

# SSN Conference Report

On Wednesday 24 May, Sustainable Scotland Network (SSN) hosted its Annual Conference, Public Sector Climate Action: Working Together.

The sold-out event welcomed over 400 attendees, bringing together a wide range of experts, leaders and practitioners to tackle the priorities needed for Scotland to respond to climate change and meet its legislative commitments.

SSN Chair, John Wincott, chaired the online event which packed in a great line-up of speakers, panel discussions and five breakout sessions covering the key topics facing Scotland's public sector.



Annual Conference 2023 Public Sector Climate Action: Working Together to Deliver



[Watch morning plenary](#)



[Watch afternoon plenary](#)

## Conference speakers:

**Máiri McAllan**, Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero and Just Transition, The Scottish Government

**Paul Johnston**, Chief Executive of Public Health Scotland

**Professor Marion Bain**, Deputy Chief Medical Officer, The Scottish Government

**Councillor Gail MacGregor**, Leader of Dumfries and Galloway Council and COSLA Spokesperson

**Phil Raines**, Deputy Director Domestic Climate Change, The Scottish Government

**Mark Roberts**, Chief Executive, Environmental Standards Scotland

**Manira Ahmed**, Chief Officer, Public Health Scotland

[View full programme](#)

# Public Sector Climate Action: Working Together to Deliver

## Ministerial Address | Máiri McAllan, Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero and Just Transition

Máiri McAllan opened the conference in her new role, that places net zero and just transition side by side, at the top of government. She called for collaborative action, stressing the critical role public bodies play in tackling the climate and biodiversity crises.

She underscored that we must maintain momentum, make challenging decisions and step-up action in the public sector, building on progress on transformative action.



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## Paul Johnston, Chief Executive, Public Health Scotland delivered a session on Leadership for Transformational Delivery

The session looked closely at addressing the climate emergency, major health challenges and the opportunity of co-benefits.

Actions we need to take:

- Whole-system public sector leadership
- Investment in primary prevention
- National and local actions and partnerships
- NHS as an exemplar

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*Our focus on climate change must go hand in hand with a focus on improving health. Climate change is a public health emergency and to prevent the threat to health from climate change and avoid making existing inequalities worse, we must take urgent action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and make Scotland resilient to changes in our climate. Work together to build a net zero and climate resilient Scotland which is healthy and equitable.*



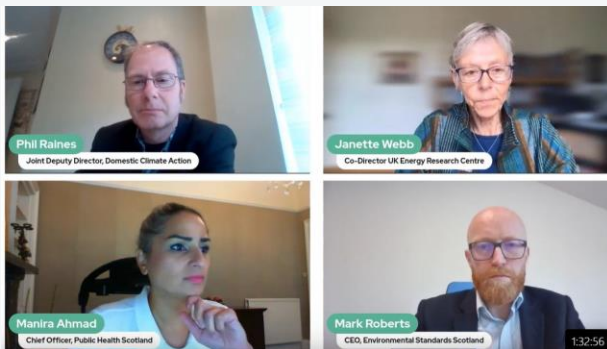
# Public Sector Climate Action: Working Together to Deliver

## Public Sector Leadership Panel Session Working Together to Accelerate Delivery

The morning's panel session welcomed public sector leaders to share their own experiences and explore the changes needed across Scotland.

Panellists shared their thoughts on collaboration and cross sectoral partnership in addressing the climate challenges and realising co-benefits.

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### Panel members:

**Phil Raines**, Deputy Director – Domestic Climate Change, Scottish Government

**Manira Ahmad**, Chief Officer, Public Health Scotland

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**Mark Roberts**, Chief Executive, Environmental Standards Scotland

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**Professor Jan Webb**, University of Edinburgh – Session Chair

**Councillor Gail MacGregor, Leader of Dumfries and Galloway Council and COSLA Spokesperson – Environment and Economy:**

*“ Local Government is fully committed to tackling the climate emergency. We may not currently have all the data, expertise or money that is required , but we are committed 100%. ”*

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# Public Sector Climate Action: Working Together to Deliver

## Policy Priorities for Public Sector Climate Action

Phil Raines, Deputy Director – Domestic Climate Change, Scottish Government and the Public Bodies Climate Change Team provided an update on 2023 policy priorities, consultations and changes to statutory guidance.

