

Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee

20th Meeting, 2022 (Session 6), Tuesday 14 June 2022

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

Note by the clerk

Introduction

1. In November 2021, the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee launched an inquiry into [the role of local government and its cross-sectoral partners in financing and delivering a net-zero Scotland](#).
2. This inquiry aims to seek out the main barriers at a local level to Scotland reaching its target of being net zero in emissions by 2045. It will consider what practical steps councils are taking to break them down, in partnership with business, the voluntary sector, and local communities. It is also considering—
 - 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.
3. The Committee launched this inquiry with an open [Call for Views](#), posing 12 questions. It has taken evidence at seven Committee meetings so far—
 - On 11 January, the Committee heard from representatives of five different local authorities with different net zero policies and priorities. [The Official Report for this meeting is here](#).
 - On 18 January, the Committee heard from the Sustainable Scotland Network, and community groups on the local route to net zero. [The Official Report is here](#).
 - On 25 January, the Committee heard from representatives of the business and private investment sectors. [The Official Report is here](#).
 - On 22 March, the Committee heard from a panel on the role of the planning system in helping reaching net zero and a panel on skills and vocational training. [The Official Report is here](#).

- On 29 March, the Committee heard more evidence on the theme of vocational skills and workforce readiness. [The Official Report is here.](#)
- On 3 May, the Committee heard from a panel of transport experts on the role of local authorities in helping to decarbonise transport. [The Official Report is here.](#)
- On 17 May, the Committee heard from an expert panel discussing the decarbonisation of heat in buildings. [The Official report is here.](#)
- On 24 May, the Committee discussed local government's role in sustaining and promoting renewables with industry and local government representatives. [The Official Report will be posted here when published.](#)
- On 31 May, the Committee heard from the "Green City" of Freiburg, to learn what steps it had taken to make itself a world leader amongst local authorities in its approach to sustainable low-carbon living. [The Official report is here.](#)

Key themes at 14 June meeting

4. On 14 June, the Committee will take evidence from an expert panel on how housebuilding could contribute better to net zero goals. Topics the discussion is likely to touch upon include:
 - Whether building standards regulation is adequate to help meet net zero goals, particularly in areas such as insulation and heating systems (the verification process for building standards is the responsibility of local authorities);
 - Housebuilders views on the role of the planning system (another local authority responsibility) and of "placemaking" in relation to net zero goals, for instance marrying new housing developments with efficient public transport;
 - Housebuilders' views on housebuyers' attitudes towards lower carbon footprint housing; what attitudes towards net zero their customers bring and their willing;
 - Workforce capacity.
5. One of the panellists the Committee will hear from (Homes for Scotland) has provided a written submission for the inquiry: see the annexe to this paper.

Next steps

6. The Committee will continue to hold evidence sessions until early autumn. It is also currently undertaking a programme of fact-finding visits, with Stirling, Aberdeen and Orkney having been visited so far, and more visits planned for September. It expects to report to the Parliament this autumn, with recommendations addressed to the Scottish Government.

Annexe

Submission from Homes for Scotland in response to the Committee's call for views – 21 January 2022

Council planning, decision-making and capacity in relation to net zero

1. What role can the local government planning system and local development plans do to help us reach net zero? Could the planning system do more?

The Scottish Government's recently published NPF4 envisages the Scottish planning system in having a pivotal role in delivering Scotland's net zero commitments. Local planning authorities will therefore be central in delivering the aims through both their development planning and development management systems.

The planning system should seek to recognise the positive role that new housing development can bring. It has the ability to meet many of the outcomes of net zero, including increasing the stock of energy efficient homes, leveraging developer contributions to improve infrastructure and working to making new developments more sustainable. Collaborative working with the home building sector will help to deliver Scotland's commitments to net zero.

2. What innovation, skills and capacity are needed in the local government workforce when it comes to making net zero achievable? Does that capacity exist or are there gaps?

The list of requirements that NPF4 has set out is lengthy. Many planning departments are already under-resourced. There is a serious concern that these new duties will require very significant upskilling of planners in terms of their climate literacy. Some of the new requirements, such as measuring emissions and understanding carbon offsetting are highly technical. A lack of suitably skilled planners to understand and interpret these could lead to significant additional delays across the planning service. This requires investment both in terms of new planning officers, upskilling of existing staff and IT resources.

The scale and pace of change is so rapid that there is a very real chance that the commitments and legislation around much of the net zero targets have been set well before the skills and culture are developed. This could result in a period of economic stagnation at a time when economic recovery is vital.

Role of the Scottish Government and its agencies

3. What is the Scottish Government doing to help the local government sector deliver on net zero goals? What, if anything, could it do more of to help the sector?

Alignment of both national and local policy is key to improving the efficiency of housing delivery. It is vital that communication around delivering net zero is also set within the context of enabling the economic and physical growth that Scotland requires. National government sets the standards and messaging, but often the

ultimate delivery of them lies with the local authorities, who make decisions at a local level. Clear and consistent language in national policies will support local authorities to deliver messages clearly.

The establishment of a National Delivery Agency with a dual focus on delivering the net-zero outcomes and

- Securing, master planning and preparing public sector surplus land ready for development
- Providing and managing financial packages of support
- Delivering infrastructure
- Promoting innovative solutions