



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee

Tuesday 22 June 2021

Session 6



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Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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NET ZERO, ENERGY AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

1st Meeting 2021, Session 6

CONVENER

*Dean Lockhart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Fiona Hyslop (Linlithgow) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Natalie Don (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)

*Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)

*Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con)

*Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab)

*Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)

*attended

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Peter McGrath

LOCATION

Virtual Meeting

Scottish Parliament

Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee

Tuesday 22 June 2021

[Fiona Hyslop opened the meeting at 09:30]

Interests

Fiona Hyslop (Linlithgow) (SNP): Welcome to the first meeting in session 6 of the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee. I am the MSP for Linlithgow. As the oldest member of the committee, I have the pleasure of convening the meeting for the first two items of business. I take this opportunity to welcome all members to the committee and I look forward to working with you. I remind everyone present to switch their mobile phones to silent.

Agenda item 1 is for each of us to declare any interests that we have that are relevant to the work of the committee. Background information on the declaration of interests is provided in paper 1.

I do not have any interests to declare for the purposes of this committee.

The members of the committee are Natalie Don, Jackie Dunbar, Liam Kerr, Monica Lennon, Dean Lockhart and Mark Ruskell. I will ask them, in alphabetical order, to declare any interests. Please wait until I call you before speaking—that will allow broadcasting to unmute your mic.

I invite Natalie Don to declare her interests.

Natalie Don (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP): I declare that I am still a councillor at Renfrewshire Council. I mention that in case there is a crossover between any of the issues that we discuss in the committee and those that arise in my role as councillor.

Fiona Hyslop: Thank you, Natalie. Do you have any other interests to declare?

Natalie Don: No, that is my only interest, thank you.

Fiona Hyslop: I call Jackie Dunbar.

Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): My interest is similar to Natalie's. I am still a serving councillor for Aberdeen City Council. I make the declaration in case anything that the council and the committee discuss coincides. I have no other interests to declare.

Fiona Hyslop: Thank you very much, Jackie. I call Liam Kerr.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): I do not believe that I have any particular interests to declare. However, members and viewers might be interested to know that I have a small shareholding in a community hydroelectric project in Aberdeen.

Fiona Hyslop: Thank you very much, Liam. We move to Monica Lennon.

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): I have no relevant interests to declare.

Fiona Hyslop: Thank you very much, Monica. We move to Dean Lockhart.

Dean Lockhart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I have a minority shareholding in a smart meter company that is based in England. I have nothing else to declare.

Fiona Hyslop: Thank you very much, Dean. Finally, we move to Mark Ruskell.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): I have nothing to declare.

Fiona Hyslop: Thank you very much, Mark.

Convener

09:34

Fiona Hyslop: Item 2, and the committee's next task, is to choose a convener. The procedure is explained in paper 2. The Parliament has agreed that only members of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party are eligible for nomination as convener of the committee. I nominate Dean Lockhart.

Dean Lockhart was chosen as convener.

Fiona Hyslop: I congratulate Dean Lockhart on his appointment. I look forward to working with him and other members of the committee. I will hand over to our convener, Dean Lockhart.

The Convener (Dean Lockhart): I thank you, Fiona, and other committee members. It is a great privilege to become convener of this committee. We have tremendously important work ahead of us and I look forward to working with all the members, the clerks to the committee, the Scottish Parliament information centre and everyone else who will be engaged with the committee's work.

Deputy Convener

09:35

The Convener: Item 3 is the committee's choice of a deputy convener. The Parliament has agreed that only members of the Scottish National Party are eligible for nomination as deputy convener of the committee. On that basis, I invite nominations for the post of deputy convener.

Liam Kerr: I nominate Fiona Hyslop.

Fiona Hyslop was chosen as deputy convener

The Convener: I congratulate Fiona on becoming deputy convener of the committee. I very much look forward to working with her on the work of the committee that lies ahead.

Decision on Taking Business in Private

09:36

The Convener: Item 4 is a decision on taking business in private. The committee is asked to consider taking in private item 6, which is the consideration of our approach to developing a work programme. Is that agreed?

I see that that is agreed.

Legacy Papers

09:36

The Convener: Item 5 is the consideration of session 5 legacy reports. The committee is asked to consider a number of legacy reports that were prepared by relevant committees of the previous parliamentary session. The reports outline the committees' main work and identify potential challenges that this committee might face in the coming session. The legacy reports of three former committees—the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee, the Economy, Energy and Fair Work Committee and the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee—have been identified as relevant to the committee, as those committees all covered areas of relevance to our work.

The clerk's paper for this agenda item draws attention to the most relevant items in the legacy reports. We are invited to formally note the reports and to agree to consider their contents as part of our work programme. I will take it as read that members agree.

As this is our final item before we go into private session, let us take the opportunity for a brief discussion on the key points arising from the legacy reports. Will members briefly highlight areas that fall within the committee's remit that they consider important for us to look at as part of inquiries or investigations?

I would like to start with the deputy convener to get her views on the important and priority topics that the committee should look at.

Fiona Hyslop: Thank you, Dean. I look forward to working with everybody on the committee.

