

## Ask ET – 28 June 2023 – Transcript

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## Transcript

**[redacted]**: Good afternoon everybody. Welcome to Ask ET. So this was to be the fourth hybrid Ask ET, with panel members and attendees participating in person, from the Media Centre in St. Andrew's House, as well as virtually, but the St. Andrew's House boiler had other plans last night. So we are all meeting virtually this afternoon.

I'm **[redacted]**. I work in the Corporate Transformation team, which is part of DG Corporate. And for today only, I'll be compering this Ask ET. If you've not been to Ask ET before, this is your opportunity, to put questions to our Executive Team, in an informal space. There is no theme, for today's event, and it may be that you want to know more about the big issues affecting government today, or perhaps something closer to home, maybe a question about corporate changes. Ask ET really is a chance for you to put your questions to our Directors General and Permanent Secretary.

Before we get started let me talk you through how this will work today and what we need you to do to get the most out of this session. First off, please note this session is being recorded and a video of the recording will be made available on Saltire. Please be aware that this could be disclosed under FOI. If you'd like to ask, a question today please raise your virtual hand on Teams, and I'll invite you in when asking your questions. Please do turn your camera on if you're happy to do so and that's where the panel and everyone else can see you. Now, I do need to explain how your own video and mic's very likely off by default. This is due to the recording policy about to go live. You may have heard about this on Saltire earlier this week, and the functionality for that was turned on in Teams just yesterday. So when you do turn on your camera and mic for the first time you may be asked to accept that the session is being recorded before your video and mic will switch on. So, just to be aware, you may see a little pop-up box to confirm.

The process for submitting written questions has also changed in response to feedback. So we're no longer using Slido and nor will we take written questions in

the in the sidebar. Today, colleagues were invited to pre-submit questions and during the session I will look for opportunities to put those most commonly asked to the panel. But it'd be great to see a lot of hands being raised to ask a question live as well, please.

My final bit of housekeeping before I do introduce our panel today note that with all internal communication channels, comments shared at this event must adhere to the comment and moderation policy to ensure that colleagues feel included and respected. So please do consider others before you speak and make sure that what you say lives up to our shared values of kindness and inclusivity, and of course, the Civil Service Code.

Without further ado then and while you're, you're thinking about that, that question to ask let me please introduce the panel. On the call today, we have our Permanent Secretary, John-Paul Marks, alongside DG Corporate Lesley Fraser, DG Scottish Exchequer, Alyson Stafford and DG Economy, Gregor Irwin and Gregor, I believe this is your, your first Ask ET as well. So welcome to you all. And to start us off, I'd like to invite the Permanent Secretary to make some opening remarks. Permanent Secretary.

**JP Marks:** Thanks, [redacted]. Good afternoon, everybody. I hope you are all. Well, thanks for joining us this afternoon.

I thought I would start just with a few messages to reflect on the term gone by, the parliamentary session as we approach summer recess. There's a day and a half of parliamentary time left to go, so plenty more still to happen, but the end is in sight.

So first of all, colleagues, as always, start with a big thank you for all your hard work and leadership through a very memorable and important period again in the history of Scotland.

And when I look back on the last few months, I genuinely really mean that it has been historic, a lot of significant moments that we have stepped through together as a team. And I want to say huge thank you for your resilience and your contribution. It

was only, of course, back at February half term that the former First Minister Nicola Sturgeon and John Swinney confirmed that they would be leaving government. And then, of course, over the Easter period with a huge thanks to everyone, 10 versions in 10 days, we put together that new policy prospectus that we've published since then.

Those three missions continue to guide our work, to reduce poverty, to realise that mission of economic transformation, to net zero and recover sustainable public services. And since then, colleagues, we've put a lot of focus into driving delivery against those priorities, but of course, also taking the chance to reset some relationships and the way we work as well.

And Gregor, who I'll welcome to say a few words of introduction as he settles into the Scottish Government, and I were both at the New Deal for Business final meeting would you believe. That sprint that has gone on the last few months to reset our relationship there, ensure that we're listening to each other and doing the right things on better regulation on non-domestic rates, on a wellbeing economy and the future opportunity for us to deliver a wellbeing economy in this country. Wonderful set of partners coming together focused on that mission, very purposeful, operating in a really nice high trust environment, which was great to see. Similarly, colleagues, you'll see, hopefully all fingers crossed, we're nearly there.

The local government New Deal by the end of this week published as well. And again, this is about us as system leaders, as partners leading Scotland towards that national performance framework, a fairer greener Scotland where all partners across civic Scotland across the country are working together towards that progressive mission. And local government and that relationship is so essential.

We've made important progress there around things like national care service, the fiscal framework review to come, and, and many more opportunities as well. Well, although I know it has been a busy few months, there is some really tangible progress that I am very, very proud of, which sometimes we don't hear enough of in the media. But let me just share a few messages with you.

