Bill and in terms of the 25 Year Environment Plan, in what sense does this SDG act as a driver of policy?

David Rutley: Clearly they are a really important set of goals. The Government does take them seriously, as we talked about, in terms of the plans. Taking policies forward, the reason the SDGs exist is because there is a compelling need to take them forward globally and domestically. The Government recognises that and has taken action.

Q78 **Kerry McCarthy:** What action, though?

David Rutley: Yes, let us come on to the action. What I wanted to say is that there are multiple reasons to want to take this action. The SDGs have been created in response to issues out in the environment and in the world and Government is also seeking to do that.

In terms of action, let us just focus on SDG2 for a minute and the soft drinks levy. That was important. There is an issue around obesity. Coming back to more agriculture-related issues around food waste and what we can do there, there is some compelling work going on with the Resource and Waste Strategy that fits in with the 25-year plan, and also the work that will be going on not just with the Agriculture Bill and the environmental land management system, which obviously creates big opportunities to improve the sustainability and animal welfare friendly approaches to agriculture, but the Food Strategy work that is going to be going on as well. That is embryonic at this stage but that is going to be a really important piece of work. That fits with the SDGs and the SDGs help inform that, but there are other factors as well as to why we want to do



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these things other than just the SDGs. That is a spur to action, along with many other triggers in our society and indeed in the environment.

Lord Bates: Could I just jump in with one other thought? Of course, a lot of the drivers for change are coming internationally and I think we should take some pride in the UK's role in developing the SDGs through the high-level panel that David Cameron co-chaired, and then seeing them implemented and supporting their intervention. A lot of the SDGs and a lot of the drivers for domestic policy come from international agreements, through the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, for example. Over the weekend I was in Copenhagen on their work on sustainable development challenges, engaging with the private sector. Then that is rooted back into domestic policy, and of course initiatives such as the environment plan and plastics in the oceans are very much coming through our international contacts and obligations that we are taking very seriously, as well as our domestic driving of the agenda.

Q79 **Kerry McCarthy:** What I am hearing at an international level, for example when I was at the UN's Oceans conference last year, is that the UK gets a lot of credit for initiating the SDGs to an extent and creating them, but there is real disappointment at our performance since they came in. They feel like we have rather dropped the ball and it is not a priority for the British Government in the way that it was when David Cameron helped establish them. Do you think that is a fair criticism? As I said, in these other countries there is a real centrality of the SDGs to their policymaking and it seems to be very much a footnote in the UK.

Oliver Dowden: From the top of Government, the Prime Minister reiterated her commitment to it at UNGA just last month—

Q80 **Chair:** When is she going to make a speech in the UK about it? She has made two speeches in New York. When are we going to hear a domestic speech? Also at the Tory Party Conference.

Oliver Dowden: As you know, she made a speech just last month at UNGA on sustainable—

Q81 **Chair:** In New York. When is she going to make it to the domestic audience? One speech from the Prime Minister would raise awareness of the SDGs and people's right not to grow up hungry, for example. She could pick on that as part of her burning injustices. Why has she not?

Oliver Dowden: I would argue she has.

Chair: In America, not here.

Oliver Dowden: I do not necessarily think that the location of the speech has that much impact but—

Q82 **Kerry McCarthy:** That is the concern—that it is seen as an international thing. When we did our inquiry last year, Ministers seemed to think that it was Millennium Development Goals Mark II, that it was just about what developing countries ought to do. There was no acknowledgment that



this is meant to be driving and raising ambitions in this country as well. That is why it is important that she is not just making the speech in an international forum but that she is making the speech about domestic policy goals here, including ending hunger in this country, not just ending hunger in sub-Saharan Africa.

Oliver Dowden: May I take one example where I genuinely think that we are working at both a national and an international level and where the Prime Minister has given personal focus, and that is on gender equality? That is really delivering on the sustainable development goals. She has made it a personal priority, for example, at a national level, requiring companies to disclose the gender pay cap, as well as at an international level with the work we have done, for example, in relation to FGM. We have been a world leader in response to that and I think that is an example of where you have an international agenda, through the sustainable development goals, that then gets entrenched in the activities of the Government, both at a domestic level but also through the Department for International Development and diplomatic relations through the Foreign Office. That is the benefit of taking the goals and putting them into the single departmental plans, so that they essentially become mainstream to everything the Government is doing.

