



'COP26...WHAT NOW?'

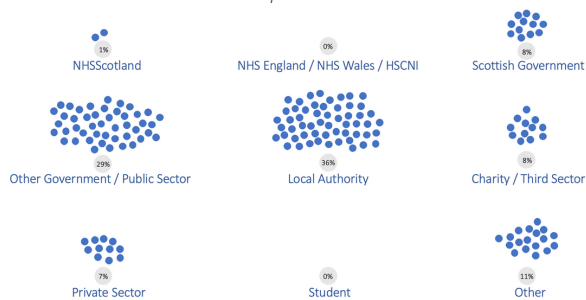
SSN CONFERENCE 2021: REPORT

On the 8th December 2021, SSN hosted 'COP26...What now?', a conference designed to build public sector capacity to deliver on net zero. With 249 people in attendance, the interactive event welcomed a great line-up of experts to address the many challenges and opportunities in achieving net zero and ensuring a just transition. The conference audience included leaders, policy makers and practitioners from across the Scottish public sector, including local authorities, NHS Boards, universities and colleges, and the wide array of national and regional public bodies that are all actively involved in SSN.

Delegates came from a wide variety of places:



Delegates came from a wide range of sectors and from across the public sector:



Conference Purpose

The Conference provided an update on key COP26 outcomes and discussed new public sector guidance as well as the SSN Manual. It encouraged exploration into the skills, finance, and leadership required to support the public sector in delivering on climate action and the just transition, identifying current gaps. The conference provided space to explore the challenges and opportunities for public sector climate action, identifying the priority support required by practitioners on key policy priorities.

Key Messages

The Conference emphasised the value of **collaboration** in ensuring a smooth transition towards net zero. It highlighted the public bodies' desire to **work together** and **share learnings** to find the most effective methods of reaching climate targets. Challenges identified throughout workshops and panel discussions included the need to **build capacity within the public sector** and **implement system change**.

SSN Annual Conference

Ministerial Address

Opening the event, Michael Matheson, Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport, outlined the public sector's crucial role in ending Scotland's contribution to climate change. He urged that *"Scottish public sector bodies have a key leadership role to play in the shared endeavour to tackle the global climate emergency and biodiversity loss"*.

Michael Matheson discussed the shared commitment of all 32 local authorities in the delivery of national and local climate ambition, as was made clear through the signing of the Scottish Climate Change Adaptation Programme in 2007. Focus must now be put on *"action, delivery, and collaboration"*, with public sector leaders urged to ask the climate and sustainability question over every key decision. This will support the embedding of climate action in corporate governance and integration fully into the delivery of public services.



Discussing the value of SSN in facilitating collaboration, the Cabinet Secretary highlighted that *"If SSN didn't exist, we would have to create it"* and that he looks forward to SSN working more closely with the Minister and the Scottish Government in future endeavours.

The Climate Change Committee

Keynote speaker, Chris Stark, Chief Executive, Climate Change Committee updated delegates on the recently published report, Progress reducing emissions in Scotland, followed by a Q+A. The report showed that in 2019, Scotland's greenhouse emissions fell by 2% compared to 2018, and are now 44% below 1990 levels. This was greatly impacted by the decarbonisation of power and reductions in emissions in manufacturing and construction.

Despite success over the previous period, Chris Stark urged that the challenge will be greater over the coming years and stated that the years to 2030 are most critical. This is due to the potential for further emissions saving from electricity generation running out and the need for radical cuts in emissions from other sectors, notably heating, transport and agriculture. The focus needs to shift to ensuring that rapid emissions reductions are delivered with no further delay to allow Scotland to meet its legislated 2030 net-zero target.

"We must not just think about what is coming next, but think about what we can do right now" Chris Stark, Chief Executive, the CCC.

