

28 March 2024

Edward Mountain MSP
Convener
Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee
Scottish Parliament

By email

Dear Convener

Climate change governance – local government collaboration

The Auditor General welcomed the opportunity to give evidence to the committee on 12 March 2024 on the Scottish Government's governance arrangements in relation to climate change.

During the session Monica Lennon asked about arrangements in local government, specifically examples of good collaboration between councils and the Scottish Government to deliver on climate change commitments. As the Auditor General's responsibilities do not extend to local government, I am writing to provide information in response to Monica Lennon's question.

In September 2022, Audit Scotland published a briefing on behalf of the Accounts Commission on [Scotland's councils' approach to addressing climate change](#). The briefing noted that increased collaboration across councils and with key partners and local communities is needed to achieve climate change ambitions. It recommended that councils should consider activity to:

- work with partners to further develop existing support networks to ensure learning and good practice is shared across the sector.
- work collaboratively to tackle some of the key challenges involved in defining and setting targets and monitoring progress, combining resources where it is more effective to do so, and focusing on maximising impact and adding value.
- work collaboratively with local communities and ensure that people are able to effectively contribute to the design and delivery of climate change actions.

The briefing included case studies of initiatives that involved collaboration between councils and partners, some of which were supported by the Scottish Government:

- **Climate Ready Clyde** – The eight councils that make up the Glasgow City Region are part of a cross-sector initiative with five other equal partners. Its purpose is to create a shared adaptation vision, strategy and action plan for the whole of the Glasgow City Region. It is supported by the Scottish Government, with a representative attending the Climate Ready Clyde Action Group as an observer. The 13 partner organisations fund the initiative. Combining resources in this way has enabled the development of very thorough plans and strategies with stretching targets and detailed analysis of where action can be best focused. More information is available on the [Climate Ready Clyde website](#).

- Aberdeen Adapts – Aberdeen City Council and the University of Aberdeen jointly led activity to develop a framework to build long-term resilience to climate change in Aberdeen. This included incorporating the views of 41 local public bodies, businesses and communities. The project was supported by Adaptation Scotland, a programme that is funded by the Scottish Government to provide information, advice and support on climate adaptation to organisations across Scotland. More information is available on [Aberdeen City Council website](#).
- Highland Adapts – This initiative aims to bring communities, businesses, land managers and the public sector together to facilitate transformational action towards a prosperous, climate-ready Highland. There are nine core partners, including The Highland Council, NHS Highland, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and NatureScot, who collaborate with other local partners and public bodies. The governance structure includes a public sector peer support group, which aims to help public sector agencies to integrate climate change adaptation into how they work. More information is available on the [Highland Adapts website](#).

To date, none of our audit work on climate change has specifically examined how effectively the Scottish Government and councils are collaborating to respond to climate change. However, Audit Scotland is planning to undertake an audit on climate change adaptation and resilience during 2024/25 on behalf of both the Auditor General and Accounts Commission. The focus of the audit is currently being scoped, but it will consider the role of the Scottish Government and councils and examine how they are working together and with partners in this area. The audit will aim to share learning and examples of effective collaboration. We would be happy to brief the Committee on the findings of this audit once it has concluded, if that would be of interest.

As well as local initiatives, such as those outlined above, we recognise the importance of national networks in supporting councils and other public sector bodies in responding to climate change. This includes the Sustainable Scotland Network, Adaptation Scotland and the Improvement Service. We welcome the partnership approach to developing and delivering the Climate Intelligence Service, which has the potential to strengthen activity in councils to reduce emissions. We are also aware that the Scottish Government plans to publish a new draft Climate Change Plan and updated guidance on public bodies' climate change duties this year. We will continue to monitor these developments and consider the implications for our future audit work.

I hope this information is helpful to the Committee.

Yours sincerely

Antony Clark
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