

Climate Change - Net Zero Nation: Draft public engagement strategy - consultation

Background

1. Audit Scotland is the independent public sector audit agency undertaking the external audit of the majority of public sector bodies in Scotland. We do this on behalf of the Auditor General for Scotland and the Accounts Commission (for local government). Public audit provides independent assurance that public money is spent properly and is providing value for money. We carry out this work through the annual audits of public bodies, Best Value audits of councils and national performance audits on specific themes and subjects.
2. Audit Scotland, the Auditor General for Scotland and the Accounts Commission welcome the opportunity to respond to the consultation on the draft public engagement strategy. This joint response outlines our shared thoughts on the draft public engagement strategy.
3. Audit Scotland has made good progress in tackling its own carbon footprint in recent years, achieving a 37% reduction in emissions against the 2014/15 baseline. In the last year Audit Scotland has set a new target for the organisation to reach Net Zero by 2030. Audit work on climate change is an important strategic priority for Audit Scotland, the Auditor General for Scotland, and the Accounts Commission. We are currently establishing a programme of work in this area which is likely to include auditing actions being taken by the Scottish Government and other public bodies to meet Scotland's Net Zero ambitions, and wider audit work assessing progress that is being made in Scotland towards a green recovery from Covid-19. Community empowerment is also an important and ongoing area of audit interest to us.

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4. In general, we are supportive of the approach, objectives and principles outlined in the draft strategy. It is encouraging to see an awareness of the necessity of public support and participation in the measures needed to reach Net Zero. The objectives outlined show a reasoned and staged approach to how this can be done. The principles outlined provide a degree of comfort that engagement activity will be taken forward within established parameters. While we acknowledge this is a high-level document and as such there are limits to the detail that can be provided, it is difficult to know how some of the actions outlined in the strategy will be delivered. For example, while there is the intention to engage with specific groups, such as young people and those most likely to be affected by the transition to Net Zero, it is not clear how this will be done.
5. We do not have any recent audit work that focuses specifically on climate change. But we have recently published reports on two areas that are key to the success of the draft public

engagement strategy. These are community empowerment and planning for outcomes. We would like to draw your attention to these reports.

Principles for community empowerment

6. Our 2019 report, [Principles for community empowerment](#), covers a lot of issues around communication, engagement and participation, which are relevant to the draft public engagement strategy. Much of the proposed action in the draft strategy goes beyond engagement and relies on the public feeling more involved and empowered to deliver the behaviour change needed to achieve Scotland's net zero ambitions. For that reason, there may be aspects of this report that would be useful to think about in delivering these actions, such as participatory budgeting and community asset transfer.
7. In its recent [Green Recovery Inquiry](#) report the Scottish Parliament's Economy, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee highlighted the importance of placed based approaches and community involvement in decision-making. Participatory budgeting could provide an opportunity for communities to influence spending priorities, particularly at the local level. There is a potential role to play for the Scottish Government and other public bodies to provide the evidence and perspectives communities need to make decisions. Community Asset transfer could provide opportunities for communities to use or re-purpose public assets for environmental and social wellbeing. Building communities' capacity to take forward participatory budgeting and Community Asset transfer is crucial, particularly among the most deprived communities.
8. Several of the community empowerment principles (p.10-15) are particularly relevant, such as the importance of engaging with all parts of the community, including those who are hard to reach or need additional support to take part. There are also case studies and links to useful references:
 - Case study 1: Citizens' jury (page 17)
 - Key references (page 23):
 - *National Standards for Community Engagement*
 - *PANEL principles*
 - *Place Standard – How good is our place?*
 - Four pieces by What Works Scotland, including *Training for facilitating collaboration and participation*.
9. Linked to this, there will be a lot to learn from the [Citizens' Assembly of Scotland](#) and its recently published report when taking forward the work of Scotland's Climate Assembly.

Planning for outcomes

10. The strategy discusses links to the National Performance Framework and National Outcomes. Our 2019 briefing on [Planning for outcomes](#) sets out good practice examples of outcome-based planning as well as setting out some of the key challenges in measuring and achieving improvements in outcomes, the main points being:

- The need to maintain a focus on long-term goals whilst responding to changing circumstances
 - The challenge of establishing clear measures of impact and success in a complex and dynamic environment
 - The importance of gathering robust evidence to measure and report progress over time
 - The need to work towards multiple outcomes and manage competing priorities
 - The need for close collaboration and effective partnership within and across sectors
11. The draft strategy seems to be focused more on outputs rather than outcomes when it talks about what will be measured and monitored.
12. The Scottish Parliament's Public Audit and Post-Legislative Scrutiny Committee held a session in November 2020 on Data Collection and Planning for Outcomes (Key Audit Themes). It highlighted a number of themes relevant to the links between the draft strategy and the National Performance Framework. These include:
- It is important to design high-quality data collection methodologies right at the start of that process, alongside the development of and implementation of the policy matters
 - Linking spending to outcomes, and the importance of wellbeing outcomes
 - The culture around sharing information needs to improve, with the current focus on performance rather than outcomes
 - The need to make use of use local/community intelligence and adopt place-based approaches
 - Collaboration and leadership are key