

# Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee

## 18<sup>th</sup> Meeting, 2023 (Session 6)

Tuesday 23 May 2023

### Evidence session on the role of local government and its cross-sectoral partners in financing and delivering a net-zero Scotland

#### Introduction

1. In November 2021, the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee began an inquiry into [the role of local government and its cross-sectoral partners in financing and delivering a net-zero Scotland](#).
2. This inquiry aimed to seek out the main barriers at a local level to Scotland reaching its target of being net zero in emissions by 2045. It also considered what practical steps councils were taking to break them down, in partnership with business, the voluntary sector, and local communities. It is looked to establish—
  - what role the Scottish Government and its agencies can play in both supporting and, where necessary, challenging local government to work well with its partners to deliver net zero
  - how local government can play its part in ensuring a “just transition” to net zero, i.e. one that is economically and socially fair.

#### A snapshot of the inquiry

3. The Committee launched this inquiry with an open call for views, posing 12 questions. [All submissions to the call for views are available here](#). The Committee held twelve evidence sessions from January to September 2022. It heard from a range of witnesses from local government, academia, business and the third sector. The Official Report from all of these meetings are available on the [Committee's website here](#).
4. The Committee [published a report](#) setting out its findings on 23 January. It included 26 conclusions and recommendations on a wide range of topics covering strategic issues relating to local government finance and funding, skills, powers and direction. It also covered net zero in the context of sectoral-specific issues such as planning, renewable energy, waste, transport, heat in buildings.

5. The report made clear that Scotland needs a “more empowered local government sector, with better access to the skills and capital it will need to play a full role in this energy revolution” in order to meet its net zero ambitions. It also called on the Scottish Government to clearly outline its expectations for local authorities in delivering net zero in key sectors. The Committee also said it wanted to see “clearer evidence of all local authorities planning strategically for net zero and ensuring that net zero goals and Council budgeting are aligned”.
6. Following publication, COSLA, the umbrella body for local authorities, issued a press release welcoming the report, and setting out its initial response to its main findings, which is in **Annexe A**.
7. On 14 March, the Committee held a debate in the Chamber of the Scottish Parliament on its report. A motion was lodged ([S6M-08209](#)), in the name of Edward Mountain, on behalf of the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee. [A transcript of the debate is available here.](#)

## Response from the Scottish Government

8. A joint response to the report from the then Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero and Just Transition and then Minister for Local Government Empowerment and Planning was [received on 20 April](#). This correspondence, alongside comments from the Cabinet Secretary during the Committee’s debate, set out how the Scottish Government was responding to the key messages from the Committee’s report. Key proposed actions include—
  - Allocating £4.3 million to expand the Scottish Government’s Climate Action Hub programme in 2023/24. The Scottish Government said this funding would allow the expansion of the current network to around 20 regions communities across the country with the aim of developing a place-based approach to transitioning to net zero advocated by the Committee in its report.
  - Establishing a Climate Intelligence Service as requested by the Committee by the end of the year. The group would be tasked with providing local authorities with technical skills and resources they require to develop their climate change plans and fill any gaps in expertise at a local level. During the Committee’s debate in March, the Cabinet Secretary indicated the Scottish Government was in advanced discussions with COSLA about setting up the service.
  - Reaffirming the Scottish Government’s commitment to working with COSLA and SOLACE to agree a New Deal for Local Government in Scotland, which it said would allow greater flexibility over local funding and a focus on partnership to deliver shared priorities and outcomes such as net zero. The Scottish Government also said it would explore with local authorities scope for new fiscal powers as part of its ongoing discussions around a new Fiscal Framework for local government.
  - Taking forward work with Heads of Planning Scotland, the Royal Town Planning Institute Scotland and planning schools to implement the key messages from the “Future Planners Project Report”. The Cabinet Secretary said during the debate that this would include the provision of an

apprenticeship scheme which he said would address issues highlighted by the Committee's report regarding a shortage in the planning workforce.

- Working with local authorities to support the development of the Scottish Government's Heat in Buildings Strategy, including the supporting role they will play in the wider implementation of policy and programmes set out within the Strategy. The Heat in Buildings Local Government Oversight Group has also been established to enhance collaboration between Scottish Government and COSLA officials on the Heat in Buildings programme and wider heat transition. The Scottish Government also said it was providing £2.4 million of funding to local authorities to enable them to develop Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategies to support the delivery of the heat transition in their local areas.
- Working with COSLA and local authorities as part of the approach to growing Scotland's public charging network. The Scottish Government said this would be underpinned by the £60million EV Infrastructure Fund that aims to leverage public and private investment to double the size of the public charging network to 6,000 charge points by 2026. It said the Fund would allow local authorities to develop their charge point infrastructure to align with local needs.
- Developing the Scottish Government's Waste Route Map through a process of co-design with COSLA and other local stakeholders to be published later this year. The Scottish Government also said that it was supporting local authorities to increase quality and quantity of its recycling through the £70 million Recycling Improvement Fund. It said this funding would help local authorities to invest in modern recycling infrastructure and improve their kerbside operations.

## Evidence Session on 23 May

9. At its meeting on 23 May, the Committee will hold an evidence session with representatives of COSLA and SOLACE (which represents senior council management), to discuss the report and the Scottish Government response.
10. The evidence session provides an opportunity to take stock of the range of proposed actions set out by the Scottish Government and to hear views on whether they will help local government's address climate change more effectively. Members will also seek to ascertain what progress councils have made in implementing some of the report's key messages about how local government can strengthen its approach to net zero.
11. The Committee expects issues raised at this session to be pursued further in future evidence-taking in the near future from the new Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero and Just Transition on her main priorities, and in its scrutiny of the 2023-24 Scottish Government budget.

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Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee

## Annexe A

Press Release from COSLA following the publication of the Net Zero Energy and Transport Committee on the role of local government and its cross-sectoral partners in financing and delivering a net-zero Scotland.

COSLA believes that the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee Report out today (Monday 23rd January) is a watershed moment for tackling Climate Change.

Cllr Gail Macgregor, COSLA Environment and Economy Spokesperson said:

“This report by the Committee on the just transition to a net zero economy is potentially a watershed moment for Scotland in tackling climate change.

“The report is clear that Scotland will not meet its ambitious climate targets without a more empowered Local Government. To empower Local Government, Councils need not just increased funding, but also larger, fewer and more flexible funding streams. This has long been COSLA’s central message, so it is hugely heartening to see it recognised so strongly in the report.

“Climate Change is a challenge we all must face. Local Government is committed, locally and nationally, to leading the net zero transition, but COSLA has been open that local authorities can’t do that effectively without the increased support of Scottish Government. The report by the Committee lays out in the clearest way yet the support that is needed and why.

“The recommendations of the report are mainly directed at Scottish Government, but we need to consider them carefully too. Climate change requires a genuine team Scotland approach and I would hope that this report coupled with last year’s publication by the Climate Change Committee could be the defining moment we have needed to get delivery of the net zero transition on track for 2030 and beyond.

“I commend the Committee for the fullness, diligence and clarity of their report.”