So, our longest NHS waits, those two year, one year waits coming down quickly as we target those that have waited the longest post pandemic, a huge amount of effort going in to improve and reduce waiting times in our in our NHS with thanks to colleagues, our courts backlogs coming down fast so that we can provide access to justice more quickly. The poverty related education attainment gap is forecast to reduce faster this year than in previous years, which is a fabulous, fabulous thing. More children in Scotland are going to university for free from deprived backgrounds than ever before. And there are less children in care. And there are many, many more, examples like that of tangible progress that Scotland is stepping through.

But I just call a few out for us to remind ourselves that we're doing the right things to make the biggest differences, in the important way. I just want to pay a huge thank you to everybody for the work on Freedom of Information. Lesley and I talk about this a lot with the Executive Team around being stewards, getting integrity right, getting transparency right, proprietary and ethics right. And that includes our responsibilities to the public, to Parliament, to provide access to information that people seek. And for the first time since before the pandemic, we are now delivering that statutory obligation to respond to more than 95% of requests within 20 days long ways, a long way still to go, but a huge amount of progress. I want to take the moment to say huge thank you to everyone involved, because it does talk to our reputation for professionalism and transparency and integrity. And that matters deeply to me.

Well, we'll no doubt get into capability and talent and diversity and the opportunity we have to keep building capabilities within the Scottish Government in the months and years ahead. That's obviously so important. We've been doing that with the likes of ScotWind, within our Exchequer, on Ukraine, in Covid inquiries. Gregor may mention some future opportunities in our economy world. So we want to make sure our organisation is meeting the needs, supporting our Ministers now, but of course, fit for the future to deliver that long-term mission and vision as well. So, a lot of, a lot of energy going into that.

Finally, just from me, colleagues, I hope you get a lovely break this summer. I'm pretty sure we all deserve it that's for sure. **[redacted]** So I've got a little, a little four

Nations tour ahead of me and a bit of downtime. So I hope you get the chance to renew, put that energy in the bank for what comes next, and we will talk a bit about that later. But genuinely from the bottom of my heart, huge thanks for all your hard work in the last few weeks and months. It's been exceptional. The feedback from the First Minister and from Ministers is very, very good. And we're very grateful for everything you've done.

If it's okay, **[redacted]**, I'm just going to introduce Gregor. Gregor you're very welcome to the Scottish Government, our new DG economy, and I thought it might be nice for Gregor just to share a few messages with colleagues on his first impressions. Thanks, Gregor.

**Gregor Irwin:** Okay, great. Thank you very much JP a real pleasure to join this call. It's just over three months since I joined the Scottish Government. I got in a week before the new Ministerial team. Turned out to be good timing I think. It was a real pleasure to be here at the start with the new team, but also to work on the policy perspectives that you refer to. I think it's a really good set of instructions from our Ministers to us about what they want us to achieve over the next three years.

Had a really warm welcome from everyone right across the Scottish Government. Got a fantastic team in DG Economy, and really good to get to know them and to be working closely with them and others as well.

If I could maybe just pick out a few things that are sort of top of my mind JP you've actually mentioned one of them already. It's that new deal for business group that we both participated in the final meeting today. But it's really the start of a process, and that is a process of really developing a much closer and better relationship with business. It's about making sure that policy right across the Scottish Government is as aligned as it can be with business, recognising that sometimes actually we will want to do things that business might not actually want themselves, but for good public policy reasons. And, for me you touched on it. I think there's signs of a really good strong partnership developing there. And there are many ways in which we can work with business and I really think we need to embrace that opportunity. But it's not just for us in DG Economy, it's for people right across the organisation.

Second thing investments. We're going to get a report from a group called the Investor Panel set up by the First Minister in a little while that's going to make a lot of recommendations about how we can improve the environment for attracting investment to Scotland. Absolutely critical for net zero work that we're doing, but really important for businesses large and small. And it's important for the government as well. So we have to invest in, in our public services and have been having many useful conversations with Alyson about the ways in which we can work with others to enhance their ability to do that. So investment, that's a really important second priority for me.

A third one, fair work and employability. Some colleagues joined the First Minister in meeting with the STUC last week, I think it was fair work a central theme there. We're building it into a procurement approach. Employability. A really important area where we worked closely with local government. ET had a meeting with COSLA leadership team yesterday. This was one of the themes, themes we discussed with them. And it's a great example of where the Scottish Government working with local government really can make a difference to our economy.

The fourth area, entrepreneurship and innovation. Lots of exciting things happening in this space. The Cabinet Secretary will actually make a statement to Parliament tomorrow on the next phase of entrepreneurship work. So launching our entrepreneurial campuses programme responding to the Stewart Review and pathways to entrepreneurship, to open entrepreneurship opportunities to more women and other underrepresented groups amongst entrepreneurial firms. So that's really important. It comes just two weeks after we launched our innovation strategy, working with universities to commercialise research. Lots of really exciting things, happening there.