### 2023 policy priorities and consultations

*Missions for 2026: equality, opportunity, community*

- Development of draft **Climate Change Plan** by end 2023
- **Just Transition Plans** to accompany Climate Change Plan and
- Draft of next **Adaptation Programme** (SCCAP3) by end 2023
- **Heat Networks** new duties
- **UK Emission Trading Schemes**
- **Circular Economy** – Bill in draft, to be laid before Parliament summer 2023



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#### Wider policy context

- *Biodiversity strategy and delivery plan*
- *Natural Environment Bill*
- *Wellbeing and Sustainable Development Bill*
- *Environmental Standards Scotland (ESS) investigation*
- *CXC research projects*

## A Fair and Sustainable Future, Professor Marion Bain, Chief Medical Officer

Professor Marion Bain addressed the public health challenges facing Scotland and the extent of health inequalities. She made a clear call to act now and support the health co-benefits of climate and environmental action.



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*"Good care is environmentally sustainable care"*

#### Acting now will reduce Health Inequalities

- ❑ Extreme weather events
- ❑ Heat stress
- ❑ Decreased air quality
- ❑ Decreased water quality and quantity
- ❑ Decreased food security and safety
- ❑ Increase in vector-borne disease

#### Health co benefits of climate and environmental action

- ❑ Improved air quality
- ❑ Increase in active travel
- ❑ Increase in green space
- ❑ Well-insulated buildings
- ❑ Improved diets
- ❑ Reducing medicinal residues in waste water helps tackle anti-microbial resistance

## Breakout Sessions

Delegates attended a range of breakout sessions on embedding Climate Change Impact into Decision-making.

### 1. Integrating Adaptation, Mitigation and Sustainability

This breakout session explored the **key climate hazards facing Scottish public bodies**, the integrative adaptation and mitigation approaches, which public bodies can adopt to become more resilient and an overview of Scotland's Third Climate Change Adaptation Programme (SCCAP3).

### 2. Place-based Climate Governance

This breakout session was delivered by staff from **Energy Systems Catapult**, an independent, not-for-profit organisation, which accelerates the decarbonisation of the UK's energy system. It explored the importance of a **whole energy system place-based approach** and demonstrated how effective stakeholder engagement can support this clean transition.

### 3. Embedding Carbon Impact Assessments in Decision-making

This session, Embedding Carbon Impact Assessment in Investment Decision-Making, discussed how public bodies can tackle the carbon impacts in their investments and infrastructure projects by **integrating carbon-focussed decision-making** throughout assets' lifecycle.

### 4. Skills for a Net Zero, Resilient and Sustainable Scotland

This session, led by Professor Dave Reay and staff and participants of Fuel Change, discuss what **upskilling for climate action** involves.

### 5. Securing Climate and Public Health Outcomes Together

This session provided an opportunity for delegates to learn more about the synergistic co-benefits between climate action and improved public health outcomes, and engage in developing the strategy that will guide PHS's work on climate change. PHS outlined the potential key roles they could undertake to contribute to Scotland's climate emergency response and proposed four key enablers to do this.

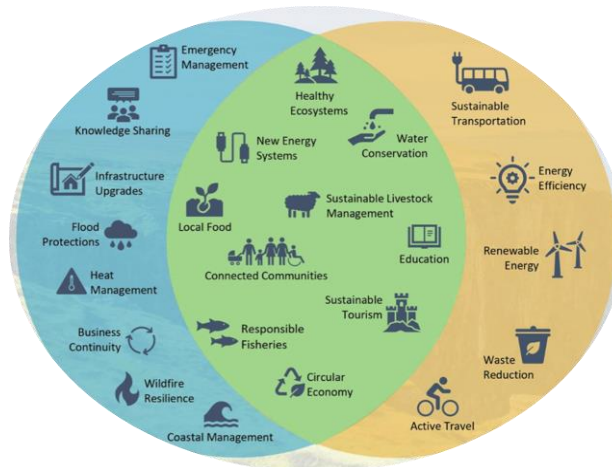
## Integrating Adaptation, Mitigation and Sustainability

The breakout session explored the key climate hazards facing Scottish public bodies, the integrative adaptation and mitigation approaches which public bodies can adopt to become more resilient and an overview of Scotland's Third Climate Change Adaptation Programme (SCCAP3).

