



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee

Tuesday 17 November 2020

Session 5



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Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE AND LAND REFORM COMMITTEE

31st Meeting 2020, Session 5

CONVENER

*Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab)

*Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP)

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

*Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

*Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Lynsey Hamill (Scottish Parliament)

Maureen Lynch (Scottish Parliament)

David McGill (Scottish Parliament)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Lyn Tullis

LOCATION

Virtual Meeting

Scottish Parliament
**Environment, Climate Change
and Land Reform Committee**

Tuesday 17 November 2020

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:00]

**Decision on Taking Business in
Private**

The Convener (Gillian Martin): Welcome to the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee's 31st meeting in 2020.

Our first item is a decision on whether to take item 5, which is consideration of evidence heard on the Scottish Parliament's environmental performance and response to the climate emergency, in private.

As no member objects, we agree to take that item in private.

Scottish Parliament
**Environmental Performance and
Climate Emergency Response**

09:00

The Convener: Our second item is an evidence session on the Scottish Parliament's environmental performance and response to the climate emergency. I welcome David McGill, the clerk/chief executive; Lynsey Hamill, the group head of resilience and sustainability; and Maureen Lynch, the environmental performance manager. Good morning to you all.

Members have a range of questions. If members want to follow up with a supplementary question, they should type R in the chat box. I will try to fit in as many questions as possible.

The Parliament is on track to deliver quite a few but not all of its targets on environmental performance. The most recent "Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body Sustainable Development Annual Report" highlighted a couple of areas for improvement. Unsurprisingly, business travel is an issue, although I imagine that this year has put paid to a lot of that difficulty. In general, members of the Parliament, in particular, go to a lot of places in order to perform their work. Will you give me an idea of which aspects of environmental performance are still challenging to tackle, and why? How are you planning to address that?

David McGill (Scottish Parliament): Good morning, convener. Your characterisation of where we are with our environmental performance is accurate. We have a very good overall message to relay. Our carbon footprint has gone down by 54 per cent since 2005-06, which is our base year and the first full year of occupation of the building. However, we have not quite met some of the individual targets within the overall target that we have set ourselves. For example, in relation to electricity, waste and water, we are falling marginally short of the targets that we set by about 1 or 2 per cent. We will have to redouble our efforts in those areas.

The targets are ambitious and stretching, as they should be, but we want to make a push to hit the target levels in the performance year. There are a few sticking points. You mentioned business travel. That has always been a difficult issue for us, as there is a balance to be struck because of the important role that members perform in meeting constituents and going out and about in constituencies. Such travel is a contributing factor to our overall carbon footprint.

We have a business travel plan in place, which we will refresh for session 6. We are currently reviewing that to get a better balance and learn some of the lessons of the past seven or eight months around how activities have been restructured during the pandemic. We will ensure that those are factored into our thinking on business travel plans.

Other areas that have caused us a bit of difficulty relate to our net zero emissions ambition. We need to get full guidance from the Government on what that means for public sector organisations, so that we can map what we are doing with those organisations.

Our energy requirements are by far the biggest component of our carbon usage. We have been stimulating discussion about a district heating network with various partners in the vicinity. That is a complex process, and it is difficult to see how we can lead that. However, we are committed to that goal, we have instigated the conversation and we want to drive it through to completion.

The Convener: How important is it that the Scottish Parliament, as the national Parliament, leads the way and is seen to be leading the way?

David McGill: It is absolutely vital. The political side of this organisation likes to set world-leading targets in relation to climate change and environmental performance. It is, therefore, incumbent on the Parliament as an institution to lead the way across the public sector in how we contribute to meeting the overall national targets and the international aspirations here. It is an area that we cannot step back from. We need to be right at the forefront and displaying best practice to all our public sector partners, in particular.

The Convener: You mentioned that you are doing a scope 3 inventory and assessment. When will that be complete, and will the future Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body environmental performance targets encompass the expanded scope 3 emissions?

David McGill: That question would be better answered by my colleague Maureen Lynch. She has been more closely associated with that.

Maureen Lynch (Scottish Parliament): The scope 3 inventory and assessment will be completed as part of the updated carbon management plan. We hope to publish the more detailed scope 3 prioritisation strategy in 2021-22. Our current carbon targets include some scope 3 emissions in relation to our operational waste, water and business travel, which is in line with the public sector.