The last thing I'll mention is working the wellbeing economy itself. You referred to it. We're working hard to really give that sharper definition to make it operational. So we talk about a fair green and growing economy that meets the needs and aspirations of people. So it's people-centric, absolutely has to deliver for people. It's a core part of what we're doing in Nset, naturally Nset is the, the means by which this all comes

together. And I think we're making really good progress on that as well. So it's a huge agenda. Really great to be working with so many teams, not just in DG Economy, but also right across the Scottish Government on that. We look forward to deepening that collaboration in the months and years ahead.

**[redacted]:** JP, Gregor, thank you very much for those opening remarks. And let's see if any of those topics come up today. So onto the main event and let's now look to take our first question. Would somebody like to start us off? If you ask it now, you get it out of the way, so don't be shy. We do have a number of pre-submitted, questions in case we don't have anyone raising their hand but please do raise your hands. But while you're thinking of that I wonder if we go to one of the questions that was submitted by a colleague earlier and it's in relation to pay.

## Questions

### Pay

Looking for an update on pay negotiations and what the panel think about any pay increases that are perhaps below the rate of inflation. Permanent Secretary, can I come to yourself first maybe on that one?

**JP Marks:** Yeah, thanks **[redacted]**. And then I'll come to Lesley if Lesley's happy to join me. So, I mean, first of all colleagues the inflationary shock the we are all still living through is really hard. So I start from the fact that we would all like to see as much mitigation we can possibly put into the system to mitigate the impacts of a cost of living crisis. And clearly pay is a key part of that.

I think we've worked very hard through last year with Ministers to try and settle fair and affordable pay awards that were targeted, particularly for those on lower incomes. And for certainly for us in SG we tried to do what we could to make sure we protected things like progression, no compulsory redundancy, but also tried to advance some of the innovation we're interested in including around wellbeing. And I'm pleased to say the dialogue with our trade union colleagues is very positive and



ultimately led to the 22/23 supplementary pay deal being agreed. So that was good progress.

Colleagues will note that we settled, for example, with our teachers with agenda for change. And so we have not had industrial action in our health service. We brought it to the end in our schools, and we've tried to prevent it wherever we could across all our core public services because we recognise they are essential for everyone and it's the right thing to do. But of course we've got to balance fiscal sustainability and the budget, and Alyson might say a bit more on that later. So we are always trying to get that balance right and those same principles of fair and affordable, trying to advance reform will be part of the important conversations to our trade union partners which are getting underway for 23/24.

Lesley could you say a little bit more on that? And then Alyson might just want to say something on the context of the fiscal position and the budget. Thanks Lesley.

**Lesley Fraser:** Yeah, thanks JP. And thanks for the question. And I just do recognise how hard this is. And also just the challenge of waiting for the conclusion of these negotiations as well. Once Ministers set pay policy we negotiate with our recognised trade union partners and we choose to do that on both sides in confidence. And colleagues will understand why we do that, so that we can fully and frankly test, you know, choices and options together. I know that is really tough because it means that people are not, you know, understanding and hearing the progress. But I think it's really important that we maintain that.

We will of course honour the pay deal when we get there, and backdate back to April. So colleagues will not lose pay. But I know that it's tough nonetheless as you as you wait for that news. We're both sides absolutely committed to cracking on with this and getting to a successful conclusion as quickly as possible. So we'll keep you updated just as soon as we can. Thanks, **[redacted]**.

## Financial strategy

**[redacted]:** Thank you, Lesley. Thank you JP. Alyson anything on kind of wider financial pressures then in that context as well?

**Alyson Stafford:** Yeah, absolutely. So one of the key areas to look at if colleagues want to follow this up is the medium term financial strategy. It was published in May. Sounds a bit dry, but it is actually worth a read because it does set out what does that medium term look like so that we can be looking ahead as well as dealing with the present. And what that is saying to us is that on our current package of policies and the things that are deliverable, the spending is really expected to grow at a faster rate than our central funding outlook.

That's not necessarily a surprise because obviously that inflationary impact that we're all feeling when we go to the shop and try and get some food or put some petrol in the car, that's happening across the spend base of all the delivery areas, whether it's cross health, local government and so on, you get the idea. So that's expected to grow at a faster rate.

And the modelling that's been done is showing that our spending requirements could outstrip our funding coming in by around a billion pounds in 24/25. So really looking ahead at that next year budget. And that rises to again a differential of 1.9 billion pounds when we model that out to this inflationary impact prices of any effect are remaining really challenging for us. And so this next period we've been talking about pay, pay obviously drives quite a lot the costs across all of the things that we put out by way of grants and support across the whole of the public sector.

So this next period is going be really challenging and a lot of therefore what we'll be looking at is just to see how in supporting those prospectus outcomes that the First Minister set out right at the start of this term of office is how we can actually make those real, how we can make sure that the money that we do have is going towards that.

So there's a number of things that we'll be looking to work through with colleagues across the organisation as to how we can put some of those choices to Ministers across that whole prospectus as to how that can be best delivered. But what are some of the things that we might have to do differently to make that happen? So that's the context really. It's a challenge. But I think there's some really great imaginative ideas.

