



Scottish Parliament Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee

Inquiry into the role of local government and its cross-sectoral partners in financing and delivering a net-zero Scotland

Submission from Stop Climate Chaos Scotland
January 2022

Introduction

[Stop Climate Chaos Scotland](#) (“SCCS”) is a diverse coalition of over 60 civil society organisations in Scotland who campaign together on climate change. Our members include environment, faith and belief groups, international development organisations, trade and student unions and community groups. We believe that the Scottish Government should take bold action to tackle climate change, with Scotland delivering our fair share of action in response to the Paris Agreement and supporting climate justice around the world.

SCCS welcomes the opportunity to provide evidence to this important inquiry by means of this written submission. Our focus is strategic and cross-cutting and complements the more detailed submissions from many of our members on individual policy issues. This submission, therefore, takes the form of a written contribution, rather than seeking to answer the specific questions in the online consultation.

Climate context

Global warming of more than 1°C has already taken place since the pre-industrial period. The impacts are already being felt and further emissions make these increasingly worse. The Paris Agreement aims for countries to work to limit warming to well below 2°C and to aim for 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. The UN’s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)¹ states that restricting global warming to the 1.5°C level would require a 45% reduction in net human-caused emissions of CO₂ by 2030, global carbon net neutrality by mid-century, and then the removal of billions of tonnes of atmospheric carbon dioxide for the rest of the century. The IPCC also stated in 2018 that there are fewer than 12 years to make the necessary changes; we must therefore act now.

In August 2021, the IPCC issued the starkest warning yet about human impact on the planet, including more intense heatwaves and more extreme weather events, with some changes now inevitable and irreversible². The UN Secretary General branded the findings a “code red for humanity”³. The science is now overwhelming: without concerted action we’re headed towards climate catastrophe; with the poorest communities and future generations suffering the most.

“As First Minister of Scotland, I am declaring that there is a climate emergency.
And Scotland will live up to our responsibility to tackle it.”

Rt. Hon. Nicola Sturgeon MSP, 28 April 2019⁴.

In April 2019, the First Minister ‘formally’ declared a climate emergency⁵. This language was subsequently central to Scottish Government policy and statements – for instance, the (then) Cabinet Secretary’s statement in May 2019⁶ and the 2019-20 Programme for Government⁷. It remains a key

¹ ‘IPCC Special Report: Global Warming of 1.5°C’, October 2018. <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/>

² <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/sixth-assessment-report-working-group-i/>

³ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-58130705>

⁴ <https://www.ukpol.co.uk/nicola-sturgeon-2019-speech-at-snp-conference/>

⁵ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-48077802>

⁶ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/global-climate-emergency-scotlands-response-climate-change-secretary-roseanna-cunninghams-statement/>

⁷ <https://www.gov.scot/news/protecting-scotlands-future/>



element of policy with one of the six chapters within the Scottish Government – Scottish Green Party Shared Policy Programme entitled “Responding to the climate emergency”⁸. The co-operation agreement also creates a Cabinet Sub-Committee on the Climate Emergency “to provide cross-Government leadership and coordination of efforts to tackle climate change”⁹.

In May 2019, the UK Climate Change Committee (CCC) recommended that Scotland could reach a net zero target for greenhouse gases by 2045 (ahead of the UK, which could meet the same target by 2050)¹⁰. The Scottish Government swiftly accepted these recommendations¹¹ and have now legislated to secure net zero emissions by 2045, with an interim target of a 75% reduction by 2030¹².

Due to the various policy and delivery responsibilities of local government and its cross-sectoral partners, their role in contributing to Scotland reaching (or not) these targets is vital. The decision by the Committee to conduct this inquiry is a recognition of the importance of this role.