We plan to collect data and gain an understanding of our scope 3 home-working emissions for next year's sustainable development

annual plan, which is very important, given the circumstances with Covid. The inclusion of expanded scope 3 emissions will depend on the outcome of the inventory and assessment, and the prioritisation strategy will highlight where to focus our efforts. That will depend on the level of emissions in relation to spend, the quality of the data that we have available and the influence that the Parliament has to reduce scope 3 emissions.

Overall, it is expected that our understanding of our scope 3 emissions will improve over the next few years and our performance targets will be set. However, it is likely to be within a separate target from our current operational carbon footprint and it may focus on qualitative, rather than quantitative, targets depending on the data that is available.

The Convener: Thank you. I have a final question for David McGill before I hand over to my colleagues. There will be people watching this session who do not work in the Parliament. Will you explain to them why a lot of the decisions around the action points that you have talked about lie with the corporate body—for example, difficult decisions on things that are sticking points that impact particularly on members and how they operate. Off the back of that, what things that have happened during the pandemic might give us some inkling as to how we can improve in the future?

David McGill: On the first point, although the corporate body is the decision maker, we have a whole governance arrangement around it to support it in that function. We have a sustainable development board that is chaired by Lynsey Hamill. I designed her role as group head for resilience and sustainability specifically to provide a strategic focus on environmental performance, climate change and sustainable development, and it brings together many of the offices that lead in that area. There is a cross-organisation effort. The board supports the corporate body in its decision making and also guides the Parliament's leadership group—its senior management team—in providing that support to the corporate body. The governance structure is really quite robust in that sense.

On the second point, we are working with various parts of the organisation on what can be done to leverage some of the benefits that we have seen in terms of environmental performance this year. You will be well aware that, last month, the Presiding Officer issued a survey to MSPs on the types of things that members might want to retain post-Covid. There was a good response to that survey, and there was a very good discussion about it at last week's conveners group meeting, which you attended.

Both of those things have shown that there is some appetite for continuing some aspects of

business, but that is not the case across the board. Members have identified a lot of disbenefits, some of which very much relate to sustainability issues. Sustainability issues oblige us to look at social and emotional needs, and those can sometimes come into conflict with environmental performance. It is not quite as easy as saying that we can stop all travel and do everything online, because that would cut across the social and environmental needs of constituents, some of whom are in crisis situations. Members deal with that all the time. There is a balance to be struck in that regard.

The Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee is looking at the temporary standing orders that were put in place and has launched an inquiry. The evidence that has been gathered from the corporate body, the Presiding Officer's survey and the conveners group discussion will feed into that inquiry. It might be some time next year before the committee reports on what might change and what should revert to the pre-Covid situation.

That inquiry will be really informative for us, but it will not define how we, as a staff group, will do things. It will let us know how members want to do things, but it means that—[*Inaudible.*]—will not be in those discussions, so there is a wider ability for us to redesign how we do things to support members and parliamentary business.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): First, I want to ask a few technical questions, just to make sure that I have baselined what might follow.

I got a slight hint that business travel includes the travel that MSPs claim in expenses. I want to be clear that that is part of what we are counting as business travel associated with the Parliament.

David McGill: Yes, it is. Our starting point is that scope 3 will take into account anything that impinges on environmental performance as a result of the Parliament existing. We are not looking to exclude parts of activity that are a direct result of Parliament existing, so the business travel to which you referred will be part of our thinking.

Stewart Stevenson: That is good. Have the corporate body and the Parliament's executives considered how business travel might relate to active travel? One of the avoidable sources of business travel might be short car and taxi journeys, which could be eliminated. Clearly, taxi use does not result in a huge carbon footprint for the Parliament but, nonetheless, we could do something about it. In particular, it grieves me from time to time to see colleagues—who appear to me to be fit enough to do otherwise—getting into taxis

at the door of the Parliament to go to our station. I find that it is a 13-minute walk to the station.

What encouragement can we give members and staff to participate in the active travel agenda, for its own sake and in order to reduce our business travel footprint? In particular, we should perhaps exclude small claims that relate to business travel from the members' expenses scheme, to encourage people to use large carbon footprint travel only when it is necessary and to use alternatives when it is not.

David McGill: We are actively looking at such things. It is not necessarily just about reducing business travel and moving things online, or converting physical travel to online activity; it is about promoting active travel. We have an annual active travel survey, which is fairly well responded to, but the response rate could be better, so we will work on all that.

I think that you are hinting at serious behaviour change, and that is what we are looking at. We are challenging ourselves to go a bit further than we normally would. You have mentioned taxis, for example. We understand that the Government has cancelled its taxi contract, so we are looking to do that. We are considering the implications of that, and it is quite challenging. If we turn that tap off, we need to see what support we can give to building users to get around on short journeys. We are looking to drive the behavioural change that you are hinting at.