You know, some of this is about helping the economy overall so we can increase our tax take, some of the things that Gregor has mentioned, but there's also a real challenge for us as to how we can really adapt the delivery of public services, whether it's through digital, a whole range of different things to actually enable us to, to get the outcomes and actually make sure we do that in a fiscally sustainable way.

**[redacted]**: Okay, thank you Alyson. Thank you all. And yeah, thank you the colleague who asked that question. Okay let's go live. And **[redacted]**, you've got your hand up. **[redacted]**, you'd like to come in with a question for the panel, please.

**[redacted]**: Hi everyone. My question is directed to Gregor, throwing you on the spot here, Gregor. Sorry.

## **Recruitment – remote working 1**

I work in the European Structural Funds and there are two main programmes ESF and ERDF will be coming to an end within the next 12 months. So when will our senior colleagues be discussing and communicating to ESF staff what will be happening to them when the programmes close?

There's a considerable amount of worry amongst colleagues in these, especially ones based in the remote locations such as Inverness, like myself, and others in Stornoway, because we find it difficult to locate vacant posts in these remote areas, even in the times of remote and hybrid working. And I was just wondering if we would be able to get regular updates, please.

**Gregor Irwin:** Thanks very much for that, [redacted]. Look the team has been doing fantastic work under a lot of pressure for quite some time now. The whole process of getting us over the finishing line in terms of processing applications for funding and doing all of the things that we have to do to make sure that we're fully compliant with European Commission requirements there is hard work. It requires detailed forensic work by the team. So I'm really appreciative of that.

We absolutely, you know, need to do everything we can to keep the team together, the expertise that's there together and focused on that work so that we get over the finishing line. I know that Colin Cook, the Director, and management team are, you know, absolutely alert to both, the needs of staff as they, as they plan their next move and the timing of that to try and make sure that there's flexibility so that staff are able to, you know, stay fully part of that team for as long as possible, and then move on to the next opportunity when that becomes available to them. So I know that's not easy for people right across the division.

The issue you've raised is an even more difficult one given, where you're based. I think collectively we need to make sure that as many opportunities as possible are available to you so that you can see what can be done from your location given our approach to flexible working in and I really hope you've got good sight of, you know, what job opportunities are becoming available that may be suitable for you.

But the main message is one of gratitude for what you're doing and, you know, if we can really keep you and the rest of the team focused on that very important work and then help you in that transition to a good new role afterwards, that would be, that would be a very good outcome.

**JP Marks:** And [redacted], I wonder if I could just build on Gregor's answer, which of course I agree with wholeheartedly, but [redacted], I was just saying to my team, I'm coming to Inverness later this summer, I wonder whether I could come and meet you and your team and, and talk about this, because as Gregor said, we want to take the opportunities of hybrid working to ensure that our vacancies are increasingly accessible across the whole of Scotland. We cherish that opportunity. We want to

represent the whole community we serve, not just those in the central belt, as much as we love all of those colleagues too.

So maybe if I could come to in Inverness and talk about that. I mean, just to give you a bit of confidence right now, there's 741 live vacancies currently on our system. And as I alluded to, whether it's the National Care Service, Social Security reform, the future of energy and hydrogen, there is going be lots of fresh challenges for us ahead and lots more recruitment opportunity. We're very committed to hybrid as a way of working, and we want to do a whole of Scotland approach.

I'd love to come and just meet you and in Inverness and we could just talk about, right let's make that really real then for you and your team. And that might be a good case study for me to step through, as you hopefully can wrap up your programmes really well as Gregor says, but have total confidence that we will then look after you so you can have an exciting career in 24 and 25 and all the years that followed from there. Thanks **[redacted]** for your question.

**[redacted]**: Yeah, Thanks. Look forward to that meeting. Thanks.

**[redacted]**: Yeah, thank you **[redacted]**. And thank you to both, Gregor and JP. If we go to **[redacted]** next, **[redacted]**, you've got a question for the panel, do come in.

**[redacted]**: Hi, **[redacted]**. Hi, colleagues. Thank you for that. Yeah, it was just a quick one.

## **Diversity and inclusion**

My eyes lit up when you talked about the talent and the capability and the diversity earlier on. So I just wondered what does that look like for SG as a whole in terms of, you know, standards, fairness, looking at that skills gap, obviously about, you know, in the current climate of headcount, challenges, etc, but what about that investment? So I just wondered what the approach might look like in the coming months.

**JP Marks**: Thanks, **[redacted]**. I'll bring Lesley in to say some more about this, but I think we've got a really lovely opportunity, **[redacted]**, to kick on with our diversity

and inclusion, culture as an organisation. Everything from, you know, we've got a Ministerial statement this week on the United Nations Rights of the Child. And we're about to launch our consultation on our Equalities Bill. So we are leading by example as an organisation. We've doubled representation for disability, colleagues with disabilities in SG, since in the last few years, which is encouraging.

We've got a long way to go. We're trying to improve the accessibility of a more modern estate, more to do, and we're doing well on gender balance in our SCS exceeding our targets for the first time. And again, I can say more, but you know, a number of new directorate capabilities created recently where we are seeing that gender balance continue to improve further.