Q83 **Chair:** I certainly think she has a way to go with some of your Back Bench colleagues, who described her as “a lame cockroach living in an irradiated environment”. In terms of abolishing all forms of violence, including gender-based violence, she needs to start working with some of your colleagues on the Back Benches.

David Rutley: I think we all deplore that language, do we not?

Oliver Dowden: Completely, yes, of course.

Justin Tomlinson: All sides of the House.

David Rutley: All sides of the House deplore it.

Chair: Absolutely. There should be no place for that sort of language here. Our point is that this is a managerialist, incremental, technocratic approach, not a vision for Government, not least because the main reporting requirement, the single departmental plans—which were the delivery mechanism when the Government removed the separate reporting requirement that was originally envisaged—did not contain these goals. That was the moment, for this Committee, when we realised that it was not central to what Government was doing.

It is good that they have now been reverse-engineered in but what we are not hearing is vision and grip on all of these issues, or accountability. We are not hearing anything about public communication of these goals anywhere across Government. They certainly were not mentioned in the Agriculture Bill second reading speeches, for which I also must take responsibility because I was in there. We are going to move on.



Q84 Alex Sobel: Just to follow that point, we have covered accountability but in the previous panel the biggest ask from them was that there be a joined-up approach, that it was not just about having single departmental goals. It does appear, from everything that you have said, that you are working in silos in your Departments. Has a joint task group or joint departmental working groups been set up to look at SDG2, to look at food insecurity and to look at malnutrition? Oliver, has something like that happened?

Oliver Dowden: We have a range of interdepartmental taskforces. Relevant taskforces, for example, would include the employment and skills taskforce, which would address goal 4, quality education, and the housing taskforce, which would address goal 11, sustainable cities and communities. Taskforces are just one way in which Ministers from different Departments work together. There is a whole panoply of ad hoc ministerial meetings where they come together to work on different issues. There are also Cabinet Sub-committees. The Cabinet Office will scrutinise groups of Departments against different macro challenges, for example building 300,000 homes a year.

What we have been trying to do as a Government since 2010 is break down the silos of individual Departments and create this cross-Government working. I do not view the single departmental plans as having a silo mentality. Because they are agreed through the Cabinet Office and the Treasury, we ensure that macro government goals such as the sustainable development goals are reflected in multiple plans.

I do think that if a part of a sustainable development goal relates to an individual Department, it is important that that Department leads on it. If we try to substitute, for example, the Cabinet Office or DfID for leading on it, it is less likely that that Department will view it as part of their central mission. The Departments' central missions are set out in the single departmental plans. That is what they are accountable for in the way that I described earlier, through the annual reports and reviews.

Q85 Alex Sobel: David, have you called something together for SDG2? Have you specifically addressed this across Departments?

David Rutley: I have recently been appointed as the Food Minister within the last few weeks and so clearly there is a lot of work that needs to be done in setting out the broader Food Strategy. Clearly I will be working very closely with DHSC on food insecurity, how we can look at food waste issues and help the most vulnerable in that way. Many retailers and the Government are working on that too. On an area that I feel passionately about, child obesity, we need to work very closely in a joined-up way. That does not have to be a taskforce. I do know the Ministers well at DHSC and I want to work with them on these issues, and they will be working with me as well.

The thing that should give you some reassurance is that it is very clear that the voluntary national review that is coming from 2019 is galvanising



the officials and Ministers to think about these SDGs in a more meaningful way. When things get reported, there is a lot more focus. There is already a lot of focus, as we talked about, but that will see a step change. We will get more input from stakeholders, which is really exciting, about the case studies they are working on, and that will help with that process of getting more joined-up.

Q86 Alex Sobel: You will let us know how you will do the joined-up working when you have worked out how you are going to do it?

David Rutley: Yes, but I just wanted to reassure you that since before I was appointed there was a lot of joined-up working that goes on between DEFRA and DHSC anyway on these issues. There has to be because many of these issues are cross-departmental.