09:15

Stewart Stevenson: Thank you—that is encouraging. For me personally, as someone who is relatively remote from Parliament, the Covid crisis has eliminated an average of 12 hours' travel for each sitting week, although some weeks are different from others. The continuing provision of electronic participation in parliamentary proceedings is very important.

We continue to use two different electronic platforms for parliamentary activities, and I have a view that that contributes to some difficulties for those who are not so comfortable with electronic use. Are we going to consider the technologies that we use for electronic participation, to help the Presiding Officer to get us to a position where the taking of interventions during debates, for instance, can return by electronic means? Although we are close to being present in how we do things online, there are still some constraints that people regard as relatively large impediments to adopting electronic participation fully, using the current provision. As part of our heading towards zero emissions, what role will electronic participation continue to play?

David McGill: I think that it will continue to play a very important role. At the very least, notwithstanding what members might say in relation to the work that the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee is sponsoring, electronic participation is our resilience or business continuity measure. It is our response for situations like this or any other situations that militate against members getting together physically.

As you will appreciate, the response that we have put in place was not a planned response in any way, and it was put in place at high speed. That is not to say that we did not put all our efforts into ensuring that it was as robust as possible, but we recognise the limitations of working between two different platforms on which members can participate. The imperative was that all members were able to do that. At the beginning, some members were not able to travel to Edinburgh because they were in the shielding category; other members were choosing not to travel to Edinburgh. It was vital that all members were able to participate.

We did not go down the proxy route that other Parliaments have gone down, because we wanted to treat every member the same, but we recognise the difficulty. It was always part of our thinking that the prize was to have an integrated system that allowed members to do everything on one platform. We simply have not had the capacity to move any way towards that yet, but it is sitting there in the background. That is something that we will be putting a lot of effort into if and when we get some time, whether that is in the run-up to next year's election or over the parliamentary recess next summer.

Stewart Stevenson: I have a final point about electronic communication, before I come to a brief question on electricity. You have put all of these matters into the context of resilience, and I understand why you should properly have done that. The weak link often appears to be the link for which members are responsible, in their personal capacity or via their offices: their broadband connection, commonly addressed as wi-fi. To what extent can the Parliament lift some of the burden of making that work for members in a consistent way and as reliably as it reasonably can?

One of the recurring issues is that people feel that their link is causing them difficulties. We need to recognise that people are experiencing difficulties, although the diagnosis might be open to question. To what extent can Parliament, in the drive to net zero, help to ensure that our links are more effective than some people's links have been?

David McGill: There is a limit to what the Parliament can do in that respect—[*Inaudible.*] I

have been working with internet service providers in some local areas, and we have had some success this year.

We have more leeway with local offices; where we can get members to move from their homes to their local offices to participate, we can do more in that environment. However, if we are providing members with the ability to work from home, we must take a bit of the responsibility for ensuring that their infrastructure is robust enough to allow them to do that. We will continue to work with internet service providers where we can to improve the service for members so that they can have confidence in it when they participate in proceedings remotely.

Stewart Stevenson: In your remarks to the convener, you referred to electricity as one area in which we are a little behind our target. I note from the numbers that our electric carbon footprint is—rather to my surprise—greater than our gas footprint, at well over 1,000 tonnes.

To what extent will we be able to get that under control, either by reducing our consumption of electricity, which I would guess that we broadly want to do, or by sourcing electricity from renewable sources, which would be another way to reduce our footprint? What is the focus in that regard?

That is my last question, convener.

David McGill: Again, my colleague Maureen Lynch would be better placed to answer that question.

Maureen Lynch: We currently pay to be on a low-carbon tariff for electricity, but we report our emissions in line with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs United Kingdom grid emission factors as part of the Scottish Government public reporting process.

We could look at that area in more detail. We need to ensure that any claim that we make about using 100 per cent renewable or green energy is definitely based on having that type of tariff. We also need to show that we have no false negatives, because we need to report our carbon emissions in line with the UK grid emission factors.

The Convener: Mark Ruskell asked for a supplementary a few minutes ago. Mark, do you want to pick up on anything under the themes that have been mentioned so far?

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): Yes—I have a quick question about local offices. We need to ensure that the digital aspect is working effectively, but there are also energy issues with local offices. I am aware that they are not Parliament buildings—they are rented, often from the private sector.