In pursuing the inquiry and making recommendations, the Committee may wish to consider:

- Do Local Authorities recognise the importance of their role in this area, and do they sufficiently prioritise climate considerations?
- If there are issues with such recognition/prioritization, is this due to weaknesses in either statutory duty (s.44 of climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009) and/or guidance (s. 45), and/or due to a lack of resources (finance, personnel, etc.); and, if so, how might these issues be addressed?

The policy and delivery responsibilities of local government

The key areas where local government are a key policy or delivery partner include: -

- Transport;
- Planning;
- Buildings and energy;
- Food and other procurement.

Each of these issues is discussed briefly below but further detail on many of these matters are also contained in more specialist submissions from a number of SCCS members.

1. Transport

Transport continues to be Scotland’s single biggest source of carbon emissions, having increased for much of the past decade. Road transport accounts for nearly two-thirds of these emissions.¹³ Local government is responsible for the maintenance of the vast majority of Scotland’s road network and will be central to efforts to reduce emissions from road transport.

Local government has a leading role to plan in the provision, and management, of active travel infrastructure – and will also be vital to the delivery of the Scottish Government’s target to reduce private car mileage by 20%. Local authorities (both as ‘owners’ and regulators) are also critical to the provision and costs of bus transport.

2. Planning

Local Government planning responsibilities (both development planning and development management) are essential to the transition to low carbon living. Good planning decisions can facilitate such a transition, while poor ones can ‘lock in’ high carbon emissions.

⁸ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-government-and-scottish-green-party-shared-policy-programme/>

⁹ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-government-and-scottish-green-party-cooperation-agreement/>

¹⁰ <https://www.theccc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Net-Zero-The-UKs-contribution-to-stopping-global-warming.pdf>

¹¹ <https://www.gov.scot/news/climate-change-action-1/>

¹² <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2019/15/enacted>

¹³ <https://www.transport.gov.scot/media/48199/sct07209535161.pdf>



Development planning (and the individual development management decisions) must help to ensure that, in future, there is no provision for further airport expansion and that car-dependent, out of town retail or office developments are discouraged. There should be a presumption in favour of “20-minute neighbourhoods¹⁴” rather than separate business/residential areas unconnected by active/public transport. Development plans must also ensure that renewable energy developments are supported in locations which minimise damage to peatland and carbon-rich soils and that commercial peat extraction is not supported.

Many Local Authorities have declared a climate emergency and Council officers must have the confidence to ensure Local Development Plans, and planning decisions, address this emergency. There are often gaps in the skills required to address applications involving complex carbon assessments. Many Local Authorities have also lost their Biodiversity Officers, who are key to providing advice on impacts to habitats which will be required for climate change mitigation and adaptation

The above will, of course, be influenced by national planning policy, such as NPF4 (see below) and national DPEA decisions.

3. Buildings and energy

Local government has both a regulatory and operational role in relation to reducing emissions from buildings and energy use. The Committee may wish to consider whether building standards systems are appropriate to delivering the necessary emissions’ reductions; this has both a national and local element.

Operationally, in relation to public buildings, local government has a range of important responsibilities in relation to schools, libraries, leisure facilities, office buildings, etc. The Committee may wish to consider whether policies and/or funding are appropriate to delivering emissions’ reduction from this public estate.

Much of the emissions’ reductions from building will relate to energy efficiency and/or energy use, and the Committee may wish to examine the role of local authorities in promoting and facilitating the generation and use of renewable energy, as well as reducing the demand for energy by efficiency measures. One model that the Committee may wish to consider/commend is that of the Edinburgh Community Solar Co-operative¹⁵, which has been supported by the City of Edinburgh Council and involves council-owned buildings.

4. Food and other procurement

Reforming the food system (including its production, processing, distribution, and consumption) is a vital part of addressing the climate crisis. Local government will have a crucial role to play in supporting such a transition, including promoting and procuring local, sustainable food. One model that the Committee may wish to consider/commend is that of the Food for Life Scotland scheme¹⁶.

