

Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee

10th Meeting, 2024 (Session 6)

Tuesday, 12 March 2024

Climate change governance stocktake

Note by the Clerk

Background

1. The Committee has agreed to hold two evidence sessions on how the Scottish Government is working to address the challenge of climate change and to play its part in the global effort to combat it, by making Scotland “net zero” in greenhouse gas emissions by 2045; a target enshrined in statute.¹ The Scottish Government has further committed to achieving net zero by way of a “just transition” that creates new economic opportunities, seeks to minimise rather than increase inequality, and does not leave communities behind.

2. The focus of these two sessions will be on the machinery of government: the effectiveness of the structures the Scottish Government has in place to achieve this momentous social and economic change. This includes particular elements of effective governance: political and civil service leadership, data collection and sharing, internal communications, specialist knowledge, corporate memory, etc.

3. The second of these sessions will be with the Scottish Government itself when, on 16 April, the Committee will hear from the Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Net Zero and Energy and the Director of Energy and Climate Change. The Cabinet Secretary for WENZE is the Scottish Government Cabinet member with responsibility for securing effective cross-government coordination of net zero policy.

4. In preparation for that session, [the Convener on 24 February wrote to the Cabinet Secretary](#) requesting information on a number of relevant matters in advance of the session.

Audit Scotland session; main themes and sources of information

5. Before this, on 12 March, the Committee will hear from:

- Stephen Boyle, Auditor General for Scotland; and
- Rebecca Seidel, Senior Manager, Audit Scotland

6. Audit Scotland published a report, [‘How the Scottish Government is set up to deliver climate change goals’](#) in April 2023 and this session will be an opportunity to

¹ Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, section A1. There are also interim targets associated with this, including one of achieving a 75% reduction in CO₂ and methane by 2030 against a 1990 baseline.

discuss its main recommendations. The report concluded that the Scottish Government's climate change and net zero governance arrangements had improved but that some core elements of good governance were missing. Conclusions and recommendations included—

- **Better align climate change governance groups:** including establishing 'clear and distinct roles and remits for the main climate change groups and individuals' and 'clear reporting lines and escalation procedures between the main governance groups'
- Ensure that **effective assurance arrangements** are in place for all its climate change governance groups
- Director-General Net Zero **workforce plan** in place by Spring 2023

7. The report highlighted the importance of cross-government working. It said that—

- 'causes and consequences of climate change sit across multiple policy areas. Responsibility for driving the delivery of climate change ambitions spans several Scottish Government Cabinet Secretaries and Ministers'
- 'Lines of accountability for climate change are complex due to its cross-cutting nature. It is vital that effective governance arrangements are in place to enable the Scottish Government to deliver on its climate change ambitions and provide assurance that progress is being made'

8. The report also made a number of recommendations on risk management:

- **Identifying and scoring climate risks** should be consistent, evidence-based and fully consider longer term impacts
- There should be clear processes for **monitoring and reviewing progress** against the relevant actions
- There should be **contingency plans** for the greatest risks and it should be clear **how risks are escalated** to the relevant executive decision maker

9. Audit Scotland also indicated that climate adaptation (i.e. making changes in order to respond to climate change) has not been given the same priority as the achievement of emissions reduction targets, and that this needed to change.

10. The Scottish Parliament's [Public Audit Committee took evidence](#) on the report from Audit Scotland on 18 May, then had a follow-up session with Scottish Government officials on 7 September. In their [letter of 7 November 2023 to the NZET Committee](#), the Public Audit Committee outlined the main themes of that evidence-taking.

11. Other potentially relevant publications for this session that Audit Scotland have recently published include:

- [Approaches to achieving net zero across the UK](#): a joint report published with the National Audit Office, Audit Wales and the Northern Ireland Audit Office in September 2023. It summarises the 'powers, responsibilities, commitments and delivery arrangements for the net zero agenda across the UK'.

- [Scotland's councils' approach to addressing climate change](#): published in September 2022.
- [‘Decarbonising heat in homes’](#): published on the 1st of February 2024, this report addresses Scottish Government plans and progress in reducing emission from home heating.

12. Alongside issues noted above, other matters that might be raised during this session include—

- Climate Change Plan delivery. Climate Change Plans are the Scottish Government’s key working document on climate change, each being a strategic multi-year delivery plan for meeting emissions reduction targets, and covering every significant policy area and outcome; transport, agriculture, transport, energy, etc. The last, a [Plan “update” laid in response to Covid-19](#), was in December 2020. In November 2023, the Scottish Government [wrote to the Committee](#) to confirm that next draft Plan would not be laid that month, as previously scheduled, and setting out the Scottish Government’s reasons for this. A new laying date has not yet been announced but the effective deadline is in November 2024.
- Climate adaptation planning. In January of this year, the Scottish Government published its proposals for a [Scottish National Adaptation Plan 2024 to 2029](#).
- Inter-governmental working relations between the UK and Scottish governments.
- The role that Scotland’s other main tier of government; local government, has to play in achieving net zero and how the Scottish Government can support it in doing so. The Committee reported on this matter earlier this session, in its report [The role of local government and its cross-sectoral partners in financing and delivering a net-zero Scotland | Scottish Parliament](#).

Next steps

13. The Committee will consider the evidence at the end of the 12 March meeting and any next steps. The main issues discussed at this meeting are likely to be explored again when the Committee takes evidence from the Scottish Government on 16 April. The Committee’s work is also likely to be relevant to its future scrutiny of the next draft climate change plan and other ongoing work, such as its rolling scrutiny of the Scottish Government budget for climate change and net zero.