Will local offices be factored into the carbon management plan? What kind of support will be provided to members—in particular at the start of the next session, when leases are taken up—in order to ensure that buildings are as efficient as they can be and that low-carbon and energy-efficient contracts are set up?

David McGill: We will work with landlords and members on that. The procurement office—*[Inaudible.]*—a lot of work on how we work with contractors. We see that there is a contractual relationship in securing carbon benefits.

For session 6, we will look at working with landlords on the environmental performance of buildings that are for let. I go back to what I said about our taking responsibility for everything that is generated by the Parliament's activities. That includes local offices, which will be brought into the scope of our environmental performance targets. That being the case, it is incumbent on us to ensure that we do not burden ourselves with unnecessary waste in our energy use, so we will do what we can to ensure that accommodation providers are aware of that and are taking responsibility for the performance of their buildings.

Mark Ruskell: Will the carbon management plan be up and running in March 2021, ready for when new members come in?

David McGill: That is certainly our aim at the moment.

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): Good morning. Some of the questions on the areas that I planned to cover have helpfully been answered already. On decision making and governance, as was highlighted, the Parliament has recently established a sustainable development and climate change strategy, which I understand defines four areas of work: climate change, scrutiny, external engagement and embedding sustainable development thinking. That is referenced in the sustainable development annual report 2019-20. Will you or one of your colleagues explore a little further how the Parliament's sustainable development and climate change strategy was developed? Is it a public document? If so, how can the public access it?

David McGill: The board that I referenced earlier is chaired by Lynsey Hamill, who is the group head of resilience and sustainability. As she was involved in developing the strategy, I will hand over to her to give you the detail that you are looking for.

Lynsey Hamill (Scottish Parliament): As David McGill mentioned, I chair the sustainable development board, which includes many of my colleagues from across the Parliament. We worked collaboratively to set out what our session

6 strategy was going to be. Our role is to recommend that strategy to the leadership group, and to the corporate body for final approval. Once the strategy is approved by the corporate body, which we expect to happen early next year, it will become a published document. It will be published on the Parliament website and accessible to anybody who wants to see it.

In developing the strategy, we were cognisant of the fact that we are moving out of a purely environmental plan, which has been operating in the Parliament for quite some time, and expanding into more sustainable development thinking. We are very aware of the recent changes in the regulations and our requirements under them. As David McGill said, and as is set out in our plan, four pillars are defined in the strategy, which are still under development.

The first pillar is around climate change. Our carbon management plan will sit under that and make up a large part of the climate change plan. Although we are not yet ready to publish our targets on that, which will be done through our governance strategy, we are aware of our requirements under regulations. Our session 6 strategy runs until 2026, which is clearly very close to 2030. Under the requirements of the regulations, we need to have achieved a 75 per cent reduction in our net emissions by 2030. That is our thinking behind the targets that we will set ourselves under the climate change pillar.

Our scrutiny strategy is focused on how, as an institution, the Parliament holds the Government to account, and how we can do so through the lens of sustainability. That involves consideration of how we can expand some of the approaches that I know the committee is already using in its scrutiny of legislation across other committees and strengthen our capacity in those areas.

The third pillar—our engagement pillar—focuses on our external engagement; it involves recognising the role of the Parliament as an institution and how we engage with others. In the short term, the focus will be on how we take advantage of the Parliament's role as we move into the 26th conference of the parties—COP26—and share that internationally and with our peers in the UK. The engagement pillar also focuses on our visitors and how we can run our education programme in a more sustainable way. We want to be more accessible to a wider range of people than those who, traditionally, have been able to travel to the Parliament.

As has been mentioned a couple of times, behavioural change will be one of the biggest issues that we need to tackle. That is why we have a separate pillar of embedding sustainable development thinking. That is about recognising that changing people's behaviour and embedding

those changes will be one of the most difficult things that we do. Our aim is to ensure that people across the organisation have a base-level understanding of sustainable development thinking and, on the back of that, that all the actions we are taking around climate change scrutiny and engagement have a change management programme to support them, so that we can really embed those behaviours.

09:30

Claudia Beamish: Thank you for that detailed answer, Lynsey.

David, I want to ask about investments by the Scottish Parliament, but I am, of course, aware that there are trustees, so I ask you to answer the question as far as it is appropriate for you to do so. How can the Parliament be at the forefront of divesting from fossil fuels as part of a just transition, which would send a clear message internationally? That is important for its own sake, but especially as we are leading up to COP26. I appreciate that there are issues around fiduciary duties, but it is becoming clearer that there also risks in stranded assets. I should not go into too much detail because I am asking the question, not giving my view—or trying not to. Will you explore that area a bit? After that, I will ask a couple of other short questions.

