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Scottish Parliament
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26 July 2024

Dear Edward

SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT BUDGET 2025/26

Thank you for your letter regarding the contribution of the health and social care portfolio to achieving a net-zero Scotland by 2045. I welcome the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee's scrutiny of this topic.

I recognise that the climate and ecological emergency is a health emergency, that human health is inextricably linked to the health of our planet and its natural systems and that tackling the climate emergency can deliver co-benefits for health and equity. This was clearly set out in the last [CMO Annual Report](#).

In 2024/25, the majority of health and social care spend was classified as neutral in its climate impact. The exception to this was the spending on Sport Scotland and Active Healthy Lives which was classified as positive with a low impact. Sectors classed as neutral primarily deliver activities which, while generating some emissions from consumption or operations such as heating, do not enable or influence wider emissions.

Our focus for spending on health and social care is improving population health and the outcomes and experiences of people who use health and care services. I do not anticipate a change in the carbon assessment of the health and social care budget in 2025/26 but I would like to take this opportunity to update you on action within NHS Scotland to reduce emissions.

NHS Scotland aims to achieve net-zero by 2040 for the following emissions sources:

- building energy use
- fleet fuel use and business travel
- fluorinated gases and anaesthetic gases
- waste
- water and waste water

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These emissions sources all contribute to the emissions within the 2045 Scottish net-zero target.

NHS Scotland also aims to maximise its contribution to Scotland and its supply chain achieving net-zero emissions by 2045. This covers the following sources which the NHS does not control but which it can influence:

- Supply chain
- Staff commuting
- Patient and visitor travel

While some of these emissions arise in Scotland, the NHS's supply chain is international in nature and many of those emissions arise outwith Scotland.

In 2022/23, NHS Scotland's reported emissions for its 2040 target sources were 571,000 tCO₂e of which 407,000 were from building energy use, 84,000 were from meter dose inhaler propellant, 30,000 were from the fleet and 27,000 were from anaesthetic gases.

It is estimated that supply chain emissions make up around 60 per cent of total NHS emissions with medicines, chemicals and equipment making up around 40 per cent of the total. Staff commuting and visitor travel are estimated to make up around 5 per cent of total NHS emissions.

Our experience is that climate and environmental action can reduce costs and improve productivity as it is fundamentally about making more efficient use of resources. For example, the National Green Theatre Programme is supporting Health Boards to achieve carbon savings of around 20,000 tCO₂e and financial savings of around £6 million annually. The Centre for Sustainable Delivery, which delivers the National Green Theatre Programme, is undertaking planning for introducing similar initiatives into other specialties.

A further priority in the area of sustainable care is improving respiratory prescribing. Our work in this area is led by the need to improve outcomes for patients and we published an updated Quality Prescribing Strategy for Respiratory in April this year. A further benefit of this work will be a reduction in emissions from inhaler propellant, which are largely driven by the over-use of short acting reliever inhalers.

Capital investment is necessary for decarbonising the estate and the fleet. However, due to a lower than anticipated capital budget settlement from the previous UK Government, my portfolio is having to prioritise the completion of projects which are currently in construction, the maintenance of the existing estate and equipment replacement and therefore it does not have the budget to begin new projects.

Health Boards are encouraged to apply to the Green Public Sector Estate Decarbonisation Fund and to Transport Scotland for funding for fleet decarbonisation. Only 20 NHS sites are responsible for over 60 per cent of building energy emissions and decarbonisation plans are being prepared for priority sites in that top 20. Some of these sites will be easier to decarbonise than others due to their age and construction – some sites will require lengthy programmes of work. We will be able to provide timelines for these plans when there is greater certainty about long-term capital budget levels.

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NHS Scotland has been making progress with reducing emissions and that progress includes:

- total heat and power emissions reduced by 31 per cent between 2015-16 and 2022-23
- medical gas emissions reduced by 17 per cent between 2019/20 and 2022/23
- In April 2024, 45 per cent of NHS cars were electric vehicles.

The Scottish Government [Care and Wellbeing Portfolio](#) is taking a range of actions to deliver more sustainable care. This includes the Anchors programme, which supports NHS Boards to contribute to the Community Wealth Building agenda, maximising spend on local procurement, which will reduce the carbon footprint of the goods the NHS purchases, and making more of the NHS estate available to communities to grow more food locally.

In the social care sector, it is the statutory duty of local authorities to deliver adult social care services. In practice, these services are delivered by a mix of public, non-profit, and private sector providers. The significant involvement of private and non-profit organisations in the provision of social care has implications for Net Zero policy, both in terms of accessing information on climate-related issues and on implementing policy in practice.

Scottish Government commitments to Net Zero targets require us to provide leadership, direction, oversight, and support to the social care sector to achieve Net Zero. To this effect, we are working to ensure that Net Zero requirements are embedded in the forthcoming National Care Service (NCS). The establishment of the NCS will create opportunities to enhance the way in which services are designed and delivered to meet objectives beyond immediate care priorities, including on sustainable development, climate resilience, and Net Zero.

New working practices and policy mechanisms in the NCS (for example, new roles for Scottish Ministers around strategic accountability), will provide means to build climate resilience and Net Zero actions into the social care system, providing a basis on which the Scottish Government can work with social care providers to identify and put into practice actions to combat the climate crisis and achieve wider environmental objectives.

Parts of the NHS estate and social care estate will face similar technical challenges and there will be opportunities for us to share learning and carry out joint initiatives across many areas in our transition to Net Zero.

The establishment of the NCS provides an opportunity to integrate Net Zero ambitions into the oversight of social care as a strategic goal, ensuring that there is a focus on the changes needed within social care to combat the climate crisis and ensure resilience in the face of global heating.

Going forward, the introduction of the National Care Service will provide further opportunities to build climate change considerations into the way that social care services are planned, commissioned and delivered.

My portfolio is also taking multiple actions to support work across government to achieve net zero emissions, adapt to a changing climate, and achieve a just transition. For example, the third Scottish National Adaptation Plan is being drafted currently, and during the consultation process Public Health Scotland undertook a Health Impact Assessment to help strengthen the plan through improving the health outcomes it can achieve. This is the first time that Health

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Impact Assessments have informed wider climate plans in Scotland. We are also in the process of developing a long-term framework to improve population health and reduce health inequalities, and climate-based policy is a key consideration within its development.

The Climate Change Committee recommends a shift towards healthier lower carbon diets and recently Food Standards Scotland completed a [review of the health impacts of these recommendations](#), finding that the diet recommended through the [Eatwell Guide](#) represents a significant reduction in diet related emissions, and a significant improvement in health, compared to current diets. Emissions are being included as a consideration in the current review of the Scottish Dietary Goals.

Sport Scotland have also taken recent steps to develop awareness of carbon impacts, commissioning the British Association for Sustainable Sport to develop carbon literacy training and a framework for Sport and Climate Change, in line with the budget assessment outlined earlier.

I hope that this information shows a comprehensive overview of the measures we are taking across my portfolio to reduce our emissions and support work across the Scottish Government, both operationally and through policy initiatives.

I am happy to provide further detail, if it would be helpful to the Committee.

Yours sincerely

NEIL GRAY

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