



ELECTED MEMBER INDUCTION

Climate Change



About this notebook

The Improvement Service, COSLA and the Sustainable Scotland Network have worked in partnership to prepare this briefing which provides an introduction to the critical role elected members have to play in tackling climate change and what this looks like in practice.

- ▶ [COSLA](#) fully supports Scotland's commitment to a just transition to Net Zero by 2045, prioritising the global climate and nature emergency and a green recovery from the Covid 19 pandemic.
- ▶ The [Sustainable Scotland Network \(SSN\)](#) is Scotland's public sector network on sustainability and climate change and supports over 600 members across public bodies in Scotland.
- ▶ The [Improvement Service](#) recognises that climate change is one of the most significant challenges for councils with an impact on every community and service area and is working to embed and accelerate climate change action.

These national induction resources are designed to complement your council's local induction programme, of which you should attend. If you are unsure of anything, ask for clarification from your council officers.

Introduction

As we recover and rebuild from the Covid-19 pandemic, there are significant opportunities to deliver a fair and sustainable future for people and planet if we act urgently. Green recovery, and climate change ambitions, are increasingly being placed at the core of local and national policy making and action.

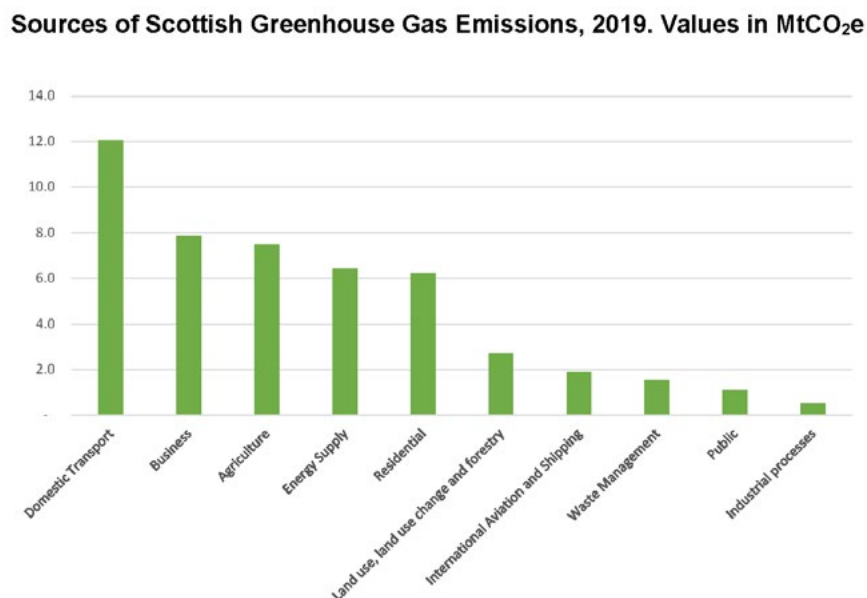
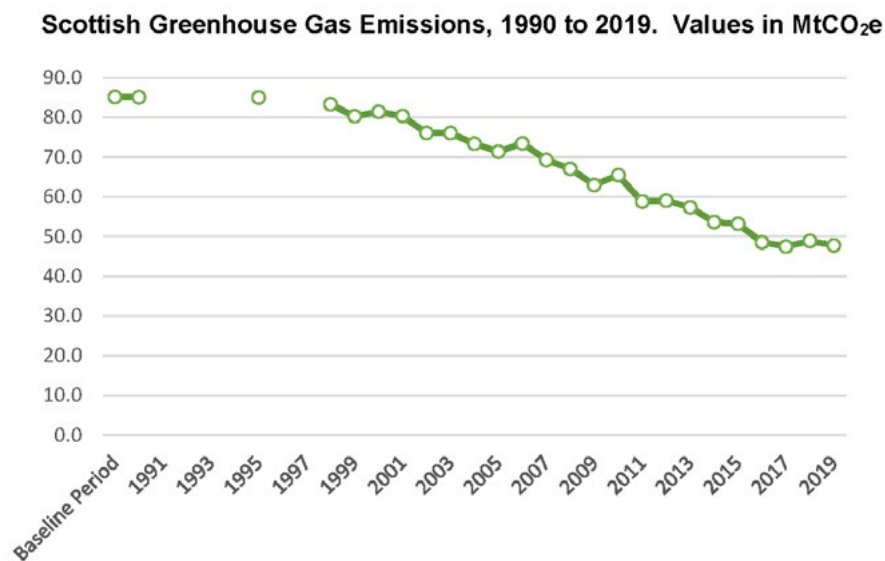
The Scottish Government, with the unanimous support of all parties in the Scottish Parliament, has committed to an ambitious target to **reduce greenhouse gas emissions to Net Zero by 2045**, with a 75% emission reduction by 2030. Councils, both urban and rural from across the country, have declared climate emergencies, many with ambitious net zero targets well in advance of the national 2045 target and councils have pressed home strongly the need for urgent action with the 2030 target in mind.