David McGill: I take it that your question relates to the Parliament's pension fund, as you referenced the trustees.

Claudia Beamish: Yes.

David McGill: You will appreciate that there is a separation of duties. The corporate body's role is to appoint the fund trustees and provide the resources for the employer contribution. The overall responsibility for the governance, management and administration of the pension fund lies with the trustees. The corporate body is aware—as are the trustees—that divesting from fossil fuels is a regular issue of concern for many members. It comes up regularly in questions to the corporate body and letters to the Presiding Officer. I am aware that there has been dialogue between the corporate body and the fund trustees, who have gone away and considered the matter. However, in order to keep that very proper and legal separation of duties, it is an area on which the corporate body cannot seek to direct the trustees. Any approaches would have to be made directly to the fund trustees.

Claudia Beamish: [*Inaudible.*]—for the record, the committee will discuss whether it is appropriate to write to ask for an update on that.

You have already touched on procurement issues with my colleague Stewart Stevenson. Is

there anything further that you can add, perhaps in relation to catering or any other aspects of procurement and parliamentary arrangements that are appropriate to mention in the context of this discussion?

David McGill: Our procurement office has provided a fantastic service to us—[*Inaudible.*]—environmental performance of all the contracts that we are involved in, and it is an active member of the sustainable development board, which we have referred to a few times. Lynsey Hamill can give more detail on the contribution that the procurement office has made to our environmental performance.

Lynsey Hamill: As David said, our head of procurement is an active member of the sustainable development board, and the procurement office has probably been leading the way for us as an institution. It has been working on the issue for some time, before we have been able to detail our strategy—sustainable development goals are already integrated into the procurement strategy. In the published annual report, we highlighted some case studies of work that has already been done. Procurement is very focused on fair work practices and employing small and medium-sized enterprises in the supply chain, where possible. There are multiple examples of such things that the procurement office has been doing. It is a very active participant in the board and will continue to be so.

Circular economy thinking is probably the next big thing. That is already embedded in the procurement strategy. Part of the work that the procurement office will be doing with us will be on how we embed that change of thinking in the organisation. We will be questioning whether we need to procure something in the first place and, if that need exists, looking to see whether we can meet that by refurbishing or reusing items rather than buying new ones. One of the focuses of the procurement office will be on how we can procure less and how it can support us to do that.

Claudia Beamish: For the interest of the committee and the public, could you give us an example or two of how changes have been made? Perhaps you can tell us about some of the cases in the annual report where things have been altered, whether that was in food or the purchase of furniture or paper. Can you highlight some examples?

Lynsey Hamill: I am almost sure that there are some examples, but I am going to be very mean and call on my colleague Maureen Lynch, who helped to put together that report and will have those examples at her fingertips.

Maureen Lynch: I would need to look into it and come back to the committee in writing with some examples.

Claudia Beamish: I turn back to David McGill. You have already touched on this, but would you like to say anything about how the Parliament monitors progress and reports back on it? [*Inaudible.*]—would be helpful.

David McGill: I am sorry, but I did not catch all of that, because your connection wavered a bit.

Claudia Beamish: I think I might be muttering. I am interested in how the Parliament monitors and reports on progress, which is important as we look to the next session of Parliament. It would be helpful for us to highlight those things in our legacy paper.

David McGill: Monitoring performance is really important for us. It does not really stack up if— [*Inaudible.*]—on that and be accountable for that. We take that aspect very seriously.

The main monitoring framework is the sustainable development annual report. We also have a quarterly reporting system so that we can see how things are developing and benchmark that against the previous quarter. Those quarterly performance reports are first presented to our leadership group so that all the senior management can see how we are doing across the piece, and they are then given to the corporate body on a quarterly basis. Once the corporate body has had a chance to analyse those, it publishes them as part of its papers. The corporate body has sight of that on a quarterly and an annual basis.

Claudia Beamish: Thank you.

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): Good morning. Most of my questions have been covered, but I still have one that I want to ask. It is all very commendable that we look at the Parliament's performance in reducing our carbon footprint but, ultimately, the priority of the Parliament—it is David's job to ensure that it carries out this function—is to give us as elected members the opportunity to represent our constituents and introduce legislation. How do you balance that out? It is all very well to say that we need to cut down on travel but, ultimately, I need to meet my constituents. That is important.