This session was facilitated by:

- **Emma Yule**, PhD Student and Tutor at the University of Edinburgh
- **Clive Mitchell**, Outcome Manager: People and Nature, Nature Scot
- **Mark Williams**, Environmental Regulation and Climate Change Manager, Scottish Water
- **Iain Thom**, Senior Policy Advisor on Adaptation, The Scottish Government

**Adaptation**  
Reducing or managing  
impacts of climate  
change



**Mitigation**  
Reducing greenhouse  
gas emissions that  
contribute to climate  
change

### Key Messages

- **Future climate trends** include 1) warmer, drier summers 2) milder, wetter winters 3) increased intense heavy rainfall events and 4) sea-level rise.
- **33%** of public bodies are taking **no adaptation action**. 67% of bodies have taken some form of action prior to or within the reporting period of 2020/2021. Just 3% of public bodies are taking advanced action.
- Global fossil fuel and land use has caused a **broken carbon cycle** and therefore climate/biodiversity crises. This linear extractive economy has altered more biodiverse, complex, connected and wetter land cover into less biodiverse, drier, less complex and more fragmented land systems.
- A **circular economy** is a solution. This considers material flows and waste, the rural biological economy, regenerative practices, more mixed woodlands, complex grasslands, mixed livestock/arable systems and intercropping for pest management.
- **Systems thinking** is key to assess the resilience of an organisation's assets and processes against the impacts of climate change.

## Integrating Adaptation, Mitigation and Sustainability

### Next Steps

The new **Scottish Climate Change Adaptation Programme (SCCAP3)** is expected to be published in Autumn 2024 in alignment with the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009. This will address the 61 risks and opportunities for Scotland identified by the 2022 Climate Change Risk Assessment.

### Group Discussion Key Takeaways:

#### Impacts of severe weather events



#### Storms, floods and heavy rainfall can:

- Impact tourism
- Incur significant financial costs
- Impact nature and biodiversity
- Cause water ingress and damage to assets
- Block roads, car parks, public entryways and footpaths
- Affect access to public bodies' stakeholders, especially in remote areas
- Disrupt transport and communication services, which isolates vulnerable people
- Strain vital services during and post-extreme weather events



#### Extreme heat and drought can:

- Lead to high water retention in soil
- Reduce water quality and availability
- Affect people's ability to learn
- Impact health and wellbeing
- Incur significant financial costs
- Increase water demand and exacerbate pressure on water resources
- Cause building damage e.g. melting roofs and physically decaying listed buildings

#### Impacts of long-term changes



#### Sea-level rise and coastal erosion can:

- Damage roads
- Cause displacement of people
- Weaken sea defenses
- Impact coastal development



#### Heat can:

- Damages infrastructure
- Affects health and social care
- Impacts mitigation projects
- Decays old stone buildings

### Climate change impacts public sector budgets due to:

1. The high upfront investments for sustainable solutions placing additional pressure on already under-resourced budgets.
2. The higher costs associated with reactive approaches that fail to address climate change now.
3. The trade-offs that are likely to emerge e.g. Air conditioning may increase cooling costs but heating costs will lower.
4. As competition for climate investments may cause the unequitable distribution of investments across key adaptation focus areas.
5. As the costs of emerging technologies and solutions are difficult to quantify and, therefore, account for.

