



Net Zero Nation

Public Engagement Strategy for
Climate Change

Mid-Point Review

April 2025



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

Executive Summary

Introduction

In September 2021 the Scottish Government published Net Zero Nation' – a five-year Public Engagement Strategy for Climate Change (the PES). The PES is structured around three key pillars and the activities delivered are intended to help achieve these strategic objectives:

Strategic Objectives		
Understand	Participate	Act
People are aware of the action that all of Scotland is taking to tackle climate change and <u>understand</u> how it relates to their lives	People actively <u>participate</u> in shaping just, fair and inclusive policies that promote mitigation of and adaptation to climate change	<u>Taking action</u> on climate change is normalised and encouraged in households, communities and places across Scotland

The PES committed to conducting an interim review of the strategy at the mid-way point of delivery. The aim of this review is to provide an update on progress towards these objectives, and help understand what improvements might be needed.

To achieve these aims, the review aims to answer the following questions:

1. What activities have been delivered since the publication of the PES?
2. What have been the key outcomes of these activities, and how do they reflect progress against the PES's strategic objectives?
3. How does the approach taken fit with:
 - i) wider evidence on effective public engagement?
 - ii) what the public and our stakeholders say they want?
4. What learning from the above might inform the remainder of the PES's implementation?

Methodology

The data sources that have been analysed to answer the above research questions include:

1. **Project and programme monitoring and evaluation information.** This covers a range of reports on funded activities including independent and self-evaluation and monitoring data. Analysing this quantitative and qualitative information provides a measure of what has been done and what it has achieved.
2. **Stakeholder survey.** To understand views and experiences of the PES among delivery partners and external networks, an online survey was

conducted. The survey was shared with 280 organisations and received 67 responses.

3. **Independent evidence review** This [independent review](#) of international evidence on public engagement on climate change was commissioned by Scottish Government to support the PES mid-point review process. It provides valuable information on effective public engagement methods, principles, and approaches, as well as insights into attitudes towards these among the public in Scotland. Referred to throughout as Millar et al. (2025).
4. **The Scottish Parliament People’s Panel report** This [report](#) considers and makes recommendations as to how effective the Scottish Government has been at engaging the public on climate change. These findings provide an important source of evidence on public perceptions of progress for this mid-point review of the PES.
5. **Scottish Household Survey data** The PES committed to reviewing data from the Scottish Household Survey to monitor how Scottish public awareness and understanding of the climate emergency might be changing. It is not possible to attribute changes in these indicators to specific actions within the PES. However, trends should be taken as a gauge of progress being made towards the strategic objectives of the PES as well as a source of evidence to inform how its aims and activities are designed and delivered.

Key Findings

This report provides a summary of the key activities delivered over the period since the publication of the PES in September 2021, up to December 2024 (where data has been available). Highlights include:

- Development of a **national network of Community Climate Action Hubs**. Over £9.5 million has been distributed to the hubs since the launch of the first 2 hubs in September 2021. In 2023-24 the network distributed over £700,000 to over 400 community projects, provided support and advice to around 600 community organisations, and ran over 480 workshops and events reaching over 16,000 people.
- Launch of a **new annual Climate Engagement Fund**. Since its inception in 2023, the CEF has provided over £800,000 of funding to 16 climate engagement projects, reaching over 8,000 people in 2023-24 and over 7,000 people by Quarter 3 2024-25.
- Launch and continued delivery of a national communications campaign **Let’s Do Net Zero**, which in Oct 2021 reached 75% of adults in Scotland who saw the activity on average 9.7 times.
- Launch of a ‘one-stop-shop’ website for resources and information, [Net Zero Nation](#) which receives 80-100,000 visitors each year.

- Publication of the **Scottish Government's [response to Scotland's Climate Assembly's report](#)**, hosting of a session between Assembly members and Ministers to discuss the response, and supporting a legacy project to enable members to continue to engage.
- Investment of at least £425,000 each year in the **Climate Action Schools** programme, engaging over 1,160 schools annually in understanding and taking environmental action.
- Delivery of over 100 events, engaging over 2,000 people through the **Participation Programme** to inform development of key climate change policies.
- Increasing the prominence of Scotland's annual **Climate Week** which in 2024 delivered 13 Ministerial events; saw hundreds of external organisations participate; and prompted 3,588 uses of the campaign hashtag (almost double the target).
- Launch of the **Climate Policy Engagement Network**, a stakeholder engagement forum and platform for gathering views and sharing ideas.