We keep talking about the Scottish Parliament being the people's Parliament. It is important that we get people into the Parliament, but how do we achieve a balance and ensure that short-term gains, such as reducing the amount that we use our cars, which still use fossil fuels, do not interfere with us performing our primary function, which is to represent our constituents?

David McGill: It is a difficult balance. The committee has heard that environmental performance is not captured as part of the Parliament's highest level strategic plan, for the reasons that you have just alluded to. The strategic plan sets out the Parliament's primary functions, which we have captured as: legislating, holding the Government to account and debating issues on behalf of the people of Scotland. Below that, we have a level of good governance, which is where we capture our environmental performance. The delivery plan, which supports the strategic plan, talks about having a sustainable development plan and high-quality effective governance. That is the hook for bringing that in to support the Parliament's primary functions.

Beyond that, we recognise that those aspects come into conflict. The Parliament exists to support members in carrying out their duties. As I have said, a lot of that is about representing and meeting your constituents, working with people and organisations in your local areas and working towards national policies. Travel has to support all that.

Our aim is to take our statutory obligations as the baseline—we have public sector duties as regards our environmental performance—and to go beyond those, so that we can build in more measures and can be, as I said to the convener earlier, an exemplar organisation. That is about finding ways in which things can be done differently and better, and finding ways in which demands on the environment from our activities can be minimised. I am not saying that members cannot or should not do the things that they clearly need to do in order to fulfil their functions.

We discuss that on-going dilemma regularly through the boards, and we are actively discussing and considering all the various aspects. We work with national and international partners to make sure that we are keyed into best practice, we look at what other organisations are doing and we seek to learn from others, too. It will be an on-going tension, but it is one that we will have to manage dynamically.

Mark Ruskell: Let us turn to climate change scrutiny and our performance as an institution on certain aspects of that. You will be aware of the committee's detailed recommendations in that regard and its suggested timescale for implementation. Do you agree with those recommendations, and are you working towards them? Are there any areas in which you do not consider it appropriate to progress recommendations at this point? It would be great if you could update us on that.

David McGill: We welcome the committee's recommendations, which will be valuable in developing our overall strategy for session 6. We

have handed over the recommendations lock, stock and barrel to the board and asked it to integrate them into its thinking, so they will be considered as a package and will, I hope, work through into our overall session 6 strategy. Any further support, thoughts or recommendations from the committee will be enthusiastically received by us.

Mark Ruskell: Do decisions need to be made ahead of the next election? I am thinking, in particular, about whether changes to standing orders might be required in relation to how the Parliament scrutinises climate change.

The committee recommended the formation of a sub-group of conveners. In session 6, the remit of certain committees might change—I do not know. How far has consideration of that recommendation been progressed?

David McGill: From the corporate body's point of view, that is not something—[*Inaudible.*]

The Convener: We appear to have lost David McGill.

Can you stop for a minute, David? We lost a good few seconds of the start of your answer.

Could you start again?

David McGill: Okay—no problem, convener.

Changes to standing orders would not be natural territory for the corporate body. There are a lot of decisions to be taken, but the corporate body's interest is in providing the Parliament and its committees with the resources that they require for their functions. Consideration of whether Parliament's rules might need to change is therefore probably for other bodies, such as the Parliamentary Bureau, the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee and, ultimately, the Parliament as a whole.

All the committee's recommendations, including those that might lead to a decision on changes to Parliament's standing orders, will be considered. We aim to have the strategy signed off this side of the election. The strategy is for session 6, but decisions will be taken in the early part of next year so that it can be published before we go into the election period.

09:45

Mark Ruskell: In lining up the strategy, are you confident that other parts of the institution will be able to make those decisions? At the start of session 6, there will be a big rush of work to set out the remits of new committees, train new members, embed sustainable development in the Parliament's work and so on. Are you confident that you have enough time and enough of a steer from the Parliament to enable you to do that work,

or are there still unanswered questions for your strategy that will require you to wait until the early part of session 6 to find out what is going on?

David McGill: I am confident that we can put ourselves in a very good position. Some things are outwith our control, and we need more information in order to nail down a lot of the detail. However, I am confident on the strategy—we are not starting from a standing position, as a lot of matters have been under active consideration for a long time.

I will give an example. The environmental targets that we have been working towards since the Parliament has been in this building were always due to expire this year, and we knew that we needed to have something in place beyond that. Parliament has adjusted the climate change targets fairly recently, which has affected our thinking about how we can meet what are now more stringent targets. A lot of that thinking has been going on for some time.