But we don't want to rest there, [redacted], we want to kick on with professions, with our leadership development capability and our People Strategy is really, really, enhanced in this regard. And I'll bring Lesley in to say a bit more, if that's okay. Thanks, Lesley.

**Lesley Fraser:** Yeah, great question. Thank you, [redacted]. And, do you know, we've done a lot actually with our race and disability recruitment and retention plans over the last few years. And those have begun to make quite a difference. Not as big a difference actually as we would all want to see and that's why we are working with colleagues right the way across the organisation now on bringing that together into a diversity strategy that looks in a more cross-cutting way actually, and uses new sources of data as well. So we brought in a new recruitment system last year that's giving us absolutely fantastic data for the first time that can really help us focus our activity in a powerful way.

I'm really excited about some of the new things that we've been bringing on recently. So, seeing I think 20 odd colleagues from minority ethnic backgrounds and disabled colleagues, and deputy directors coming into our developing diverse leaders schemes. So that's really, really exciting to be really building that pipeline.

And I think as we get going on professions, just as JP was saying, huge potential and opportunity there. And as we bring in a new HR system to replace eHR, again

that's going to give us new ways of working with each and every person in the organisation so that you can, you know, build a career pathway and a professional pathway as well. So I really hope that for every one of us, that helps just, you know, channel and focus talent in the way that the organisation's going to need. Thanks.

**[redacted]:** Thank you, Lesley. That okay **[redacted]**?

**[redacted]:** Great. Thank you.

**[redacted]:** Thank you. **[redacted]** next please. **[redacted]**, come on in.

## **Recruitment – remote working 2**

**[redacted]:** Hi there, I was quite keen just to pick up on the earlier point there regarding staff in Inverness and Stornoway. And it was really to ask whether there's more of an opportunity for looking at remote working and particularly in terms of supporting the deliveries in the Islands Plan and the Rural Delivery Plan when that comes along. Because I do feel that there is an issue in the current hybrid working arrangements, and that that is actually, I think it's a significant barrier to increasing people working particularly in islands. So it was just to really ask if there was any more thoughts on that or anything that could be given more consideration.

**JP Marks:** Thanks, **[redacted]**. I think you've raised it, and so we should make sure we're giving it the right consideration. Do you know what I mean? I sort of, I absolutely understand the point, and as I say, when I come to Inverness later this year, I would genuinely be delighted to get together with some colleagues and talk about this some more.

I'm attending a meeting this evening on that Rural Delivery Plan, and no doubt, much of that conversation will be about, you know, connectivity and ferries and land use and, you know, all of the right conversation. But we also need to make sure that it's a conversation that we bring into the civil service too, and we reflect carefully on how we work. Lesley and I were talking about this earlier, I'll bring Lesley in. We've got around 70 buildings in this Scottish Government estate, and they are all around

Scotland and many of them around the coast, of course, in terms of Marine Scotland, Fisheries office, Social Security and others. And we cherish that, and we want that whole of Scotland approach, and as you say, hybrid gives us more opportunity to be more representative of the community we serve including islands, Highlands and our rural communities.

But we need to just step through it smartly so that we get the guidance right, and also give colleagues that opportunity to be part of teams and connect in that face-to-face environment where it's the right thing to do, serving Ministers being part of that huddle, that team, that innovation space. So, you know, I want us to get the guidance right in that regard. But Lesley do you want to say anything more there? Thanks.

**Lesley Fraser:** Yeah, it's, it's such an important point, and I think [redacted], you're sort of pinpointing a really critical set of issues for the organisation as we come out of covid and covid recovery and just set ourselves up so that we are, you know, as well placed as we possibly can be to serve the people of Scotland and Ministers in the future.

And we're still, I think, very much learning about working with hybrid. Do you know, I think we all made that huge shift with covid and we sort of thought things might go back and it hasn't, but it's equally as seismic a shift for us, I think, to get our heads around the potential of, of hybrid. And I very much see hybrid in potential mode. I think face-to-face is hugely important. We're always going to need those human relationships. Those human relationships also, you know, stand us in great stead working in partnership in local communities as well, you know, so that spread across the country is, is hugely important.

I'm delighted that again, just paying tribute to trade union colleagues. We're working through with them some of the things that we could just begin to formalise around our hybrid offer and location neutral and how that works across the whole of the country. So watch this space and hopefully there'll be a bit more that we can see on that in the course of the next few months. Thanks.

[redacted]: Okay, thank you. And thank you [redacted] for the question.



## Four day working week

Kind of following on from that Lesley, one of the questions that kind of came through before the session was talking about ways of working, flexibility, hybrid working and someone was looking for an update on that 35 hour working week, or trialling of the four day week as was committed to in the public sector pay strategy. Is there, is there any update on, on either of those two?

**Lesley Fraser:** Yeah, thanks, [redacted]. And I think, again, just that kind of theme of as we all kind of recover and work our way through post covid, actually that focus on wellbeing and, you know, is hugely important.

