

Climate Change – Scottish Parliament’s Net Zero Inquiry

Summary and Recommendations

This paper informs the Board of our recent interaction with Scottish Parliament’s Net Zero Transport and Energy Committee on their inquiry on Local Government’s ability to deliver on net zero policy.

We are keen to substantiate this with examples from individual Local Authorities and contribute further oral evidence to this important inquiry. Members may also wish to offer any other views and perspectives.

The Board is invited to:

- i. Note the position delivered by the spokesperson to the Scottish Parliament’s Net Zero, Transport and Energy Committee;
- ii. Agree that COSLA should offer to provide the Committee with further oral evidence to the Committee;
- iii. Provide evidence from their own localities to substantiate and illustrate our position and offer any other relevant views.

References

Previous relevant reports:

- Environment and Economy Board June 2020 - Covid-19 - Economic & Environmental Recovery and Renewal
- Environment and Economy Board September 2020 – Environment and Economy Board Priorities
- Environment and Economy Board October 2020 – New Environment and Economy Board Plan
- Environment and Economy Board October 2020 – Biodiversity and Nature Based Solutions
- Environment and Economy Board February 2020 – Climate Change

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Purpose

1. This report informs members of our recent and planned interaction with the Scottish Parliament’s Net Zero, Transport and Energy Committee on their inquiry on Local Government’s ability to deliver on net zero policy.¹

Current Position

2. The Board has developed a clear and strong position that Local Government is committed to a Just Transition and delivery of the 2030 and 2045 targets, and that all aspects of this Board’s work, including policy on transport, planning, waste and economic development will be informed by this aim.
3. This position was put forward in a range of fora, including importantly at COP26. More specifically, we have put forward to the following key messages:
 - Local Government is committed to a Just Transition and delivery of the 2030 and 2045 targets. The successful delivery of the targets will be put at risk if Local Government is not properly resourced. Individual programme or project funding is not adequate and not effective in addressing the many interlinked issues and challenges. Local Government needs un-ringfenced and more flexible revenue and capital – in addition to funding allocated through national programmes - which it can invest in local projects and programmes
 - We need to ensure we have the right skills in place within Local Government, especially in sectors that will face the biggest changes e.g. transport and heat decarbonisation.
 - Local Government is part of the democratic fabric of Scotland and will have a key role to play in local leadership. Behaviours change and working with local people through our democratic structures will be central to delivering results that may otherwise be unachievable. This critical role needs also to be recognised at the national level as Local Government needs to work in partnership with Scottish Government on all aspects of the Just Transition.
 - Urgent delivery is now critical. We need to make progress on emission reduction on a month-to-month basis or the targets will be at risk.

What is Changing?

4. The Spokesperson was invited in December 2021 by the Scottish Parliament’s Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee to a private session, to help inform the Committee’s forthcoming inquiry into Local Authorities’ ability to deliver on carbon reduction. Along with SOLACE, we were able to have a fruitful and open discussion, highlighting the range of typical challenges Councils face. We explained the impact on the ground resulting from a lack of a long term and stable financing framework, and the implications when there is no effective and early dialogue between the two spheres of government on policy frameworks and interventions.

¹ [The role of local government and its cross-sectoral partners in financing and delivering a net-zero Scotland](#)

5. Councillor Heddle stressed that in order to meet net zero by 2045 in a just transition, we have to engage in a national endeavour that has the same urgency as our Covid response. Funding, resources, legal frameworks and the quality and effectiveness of policy development are all important here. We do not believe that we can meet our national net zero targets fairly without an empowered and properly financed local government in Scotland, and we need the Scottish Government to recognise this.
6. Our full submission to the Committee following this session is attached in appendix 1. In addition to our own evidence, a number of individual Local Authorities have recently evidence to the Committee on this inquiry.

COSLA Position

7. We are proposing to offer the Committee further oral evidence for their inquiry, drawing together Councils' contributions to date and discussing how these could be reflected in national policy. We are keen that all Councils have the opportunity to contribute to this most fully, including those that were not able to present directly to the Committee.
8. It is essential that MSPs are aware of the ambitious targets that Councils have set themselves and understand how these are translated in into local action, along with a clear understanding what the barriers and opportunities are here.
9. We are therefore inviting members to offer examples and evidence from their own localities to substantiate and illustrate our generic position. This may include naming obstacles and opportunities, and what is required to move rapidly in this policy area (risk minimisation/sharing, flexible legal instruments, electricity infrastructure etc), at the Scottish or UK level.
10. We are aware that the Climate Change Committee has come forward saying that there is now acute risk of failing on the national 2030 emissions target, and we need Scottish Government to step up and listen to us. We are also aware that the biggest difference Councils can often make is by local political leadership, and that opportunities can vary significantly across the country, depending on factors such as rurality/urbanity, ownership of housing stock, levels of fuel poverty etc. Agriculture and national diet, for example, have been marked up as some of the less tackled, but vital components for our ability to meet net zero by 2045 in a just transition, next to existing focusses such as heat/energy, transport, waste and planning.
11. Local Government's strength lies significantly with our local political leadership and with our ability to prioritise the most effective interventions and the most promising opportunities here, across the full range of the Scottish Government's Climate Change Plan, from transport to energy, education policy and land use.