Lord Bates: I was just going to quickly underscore that. Next year, for the SDGs and those who care passionately about the SDGs, which we all do across Government, is going to be a very significant year. The publication of the data in the voluntary national review will attract an awful lot of attention. That then needs to be presented. There will then be feedback on that from the UN in terms of looking at how we have performed. Then in September there will be the first stocktaking by Heads of Government taking place at the UN on progress towards the SDGs. Next year is a very big year on that.

Just to put this on the record in terms of the previous exchange about speeches, there was a very substantial speech given by Penny Mordaunt on 9 October at the CDC offices, just up the road in Victoria, entirely focused on the SDGs, calling on the City of London to be used as a means by which we can engage the private sector and pension funds in impact investing as a way of bridging the gap in terms of their delivery. There is a lot of energy going into this, a lot of commitment, and all of us who are working closely on it recognise that next year, with the publication of the VNR, will be a significant moment of moving forward on that.

I would also highlight, just in closing, the fact that we have opened up a consultation inviting civil society to submit into the voluntary national review, which is a real innovation, recognising that it is not just Governments but business and civil society as well. That can be done online up until 16 November through the website [gov.uk/sustainabledevelopmentgoals](https://www.gov.uk/sustainabledevelopmentgoals). We hope that many civil society organisations and businesses that are watching these proceedings might follow up on that, so we get a true picture of what is being done.

Q87 Anna McMorris: You talk a lot about a joined-up approach and feeding into that, but I do not see any evidence of this. We know, for example, in Wales, it is legislated for. There is an Act that works across all public sector bodies, not just Government, holding them accountable for what they are doing, and that is directly linked to the SDGs. Oliver, can I ask you first of all, are you going to bring in such an Act in England?



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Oliver Dowden: I have seen the Welsh example. I do not think we need to have an Act of Parliament because we are already entrenching it through the single departmental plans and that is the correct approach. You raise an important point about arm's length bodies. Certainly from the Cabinet Office's perspective, we are ensuring that the arm's length bodies that we work with are aware of the goals and are entrenching it through the activities that they undertake. The single departmental plan process does not just relate to the Department narrowly; it describes what is expected both by the Department but also the arm's length bodies that are accountable to that Department. That is the best way to go.

I am open to the argument. Clearly it would not be my decision but I am open to the argument for having a new piece of legislation. However, I am struggling to see what exactly it would add beyond what we are doing.

Q88 **Anna McMorris:** This piece of legislation is widely acclaimed across the world, including from the UN itself. It is a new piece of legislation and we have yet to see the outcomes on the ground but all evidence suggests that it will lead to domestic outcomes—those key changes that are happening in our communities. What you are saying is very top-level. It all depends on the individual Ministers in the individual Departments and how well they do at cross-working.

Oliver Dowden: I would say, in respect of the single departmental plans, that there is a top-line summary that is published for each Department but sitting underneath that are incredibly detailed plans running to dozens of pages, as I think other Ministers here will attest. They get that level of granularity as to what is expected of Departments and the themes of the sustainable development goals run through the activities of Departments.

Q89 **Anna McMorris:** How do you see that leading to outcomes on the ground?

Oliver Dowden: The single departmental plans are basically the—I do not want to say “contract” but they are the reporting mechanism for Departments for what they and their arm's length bodies are actually going to deliver. There is a system of accountability. Because they are signed off and agreed by the Treasury, departmental funding is contingent on delivering as allocated, according to the needs identified in the single departmental plan. For overall Department delivery as scrutinised by No. 10 and the Cabinet Office, the principal tool we use is the single departmental plan, and Departments have to report annually on the delivery of that. It is a strong accounting mechanism.

My concern is that we do not have another mechanism that sits on top of that. It makes sense to have one reporting and accounting mechanism. That is why the coalition Government introduced the predecessor of single departmental plans, the business plans, to bring that focus to



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Departments. It is working, bringing that focus. The challenge we have is then ensuring that the SDGs are entrenched in the single departmental plans, and as I hope you have seen with this year's single departmental plans, there is a lot of evidence of that now.

- Q90 **Anna McMorris:** It seems to me that that is not working. It is not working on the ground, it is not working with arm's-length bodies and it is not working across civil society.