December 2021

Progress in reducing emissions in Scotland
2021 Report to Parliament

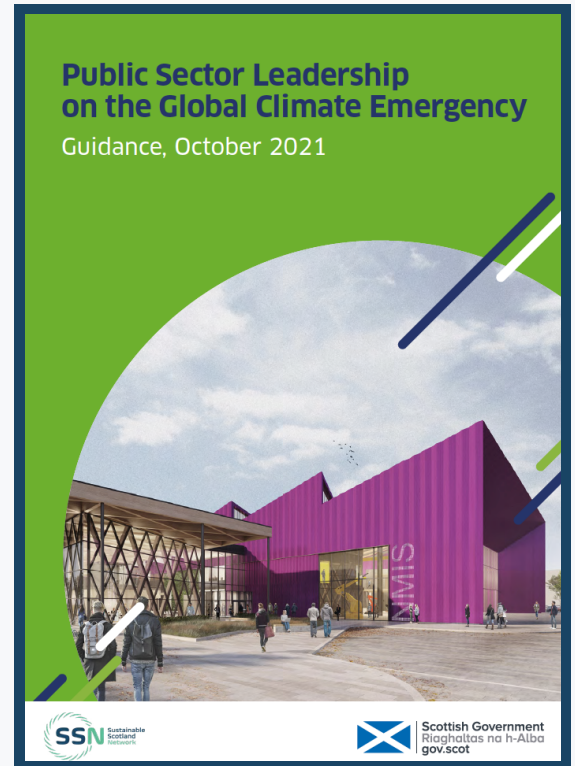


Supporting Public Sector Climate Collaboration

Public Sector Leadership

During the first plenary session, Gavin Barrie, from the Energy & Climate Change Directorate at the Scottish Government, discussed the new public sector guidance, co-designed in partnership with SSN, that aims to support public bodies in tackling the global climate emergency. The Public Sector Leadership on the Global Climate Emergency Guidance highlights policy areas, action plans, and benchmarks of key importance. It outlines the requirement for bodies to ensure that they reach climate change targets.

Published in October 2021, a key aim of the guidance is to target leadership within the public sector with the guidance reflecting a switch from measuring only direct operational emissions to measuring the whole carbon footprint. It highlights a target date of 2038 for achieving decarbonisation of heat in buildings, assisting the country-wide aim of becoming a net zero nation. Reporting standards, offsetting and insetting emissions, nature-based sequestration, and home working and commuting are all discussed within the document to provide clear assistance on maintaining and reaching targets.



Developing the SSN Manual

June Graham, Data and Engagement Officer at SSN, discussed the development of the SSN Net Zero Manual. The manual will complement the Public Sector Leadership on the Global Climate Emergency Guidance and provide a collaborative space to clarify and make transparent how the public sector can work more efficiently together to achieve better impact. June explored the key aspects that will be included in the manual and an overview of its aims and objectives.

The manual will bring together resources, knowledge, and experience to assist the public sector in achieving climate targets.

Key themes and topics will include:

- Leadership and Governance
- Organisational Capacity
- Net Zero Pathways and Targets
- Emissions
- Place-Based Actions



SSN Manual topic and theme examples

Conference Workshops

Building the Manual and Prioritising Actions

Delegates participated in a choice of one of five collaborative workshops on key Net Zero topics and explored 'what now?'. Led by experts from across the sector, delegates were encouraged to share knowledge and identify the actions that can be taken to address barriers to delivery, including policy, finance and skill challenges.

Each workshop identified key priority areas for further discussion in the final plenary and to inform SSN's workplan for 2022/23. Three common themes were identified throughout all workshops - **leadership**, **capacity**, and **working to a common set of targets**.

Net Zero Direct Emissions | Workshop 1

This workshop explored actions that can assist in reaching net zero emissions across Scottish public bodies. Led by Mark Williams, Head of Sustainability and Climate Change, Scottish Water and Clare Wharmby, Carbon Innovation Manager, ECCI, the workshop encouraged participants to explore setting targets, Scottish public sector influence on emissions, and actions that can assist in combatting existing and future challenges.

