

Elected Member Briefing: Net Zero Committee Local Government Report



Key points

- Local Government has a vital role in supporting Net Zero Target's but requires further support and empowerment from Scottish Government.
- The number of council planners will have to increase to meet the ambitions of the National Performance Framework.
- Local Government will need to engage with communities to ensure that they are closely involved in the Net Zero transition and that policies are not imposed on them.
- Councils should align Net Zero goals into all aspects of their work.

The Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee recently published a report on [the role of Local Government and its cross-sectoral partners in financing and delivering a Net Zero Scotland](#).

This was the culmination of a process which began in October 2021 when the committee agreed to hold an inquiry into progress in meeting the Scottish Government's Net Zero targets, with a focus on the role of Local Government. The committee took evidence from a range of Local Government, community and industry experts, before publishing their findings and recommendations in January 2023.

The impetus behind the inquiry was the recognition of the vital role that Local Government has to play in Scotland meeting its target of being Net Zero by 2045; in fact, the committee report went as far as to say that "Scotland will not meet its ambitious target of being net zero by 2045 without a more empowered Local Government sector".

They recognised that councils are ideally placed to use their local knowledge to develop the partnerships that will be needed to reach Net Zero targets, as well as acknowledging the important work that many local authorities have already been undertaking in this area.

There was also a recognition of the issues currently facing Local Government, and that the technical and highly-skilled demands associated with Net Zero changes need to be balanced with the financial and resourcing challenges councils are working under.

The overarching conclusion of the committee was that local authorities need more help and support if they are to be empowered to deliver their full potential in this area and make a valuable contribution to Scotland's Net Zero targets. A number of proposals were made for action in areas such as strategic planning, Scottish Government support, planning and place-making, renewable energy, housing, transport and active travel, recycling, natural infrastructure and communities.

[Key recommendations](#) included:

- for the Scottish Government to provide a comprehensive roadmap for delivery of Net Zero in key areas, giving councils more certainty than they have at present about the roles they are to play;
- for the Scottish Government to create a Local Government-facing “climate intelligence unit” to provide specialist help to councils in areas where in-depth specialist knowledge is lacking;
- the creation of larger, fewer and more flexible challenge fund streams for Net Zero-related projects at a local level that are better placed to support a holistic response to climate change;
- for the Scottish Government to address issues in the planning process that are holding up major renewables and other projects necessary to help meet net zero goals. The decline in numbers of council-employed planners needs to be reversed in order to meet the ambitions of the new National Planning Framework, and this could be addressed by the introduction of planning apprenticeships;
- for the Scottish Government to clarify the role councils will play in an area-based approach to heat decarbonisation and to set out the additional support they will be offered in preparation and delivery of their Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategies.

The committee did recognise that any additional government funding that is likely to be made available for Net Zero projects is unlikely to meet the needs of Local Government to play their full role in meeting targets, and that private investment will be needed to make up the shortfall. It was suggested that the Scottish National Investment Bank could play a role in this area, to facilitate work between Local Government and investors and promote models of co-financing.

A place-based approach was acknowledged as the best way for Local Government to support Net Zero targets, especially given their local expertise and existing relationships, including with the communities who will be affected by new initiatives and policy changes. As the committee said in their report: “Strategic plans for climate change must also set out how Councils will engage with local communities in order to ensure that the net zero transition is not something imposed on local communities, but something that people and groups can help shape, lead and deliver.”

Finally, the committee called on local authorities to play their part, by aligning and integrating their Net Zero goals into all aspects of their work. Many of the committee recommendations also called for partnership working between the Scottish Government and COSLA to support these Net Zero goals, and the Improvement Service also has a role to play in taking these actions forward.

The Improvement Service submitted evidence to the committee's inquiry in 2022 which detailed the work that we have been undertaking to support Local Government to meet their Net Zero goals. Developing the skills of council officers and Elected Members has been one of our priorities, including the delivery of Carbon Literacy training and climate change sessions with those working in senior roles in change management and organisational development. We continue to work closely with COSLA and the Sustainable Scotland Network among others to support the vital role Local Government has to play in meeting Scotland's Net Zero target.

More information

[Elected Member Induction: Climate Change](#)

[Elected Member Briefing Note: Nature-Based Solutions](#)