Conclusions, reflections and next steps

The findings from this review largely confirm that the approach taken by Scottish Government to deliver the PES is consistent with the wider evidence base, while also providing suggestions on ways to improve and develop. Overall, as Millar et al. (2025) conclude, Scotland is already leading the way - not only in having a Public Engagement Strategy on Climate Change in place, but also in seeking to review and evaluate its progress. Millar et al. (2025) suggest that the PES should continue to provide a clear and positive vision for the future and use multiple approaches, including coordinating large-scale engagement and supporting smaller local engagement.

The evidence, learning, and reflections brought together for this mid-point review will help inform the delivery of Scottish Government's strategic approach to engaging the public on climate change. It is clear from this review that improvements could be made to how activities delivered under the PES are monitored and evaluated. More consistency in data gathering and reporting, aligned to the PES Theory of Change, would help strengthen the conclusions that can be drawn. There is opportunity to take action on this for the remainder of the PES delivery period, and particularly for designing the end of PES review.

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Public Engagement Strategy for Climate Change Mid-Point Review

1. Introduction

In September 2021, the Scottish Government published 'Net Zero Nation – a five-year Public Engagement Strategy for Climate Change' (PES). Producing a public engagement strategy is a legislative requirement as contained within the Climate Change Act, in recognition that achieving Scotland's emissions targets will require understanding, participation, and action from people across Scotland. The PES sets out the Scottish Government's vision that everyone in Scotland recognises the implication of the global climate emergency, fully understands and contributes to Scotland's response, and embraces their role in the transition to a net zero and climate ready Scotland.

The PES is structured around three key pillars and the activities delivered are intended to help achieve these strategic objectives. These objectives are based on significant engagement with the public and experts in climate change engagement:

Strategic Objectives		
Understand	Participate	Act
People are aware of the action that all of Scotland is taking to tackle climate change and <u>understand</u> how it relates to their lives	People actively <u>participate</u> in shaping just, fair and inclusive policies that promote mitigation of and adaptation to climate change	<u>Taking action</u> on climate change is normalised and encouraged in households, communities and places across Scotland

The PES committed to conducting an interim review of the strategy at the mid-way point of delivery. The aim of this review is to provide an update on progress towards these objectives, and help understand what improvements might be needed. The PES was developed in the context of evidence and research on what makes effective public engagement on climate change and that evidence-base has guided its implementation. The mid-point review therefore also provides an opportunity to test those evidence-based assumptions about what works, and consider whether the approach needs adapting in light of new learning.

To achieve these aims for the mid-point review, this review asks the following questions:

1. What activities have been delivered since the publication of the PES?
2. What have been the key outcomes of these activities, and how do they reflect progress against the PES's strategic objectives?
3. How does the approach taken fit with:

- i) wider evidence on effective public engagement?
 - ii) what the public and our stakeholders say they want?
4. What learning from the above might inform the remainder of the PES's implementation?

2. Context

When reviewing progress towards the objectives of the PES it is important to recognise that the initiatives supported and delivered by the Scottish Government under this strategy take place within a much broader, highly diverse landscape of messaging and activity relating (both directly and indirectly) to climate change. As well as contributing to this wider discourse, the PES must also operate within it, by being aware of, and responding to, shifting public attitudes towards climate change.

At the start of the PES delivery period, in Spring 2022, the Scottish Government commissioned a survey to provide an up-to-date snapshot of Scottish public attitudes relating to each of the three key pillars of the PES. In relation to the 'Understand' pillar, over half (58%) of the respondents felt that they knew at least "a fair amount" about climate change at that time, with just 4% saying they didn't know anything about it. However, a large minority (38%) stated that they only knew "a little bit", and only around one in ten (12%) were confident enough to say that they know "a lot" about climate change. Under the 'Participate' pillar, when asked the extent to which respondents agreed or disagreed that they have the opportunity to influence decisions the Scottish Government is making about climate change, only 27% of respondents agreed. Over two fifths of respondents (42%) disagreed with this statement, with just under a quarter (23%) strongly disagreeing. Finally, in relation to the 'Act' pillar, around four in 10 (39%) respondents believed it was difficult for members of the public to find opportunities to get involved in climate action, and less than a quarter (23%) believed it was easy to do so.