## Place-Based Climate Governance: Pathways to Decarbonisation

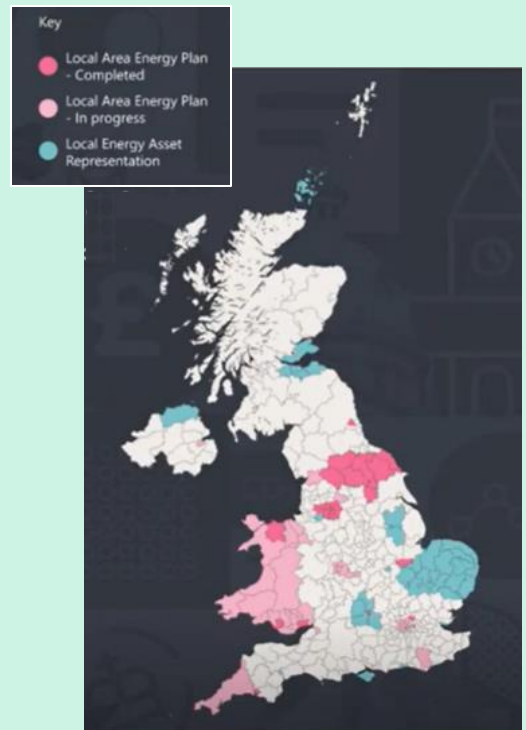
The breakout session was delivered by staff from Energy Systems Catapult, an independent, not-for-profit organisation, which aims to accelerate the decarbonisation of the UK's energy system. It explored the importance of a whole energy system place-based approach and demonstrated how effective stakeholder engagement can support the low carbon transition.

### This session was facilitated by:

- **Tim German**, Senior Strategic Relationship Manager, Energy Systems Catapult
- **Chris Brierley**, Senior Engagement and Research Advisor, Energy Systems Catapult
- **Hugh Muschamp**, Lead Officer: Climate and Energy, Fife Council
- **Dr. Katherine Maxwell**, Visiting Fellow, Global Centre on Healthcare and Urbanisation, University of Oxford, Technical Director – Net Zero Cities, Sweco
- **Craig Mellis**, Senior Advisor, Decarbonisation of Sites, Energy Systems Catapult
- **Gordon Graham**, Net Zero Go, Strategic Engagement and Research Manager, Energy Systems Catapult

### Key Messages from the breakout session:

- **Whole-systems thinking** joins up the system from sources of energy to the consumer (generation, transmission, distribution, buildings and consumers).
- 80% of local authorities in the UK have declared a climate emergency yet many do not have energy plans. This calls for **integrated and evidence-based approaches to energy**.
- As of April 2023, 64 **Local Area Energy Plans (LAEPs)** were developed/in development.
- Energy Systems Catapult outlined a 7-step process to LAEPs. This includes;
  1. **Prepare:** Outline area hopes and ambitions
  2. **Engage:** Identify/ engage key stakeholders
  3. **Map:** Understand your current local area
  4. **Model:** Get your options for the future
  5. **Choose:** Pick your future pathway
  6. **Identify:** Actions, priorities, projects
  7. **Create** the plan
- Scottish local authorities conduct energy plans as part of their **Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategies (LHEES)**.

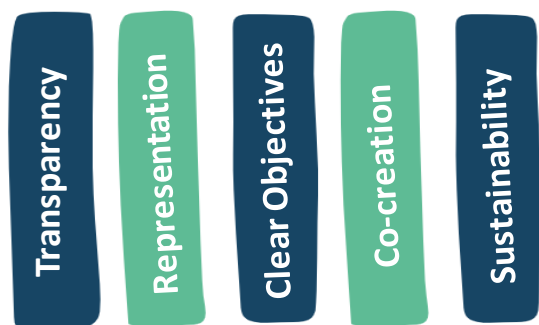


This figure shows UK local authorities' development and completion of Local Area Energy Plans. Note 'Local Area Energy Plan – Completed' excludes Perth and Kinross Council.



## Place-Based Climate Governance: Pathways to Decarbonisation

Meaningful stakeholder engagement is critical for net zero delivery. The 5 pillars of effective local engagement are:



Stakeholder engagement sessions on LHEES and LAEP should consider having:

- A reasonable numbers of stakeholders
- A sectoral mix of stakeholders
- A diverse mix of skills and expertise
- Terms of reference to clarify roles and responsibilities
- No remuneration for stakeholders
- Long-term perspective

Challenges of stakeholder engagement include a lack of sustained resources, differing priorities and a lack of long-term vision and stakeholder roles.