Key Priorities

- ▶ **Net zero** refers to achieving a balance between the amount of greenhouse gas emissions released to the atmosphere and the amount removed from the atmosphere through sequestration (such as tree growth, peat restoration, and carbon capture and storage). 'Net' recognises that it will not be possible to reduce all emissions to zero and so these will need balanced, mainly through natural carbon sinks such as oceans and forests. This is climate change **mitigation**; reducing emissions in the atmosphere.
- ▶ The impacts of climate change on infrastructure, communities and businesses are happening now, and often the most vulnerable are the most affected. Scotland must be prepared and resilient to these effects. This is climate change **adaptation**; adapting to the impacts of a changing climate.
- ▶ Both adaptation and mitigation measures need to be implemented by Local Government, acting in a way that is fair, and delivers a **Just Transition**. This is described by the Just Transition Commission as to:
 1. Pursue an orderly, managed transition to net-zero that creates benefits and opportunities for people across Scotland
 2. Equip people with the skills and education they need to benefit from our transition to net-zero
 3. Empower and invigorate our communities and strengthen local economies
 4. Share the benefits of climate action widely; ensure costs are distributed on the basis of ability to pay

- ▶ Scottish Local Government was at the forefront of highlighting the need to include nature and biodiversity in the climate change dialogue, and Scottish Government is now aiming to tackle the **nature emergency** by protecting and restoring biodiversity, supporting healthy ecosystems, connecting people with the natural world, and maximising the benefits of a diverse natural environment and the services it provides.

The most recent analysis from 2019 indicates that Scotland is making progress but there is an urgency needed in the scale and pace of change across every sector, particularly transport and heat:



Source: [Scottish Greenhouse Gas Emissions 2019](#), Scottish Government

To deliver these ambitions, councils are subject to an increasing volume of legislative and policy requirements and targets. Since 2015, there has been a **legal duty** for all public bodies, including councils, to contribute to the reduction of emissions, adapt to climate change and act sustainably and report on this annually. Guidance on [Public Sector Leadership on the Global Climate Emergency](#) was published jointly by Scottish Government and Sustainable Scotland Network in October 2021 to help inform public sector leaders on their climate change duties. It is recommended that all elected members review the [reports for their council](#) to become familiar with progress to date. Audit Scotland are developing their role in this area and have published a summary of [key recommendations for public bodies](#).

Local Government is vital to the delivery of these targets and councils are designing and delivering their own ambitions and action plans. Councils have a key role through both their own direct operations, the supply chain and broader influence and partnership working across the local area. Urgent action and delivery at local level is essential to maximise the benefits and reduce risk.



What does this mean for elected members?

As an elected member you can influence decision making and policy development, scrutinise and monitor progress and provide leadership to make a difference, improving the quality of life in your local communities.

Decision Making and Scrutiny

Elected members, collectively, are responsible for ensuring the council has a clear direction, appropriate lines of accountability and effective working arrangements in place to ensure that it achieves what it sets out to do.

Understanding the climate change impact of decisions and projects can be complex. Different councils are taking different approaches, some using impact assessments or carbon budgeting to ensure organisation-wide buy in and to assist with decision making. Whatever the approach, leadership must work to understand and analyse the impact of policies and projects, from strategies to capital works and infrastructure.

As an elected member, you could consider:

- ▶ **Has your council adopted, or is adopting a clear, detailed and costed approach to climate change adaptation and mitigation? If not, what are the barriers and how can these be overcome? What support is needed?**
- ▶ **What is the understanding of current Greenhouse Gas Emissions (GHGs) emissions at organisational level and area wide, including the supply chain?**
- ▶ **Have clear targets been set for key areas such as Net Zero and renewable energy generation which are supported with action plans and resources?**
- ▶ **Is there a regular review of progress based on evidence and an understanding of climate related opportunities and risks?**

Strategy and Policy Development

You can contribute to the development of your council's climate change policies through membership of committees, panels or bodies with a remit for policy development. You may also be able to influence development in other ways through your role in scrutinising and monitoring services and policies.