The Scottish Household Survey (SHS) currently provides the most robust Scotland-level data on public attitudes towards climate change over time. The PES identifies three indicators from the SHS to monitor Scottish public awareness and understanding of the climate emergency and the actions they can take. As shown in the table below, at the time of the publication of the PES, the most up-to-date SHS data suggested over two-thirds (68%) of adults in Scotland agreed that climate change is an immediate and urgent problem. In terms of climate action, over half (58%) believed their behaviour and lifestyle contribute to climate change, and almost three-quarters (74%) agreed that they understand the actions they should take to help tackle climate change. More recent SHS data is now available¹ and shows an increase in all three indicators, suggesting increases in levels of concern about, personal responsibility for, and understanding of climate change amongst adults in Scotland.

¹ Due to COVID-19 restrictions on SHS fieldwork at the time, trend data is not available for 2020 or 2021.

Indicator	Baseline	Update
Percentage of people agreeing that climate change is an immediate and urgent problem	68% (2019)	74% (2023)
Percentage of people who believe their behaviour and everyday lifestyle contribute to climate change	58% (2018)	66% (2022)
Percentage of people agreeing that they understand what actions they should take to help tackle climate change	74% (2018)	80% (2022)

Source: Scottish Household Survey

The high levels of public concern about climate change indicated by the SHS data is supported by findings from other recent surveys of public attitudes towards climate change in Scotland and the UK. For example, Consumer Scotland's 2022/23 'Consumers and the transition to net zero' survey¹ found that over three-quarters of consumers in Scotland (77%) are concerned about climate change. Similarly, in the most recent wave of the UK Government's climate attitudes tracker², 80% of (UK-wide) survey respondents said they were very or fairly concerned about climate change. Although, the data also shows a gradual decline in concern over the past three years, falling from 85% in Autumn 2021.

The evidence relating to taking action on climate change is less consistent and more complex to interpret. Whilst the latest SHS found that 80% of people agreed that they understand the actions they should take to help tackle climate change, this a self-reported measure and is not a reliable measure of whether people actually have an accurate understanding of the most effective actions they can take. There is evidence to suggest that some people may be overestimating the positive impact of some actions, particularly recycling.³

To improve the availability of good quality data on Scottish attitudes and behaviours relating to climate change, the Scottish Government has recently commissioned a new Scottish Climate Survey. This is a survey of over 4,000 randomly selected adults in Scotland covering perspectives and experiences of a wide range of climate change mitigation and adaptation issues. Questions have been specifically designed to gauge public understanding of climate change mitigation and adaptation actions, as well as to better understand levels of trust of different sources of information on climate change and perceptions around participation in local decision-making processes. A report of findings from the survey is due to be published in April 2025.

3. Methodology

The PES outlines a multi-method approach to monitoring and evaluating progress towards achieving its strategic objectives. This approach incorporates a range of quantitative and qualitative data, reflecting views shared in the consultation on the

¹ Due to COVID-19 restrictions on SHS fieldwork at the time, trend data is not available for 2020 or 2021.

² [DESNZ Public Attitudes Tracker: Net Zero and climate change, Summer 2024 \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/desnz-public-attitudes-tracker-net-zero-and-climate-change-summer-2024)

³ [Climate change - public engagement: survey results 2022 - gov.scot](https://www.gov.scot/publications/climate-change-public-engagement-survey-results-2022/pages/10/)

draft strategy as to how people felt progress should best be measured and communicated.