Procurement decisions do not only apply to food. Local Authorities budgets support the purchase of millions of pounds of goods and services, and these should be subject to a policy that drives demand for sustainable, low carbon goods and services. The Committee may wish to consider the extent to which this is the case and, in particular, whether duty and guidance on ‘best value’ under s.1 *et seq* of the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 is fit for purpose.

National policy to support local government delivery

Notwithstanding the above, the ability (and sometimes willingness) of local authorities to deliver desired outcomes in all the above areas is affected by national Scottish Government policy and funding. The Committee will wish to consider this as part of the inquiry.

¹⁴ <https://www.sustrans.org.uk/our-blog/get-active/2020/in-your-community/what-is-a-20-minute-neighbourhood>

¹⁵ <https://www.edinburghsolar.coop/>

¹⁶ <https://sustainableScotlandNetwork.org/news/food-for-life-scotland>



For instance, while local government has vital planning duties and powers, these are exercised in the context of a national system, including the National Planning Framework (NPF) and the decisions/precedents of the appeal (and call in) decisions by Scottish Ministers and/or DPEA. The ability of, and the role of, of local government to deliver a planning system that encourages and facilitates a transition to net zero depends to a great extent on this national policy/context.

The Committee may wish, therefore, to consider whether this national policy/context appropriately supports actions by local government – and, in particular, whether the draft NPF4¹⁷, currently subject to Parliamentary consideration¹⁸, requires any improvements; for example in relation to policy on renewable energy developments and soils, which will have implications in relation to achieving net zero targets. The NPF now forms part of the development plan, so it is more important than ever before that it contains strong policies to tackle the climate emergency.

National policy, in relation to climate change and the meeting of net zero targets, is coordinated by the Climate Change Plan (CCP), under s.35 *et seq* of the 2009 Act. The current such plan, along with its 'update' from 2020/21 and 'catch-up report' from 2021 address national policy on most of the issues above. The Plan is to be reviewed in 2022 and a revised and updated Plan will be presented to Parliament "in the first half of this parliamentary session"¹⁹. The Committee may wish to consider whether the CCP provides the appropriate context/support for local government action on the issues above and, if not, what improvements should be recommended for the next iteration of the plan.

Likewise, the Scottish Government's budget and funding settlement with local government also provides the context/support for local action (or otherwise) on reaching net zero. The Committee may wish to consider whether the current budget for 2022/23 provides the appropriate context/support for local government action on the issues above and, if not, what improvements should be recommended for the future.

Conclusion

SCCS welcomes the opportunity to provide evidence to this important inquiry by means of this written submission.

The various policy and delivery responsibilities of local government and its cross-sectoral partners mean that their role in contributing to Scotland reaching (or not) these targets is vital. In pursuing the inquiry and making recommendations, the Committee may wish to consider whether Local Authorities recognise the importance of their role in this area, and whether they sufficiently prioritise climate considerations. In reaching a conclusion, the Committee may wish to consider whether the statutory duty (s.44 of 2009 Act) and/or guidance (s. 45) is appropriate, and/or whether there is an issue with a lack of resources (finance, personnel, etc.); and, if so, how these might be addressed.

The key policy and delivery areas to be considered include transport, planning, buildings (regulation and management), energy (use and generation), food and other procurement. In addition to considering the success (or otherwise) of local government and its cross-sectoral partners (and the challenges they face), the Committee should also consider the national policy that support (or otherwise) this success.

In particular, the Committee may wish to consider whether the current Climate Change Plan (including latest 'update' and 'catch-up report') provides sufficient guidance and steer. The Committee will also wish to consider whether the budget and funding settlement for local authorities provides sufficient resources (or resources directed to the appropriate, or inappropriate, areas).

¹⁷ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotland-2045-fourth-national-planning-framework-draft/>

¹⁸ <https://yourviews.parliament.scot/lgc/npf4/>

¹⁹ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/fairer-greener-scotland-programme-government-2021-22/pages/6/>