So I was really, you know, pleased that we were able to agree with union colleagues a supplementary element to pay last year was the introduction actually from I think next week of a pilot wellbeing hour. So non-contractual at this point, but we're really keen to learn how colleagues use that and how that can, you know, benefit, the organisation and individuals, and really focus on improving that kind of resilience and wellbeing, which I know is a kind of key point for all of us working in government.

So, we're also, I think, very interested, we have a number of public sector bodies who are keen to pilot four day working week, and we are very keen to learn from that as well. So, I think, it's good to have some practical pilots now rolling out both within this organisation here that we can learn from and as we look across into public sector bodies as well. Thanks.

**[redacted]:** Thank you. Okay. I wonder if we changed theme a little bit and there was a lot of interest in the estate in the in the pre-submitted questions. Estates has also been a topic of a lot of conversations in some of our corporate transformation engagements, as the estate strategy gets built up. So as expected, quite a few questions coming through on estate, So I wonder if I can pick out one of those. And it's about net zero commitments.

## Net zero targets

So why is net zero not included in our corporate objectives given that we declared a climate crisis in 2019, and both the heat and building strategy and climate change act call for the public sector to show leadership? So what are we doing to demonstrate that?

**Lesley Fraser:** Shall I leap in again, [redacted], or sorry JP do you want to go first?

[redacted]: JP, you kick us off.

**JP Marks:** Yeah, I'll just say a couple of things because I think Scotland continues to lead the response to the climate crisis by example. And we, you know, as I've articulated earlier in the prospectus, it is our second mission, in terms of top priorities to achieve net zero, both that 2030, 2045 target. And, and actually a lot of the conversations I've been having with teams in the last few weeks and months have been around, you know, hard, hard interaction with UK Government on the deposit return scheme. A lot of hard work going on heat and buildings strategy and the pivot we need to make to sustainable heating systems for domestic and business estates. We're going to be saying more about that. Ministers will be making announcements soon, which will be really, really progressive.

It was great to go out to Glen Falloch to meet with land estate to talk about peatland restoration, where we've got a really exciting programme standing up to accelerate progress, obviously on forestry and planting more trees where we're making huge progress, but we want to accelerate and go faster. And there's a great strategy in there.

I think we got our first electric public transport system standing up with thanks to Transport Scotland colleagues. And we know we want to do a lot pivot people off public transport and out of out of cars and on to public transport and concessionary travel support services are all part of that.

And then that's before you get into hydrogen, carbon capture and renewables and the opportunities of Scotland. So I think when we look at climate, the climate crisis and our response, I think Scotland has got it in view. Roy Brannen can articulate where we are on the roadmap much better than I can, as can his teams, but we are able to see what it's going take to get to our net zero targets. And we're not there yet, but in 2023, we can see the journey, where we need to accelerate the changes we need to make. And the political, coalition to achieve those changes is very, very robust and very strong. And clearly our Scottish Green Party Ministers working with our Cabinet are determined to make that happen.

So I'll just say that upfront because I'm proud to be part of a team who are absolutely serious about pulling this off. Now, Lesley will say more about our own estates and some of our older buildings where we have got a big transition to make, but we are into that process with our estates team, and we'll be able to put advice to Ministers of what that'll take and what the capital investment will be for us to achieve that. And Lesley, maybe just say a bit more. Thanks, Lesley.

**Lesley Fraser:** Yeah, thanks JP. And yeah, in that context, of course, you know, what we do back at home, as it were with our own buildings absolutely critical. So, we're currently working off a and we've reduced our carbon emissions by 42% over that period, which sounds quite impressive, but clearly nowhere near as much as we will need to do to meet the 2030, 2038 standards, which we're absolutely committed to doing. We are producing an estate strategy, and that has net zero as one of its key objectives. And as JP was saying, that will be something that we'll be talking to the organisation about and talking to Ministers about over the next period. And that will include a carbon reduction management plan as part of that as well.

I guess, you know, there's different ways in which we can meet those standards. So some of it is about kind of retrofitting and some of it I think will be taking opportunities to share our buildings, for example, with other public sector organisations and indeed sometimes to move out of buildings that, you know, are no longer going work for us in the way that we want to work now. And to provide us with the kind of facilities and standards that we're going to require and look to do something different. So, you

know, for example, we're, we're looking at areas like Glasgow, for example, where we can see future opportunities towards 2030 and what we might do, you know, working with other public sector organisations to be net zero really efficient, but get really high quality facilities as we want to use them now. Thanks, [redacted].

[redacted]: Lesley, thank you. And for colleagues on the call, please do remember you can raise your hand. We've got probably about 15 minutes left so time for a few more questions.

### **Accessibility of buildings**

Lesley, I wonder, you mentioned kind of retrofitting existing buildings and some of the changes and improvements that we're making to the estate. In those considerations, are we taking into consideration kind of accessibility needs? So for example, there's a particular question around power assisted doors. So do those feature and improvements that we'll make to the estate?