Can I ask Lord Bates as well? There are seven months now until the UK voluntary national review has to be completed. How far along is that? We are hearing evidence telling us that organisations have seen very little progress so far.

Lord Bates: There is a tremendous amount of work that is going on across Whitehall, as you would imagine, at this point. Everything is on progress towards meeting that deadline that we intend to publish.

- Q91 **Anna McMorris:** When are you going to report on that?

Lord Bates: On the timetabling as to when we do this, we must send across the main messages from the voluntary national review by about mid-May, about 17 May. Then it is formally presented—

- Q92 **Anna McMorris:** To Parliament?

Lord Bates: No, it is formally presented to the UN. The UN sustainable development goals—

- Q93 **Anna McMorris:** The UN guidance suggests that parliamentarians need to be consulted on this. How is it coming to Parliament?

Lord Bates: We are looking, at the present time, at the possibility of an event. We would be open to your advice on this as to how we engage with Parliament. There will be engagement with Parliament. The exact format of that is something that we are open to and discussing, but in terms of the actual process of this, it is mid-May for initial messages, then the presentation in mid-June at the UN as a formal process to it. Then there is a feedback mechanism and a review in September at a high-level political forum in the margins of the UNGA. Those are all the points there. I have mentioned the civil society element. I have mentioned how we are engaging with business on this. Of course, I have touched on the devolved Administrations. On Parliament, again, you as the Committee could make suggestions. I know the IDC is also looking at this. We would be open to looking at how that best takes place.

- Q94 **Anna McMorris:** Oliver, would you like to comment on that? Will you be bringing it to Parliament?

Oliver Dowden: DfID is the lead Department for the sustainable development goals. If it is going to be brought to Parliament, it would be by them.

- Q95 **Anna McMorris:** You are responsible for the domestic implementation,



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are you not?

Oliver Dowden: The Cabinet Office is responsible for all implementation. We are seeking to implement the sustainable development goals in the way I have described to entrench them.

On the point about the voluntary national review, I am quite sure that parliamentarians will want to debate and discuss that and the Government would facilitate opportunities for that to happen.

Q96 **Anna McMorris:** Before May, obviously?

Oliver Dowden: We would have to have a discussion with DfID as to the mechanisms for doing that, but I have no principled objections to that at all.

Lord Bates: We are in the process—not quite ready yet—of going out and talking to—

Q97 **Chair:** With seven months left, you are not ready. UKSSD says: “It is still unclear what the scope and process for engaging stakeholders will be in detail.” It says it is “not aware of preparations, mechanisms, or a reporting process”, and nor are we.

Lord Bates: There are some specifics here. If you are talking about the stakeholders, I have already talked about the stakeholders that we are engaging with actively at the moment. There is also an obligation, which is communicated to Departments, to consult with stakeholders in the areas about the implication of the SDGs, so that is a commitment as well. We are aware of the commitment to engage with Parliament and we will be doing that. The exact format of doing that is currently being worked on but, because we are working on it and have not announced it, it is also an opportunity for colleagues in Parliament to express a view as to what form and what shape that should take.

Oliver Dowden: Indeed, clearly, we will be listening to the recommendations made by this Committee.

Q98 **Chair:** No, you did not ask us to do this. We are doing this off our own bat. It sounds to me like you do not know what you are doing with parliamentarians and you are just going to wait and see. You have seven months left before this thing is reported to the UN.

Lord Bates: Yes. We are saying that there will be some engagement with Parliament and the exact format of that, for it to be a meaningful—

Q99 **Anna McMorris:** Perhaps commit to just coming back to Parliament on this before May, Oliver, if you can do that.

Oliver Dowden: I did not want to be bureaucratic about this.

Anna McMorris: As the Cabinet Office, I am sure you could make that commitment.



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Oliver Dowden: DfID is the lead Department on this and I am afraid you cannot ask me to make a commitment on behalf of another Department.

Lord Bates: If I could make the commitment, therefore, on behalf of the team of Ministers present, there will be a mechanism for consulting parliamentary colleagues on our progress towards a voluntary national review. That will happen before May. The exact format and structure as to how that consultation takes place is something we are discussing in Government, as you would expect, but we are also open to other colleagues in Parliament making suggestions to us.