There is a big challenge ahead of us. The import of the subject matters that we are responsible for is huge. I was impressed with the content of the legacy papers. The content is wide because of the wider remit of the three former committees, but there are some specific steers for us that are strong and important. I am keen that the committee hits the ground running, and there are a lot of agenda items that are immediate, although some might be more longer term.

With the 26th United Nations climate change conference of the parties—COP26—coming up, I am conscious that we need to move quickly to understand and get an appreciation of developments, at all levels. I am thinking about not just preparation but output and outcomes, and Scotland's role in that regard; I am also thinking about work with young people and what Italy is doing on that strand of COP.

Committees in the previous session set out clearly what had to be done, how it had to be done and the timetables for all that. A great deal of scrutiny needs to take place. Implementation, therefore, needs to be our main focus.

I have a particular interest in different energy use and innovation. We should work with colleagues on the Economy and Fair Work Committee on jobs and the green recovery. The just transition commission's work is important and we can move quickly in that regard.

I will mention two more areas, which other members might touch on: infrastructure, particularly housing refit, which will be important to the net zero agenda; and community, because we must ensure that communities in Scotland can lead on issues, rather than just be on the receiving end. There might be something to consider there.

Other members will probably have ideas on this, but as deputy convener I thought it might be helpful to do the scoping. I am conscious that this committee has no members from the Highlands and Islands or the south of Scotland. It might be appropriate to consider the advice in the legacy reports and take particular cognisance of communications and engagement work, especially with those parts of the country.

I will stop there. I hope that that was not too much, convener.

The Convener: Thank you, Fiona. You set the scene, which was helpful, and I am sure that other members will contribute additional items. I will bring in other members in alphabetical order, so we will start with Natalie Don.

Natalie Don: Thank you. Welcome to your role, convener.

The deputy convener was spot on in talking about COP26. We need to move quickly so that we know what our aims are.

In the context of the green recovery, climate change and net zero, I am particularly interested in transport and infrastructure, which will be key. The move away from cars and the drive to improve public transport will be a massive part of our remit.

I was interested in what the deputy convener said about community empowerment, which is hugely important. As a councillor, I have been very much involved in that. There will be huge changes in our communities and it is important that we take local people's views and consider the need to do things differently in different areas, depending on their make-up.

When I look at the legacy reports, I can see that we will be dealing with a massive number of issues, and it is hard to say that any one thing is more important than another. Given the timescale,

our climate change and net zero brief will be hugely important.

The Convener: You are absolutely right: we have an enormous remit. That is why, under the next agenda item, which we will take in private, we will try to focus on the immediate priorities.

Jackie Dunbar: We have been given a huge remit, but it is an exciting one. Given that I represent Aberdeen Donside, it will be no surprise to members that this is the committee that I wanted to join.

Natalie Don was right to say that consultation with the public and other bodies will be key, because whatever this committee manages to achieve, we must bring people with us. We will be tackling a huge area, and if folk are not behind us, we will not succeed.

I live near the Haudagain, so members—again—will probably not be surprised to hear that I am keen on transport and our roads infrastructure. I am also interested in the energy sector. How the just transition will work is a key issue for many people.

I have read the legacy reports. I admit that I am going to reread them two or three times because they are huge, but I am looking forward to working with everybody in and outwith the committee.

The Convener: Thanks very much, Jackie. That is fantastic.

09:45

Liam Kerr: Congratulations on your new position, convener.

My colleagues have set out some really interesting and full thoughts. The deputy convener talked about implementation. I have given that quite a lot of thought. When I was on the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee in the previous parliamentary session, the issue of targets and delivery was one of the things that I found most disconcerting, because I am not convinced that the two things marry. I think that the cabinet secretary would acknowledge that point. In the debate that we had a couple of weeks ago, the cabinet secretary and I agreed that it is all very well putting targets in place, but we have to deliver on them, and the time for delivery is very short. Last week, following a ministerial statement, I asked about the sanctions—what happens if targets are missed—and I am not sure that the cabinet secretary was in a position to give me an answer at the time. I am interested in knowing what targets we have, what we are doing to get them implemented and whether we will get delivery.

Yesterday, I had a very interesting meeting with CalMac Ferries, just to familiarise myself with the operation. I know NorthLink Ferries very well, but I am much less familiar with the CalMac operation. The RECC report on that area and its legacy report are, of course, comprehensive, and I know that work is being done on the structure of our ferries operation in the future. Given that, I cannot see beyond doing something on that. We really need to drill down into that area, particularly with our environmental focus. I do not know that much about shipping, but I have it in my mind that we will not want to see the emissions that will come from an ageing fleet. Ferries are an interesting issue that the committee should explore.

The other thing that is in my mind for us to look at, if there is time for us to do so, is the issue of a public energy company. I recall that the announcement on that was a significant time ago. Perhaps that goes back to my targets and delivery piece. I am not sure that much has come on the proposed public energy company. I stand to be corrected, but I am not sure whether it exists at the moment. That is very important. There are social and economic implications of that. I would find it rather concerning if that was not being delivered. It might be right for the committee to look into that.