**Lesley Fraser:** They do indeed [redacted], and just a, a huge thank you to all those colleagues, through the disabled staff network and other routes that contribute to kind of advice to me and the team on how we continue to make our buildings more accessible. We actually have undertaken accessibility audits around our estate so that we're beginning to build that prioritised plan of how we can, not only, you know, improve our carbon use but we can also make our buildings more accessible for all our employees as we go as well.

Power assisted doors? Really important. I work in St Andrew's House, and I must say, me moving about the office is I think a lot easier with the power assisted doors that we've been able to introduce there, but that's a good example of how the accessibility audits plus the feedback that we get are helping us just kind of prioritise where we go in the estate to improve accessibility. Thanks.

[redacted]: Thank you very much. And I'm sure colleagues will be delighted to hear that is an important focus of the work.

## Inclusion

Staying on the theme of inclusion, I'll maybe open up to Gregor and Alyson just in the wider context of discussions at ET. So, at many of the Ask ET sessions there's questions around disability inclusion and a view that there isn't really a joined up experience for disabled staff and very little opportunity to offer up constructive feedback on what isn't working and how we can build kind of better person-centered approaches into that business as usual, so that we strive for excellence for disabled staff rather than aiming for kind of good enough or compliance.

At ET, kind of interested to hear what is being done in that space to really give accessibility and inclusion, the kind of the prominence that it needs to have in the organisation? Don't know who would like to share kind of reflections on that?

**Gregor Irwin:** I can start. So you know, when I think of the different organisations that I've worked in, I've worked in a number of public sector organisations and worked in the private sector and as an academic, I think the Scottish Government takes seriously the challenges and the opportunities of inclusion more than any other organisation I've worked in before.

I think we've got a good group of champions and allies who are pretty diligent at raising different viewpoints and perspectives in ET meetings. I think, collectively as a group, you know, I think we really can see opportunities from getting this right, from having a diverse and inclusive workforce, really good for our ability to make good policies, policies that work for everyone, but also to make sure that we are as creative and impactful as we can be.

So, I'm absolutely sure there's more that we can do. There's room to improve but it's definitely a sort of integral part of the conversation, an integral part of those discussions. So there's lots to work with there and to build upon, and this wider sort of discussion I think is part of that as well. So it is not just about discussions in the ET it has to be about discussions right across the organisation.

**[redacted]:** Gregor thank you for those reflections.

**Alyson Stafford:** Alyson, do you want to come in as well? Absolutely. I was just struggling like as others do occasionally to find the mute button properly.

But anyway, it really has moved on. So as Gregor says it sort of permeates a lot of our conversation, but when we do have our dedicated sessions on this, the last time we had, which was in the last couple of months, it felt like a real step change.

The data that we had to look at was night and day compared with what it was like even 12 months ago. And there was some real, some real great feedback and granular feedback about just how easy or how difficult it is, but also the adaptations that have already been made, just about how people can get a job in the government because we know through recruiting we will be continuing to drive up the diversity of our workforce across the piece. So really understanding about how the application forms are shaped, what the nature of the questions are, actually really powerful outreach to different organisations, both to help with that process, but also to draw in and maybe bring to the attention of others, the sort of work that we have here and actually how it could, how people could really, really make a difference and improve our understanding of the general public in Scotland by being part of the workforce here. And that rubs off.

I mean, I think the other thing though is just about how we create the conditions for people to feel really true and able to be their full self in work. So I know we've talked quite a bit about disability and that was really a big emphasis of what we were discussing as ET in this diversity one. I head up and championed the socioeconomic diversity side of things. And you know, it's amazing how even the number of people who have read the blogs that myself and different colleagues have put just to say about our own personal experience, JP has been very transparent about his own background, you know, just so that actually it's amazing the people that still mentioned to me, even though I wrote that blog must be even at least 18 months ago, they've used that to say, well, actually they, they'd like to, to be mentored or they've reached out to say, do you think I can really take this sort of opportunity on?

We've got some amazingly talented people and have come from some tremendous backgrounds and have actually really flourished. So there's some great role models

out there, but we just need to continue to create those conditions. And I think hopefully you can tell at least from a couple of contributions this afternoon that we are all passionate about this to really make it a place where people can be their full self, give their role, but also be so much more representative of the people we see across Scotland.

**[redacted]** Okay, thank you very much both for those thoughts. We've got another couple of hands up. So, **[redacted]** in you come with a question for the panel.

### **Mutual mentoring**

**[redacted]**: Thanks. It's not actually a question, it was actually just a follow on from what you're talking about there. I've recently joined the mutual mentoring group and it is so insightful. I'm just on here to promote it because you do learn so much about the experiences of some of her colleagues who are suffering, you know, who have protected characteristics, mine is my mentee is disabled and I'm learning more about what challenges that individual has every single day, even going into an office or going to an event through work.

And it's something I think we can all learn from and it's how we then capture that information, you know, taking it forward. You know, I know a lot of it's confidential, but we can use a lot of the generic information that comes out of that and it's how we can then build on that moving forward.