Q100 **Anna McMorris:** To follow that up, the deadline you have set yourself is May to go to the UN with this voluntary review. I would imagine then, as UK Government, you are involving what Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are doing as a contingency and you will be including in your evidence the Well-being of Future Generations Act.

Lord Bates: On the specifics of the Act, I am afraid I do not have a position on that. It is fairly new. We are looking at it.

Anna McMorris: It is part of the UK and part of UK government.

Lord Bates: Of course, we are consulting, as I mentioned before, with the devolved Administrations on areas that are their responsibility because we want to project an accurate picture of what is happening in the UK. That is what is happening in Wales, which is part of the UK. Therefore, it will be, naturally, part of presenting what the UK is doing to implement the SDGs, which is the purpose of the voluntary national review. All of that is clear. The specifics on the format of engagement is something which, as I said, we are discussing among colleagues, if you will allow us to do that, and we are open to others making suggestions to us. But it will happen.

Q101 **Chair:** Can I ask the other Ministers, Mr Tomlinson and Mr Rutley, what contributions your Department made to the voluntary national review?

David Rutley: We will be making submissions. I was speaking to some of the officials yesterday. They are gearing up their activity and are liaising very closely with the Cabinet Office as to the response.

Q102 **Chair:** Have you been asked by DfID for a contribution to the VNR yet?

David Rutley: That process is underway.

Q103 **Chair:** Mr Tomlinson, you had a slightly—

Justin Tomlinson: I am relatively new, but we are committed to continue to work with DfID and the other Departments in this area.

Q104 **Chair:** Nothing so far from you?

Justin Tomlinson: It could have been, but not me personally.

Q105 **Chair:** Did someone else want to come in?



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Lord Bates: Yes. I want to quickly come in on that because of course the decision to submit ourselves to the voluntary national review was a decision taken at the highest level. It was a decision of the Government collectively to submit ourselves to the voluntary national review. At that point where the commitment was given that we were going to have a voluntary national review, clearly, all Government Departments were signed up to and aware of that process and the obligations that it infers.

Q106 **Chair:** Of course that decision was an opportunity to raise domestic awareness of the goals. What plans do you have to take advantage of this opportunity, and not the speech at the CDC offices?

Lord Bates: It is a great moment. 2019 will be a significant moment for the SDGs in the domestic focus. Once you start producing into the public domain data as to how we are performing against SDGs, clearly that is going to attract a great deal of media interest. It will attract parliamentary interest. It will start a debate. We are doing our best through the consultation that we are having with civil society and business to start the conversation early, but we expect that it will gather pace as we produce more data on this. Contributions such as your report will contribute towards that overall effort.

Q107 **Chair:** Your own submission notes the Department is still in the process of identifying leads within other Departments to support the production of the review, and yet we have just seven months to go. Why has this taken so long? Why have you waited so long in preparing for the VNR?

Lord Bates: The decision to take the VNR was a decision that was taken—

Chair: It was made at least 18 months ago. It was made at the UNGA in 2017, was it not?

Lord Bates: That we would participate in a VNR. The specific timing of when we submit ourselves for VNR is open to us. That commitment was made more recently than that. That is there. The process is underway, the deadlines are clear, the commitments are there and we are confident that we will meet them.

Oliver Dowden: Just to echo Lord Bates's point about the processes being underway, the first step is collating the information together from individual Departments as to how they believe they are meeting the sustainable development goals. Already at official level, Departments have been asked to prepare contributions. That will then go to Ministers and then Ministers will make representations. There will be a formal Government clearance process for it. Also, as part of Anna McMorrin's point, we will then seek to engage more widely. This is an ongoing process as we develop it, but we have already started this process, the first step of which is getting the information from individual Departments.

Q108 **Chair:** DfID's own evidence to this Committee says that it has not identified leads in different Departments. How do you explain that?



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Lord Bates: Given that it was DfID evidence, it was a point—forgive me. I am not sure when the evidence that you refer to was said.

Chair: Last month.