We need a bit more guidance from the Government on zero emissions: what that means, how public sector organisations can work on it and what can and cannot be leveraged into those figures. We are still waiting for some of that information to come through. Our position just now is challenging, but I am reasonably confident that we can put ourselves in a very good position before the end of the current parliamentary session.

The Convener: Has Mark Ruskell finished his line of questioning?

Mark Ruskell: I think so, unless David McGill wants to say anything more about scrutiny in the Parliament.

I understand that your role is in the corporate management of the organisation, but do you see any blockages that might prevent decisions on scrutiny from being made?

David McGill: The corporate body will be hugely supportive, but we need other parts of the organisation to work with us to look at how things are currently done, what the ideal situation would be and how we can transition to that. The session 6 strategy will contain a lot of information on upskilling MSPs, MSP staff and parliamentary staff with regard to looking at things through a sustainable development lens. However, it will be up to other parts of the organisation to deliver that. The corporate body can put training in place, but it will have to work with other parts of the organisation to ensure that those issues are picked up and improvements are made.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Good morning. I want to ask about COP26, which is obviously a huge international event through which, I hope, Scotland will be able to

demonstrate that she is a world leader in tackling climate change. What role can the Parliament play in that?

David McGill: We see COP26 as a fantastic opportunity that we really want to grasp. We had already secured accreditation for the conference, which should have been taking place now, but we hope that we can retain that accreditation for when COP26 takes place next November. The conference will be the biggest-ever such gathering in Scotland, and we will probably not see it here again, so we are determined to get as much out of it as possible and ensure that the Parliament has a strong presence at the event.

We are aware that, given the sheer scale of COP26, there will be a lot of activity in the Edinburgh area, and that will present us with a great opportunity to put the Parliament building at the centre of the conference. We are currently working with a range of national and international partners to develop a programme of events through what we are calling our route map to COP26, and some of the stuff that is coming together is really quite exciting.

We are planning some online events for the early part of next year—we will not sit back and wait until COP26 takes place. However, as things move on and as we move through Covid, I hope that we will be able to add some more face-to-face events.

We are using the festival of politics, which starts this Thursday, as a hook to look at what our contribution as a country should be to COP26. The convener is chairing a session on Friday that is titled, "What should Scotland's top five aims be for COP26?" There is an excellent panel, and we will be watching the session closely to hear what other people's ambitions in that regard are. In addition, it would be remiss of me not to mention that Claudia Beamish is chairing a festival of politics session on sustainable cities. In the run-up to COP26, we will use the festival of politics as an arena in which we can talk about sustainability and environmental performance.

Liz Smith: You talked about your engagement with other bodies in the UK and other international bodies on what COP26 might involve. Does that include engagement with other national Parliaments?

David McGill: Very much so. That is one of our main areas of focus as a—*[Inaudible.]*—of the events to which I am referring. We would like to see an event—it is currently in the very early stages of development—that brings together parliamentarians from around the world to discuss how their Parliaments play a role in tackling climate issues and responding to climate emergencies. That would be a big prize for us. If

we can get that information, it might lead to a step change in how we approach things.

All of that will be overseen by pillar 3 of the strategy, which is about engagement. At the moment, pillar 3 is almost entirely about COP26. The lead officials are our head of events and head of outreach, and key Scottish Parliament information centre researchers. Our senior people in those areas are putting their heads together on how we can leverage as much benefit as possible from the fantastic opportunity that we have in front of us.

Liz Smith: You mentioned outreach. Over the past 21 years, Parliament has prided itself on the quality of its outreach, both in reaching out to parts of Scotland where people do not always have the opportunity to come to Edinburgh and through its schools programme. What work is being done to assist young people's understanding of COP26? That generation is extremely engaged with climate issues. What are you doing to encourage a lot of youngsters in schools to participate in the event?

David McGill: Again, that is very much part of our thinking, although we have to move a bit carefully because of the amount of pressure that schools currently face. We cannot push it too hard, but we have certainly not been neglecting that aspect. We have obviously taken a big step back in the past few months, but we are now tentatively starting to put out our feelers again.

You are right that there is a great opportunity for us to get younger people involved in a massive global event that will be taking place on their doorstep.

Liz Smith: Is the Scottish Youth Parliament also doing something on that?

David McGill: I am not entirely sure, but I would be surprised if it was not. I have no knowledge of anything like that at the moment, but I can certainly find out.

The Convener: Liz Smith asked about your engagement with schools. That is not only relevant to COP26; the Scottish Parliament's work with schools, including school visits to the building, is really important in ensuring that young people understand what happens here.