Priorities Identified Setting & Meeting Targets (Mark Williams, Scottish Water)

1. **Technology pathways** for the key emission areas need to be mapped to find opportunities and how we will implement - starting with heat, followed by fuels etc.
2. **Cultural and behavioural change** - capacity building across organisations to ensure people understand where emissions are in their function and how they address them annually and long term
3. **Leadership** and **empowerment** to action
4. **Vacant and derelict land** is a missed opportunity

[Workshop Miro board](#)

Priorities Identified Setting & Meeting Targets (Clare Wharmby, ECCI)

1. How **private sector investment** will be brought into / aligned with Local Authority actions, led by Scottish Government and Scottish Enterprise.
2. **Consistency** within sectors for carbon boundary, Scottish Government to mandate SSN to set rules.
3. **Develop a framework** to enable setting targets and pathways and getting executive buy-in, led by SSN with other partners involved.
4. **Capacity, knowledge** and **skills shortage**, academic organisations, Scottish Government, helping to develop a professional development programme and our future workforce trained up

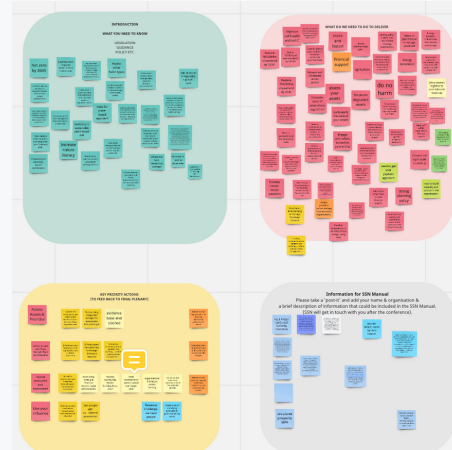
[Workshop Miro board](#)

Nature based sequestration on public sector land | Workshop 2

Led by Brendan Turvey from Nature Scot, with the net zero target of 2045 in mind, this workshop explored how nature-based solutions can tackle both climate change and nature loss. It looked at how to reduce existing emissions from land and best sequester carbon using land. Participants discussed ways to prioritise and deliver investment, as well as the adaptation and resilience of land use in terms of climate change.

Priorities Identified

1. Assess your assets and **prioritise based on degradation.**
2. Build **place-based-partnerships** to deliver at scale.
3. **Secure resources and investment** and include private investment and non-financial returns.
4. Use your **influence** on all your stakeholders through the decisions you make which affect land use



Workshop Miro board

Reducing embodied emissions in supply chains | Workshop 3

The reducing supply chain carbon workshop looked at the measurement, analysis, and implementation of policies and behaviour that encourage a reduction in supply chain embodied carbon. Workshop participants explored the planning, design, and construction stages of reducing carbon and how they can best be implemented.

Priorities Identified (Chris Francis, Scottish Water)

1. Articulate demands from UK and Scottish Governments to **support a transition** to having environmental costs reflected in prices of materials and services - difficult but would seem essential.
2. **Unified, cross-sectoral approach** to supply-chain emissions and resource use quantification and reduction using technological advances such as AI, Machine Learning and Blockchain technology.
3. Accurately understand and baseline the magnitude of our supply-chain emissions and resource impacts by using **better tools** that are not just based on spending.

Workshop Miro board

Priorities Identified (Lewis Barlow, Scottish Government)

1. Highlight sources of whole life carbon management **best practice** from all Scottish sectors (and how carbon relates to those sectors)
2. Write **advice for supply chain** based on Scottish Government's sustainable procurement tools, signposting likely upcoming requirements (whole life carbon)
3. **Review public sector frameworks** & assess their ability to drive whole life carbon reduction

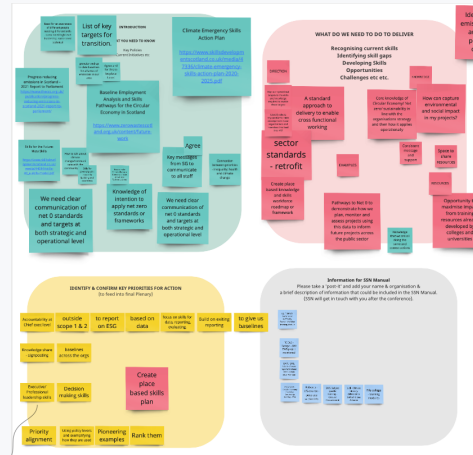
Workshop Miro board

Skills for transition to net zero | Workshop 4

Led by Mhairi Creanor from Zero Waste Scotland, this workshop discussed how to develop the skills and a better understanding of the transition required to meet net zero. Discussion was based on the Climate Emergency Skills Action Plan (CESAP). Participants explored the value of recognising current skills, identifying the skills gap and developing skills to address opportunities as well as challenges.