Lord Bates: We made a statement that we would be appointing SDG champions for each of those goals to drive forward that particular goal for the voluntary national review process. We have appointed them in most areas but not all areas. Once they are appointed—

Chair: It sounds like the DWP may not have somebody appointed.

Oliver Dowden: Just to chip in further on that point, there will be lots of different policy streams and workstreams across Government Departments. At official level, they have been asked to start compiling that information. The official champions, which are in the process of being appointed, will pull that all together. Then it comes to Ministers as a normal process in Government and Ministers make decisions as to the extent to which they believe these are being met. That feeds into the formal Government clearance process being led by DfID as the responsible Department and then DfID pulls together the whole thing as the lead Department.

Q109 **Chair:** When does Parliament have its say in that process?

Oliver Dowden: Parliament will engage as part of that consultative process, but at the moment we are at the stage of getting the actual granular delivery information together from across what all Government Departments are doing. We are at the beginning of this process, which, as you have acknowledged, will take several months.

David Rutley: Just to reinforce, that process is underway within DEFRA. One of the things that is going on is that we want to get stakeholder input to the VNR process. I understand that Environment Links had a UK conference very recently and has committed to draw on its network to help get input to that. That is an example of how that is moving forward. That is not to say, of course, that there is not more work that needs to be done, but we are at a relatively early stage in that process.

Q110 **Chair:** I want to come back to the issue around housing and goal 11 for the MHCLG. Minister Dowden, you said that this is 300,000 homes a year. We have had evidence from the Royal Town Planning Institute saying that there is no evidence the Government has an explicit action plan to create sustainable cities and communities.

One of the concerns of this Committee has been through our Heatwaves report and the creation of modular homes, which are being subsidised through MHCLG. How many of those 300,000 homes are modular? Are you satisfied that we are creating sustainable cities and communities when these homes are not flood resilient, not insurable, in some cases not mortgageable and are susceptible to extreme heatwave conditions and overheating?



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Oliver Dowden: You will have to ask MHCLG Ministers on the specifics of—

Q111 **Chair:** You are the Minister responsible for the domestic implementation of the goals, are you not? Is that not why you are here?

Oliver Dowden: I am here because I was invited by the Committee. The role of the Cabinet Office is to support cross-Government work. Implementing the sustainable development goals is cross-Government work, which the Cabinet Office will seek to facilitate, supporting DfID, which is the lead Department.

On the point about how we are ensuring the important points that you raised about modular housing sustainability, that is being dealt with by the Housing ITF, the implementation task force, which is chaired by the Prime Minister. One of the items that we are considering and developing is ensuring that for our goal of 300,000 houses a year, first of all, we take advantage of full modern mechanisms, including modular development. Just yesterday we had the Industrial Strategy Task Force, which was looking at how we can encourage industry to develop those products.

In relation to sustainability, we sat round the table in developing our housing policy across the Government with all relevant Ministers. Both sustainability and modular housing have been constantly on the agenda and form part of our plans.

In terms of the specific points you raised about delivery of MHCLG, clearly, MHCLG Ministers will have to account for that.

Q112 **Chair:** In the response to the Heatwaves report, they say they take a technologically neutral approach to modular housing. That means that Government money could end up subsidising homes that are not fit for human habitation within 20 or 30 years. In a modular construction, if there is a flood and the homes at the bottom are flooded, then every home at the top is affected as well. I do hope you will take this Committee's concerns back to that Housing Task Force. We are unlikely to get the Prime Minister to come and give evidence to us on that.

Oliver Dowden: I will certainly undertake to ask the Secretary of State for MHCLG or one of his Ministers to write to you on that point.

Chair: They have and we are not satisfied with the answer. We do not believe that that is creating sustainable cities and communities. It is one example—a small one but an important one—of how a dash to fast track housing can lead to unintended consequences and great hardship for individuals further down the line.

We are going to, I believe, have a vote very shortly on a ten-minute rule Bill and so we will have to leave it there. I want to thank Ministers for coming and also say that this is something the Committee is going to be undertaking on an annual basis. We will be looking at different themes



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across Government.

We also hope that Parliament will be involved in the VNR process. I know at the UNGA other Government delegations that had presented brought parliamentarians with them to the United Nations. That is something that the Government and Ministers need to consider.

Thank you very much.