### Resources Mentioned:

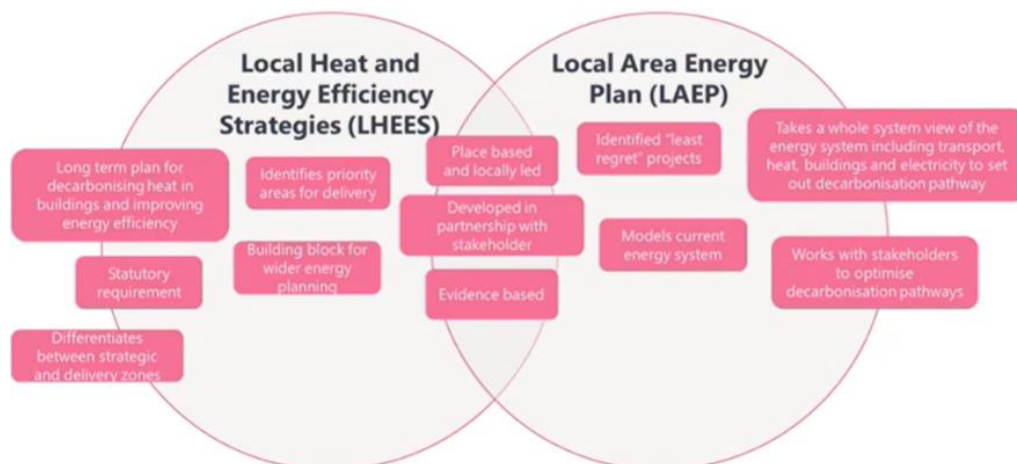
- [Public Sector Decarbonisation Guidance](#) or email [PSDecarbGuidance@es.captult.org.uk](mailto:PSDecarbGuidance@es.captult.org.uk)
- [Whole Energy Systems Accelerator](#)
- [Net Zero Go](#)
- [Aberdeen – Warm Homes Prescription Work](#)
- [Manchester LAEP Case Study](#)
- [York and North Yorkshire LAEP Case Study](#)
- [Local Scottish LAEP Case Study](#)

### Breakout session polls and results

1. All but 1 respondent saw the value of a localised whole system approach to decarbonisation.
2. The majority of participants considered funding to be the greatest barrier to whole system approaches to decarbonisation. This was followed by staff capacity and the need for further advice on whole system approaches.
3. Respondents stated that action was the most important output when undertaking either LHEES or LAEPs.



To view the breakout session, click [here](#)



## Embedding Carbon Impact Assessments in Investment Decision-Making

**This session discussed how public bodies can tackle the carbon impacts in their investments and infrastructure projects by integrating carbon-focussed decision making throughout the assets' lifecycle.**

**This workshop was facilitated by:**

- **Lewis Barlow**, WSP
- **Sam Ibbott**, Climate Change Officer at East Renfrewshire Council
- **Rod Lovie**, Principal Climate Change Officer Morray Council
- **Robyn Lovelock**, Programme Manager and Benefits Realisation Lead at Uchelgais Gogledd Cymru/ Ambition North Wales.

Managing and reducing the whole life carbon emissions associated with buildings and infrastructure projects is critical in order to meet our national Net Zero targets.

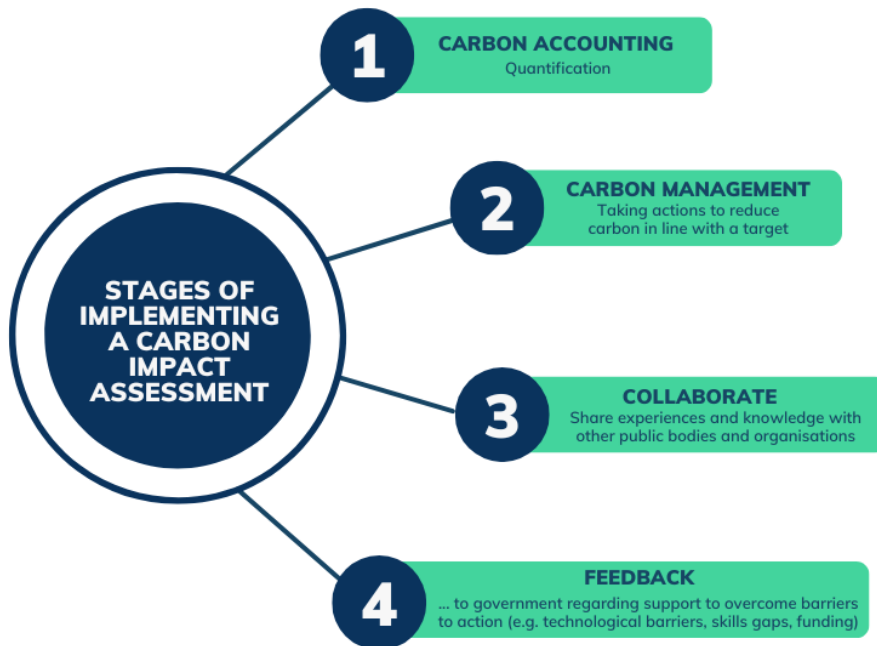
The session touched on the key principles and practices of **PAS 2080** (the world's first specification for decarbonising buildings and infrastructure systems), the related guidance issued by Scottish Government and the **new Climate Change Impact Assessment practitioner guidance** document (created by the SSN CCIA task and finish group).