So I just wanted to promote the mutual mentoring. I joined it and I would, I just promote to anybody else that's got the time. It does take a bit of time because it is about two hours learning each month and then an hours conversation with your individual. But it is a very good learning experience for both people in the partnership. Thank you.

**Alyson Stafford:** Spot on, **[redacted]**. I couldn't agree more. I've learned so much through that scheme, so yeah. Thanks **[redacted]**. Allowing me to just burst in with that one.

[redacted]: No, of course. And fantastic, thank you very much for sharing your experience [redacted] and I'm sure our Saltire colleagues if you popped mutual mentoring into the Saltire search I would come up with details on how to join. Okay We're next going to go to [redacted], please. [redacted], I think you've been plagued by the new mute and then acknowledge.

[redacted]: No, I just have say it's my own incompetence. I do apologise.

## Digital transformation

I guess one thing I've been thinking about since being a relatively new start to Scottish Government, just generally what the thoughts are around how do we sort of prioritise the right investment in digital and I guess, you know, having been involved in digital transformation, how do we avoid that kind digital transformation overload?

You know, there's only so much we can do at any given time and I guess with that, how do we, how can we speed up our delivery of digital services? And having worked quite a bit in that space, there's quite often I guess the perception that government move moves quite a bit slower when it comes to the delivering digital.

So, you know, with that, how can we speed it up and then with that it kind of build our own internal project and programme talent pool so we're less reliant on the market for delivery of these services, you know, which is often expensive and you lose people when they come and go.

So I suppose it's yet the prioritisation, the speeding up of delivery, because you're often, you know, digital partners will, they'll move quickly and they'll be agile and they'll have a different pace to the way that we might move. So I guess just, Yeah, just really just your thoughts. Sorry that I'm sure everyone on, on the call will have some thoughts and just wonder what you thought.

**JP Marks:** Thanks [redacted]. Great to see you. Welcome. I hope you are enjoying your Scottish government journey. So look, this is a really important question because as you know clearly from your profession, the opportunity of digital and



technological transformation are huge if we get it organised and do it well. So if I just take an example from this week meeting with David, Stephen, Lisa, and the Social Security team, they have got a fabulous prioritisation framework based on need and user feedback and evidence and then an accelerated release strategy to automate the Social Security service so that we can support more of our people with a better experience and our clients can access social security faster and get money in their pockets accurately first time. So that is absolutely integrated core to the programme and it's agile, it's flexible and it's needs based. So from my perspective, that's best practice.

I think there's a second point though out with SG and how we create the environment for digital transformation. So when I think about Gregor's world and things like tech scalars and creating the ecosystem for transformation to disrupt and improve outcomes, you know, whether that be about the use of AI and cancer diagnostics or it's about how we create a startup nation whereby smaller startups can access the support they need. Might be CivTech, might be FinTech, might be whichever tech it is to get the support around them to to to scale up and become thriving businesses and hopefully pay lots of tax so that we can fund sustainable public services and all the rest of it. So it all, it all sort of comes around. So I think digital core to our own transformation, but also to the success of Scotland to achieve its ultimate aims of a wellbeing economy.

Final point, Lesley will say a bit more, we've got some big transformation coming, which is enterprise wide and there is a time for accelerated change and then there's a time for very deliberate careful change because this is a big one. So I think that is where we're going to all need to work really well together to land a new HR and finance systems for which we all will participate as we step into a new operating system. Lesley do you want to say a bit more about that and anything else you'd like to add? Thanks.

**Lesley Fraser:** Yeah, spot on and thank you for the question [redacted]. We haven't upgraded a lot of our core technology in Scottish Government since we actually, since devolution. You know, we put in things like the Scottish Executive Accounting

System back in about 2006 and hr, our eHR system not long after, so well due bringing up to date and all of the digital capability that are very modern system running on industry best practice will give us. So that's top of our priority list. And you were asking about priorities **[redacted]**.

I think for me the other element where government can really, pay dividends is getting some of the fundamentals right. So getting a cloud offer for public services, getting identity sorted out for public services, publication and so on. And so I know that Geoff Huggins and the Digital Directorate are working with colleagues right the way across public bodies kind of Ministerial portfolio by Ministerial portfolio to think about how we prioritise and get the absolute best value out of the digital investments that are being made. Because there's quite a lot of digital investment out there, not necessarily as I think your question is indicating, absolutely optimised at the moment. So there's definitely some things we can do.

**[redacted]**: Thanks, Lesley. JP, thank you. And **[redacted]** thank you very much for the question. So you got to ask the last question in the session.

We're unfortunately out of time. So a very interesting discussion, today, and I think you'll agree it's covered a range of different, different topics. So a massive thank you to our panel. And to yourselves colleagues for questions that you've asked today or beforehand as well as the engagement, You will receive a feedback survey from Internal Comms team and be really grateful if you could share your feedback with us as that really helps to shape future events such as these.

And then finally for myself, thank you very much for listening. Enjoy the rest of your day. Enjoy the rest of the week and for any of you with school aged children good luck for the next seven weeks. So on that closing enjoy the rest of your day. Thank you very much.