Next Steps

12. If members agree, we will be approaching the NZTE Committee as discussed above, incorporating any issues raised by members at or shortly following this Board meeting.
13. At officer level we are continuing cooperation with SSN (Sustainable Scotland Network), SOLACE and the Improvement Service, as well as with Scottish Government, and keen to pick up dialogue with the Climate Change Commission.



Submission to

Scottish Parliament's 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"

Introduction

1. As the political voice of Scotland's 32 Local Authorities, COSLA is delighted to respond to the Committee's inquiry and would be happy to provide further verbal evidence later in the Committee's consideration.
2. We live in a time of crisis. Tackling the climate crisis in a just way will require an unprecedented level of change to both the economy and society. Local Government is part of the democratic fabric of Scotland and must, therefore, play a full role guiding the changes to come. Local Government is committed to the Just Transition, but we need support. It is fact that Local Authorities do not have the resources at our disposal which are required to meet the multiple decarbonisation challenges. We recognise that few, if any, Governments across the world have the correct resources in place, but in Scotland we have set our selves a high bar. The 2030 target is extremely stretching – as it should be – but its delivery requires urgent and consistent progress in the months and years to come. As we, perhaps, tentatively exit the pandemic, and we evaluate the recent budget settlement we must ask if Local Government is being equipped to meet this target? The answer we must arrive at is, unfortunately, no. Local Government in Scotland is an ally of anyone who wishes to tackle climate change justly. We are therefore an ally on Scottish and UK Governments on this issue. However, at a time of an unprecedented challenge, we should not be surprised that we need to go beyond the usual level of investment in a sector which is so critical to delivery. As a result, we hope the focus of the Committee is on reaching a cross party-political consensus that Local Government needs more help if it's to play the role on decarbonisation that Scotland needs.

Key message

- Local Government is committed to a Just Transition and delivery of the 2030 and 2045 targets. The successful delivery of the targets will be put at risk if Local Government is not properly resourced. Individual programme or project funding is not adequate and not effective in addressing the many interlinked issues and challenges. Local Government needs unringfenced and more flexible revenue and capital – in addition to funding allocated through national programmes - which it can invest in local projects and programmes
- We need to ensure we have the right skills in place within Local Government, especially in sectors that will face the biggest changes e.g. transport and heat decarbonisation.

- Local Government is part of the democratic fabric of Scotland and will have a key role to play in local leadership. Behaviours change and working with local people through our democratic structures will be central to delivering results that may otherwise be unachievable. This critical role needs also to be recognised at the national level as Local Government needs to work in partnership with Scottish Government on all aspects of the Just Transition.
- Urgent delivery is now critical. We need to make progress on emission reduction on a month-to-month basis or the targets will be at risk.

General

3. Local Government is committed to delivering a Just Transition to a Net Zero Economy. Many Local Authorities, urban and rural, have declared target dates for net zero well ahead of the national 2045 date. We said to Scottish Parliament last year that the Just Transition won't be delivered without a strong local delivery and democratic leadership, and we stand by this message.
4. The political commitment by Local Government is in place, and we now need to look at how Local Government is equipped in terms of funding, skills and in the legal framework that it operates, or we will likely miss the 2030 target. If we miss the 2030 target, then we are in danger of contributing to overshooting the 1.5 degrees centigrade target.
5. We cannot underestimate how important the next few years will be to the longer-term targets. Decisions which may normally be taken within years will need to be taken quicker. We need to be able to take risks, because doing nothing or not enough is likely to be a bigger mistake in the long run. We need a strong political consensus that Local Government needs to be resourced to achieve our Just Transition goals and this consensus must hold during what is likely to be a challenging period of time over the course of this Parliament.
6. The Paris protocol, and therefore by extension the COP 26 agreement, recognises that action by local/regional government and at the local level is critical to reducing climate change. Having been the host country for COP 26 we have an opportunity to demonstrate best practice in how Local and Scottish Government work together.
7. Local Authorities are pursuing a wide range of innovative action/approaches locally - see COSLA [COP26 Case Study Collection](#), but to deliver at scale Councils need the free resources, especially revenue, to invest in skills and programme development. Councils can't just be reliant on Scottish and UK grant funding if we wish to make the progress we want to achieve, but need the capacity in terms of money and skills to act independently, but in a complementary way, to national programmes.
8. We know resources are tight for all Governments and the anticipated cost of implementing carbon reduction is significant. We need to have a clear understanding of the roles and outcomes that are expected of Local Government in the Climate Change Plan, and how these are to be resourced. Equally we need national targets to be based on local experience, and a meaningful dialogue as to what is achievable with given resources.
9. We need to find ways at the national level to take away the risk faced by Council in delivering innovative programmes. This risk is both financial, so can

be mitigated by further investments, but also political. This links to the need for a strong political consensus at the national level which will allow Councils at the local level to tackle challenging issues like behaviour change, for example reducing car usage.