It is important to understand the connection between different priorities and to design and implement interventions which are effective and complementary. Action

to decarbonise contributes to economic development through job creation, skills, creation of better places for investment and development. The journey to a low carbon society can also improve health and wellbeing through increased energy efficiency of homes, cleaner air and active travel. The direct and indirect health benefits are so great that tackling climate change has also been described by the [Lancet Commission](#) as “the greatest global health opportunity of the 21st century”.

As an elected member, you could consider:

- ▶ **Do all strategies and plans assess and incorporate the impact of climate change mitigation, adaptation and the just transition? This is particularly important for economic development strategies and policies.**
- ▶ **Is the relationship between climate change policies and other priorities assessed and used as the basis for decision making?**
- ▶ **How does your council protect the most vulnerable to climate change, in particular amid the energy crisis, whilst maintaining the commitment to Net Zero?**

Community Leadership and Partnership Working

Local authorities can deliver against the just transition to Net Zero through direct and indirect control and also influencing wider developments and activity. Councils are well placed to work across sectors and coordinate interventions for existing and emerging emissions, and emissions removal.

As an elected member you will play a pivotal role in this, able to provide leadership and direction. There are significant opportunities to facilitate local communities actively participating in democratic processes and shaping the decisions that affect their lives.

Empowerment at local level is key to successful climate action and you can provide support to community groups and constituents by representing concerns and empowering and mobilising support for the actions needed. This includes working to reduce emissions from the council’s own operations and supply chain and influencing and facilitating a broader net zero approach across your geographical area.

As an elected member, you could consider:

- ▶ **Does senior leadership support and champion action on this agenda both internally within the council and externally?**
- ▶ **How are the council’s climate ambitions communicated externally and are the local community involved in co-design and delivery?**
- ▶ **How is the council engaging and working with local actors such as Community Planning Partnerships?**

No organisation can tackle climate change on its own. A collaborative approach is required with leaders (both political and non-political) working together across all sectors. Elected members have a key role to play in this approach by questioning, scrutinising and working with your communities to promote and deliver the just transition to a Net Zero Scotland by 2045.

Useful Organisations and Resources

[Sustainable Scotland Network](#) (SSN) is Scotland's public sector network on sustainability and Climate Change. In addition to providing regular monthly forums for partners, SSN provides a range of planning and project tools which will be helpful for partners. Contact info@sustainableScotlandNetwork.org to receive SSN's monthly newsletter to keep pace with events, policy updates etc.

[Adaptation Scotland](#) provides information on how to prepare for the effects of climate change, and can support partners to gain skills, develop networks and make progress with adaptation planning and action.

[Ashden Co-benefits Toolkit](#) provides details on the connection between climate change and other priorities

[Resource Hub](#) from the Centre for Alternative Technology offers inspiration, webinars and case studies.

Climate Emergency UK have produced a [checklist](#) and [10 tips](#) for improving climate action plans.

[Carbon Literacy Project](#) provides training resources specifically tailored for local government.

LGIU produce a number of blogs and briefings on relevant topics such as [economic opportunities](#), [placed based climate mitigation](#), [adaptation](#) and the [importance of communities](#).

Local Government Association [Councillor's Workbook](#), [briefing on resilient communities](#), [behaviour change](#) and [finance](#).

[Nature based Solutions briefing](#) prepared by COSLA, NatureScot, the Improvement Service and the Sustainable Scotland Network.

Sustrans produce the [Walking and Cycling Index](#) to support leaders of cities and towns to understand and improve walking, wheeling and cycling.

iHub
Quarrywood Court
Livingston
EH54 6AX

Tel: 01506 282012
Email: info@improvementservice.org.uk
www.improvementservice.org.uk

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*The 'go to' organisation for Local
Government improvement in Scotland*

The logo for Improvement Service, featuring the letters 'is' in a bold, dark blue font. The 'i' has a red dot above it, and the 's' has a red dot at the bottom right. Below the 'is' is the word 'improvement' in a dark blue sans-serif font, followed by the word 'service' in a red sans-serif font.
improvement **service**