

# Cross-Party Group on Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency

15 March 2022, 7.00pm

Minute

Present

MSPs

Sarah Boyack MSP  
Liam Kerr MSP  
Tess White MSP  
Brian Whittle MSP  
Jenni Minto MSP  
Audrey Nichol MSP  
Beatrice Wishart MSP  
Jackie Dunbar MSP

Invited guests

Simon Markall  
Pauline Hinchion  
Neil Barnes

Non-MSP Group Members

Elaine Waterson  
Ben Walker  
Kate Morrison  
Johanna Carrie  
Laura McGadie  
John Birchmore  
Paul O'Brien  
Geoff Calder  
Fabrice Leveque  
Kairvee Tyagi  
Ranald Leask  
Russell Bibb  
Francesca Kirtley-Paine  
Debbie Mathers  
Pete Roche  
Keith Baker  
Dan Jones

Teresa Bray  
Elizabeth Leighton  
Karri Tough  
Lesley Scott  
Ross Williams  
David Hickling  
Eddie Holmes  
Agnes Holmes  
Nigel Holmes  
John Maslen  
Keith Baker  
Geoff Calder  
Angela Lamont  
Bill Roger

## Apologies

Liam McArthur MSP  
Joe FitzPatrick MSP  
Foyso Choudry MSP  
Gillian Martin MSP  
Mark Ruskell MSP  
Colin Pritchard  
Norman McLennan

## Welcome and Introductions

Sarah Boyack MSP welcomed everyone to the meeting. She noted that the meeting would focus on the current energy price rises and the role that renewables and energy efficiency can play in this space. She noted that from 1 April 2022 the energy price cap will increase for approximately 22 million customers across Great Britain. And that those on default tariffs paying by direct debit will see an increase of £693 from £1,277 to £1,971 per year (difference due to rounding) - is a 54% increase. For prepayment customers the increase will be £708 from £1,309 to £2,107. She went on to say that prices are expected to rise again in October, and that the support announced by the UK and Scottish Government's to date (£200 off energy bills from October (to be recovered from people's bills in equal £40 instalments over the next 5 years, and a £150 rebate for households in council tax bands A-D) were not targeted to those most in need.

## Approval of minutes from the last meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting, held on 23 January 2020, had been sent round group members in advance and the secretariat received no requests for additions or corrections. The group agreed that these provided an accurate account of the meeting (proposed by Brian Whittle MSP, seconded by Paul O'Brien).

## Presentation from Simon Markall, Deputy Director of External Relations, Energy UK

Simon began his presentation by emphasising that GB is exposed in terms of prices not in terms of security of supply – it is therefore a price crisis that GB is facing. Simon went on to say that the UK energy market is heavily linked to the European Energy market and emphasised that this is a global price issue and that it won't be solved by greater production of gas. Simon then noted that fracking will not provide the necessary volumes within the timescales necessary to bring down prices. Simon went on to clarify that the cap is not on the bill itself but on the unit charge and that many people will therefore see bills in excess of £3,000. Simon emphasised the importance of being prepared for future events noting that we are likely to see more market failures and that current supplier failures have pushed up bills by £68. Simon's view is that it is better to look to support suppliers and customers to stop companies going bust. Simon then briefly considered how costs can be brought down for consumers noting the £200 rebate that consumers will be receiving and emphasising the importance of the UK Government remaining flexible in its support. Noting the UK's existing net zero ambitions Simon suggested that the long term solution was to speed this up – to “turbo charge” it and emphasised that if the Scottish and UK Government's turbo charged their ambitions Energy UK would meet these. Simon went on to talk about the need for effective planning regimes. Simon concluded his presentation by saying that the quicker we move away from our reliance on fossil fuels the cheaper bills will become.

## Presentation from Kate Morrison, Strategic Lead – Fair Markets, Citizens Advice Scotland

Kate began her presentation by outlining the role of Citizens Advice Scotland and noting that some its roles will transfer to Consumer Scotland. Kate went on to emphasise that from April 1<sup>st</sup>. national insurance, council tax and energy bills will all increase, and that research shows 84% of Scottish adults are concerned about their energy bills. Kate then said that the picture for many households was bleak noting that one third of people currently find their bills unaffordable and that around half a million people are cutting back on food bills. Kate emphasised that Scotland needs to grasp the opportunity of a green recovery from the pandemic and the cost of living crisis noting that a just transition is one that works for everyone. Kate then said that Governments should not take short term actions that put longer term aims at risk and went on to say that the support already announced by the UK and Scottish Governments was very welcome but that it was not enough to prevent households being pushed into poverty. Kate's view is that in the short term additional support is required through the benefits systems and that the longer term solution is decarbonising the UK's energy system - there is therefore a need to invest in energy

efficiency and renewables. Kate concluded her presentation by saying that taking action to improve energy efficiency will also create well paid jobs.

## Presentation from Neil Barnes, Linlithgow Development Trust and Pauline Hinchion, Scottish Communities Finance Ltd

Neil said that his presentation would explore the role of community renewables and how ambitions for community renewables might be scaled up. Neil went on to say that Communities-Go-Solar had started in 2019 when they found a local community champion – their local rugby club. They then teamed up with Pauline from Scottish Communities Finance, raised £17,000 in 5 weeks and installed a 15kW PV system on the rugby club's roof. After which they partnered with a local sports club and golf club. Neil noted that £900 had been saved on grid electricity and that they pitched the price below that available from the grid. They also able to receive FiT income. Neil then said that 99% of investors had come from the local area (EH49 postcode). Neil went on to say that the fundamental basis of the economic model was the power purchase agreement. Savings of c.£40,000 are expected over a 25 year period – this figure was calculated before recent price rises so is likely to be higher in reality. Neil then said that they are looking at an additional phase of the project which could place PV systems on the roofs of non-domestic properties and suggested that surplus generation could help those in fuel poverty. Neil also suggested that there might be a further 2 phases of the project which could include domestic properties. Neil concluded his presentation by flagging work by Martyn Day, MP which is trying to make it easier for communities to sell on electricity, and by emphasising that communities urgently need revenue to pay for staff etc. and said he would welcome further discussion on this. Pauline from Scottish Communities Finance then spoke about her role helping organisations to raise investment locally (patent capital, community bonds).

## Q and A and Discussion

A range of questions were directed at the panel and included:

Angela Lamont asked about solutions for those living in flats.

Brian Whittle MSP noted the current cost of electricity and the cost of running heat pumps and asked what the solutions were in the meantime.

Bill Roger asked about how communities can be brought together to act.

Johanna Carrie asked whether the option of reducing standing charges for those using less fuel would be sensible.

John Birchmore suggested that a single company buying from a generator may be a more sensible approach.

Sarah Boyack MSP then asked the presenters to provide one take away message each.

Simon Markall asked that between now and October each member of the audience look at their bills and talk to other people at their bills and about energy efficiency.

Kate Morrison emphasised the importance of advice and long term investment in communities.

Neil Barnes said he would like to see communities having an equal place at the table in developing sustainable energy solutions.

## Dates of future meetings

Sarah Boyack MSP noted that the group will meet once more before the summer recess and that the secretariat are looking at dates in late May/early June. The secretariat will be in touch with members once a date has been confirmed.

## AOB

Sarah Boyack MSP asked that the Zoom chat from this meeting be circulated to all members after the meeting. The secretariat confirmed that they would do this.