

**What is climate change and why does it matter?**

1. Climate change means large-scale changes to the world's weather patterns. Climate change causes global temperatures to rise. This leads to snow and ice melting and sea levels rising. It causes flooding, droughts, loss of homes and land, reduced food production and poorer health.
2. Greenhouse gas emissions are the cause of climate change. Since the 1800's, humans have increasingly produced greenhouse gas emissions. Predictions are that, without action on emissions, global warming and rising sea-levels will continue and increase at ever increasing rates.

**All governments have agreed to reduce emissions and adapt to global warming**

3. In response, countries across the world are committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and adapting our world to live with the current and predicted effects of global warming. The 2015 Paris Agreement is the biggest international commitment of this kind.
4. In the UK, responsibility towards climate change sits with both the UK and Scottish Parliament and both have passed legislation to reduce emissions. Some important powers over gas and industry are reserved to the UK Parliament. Other key areas such as transport, agriculture and infrastructure are largely devolved to the Scottish Parliament. Local Government has a key role in tackling climate change through planning and delivering these services in communities.

**Scotland's emissions have reduced but most legal targets have not been met**

5. In the last 30 years, there has been a 45 per cent reduction in Scotland's greenhouse gas emissions. This compares to a 43.1 per cent reduction across the UK. Reduced emissions from energy supply make up the majority of this reduction although there have been reductions in most sectors (business, residential and agriculture). Transport saw a slight increase due to international aviation and shipping.
6. Between 2010 and 2018, Scotland's legal targets for reduced emissions were only achieved in 2011. Transport is the biggest producer of greenhouse gases, followed by business, agriculture and then energy supply. Measuring emissions is complicated. In 2017, following scientific advice, the Scottish Government introduced a new approach to measure its own emission targets. In line with scientific advice, the Scottish Government now uses different ways to measure emissions for different targets and reports. This is to ensure information is as comparable and accurate as possible.

## **Scotland has a new ambitious target that requires action across all levels and areas of government, business and private life**

7. In April 2019, the Scottish Government declared a climate emergency and announced that Scotland will seek to become net-zero by 2045, five years earlier than planned. This is now enshrined in legislation and interim targets set, including a challenging 75 per cent reduction by 2030. The Scottish Government's climate change plan to achieve its ambitions has been delayed due to COVID and is expected in December 2020. The COVID pandemic has very quickly changed how many of us live, work and travel, and many of these changes are expected to remain in place even after the pandemic. This could have a significant impact on the Scottish Government's targets and the steps needed to achieve them.
8. The Committee on Climate Change (CCC) provides an independent assessment of the Scottish Government's work on tackling climate change. It welcomes the Scottish Government's ambitions and has encouraged the UK Government to match them. The CCC has made clear that meeting the 2030 and 2045 targets requires early and decisive action to deliver meaningful reductions across all sections of the economy. It states that net-zero policy must be embedded across all levels of government, with strong leadership and coordination at the centre. Efforts to reduce climate change and its impact must take place across all government policies and other public and private sector activity. Community engagement will be key. This is not an easy task and will require significant collaboration and difficult decisions. The CCC also recommended that the Scottish Government develops stronger governance arrangements to manage its work on climate change.
9. COSLA believes that strong collaboration and leadership are also essential at a local level to drive forward the changes needed in almost every aspect of public and private life, from transport, housing to business support. To date, twenty Scottish councils have declared a climate emergency, set targets and developed plans to achieve Net Zero, sometimes as early as 2030.

## **The Scottish Government plans to invest significantly in climate change**

10. Recent Scottish Government action, as set out in its 2018 Climate Change Plan and its Programme for Government in 2019-20 and 2020-21 include plans, targets and funding to increase the use of renewables, reduce emissions from buildings and transport, give support to green business, skills and jobs, invest in adaptations and increase forestation. The Scottish Government also has a number of recently published or forthcoming strategies that it considers central to tackling climate change such as the National Transport Strategy and the Infrastructure Investment Plan.

11. The most recent Programme for Government (2020-21) is centred around creating green jobs that support economic recovery and eliminating inequalities, including those that come from climate change. These include some significant public sector investment:
  - £3 billion investment into a Green New Deal to support sustainability
  - £2 billion for the Scottish National Investment Bank with a primary mission to support the transition to net zero emissions
  - £1.6 billion over the next Parliament to decarbonise the way we heat our home and our buildings, reducing emissions, tackling fuel poverty and creating new jobs.
12. These build on significant funding commitments in the Programme for Government for 2019-20, most significantly a £3 billion green investment portfolio that will be backed by public and private finance and £500 million to improve bus services and limiting petrol and diesel cars. More work is required to understand the extent of overlap, duplication and double counting in these, and other 'green funds'. Considerable work is also required to understand the impact of this, and other, investment at a council level.
13. The Scottish Government is currently working to review all its budget commitments to understand the emissions associated with them. This is an on-going piece of work which is still at an early stage but should allow the Scottish Government to align its spending with its net zero ambitions.

#### **There is little scrutiny of other public bodies**

14. One hundred and eighty public bodies in Scotland, including the Scottish Government, NHS Boards and councils, are required to produce an annual report that sets out what action they are taking to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, adapt to a changing climate and promote sustainable development.
15. Reports show that councils account for half of Scotland's public sector emissions. The NHS accounts for 18 per cent. The biggest sources of public sector emissions are electricity and gas. However, there is little scrutiny of these reports and little is known at a national level about the progress of and variation between individual public bodies.
16. As well as working to reduce their own emissions, public bodies can play a role in regulating the factors that contribute to climate change and influencing the progress towards net zero across the private sector. It is unclear if and how this activity is monitored or whether good practice is shared.

#### **There is less scrutiny of actions to adapt to mitigate the effects of climate change**

17. Adapting the environment to the current and future effects of climate change is a key feature of public action and spend which public bodies must report against. The Scottish

Government is legally required to report each year on progress against the Scottish Climate Change Adaptation Programme which it does using an outcomes approach. This is at an early stage, so it is difficult to draw conclusions. Councils and other public bodies are also required to report progress each year. There appears to be little external scrutiny to assess the public sectors efforts to adapt to climate change.

### **World leaders will be in Scotland in November 2021**

18. In November 2021, the 26<sup>th</sup> United Nations Climate Change Conference, Conference of the Parties (COP26), is to be held in Glasgow. Most world leaders are expected to attend, and it is hoped an updated agreement to the 2015 Paris Agreement can be reached. As the host country, there is added pressure on the Scottish Government to deliver action to reduce emissions and protect the environment.