10. We also need to be watchful of the impact of other policy changes on Councils' ability to invest in Net Zero programmes that nationalise services currently undertaken by Councils. A smaller Local Government has less financial clout to meet the climate emergency challenge.
11. Overall, good partnership working between Local and Scottish Government, especially input into early national policy design, is key to successful climate action. This currently varies significantly across Scottish Government departmental areas. In some there is good partnership, with jointly funded posts and joint policy fora that allow for early, meaningful effective joint policy design, based on national ambition, and underpinned by expertise on the ground in service delivery. With the size of Scotland, this is an important and exceptional opportunity for having national climate policy design that is well-informed by service delivery and local knowledge, and therefore effective.
12. We are keen to design a joint approach with Scottish Government on the delivery of a Just Transition which recognises the vital role played by Local Government. We want to be able to harness the new JT Commission to provide advice which is relevant to both Local and Scottish Government and we are in active discussions here.
13. Some key questions we put to test the above include:
 - The extent to which national policy and strategy is evidence led, informed by (local) delivery expertise and whether there is sufficient evaluation of the interventions that have been tried;
 - Whether Scottish Government funding is properly aligned to the outcomes that are being sought;
 - Conflicts between different national policy aims, becoming evident at the local level;
 - The need for a true, whole-system approach;
 - The role of and expertise that local government brings to the sector;
 - The importance of investment in communications and behaviour change at local and national level;
 - The impact of change and uncertainty on achieving the outcomes;
 - Access by Local Authorities to knowledge sharing/good practice beyond Scotland, especially after cessation of EU funded programmes and networks for Scotland.
14. Much of the funding landscape in carbon reduction is still dominated by Scottish Government challenge funds. These are unhelpful and expend a disproportionate amount of resources in bidding for and assessing submissions. Finance that recognises the additional costs of achieving the outcomes supported by expertise and a national overview would result in better value for money and quicker implementation. Multi-annual frameworks are crucial for planning, strategic use of resources and effective spend. In some areas we see a move by Scottish Government to joint design of these, which is preferable and acknowledged. However, this still falls short of what is required.

15. Local Government in Scotland is involved in a wide range of areas that are of relevance for Scotland's net zero ambition. Some specific issues are highlighted below.

Transport

16. Transport is Scotland largest source of greenhouse gas emissions. If we do not make deep cuts by 2030, especially in emissions from vehicles, we will fail on our net zero goal. Local Authorities are already doing extensive and often innovative work with limited budgets to encourage a reduction in transport emissions, from delivering active travel infrastructure, growing the EV charging network, decarbonising their fleets, or supporting the local public transport network.

17. The key challenges lie in embedding behaviour change; creating favourable conditions for needs to be met as locally as possible and for journeys to be shorter; making sustainable travel affordable and accessible in line with Just Transition principles.

18. COSLA and the Scottish Government have worked jointly to develop a route map for a 20% car km reduction by 2030. COSLA Leaders acknowledged in August 2021 that the current level of car use is unsustainable. They agreed that Local Government should show commitment to local action to deliver sustainable and fair car use reduction, recognising that some car journeys will continue to be essential, especially in rural and remote areas.

19. While we are committed to the target, we are also conscious that without increased investment, Local Government's ability to contribute to its realisation will be seriously limited. This very much applies to all other sustainable transport policy areas too (i.e. EVs, public transport). Local Authorities' strongest levers are in terms of capital and revenue allocation, as well as their ability to help influence behaviour change locally. We strongly need adequate resource (both capital and revenue) and to move away from one-year funding allocations (e.g. active travel funding). We also have concerns with lack of staff resource/skills locally and available expertise to deliver (e.g. active travel schemes).

Planning

20. Planning and place making is an important tool in the Just Transition. We must look at ways at enabling planning to make this contribution to decarbonisation. The National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) presents us with the opportunity to put a just transition to net zero at the heart of planning decisions but requires strong policies to make delivery of these ambitions possible. We look forward to giving evidence on NPF 4 in the near future. As we argue throughout this submission, Local Authorities need to be equipped financially to meet the multiple challenges posed by climate change. Planning is no different. While we have long argued for full cost recovery for planning fees, the realisation that we need to rapidly up the pace of decarbonisation is likely to put pressure on the already stretched planning systems. Planning contribution to tackling climate change needs a renewed focus at the national level and, we argue, should be on the agenda for the High-Level Group, which is co-chaired between COSLA and Scottish Government.