The data sources that have been analysed include:

1. **Project and programme monitoring and evaluation information.** This covers a range of reports on public engagement activities that have been delivered, including independent evaluations; organisations' self-evaluation and monitoring data; and Scottish Government reviews. Analysing this quantitative and qualitative information provides a measure of what has been done and what it has achieved.
2. **Stakeholder survey.** To understand views and experiences of the PES among delivery partners and external networks, an online survey was conducted between 24th July and 31st August 2024. The survey was shared with 280 organisations, including applicants to the Climate Engagement Fund and members of the Climate Policy Engagement Network, and received 67 responses.
3. **Independent evidence review.** This report is also supported by an independent review of international evidence on public engagement on climate change by IPSOS and CAST which was commissioned by Scottish Government. It provides valuable information on effective public engagement methods, principles, and approaches, as well as insights into attitudes towards these among the public in Scotland. The research involved desk-based research and focus groups with the public to gather views on what effective public engagement looks like. The study updates the evidence base for the PES and key findings and reflections are referenced in this report and form a key part of the overall mid-point review of the PES. Referred to throughout as Millar et al. (2025).
4. **The Scottish Parliament People's Panel report.** The People's Panel was formed in October 2023 to support the Net-Zero, Energy and Transport Committee's scrutiny of Scottish Government's delivery against its commitment to engage the public on climate change. Their [report](#) considers and makes recommendations as to how effective the Scottish Government has been at engaging the public on climate change. These findings provide an important source of evidence on public perceptions of progress for this mid-point review of the PES.
5. **Scottish Household Survey data.** The PES committed to reviewing data from the Scottish Household Survey to monitor how Scottish public awareness and understanding of the climate emergency might be changing. These indicators provide a measure of progress against achieving the national vision and strategic objectives as set out in the PES.

The following sections present summaries and analysis of this evidence and information against each of the 3 strategic pillars of the PES.

3.1 Limitations

At the time of this review the portfolio of activity in support of the PES represented a variety of approaches at different stages of delivery. Activities operate at a range of scales, with different measures of success which are difficult to aggregate or compare across. These factors add to the complexity and challenge of evaluation.

Scotland is one of the first countries to have a public engagement strategy on climate change, and there are limited occasions where a (national) climate change engagement strategy has been evaluated. In their review of evidence on climate change public engagement, Millar et al. (2025) highlight the challenges inherent in measuring impact of specific engagement interventions, as well as of an overarching strategy like the PES. They note that links between variables such as engagement, awareness, attitudes, and behaviour are complex. Therefore there are clear challenges to determining how far the PES is delivering against its strategic objectives. However, drawing together information and insights from the range of available data it is possible to provide a measure of progress and test the assumptions that underpin the Theory of Change.

It is also important to acknowledge the limitations inherent in the self-reported data which is used as a measure of impact in several areas of PES delivery. For example, there may be differences in the proportion of people reporting that they took action, compared to the numbers who actually took new, relevant actions as a result of engagement with, or participation in, a PES activity.

4. Understand

Communicating Climate Change

Strategic Objective

People are aware of the action that all of Scotland is taking to tackle climate change and understand how it relates to their lives

The PES outlines the Scottish Government's commitment to communicate on climate change policies positively and effectively in a way that is meaningful and inclusive. This includes using a range of communication channels. The PES also outlines an approach to working with a range of external organisations as trusted messengers on climate change, recognising that they are able to reach different groups, including those who are less engaged or have a certain distrust of government messaging. Key programmes and activities designed to help achieve the Understand objective of the PES include:

- Let's Do Net Zero communications and the Net Zero Nation website
- Scotland's annual Climate Week
- Climate Engagement Fund
- Climate Action Schools

Summaries of outputs from delivery of these projects and programmes and the outcomes achieved so far are provided below.

4.1 Let's Do Net Zero communications

4.1.1 Background and summary of delivery

In 2021, the Scottish Government developed a cross-cutting communications approach to ensure all activity, across multiple channels, was coordinated in their invitation to people, communities, and businesses to take climate action. It was designed to engage the public on climate change in the build up to, during and after COP26, hosted in Glasgow in November 2021.

The approach has been sustained over the past few years. Its purpose is to elevate the issue of climate change while encouraging action united by a single communications proposition – Let's Do Net Zero (LDNZ).