Attendees also heard practitioners' perspectives on applying carbon impact assessments to public sector decision-making.

### Key Messages:

- There must be a **carbon impact accountability process** for all decisions taken by a public body.
- The **climate impact of a project must be visible and understood** at the point of decision making.
- The **earlier the consideration of carbon**, the greater the potential savings.
- Doing something is better than nothing, even if it cannot be measured. Organisations cannot wait for all possible data before making a decision. Public bodies must **make the best use of the available data, and be prepared to modify their plans over time**.
- **Carbon Impact Assessment (CIA) methodologies** should capture and promote positive action, and not solely the negative impacts of decisions.
- **No one size CIA fits all**. The assessment should be developed in proportion to a public body's level of resources.
- There is an acknowledged **skills gap** in conducting carbon assessments. Public bodies should consider using this as an educational opportunity, and to get greater engagement from their team, by carrying out carbon assessments inhouse.
- Organisations **do not need to reinvent the wheel**, instead, they should consolidate useful existing approaches and frameworks.

## Embedding Carbon Impact Assessments in Investment Decision-Making



### Next steps:

- CIAs are gaining momentum. Approaches are beginning to harmonise towards a central methodology, which will be mandated at some point in the future, so it is wise to start incorporating CIAs into public bodies' decision-making processes now. This centralised approach will be shaped by forthcoming planning process regulations and economic incentives.
- Implementing a carbon assessment approach to procurement now will help drive and prepare the market.
- Communicating carbon-focussed decision-making ideology to senior leaders within public bodies remains a major challenge.
- Building capacity in monitoring and measuring CIAs to overcome the skills gap.

### Resources mentioned:

- [Scottish City Region and Growth Deal: Carbon Management Guidance](#) (Scottish Government, 2022).
- [Transitional Arrangement for National Planning Framework 4](#) (Feb 2023).
- [PAS 2080 Carbon management in buildings and infrastructure](#) (updated Apr 2023).
- [State of Delivery: Bridging the gap between climate ambition and action in Scotland](#) (May 2023). The Climate Emergency Response Group (CERG) Net Zero Test recommendation for policy, procurement and investment decisions aims to ensure that all decisions are aligned with the transition to net zero
- [Sustainable Energy - without the hot air](#), by Professor David MacKay (2009).
- Examples of geographical boundary approaches used in CIAs: The Ireland Government's [Local Authority Climate Action Plans: technical Annex C](#) and the Swedish Government's Net Zero Plan online interactive visualisation [Panorama](#).



To view the breakout session, click [here](#)

## Skills for a Net Zero, Resilient and Sustainable Scotland

**Skills are at the heart of a successful just transition to net zero and climate resilience. Fuel Change is an organisation designed to engage the next generation workforce to drive a positive transition to net zero. This session, led by Professor Dave Reay and staff and participants of Fuel Change, discuss what upskilling for climate action involves.**

**This workshop was facilitated by:**

- **Professor Dave Reay**, Director of the Edinburgh Climate Change Institute
- **Gavin Tweedie**, Director of Community at Fuel Change
- **Andrew Barnes**, Industry Partnerships Lead at Fuel Change
- **Keith Masson**, Head of Net Zero Transition at Highlands & Islands Enterprise

**Fuel Change:**

- [Fuel Change](#) aims to engage the disengaged and mobilise mass action across Scotland to reduce the skills shortage and build capacity for the jobs needed in the transition to Net Zero.
- They collaborate with Scottish enterprises, educational institutions, businesses and local authorities.
- They engage young people in climate and sustainability issues while developing new skillsets through practical learning experiences.
- The Fuel Change National Challenge is a 16-week programme which allows participants aged 16-25 to take on real-world climate challenges set by a business, collaborate on a solution and present it.
- SMEs, who otherwise don't have the bandwidth or skills to prepare for climate change mitigation and adaptation, benefit from participants.