Waste and Circular Economy

21. This is another policy area that is key to carbon reduction. We are actively discussing policy options and effective use of resources through the Joint Scottish/Local Government Waste Policy Forum that is designed to look at current and future policy initiatives, aimed at improving waste management, reducing residual waste, increasing recycling, and developing the circular economy.
22. Current challenges experienced and discussed in this forum include the need for a stable legislative basis so that Local Authorities can implement effective solutions. An example of contradictory policy direction here is the recently announced incineration review which is likely to impact on market confidence for new Energy from Waste plants, which are currently the cornerstone for meeting the Landfill Ban. While Local Authorities are committed to the waste hierarchy and determined to reduce overall waste volumes and increase recycling and reuse, there are currently no viable alternatives in place that would allow the timely meeting of the Landfill Ban.
23. These services and the supporting infrastructure facilities require long term certainty given the complexity, cost, and lead times. Investment cost, uncertainty, lack of economies of scale (particularly in rural areas) and existing contracts are some of the challenges for achieving significantly improved outcomes.
24. We need to grow the trust and respect to evolve challenge funds into more strategic, flexible, and more effective financing structures. The Recycling Improvement Fund was designed jointly by Scottish and Local Government and Zero Waste Scotland, which is an important and significant step in the right direction. We are clear that future allocations of funding, such as for example obtained through Extended Producer Responsibility will need to go directly to Local Authorities and enable strategic change.
25. The expertise of local government in this field is significant, we have the ability to bring a local systems approach to solutions if we are given the freedom, flexibility and funding to do so. More emphasis must be placed on communications and behaviour change and there is a need to look at the whole system that impacts on waste, especially for developing a circular economy which requires a platform of businesses with the ability to use specific recycled materials. Local Authority waste specialists and their professional associations bring considerable expertise and to the table and facilitate sharing and developing partnership and best practice. This allows for a sensible equilibrium between designing services based on local opportunities/challenges on the one hand, and a certain level of consistency across the country, to encourage consistent citizen behaviour.

Energy/Heat

26. Alongside decarbonising transport, this is the sector which will present the greatest challenge. The Scottish Government's Heat in Building Strategy lays out this challenge:
 - By 2030 emissions from homes and buildings will have to fall by 68% against 2020 levels. This requires:
 - Very significant progress toward all homes reaching EPC C
 - The vast majority of the 170,000 off-gas homes on fossil fuels switching to zero emissions heat

- At least 1 million on-gas homes switching to zero emissions alternatives
 - The equivalent of 50,000 non-domestic buildings switching to zero emissions alternatives.
27. This is a vast undertaking which needs to be considered a national mission if it is to be achieved. COSLA Leaders are committed here, Local Government has rich experience of delivering on energy efficiency programmes in the past and we have good expertise to draw upon, but as we stand, we do not know how the target will be delivered successfully.
28. Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategies (LHEES) will form part of the solution and are an active area of work for COSLA and Scottish Government. Local Authorities have a wealth of knowledge and experience of LHEES from the extensive pilot programmes and we are working to produce a framework for introducing these on a statutory footing, but this will only be successful in decarbonising heat if Local Authorities are properly resourced and have the skills in place to make the physical changes to buildings required.
29. In energy policy, more so than in others, important levers for implementing change lie not just at the Scottish but the UK level, but also significantly with energy providers/networks. Projects for renewable energy have, for example, been struggling with grid connection, which is also an important issue for EV charging infrastructure.

Europe/International

30. COSLA has always been very active at the European and international level, though its membership of European bodies and networks. COSLA worked closely with the wider Local Government constituency, to encourage the UK COP26 Presidency to build on the recognition of local/regional government in the Paris protocol and introduce specific references to Local Government and multilevel partnership working in the draft deal. We are pleased that this was eventually successful and now multilevel and collaborative action has been included in the preamble of the final text of the [Glasgow Climate Pact](#).
31. The inclusion of multilevel and collaborative action is a major success, as it is considered that a stronger reference to regional and local governments in the international framework for climate change will encourage national governments to work in partnership to deliver climate action, therefore meeting the climate commitments made at COPs and supporting the 1.5 degrees centigrade goal.
32. The Glasgow Climate Pact also urges Parties to ensure meaningful youth participation and representation in local decision-making processes, to further integrate adaptation into local planning and to take an integrated approach to local policy and planning decisions in protecting ecosystems.
33. We believe that the Scottish Government now needs to actively embrace and engage with the Paris and Glasgow COP principles and empower Local Government in Scotland to deliver on carbon reduction in line with their own ambitious targets, and in line with national targets.

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