Can you outline some of the stuff that you have been doing during the pandemic to keep that engagement going? There is a lot to be said for visiting the building in person. I know that people cannot do that right now, but if we do not find a way of enabling that to happen during the pandemic, swathes of children will not get the opportunity to find out what their national Parliament does. What have you been doing on that?

David McGill: There has not been a huge amount of activity in that area. First, the schools were closed altogether and, when they were back up and running, we recognised that they were under a lot of pressure to set up learning for the students coming back in, so we took a wee bit of a step back. However, we are now starting to engage with schools again and look at the provision of online resources. We are issuing resources that schools can use themselves, and our officers are starting to engage with schools again. We are in the early days of looking at how things can be done differently.

I will check with the internal service providers and write to the committee with more detail on what we are doing just now and what our plans are to build that work up as we continue to live with Covid.

The Convener: There might be some lessons for how we can engage more with schools in far-flung areas of Scotland, where—as Liz Smith mentioned—pupils do not have the opportunity to come down to Edinburgh.

David McGill: That has always been a bit of a problem for us, in particular the extent to which—*[Inaudible.]*—financial support to—*[Inaudible.]*—lower-income areas or from—*[Inaudible.]*. However, Covid has changed things radically; engagement with the Parliament is no longer all about travelling to Edinburgh and coming to the building, which has opened up great opportunities for us.

The Convener: Claudia Beamish has a question on engagement.

Claudia Beamish: I ask David McGill to explore the connections that the Scottish Parliament is making with Parliaments in the global south, in view of the fact that the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 highlights our responsibilities, as a developed nation, to ensure that we recognise that—to use the usual phrase—those who have done the least to cause climate change are often those who are already badly affected by it.

Can you highlight anything in that regard, or perhaps let us know as things progress?

David McGill: I am happy to do that. In building up—*[Inaudible.]*—we have focused primarily on our connections with the other legislatures in the United Kingdom, and we have managed to establish good and regular contact with the officers who have responsibility in that area. It is an active network, which shares good practice.

However, we are using COP26 as an opportunity to widen our horizons and to bring Parliaments in the parts of the world that you mention into our networks in order to learn from

them about what it is like for those Parliaments, the situations that they are dealing with and what impact environmental performance in our part of the world might have on other parts of the world. I am happy to keep the committee updated on that work as it develops.

Claudia Beamish: Thank you—that is helpful.

The Convener: I see that no other members want to come in. I thank all the witnesses for their evidence on what the Parliament is doing and planning. We will leave the session there, but if you want to follow up in writing anything that you have mentioned, that would be welcome. I am sure that we will continue the conversation.

European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018

Control of Mercury (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2020

Greenhouse Gas Emissions Trading Scheme (Withdrawal Agreement) (EU Exit) Regulations 2020

09:58

The Convener: Item 3 is consideration of two notifications from the Scottish Government in relation to consent to UK statutory instruments.

Members will recall that there is an agreed protocol between the Scottish Government and the Parliament in relation to instruments being made by the UK Government under powers in the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 which relate to proposals within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament. The Scottish Government and the Parliament have agreed an approach to UK-wide statutory instruments.

The committee raised some queries with the Scottish Government in advance of the meeting, and we have received a response. Do members want to comment on either of the instruments?

I see that members have no comments. In that case, do members agree to approve the Scottish Government's proposal to consent to the provisions being made in the UK Parliament on those UK statutory instruments?

I see that members agree to do so.

Subordinate Legislation

Water and Sewerage Services Undertaking (Borrowing) (Scotland) Order 2020 (SSI 2020/341)

09:59

The Convener: Item 4 is consideration of a negative instrument. Do members want to comment or make any recommendations on the instrument?

Mark Ruskell: I welcome the instrument and the increased flexibility that Business Stream will have as a result. However, I suggest that, the next time that Scottish Water is in front of the committee, it might be worth asking it to report on the use of those borrowing powers in relation to the business aspect of the group. It would be useful for us to get a greater understanding of how the state utility is working with the privatised element of its group and how the borrowing power is working.

The Convener: We will note that suggestion for the next time that Scottish Water is in front of the committee.

I see that there are no further comments from members on the instruments.

That concludes the public part of our meeting. At our next meeting, on 24 November, we will consider amendments at stage 2 of the UK Withdrawal from the European Union (Continuity) (Scotland) Bill.

10:00

Meeting continued in private until 10:47.

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