I would be interested in those areas, if there is time to cover all of that. Those are my top three areas. I hope that that is useful.

The Convener: Yes, that is very useful—thank you very much. Like other members, you have highlighted the wide range of potential topics in front of us.

Monica Lennon: I congratulate you, convener, and Fiona Hyslop, and I look forward to working with all members of the committee.

There is already lots of agreement. I thank colleagues on our predecessor committees. There is a lot to read in the reports. Like Jackie Dunbar, I will go back and read them a number of times.

Fiona Hyslop is right that our focus really needs to be on scrutiny and implementation. We have had a steer on the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019, for example. There is a lot in that. We have already discussed the climate change plan in the chamber since we came back. We will have a big role to play there.

Liam Kerr touched on ferry procurement and future ferries policy. Obviously, there are recommendations on that in the legacy reports. The deputy convener made a point about the fact that the members of this committee do not represent all of Scotland. However, I think that, through our work, we will very much aspire to do that. I represent Central Scotland, where ferries are not a big issue, but they are a big issue across the country. With regard to how we engage,

particularly with younger people, we have a real opportunity to set a good example and be innovative, and also to get out there and do interesting visits.

In September, we will know more about the programme for government. The circular economy has to be a massive priority, and I am interested in what the Government plans to do around incineration. I know that the minister and the cabinet secretary have given a commitment on that.

Transport infrastructure is a huge area, so we will need to break that down. Obviously, we are looking at the remit of the Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport, but his performance in his job will depend on the performance across all portfolios of Government, and we already know that there is some overlap with issues that are in, for example, Mairi Gougeon's portfolio. Issues such as 20-minute neighbourhoods will present real opportunities. The cabinet secretary will have strategic responsibility for that policy across Government, but it will involve lots of other areas. I am interested to see how all that works in practice. We have a job to ensure that Government does not work in silos. We all appreciate the ambitious targets, but the key is delivery and how we get there.

Like Liam Kerr, I am interested in getting an update on the public energy company. I think that work is under way with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to develop a business plan. Again, the role of local government in that is important.

Others have touched on the issues of a just transition, which involves green jobs, support for businesses that want to innovate and the need to ensure that we have the right skills and that communities are not left behind.

I think that it is going to be a really exciting time. We have a lot of work to do and I look forward to working with everyone on the committee.

The Convener: Thank you, Monica. You made a number of great points. The point about cross-portfolio work and the need to ensure that we are not siloed in one particular portfolio is important, because the net zero ambition cuts across many portfolios. I think that that point has been made by all members.

Mark Ruskell, would you like to talk about your priorities now?

Mark Ruskell: Thank you, convener. I congratulate you and Fiona Hyslop on your appointments. I look forward to working with colleagues across the committee. It is good to hear some early areas of consensus emerging.

I served on the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee in session 5. It was a hard-working committee, as you can see from our 119-page legacy report. We faced some particular challenges, and it is good to see that one of the key recommendations—that there should be a dedicated net zero committee—has been picked up on. That is a great first step. It is important that some of the key sectors where we face new challenges in terms of a just transition have been brought into the remit of this committee, and that our remit mirrors the cabinet secretary's responsibilities.

Members have already spoken about some of the challenges around energy and about the public energy company, which I am also interested in. There are massive issues around how we scale up delivery. Particularly in relation to heat, there will have to be an unprecedented increase in effort and installations if we are to meet the targets and deliver the progress that is needed.

On transport, a few key points have come up. The strategic transport projects review, the national transport strategy and the national planning framework are all hugely important, alongside the climate change plan, when it comes to how we build future-proofed infrastructure that will tackle the climate emergency. It makes sense for us to deal with all of that.

As other members have said, there are a number of other cross-cutting areas that we need to address. I point in particular to the need to work with the committee that has responsibility for farming and land use, because that is another sector where there must be a transition. That process must support farmers and managers, but we need to see cuts in emissions in that sector.

I am interested in how we might work creatively with other committees. For example, we have to think about whether we could appoint reporters or conduct joint inquiries, for which, I think, there is some precedent. In order to avoid the siloed scrutiny that has been mentioned, we will have to work across the Parliament, and we faced some challenges in that regard in the previous session.

Housing and planning are two other areas where, again, we will need to do some further work to get the most out of our time.

I am looking forward to the discussions ahead. We are dealing with the biggest issue that faces us, and we need to tackle it.

The Convener: Thank you, Mark. It is great that you sat on one of our predecessor committees. I think that, between us, members of the committee cover all the relevant previous committees. I was on the Economy, Jobs and Fair Work Committee, and other members were on the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee. Working as a team,

we can bring that experience to this new committee.

I thank all members for their contributions. I think that there are a number of areas of consensus, and we have identified that our committee has a wide remit.

In terms of timing, a number of members highlighted that the overarching priority is COP26, which begins in early November. When we return from recess in September, that conference will be one of our focused topics of inquiry. We will need to hit the ground running to ensure that we cover it in a timely fashion.

That concludes the public section of our first meeting. Again, I thank members for their contributions. We will now move into private session.

09:56

Meeting continued in private until 11:02.

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