**Key Messages:**

- Learning in schools and universities must be applicable to future jobs.
- Upskilling can help address existing inequalities inherited from deindustrialisation.
- 'Green skills' can get pigeonholed into technical renewable energy skills, but they also encompass people, planning and problem-solving skills.
- Earlier intervention with students is key to influence their career path to grow the green workforce of the future, especially with young women.
- A place-based approach is needed for successful and sustainable action.

## Skills for a Net Zero, Resilient and Sustainable Scotland

### Wider Group Discussion and Next Steps:

- A key role of local authorities should be to support, run and signpost to green skills programmes, however, this responsibility must not exclusively fall on them. Businesses are also needed to contribute as part of their social value by investing in the Scottish workforce and supporting initiatives, as well as using their influence through procurement.
- In the future, agriculture and land use will be key areas, which must receive more focus regarding skills transitioning.
- Opportunities exist to get involved as a mentor or join the Fuel Change programme for educational institutions. Fuel Change is planning to create a health-focused challenge in the future.
- Public sector practitioners should participate in upcoming consultations on Just Transition Plans to ensure upskilling is at the heart of discussions.

### Resources signposted:

- [North East and Moray Just Transition Plans](#)
- [Energy Skills Partnership](#)
- [Climate Emergency Skills Action Plan 2020-2025](#)
- [A Net Zero Workforce](#), Climate Change Committee report (May 2023)



To view the breakout session, click [here](#)

## Developing the PHS strategy on Climate and Health

Public Health Scotland (PHS), the national agency for public health, is developing its climate change and sustainability strategy. This session provided an opportunity for delegates to learn more about the synergistic co-benefits between climate action and improved public health outcomes, and engage in developing the strategy that will guide PHS's work on climate change. PHS outlined the potential key roles they could undertake to contribute to Scotland's climate emergency response and proposed four key enablers to do this (see figure).

### Workshop Leads:

- **Joanna Teuton**, Public Health Intelligence Advisor
- **Barry Melia**, Principal Pharmacist, Technical Specialist
- **Annie Gebbie-Diben**, Health Improvement Manager, Economy, Poverty & Environment
- **Nicola McCallum**, Executive Directorate Manager

### Key Takeaways from the Group Discussion :

Roles where PHS would have the greatest impact:

- As a trusted central **voice of expertise**. This is important for quick policy roll-out at the required speed.
- As a **public educator**, putting on national education campaigns and working with schools and local authorities on topics such as the urgency of climate action, the co-benefits of positive climate action and sustainable food.
- As a **facilitator and space for peer-to-peer knowledge exchange**, providing structured sessions on key health and climate topics and sharing best practice.
- To share evidence and data. For example, the learnings regarding public buy-in from the Covid-19 vaccine could be applied to hesitancy around the roll-out of traffic free zones. Data should be accessible and what existing data is available should be clear.



## Developing the PHS strategy on Climate and Health

### Key areas the strategy should address:

1. The opportunities in Green Health prescribing of lower carbon alternatives. Regarding sustainable care, Green Theatres, medical gases and inhalers are top priorities.
2. The anticipated additional stress climate change will put on existing resources and services. Climate migration will only further exacerbate this e.g. regarding water resources and access to healthcare.
3. Sustainable food and the opportunities of integrated sustainable public food systems; encompassing community cooking, public larders and urban food growing.

### Next steps

- PHS are currently processing the learnings and feedback from this session to assess how to best progress the development of their strategy.
- Further stakeholder engagement sessions on the PHS strategy will be held in June and July 2023.

### Resources mentioned:

- PHS's [Place Standard Learning Resource](#)
- NHS Scotland [Sustainability Assessment Tool](#) (NSAT)



To view breakout session recording, click [here](#)