Priorities Identified

1. Identify **accountability** for meeting targets in order to inform reporting structures to provide baselines
2. Develop and deliver a **knowledge exchange** (e.g. digital platform).
3. Develop **place-based** sustainability skills plans.



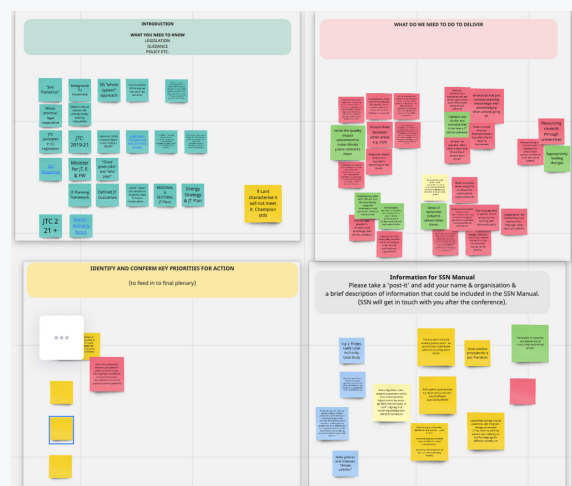
Workshop Miro board

Putting a just transition into action | Workshop 5

The just transition is emerging as a vital component in the transition towards a net-zero economy. It highlights the importance of ensuring that actions taken to tackle the climate emergency also take into account social priorities. This workshop was led by Colin Seditas, Head of Just Transition Engagement at The Scottish Government, and encouraged conversation on what measures can be taken to ensure the application of a Just Transition.

Priorities Identified

1. **Revise the equality impact assessment** to make climate justice central to them;
2. **Engaging leaders/showing leadership** and assessing current awareness and what else is needed
3. More options for **informal mentoring/shared learning**, development of frameworks.
4. Political sensitivities and influence, weighting of values/outcomes and how to **balance demands** across range of organisational duties and deliverables.



Workshop Miro board

Panel Discussions

Morning Plenary

Delegates participated in a panel discussion that explored Public Sector Climate Leadership. Questions were welcomed from the floor and explored in depth by panellists as they aimed to address key queries post COP26.

List of panellists:

- Prof. Simon Parsons, Scottish Water
- Nick Halfhide, NatureScot
- Gordon James, NHS National Services Scotland
- Russell McCutcheon, North Ayrshire Council

Topics explored included:

- *Building back better post-pandemic*
- *Improving public sector working with the Scottish Government in the development of agreed delivery plans*

Watch this panel session [here](#) - beginning at 1:05:39.



Afternoon Plenary

The second plenary invited 3 panellists to explore 'Investing in a Just Transition towards Net Zero and Carbon Resilience'. Speakers reflected on COP26 and the opportunities that are arising for Scotland and public bodies. Looking at the social, economic, and environmental drivers towards net zero, speakers explored how to build skills capacity within the public sector and practical ways the public sector can work together on climate change.

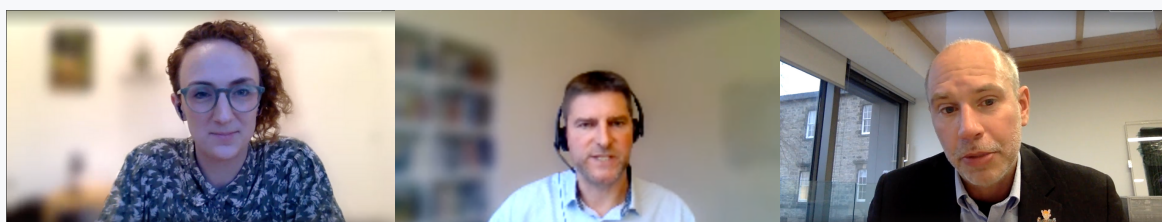
List of panellists:

- Dr Andy Kerr, Climate KIC UK and Ireland
- Prof. Dave Reay, Edinburgh Climate Change Institute
- Lisa Hough-Stewart, Wellbeing Economy Alliance

Topics explored included:

- *Barriers to a wellbeing economy*
- *Communities, finance, investment, and capacity - what comes first?*
- *Development of shared regional hubs of expertise*

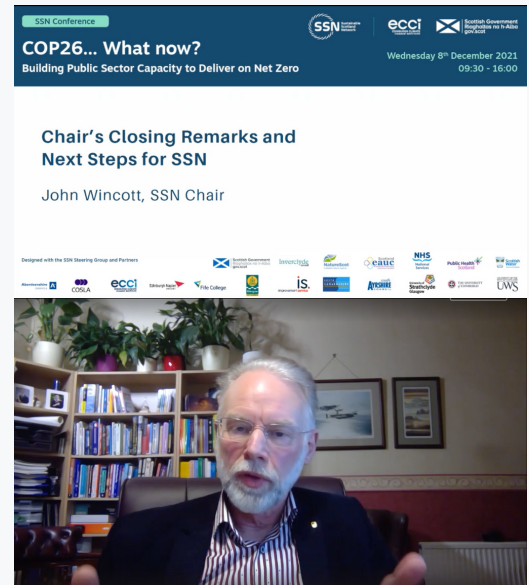
Watch the full second panel session [here](#).



Conference Closing

Bringing the event to a close, SSN Chair, John Wincott, discussed the initial findings of the Conference from panel discussions and workshops. Key messages included acknowledging the importance of non-state actors in the delivery of key climate goals, as well as the need to bring together expertise and deliver knowledge exchange. Initial challenges identified were the need to build on public sector capacity and implement system change to ensure a smooth transition towards net zero.

“The Scottish Government will not deliver targets and goals on its own, we are the delivery vehicle and, as the public sector, we must take the lead.”



Next Steps

Conference discussions and outputs will be used to inform the SSN annual planning meeting on the 26th of January 2022, which will scope the SSN programme for 2022/23 and beyond.

SSN will be in touch with those who kindly offered material that can be added to the SSN Manual. Content will start to be published in spring 2022. Please do get in touch with the SSN Secretariat if you have material that can be shared, or if you'd like to collaborate in developing content for the manual.

SSN will follow up with conference speakers and workshop leads to take forward practical initiatives of value to delegates and the wider public sector.

Feedback

“Excellent presentations throughout and I very much enjoyed the closing panel session”

“Very topical and relevant, a conversation much needed right now”

“All of the speakers were excellent”

“Very insightful presentations from speakers”

Thank you to all who completed feedback on the event proceedings. All evaluation will be taken into account and help in the planning of future events.

A message from SSN Chair, John Wincott

*“Firstly, a huge thank you to everyone who made the SSN Conference such a success. The conference left me almost speechless - something that very rarely happens! The contributions from the speakers, panellists, and perhaps most of all, those attending, has been an inspiration for me, and I am sure for those who were there. This is a crucial time for all of us, as we are now post-COP26, and two years into the vital 'decade of change'. With new Net Zero Guidance produced jointly by the Scottish Government and SSN, we are facing new challenges and opportunities that will determine whether or not Public Bodies **will** lead the way in delivering on Scotland's hugely ambitious climate change targets.*



The conference has shown that there is a tremendous appetite to act, and a strong will to share, work together and collaborate to create the most effective ways to deliver the pace of change we need to succeed. We will be using the outputs from the conference to shape our plan for the coming year and beyond so that SSN can provide the most effective support for all of our members in the public sector.” - John Wincott, Chair of the SSN

Useful Resources

- Watch: COP26 and Public Sector Climate Action: What Now? [[Link](#)]
- Watch: Investing in Net Zero Action [[Link](#)]
- Event Programme [[Link](#)]

Membership

If you would like to find out more about becoming a member, don't hesitate to get in touch at info@sustainablesotlandnetwork.org. You can also sign up for our monthly newsletter [here](#).

Thank you

SSN would like to thank all attendees, speakers, workshop leads, and panellists for their participation in the event and give a special thanks to the NHS events team for their assistance in the creation and smooth running of the conference.