The LDNZ umbrella covered all cross-communications activity aligned to the overarching strategy to:

1. **Educate** – build understanding of the climate emergency, the challenges and opportunities
2. **Motivate** – changing attitudes and empowering change

3. **Support action** – signposting to funding and services that make taking action easier

Paid-for media activity to support these aims ran in two phases in June and October/November 2021, targeting 25 to 54 year olds in higher socio-economic groups (ABC1C2 audiences). Activity ran in Scotland across TV, out of home media (posters), in digital and social channels.

Paid-for media marketing has always been supported by Ministerial events, an ongoing programme of media relations, organic digital content and internal communications throughout the year. These aim to increase awareness of key government priorities and announcements across the population of Scotland, as well as delivering behaviour change and social proof messaging in a consistent way and on a continuous basis to prompt climate action.

The LDNZ marketing campaign has used a number of channels to reach audiences across Scotland and empower change including:

- TV ads
- radio ads
- out-of-home billboards
- digital and social media
- newspaper, radio and TV earned coverage
- a website, [Net Zero Nation](#).

To enable change, the Net Zero Nation website is an authoritative ‘one stop shop’ for individuals, communities, and organisations across Scotland seeking information on what action they can take to address the climate emergency. Content is also shared via emails that visitors to the website can subscribe to receive. The website forms the cornerstone of Scottish Government’s climate change communications’ Digital Content Strategy. This supports the PES by seeking to create content that will:

- elevate the issue by educating people that we are living in a climate emergency
- build momentum and tackle feelings of impotence creating a barrier to change by demonstrating that society-wide action is already underway
- build capability and agency by increasing awareness of the individual actions needed to help Scotland reach net zero.

Following 2021, Scottish Government climate change communications continued to be developed and delivered strategically across policy areas and with public sector partners maximising organic content – across social, digital, media and partner channels.

The Net Zero Nation website continued to be developed, and activity was run on social media, focusing bursts of activity around key events such as Scotland's Climate Week and using established partner relationships to widen the reach of communications.

In recent years, paid-for media marketing activity involved some new assets and the re-use of campaign assets developed in 2021, updated in 2024. Annual budget details for spend on marketing is available [here](#).

4.1.2 Summary of outcomes and learning

Independent evaluation research is commissioned to explore the effectiveness of marketing activity. A [case study](#) covering the 2021 communications activity was produced as part of Scottish Government’s evaluation of the COP26 activities. This showed that the October 2021 communications activity reached 3,475,000 (75%) of adults in Scotland, who saw the activity on average 9.7 times. Headline findings for the 2021 autumn campaign activity are summarised below. All participants in the research were shown the advertising. “Campaign recognisers” reported having seen it in or on paid-for media channels while the campaign was live while “non-recognisers” said they had not seen it before.

Measure	Target	Delivered
% of campaign recognisers reporting having better awareness of action needed to taking climate change having seen the campaign	73%	Film 1 75% Film 2 73%
% of campaign recognisers reporting having taken action as a result of seeing the campaign	50%	Film 1 78% Film 2 78%

There are limitations to the comparisons that can be made between research findings from the 2021, 2023, and 2024 campaigns because the target audience profile changed across campaign bursts. Activity in 2023 targeted people aged 18 to 54 in the ABC1C2 socio-economic category, while activity in 2021 and 2024 targeted 25 to 54 year olds in the same group. This must be kept in mind when reviewing the data. Taking that into account, however, there does appear to have been a positive impact over time in the proportion “campaign recognisers” and that agree there are personal benefits to taking climate action. A consistently high proportion of “campaign recognisers” also report having been motivated to take action having seen the campaign.

Measure	Target (2023)	Delivered (2023)	Target (2024)	Delivered (2024)
% of campaign recognisers reporting having taken action as a result of seeing the campaign	50%	86%	60%	80%
% of campaign recognisers reporting that they understand actions needed to tackle climate change	N/A	77%	N/A	78%

It is also clear that seeing messaging relating to the need to take action to tackle climate change has a positive impact on the target audience’s commitment to taking action.

Measure	December 2023		November 2024	
	Recognisers	Non-recognisers	Recognisers	Non-recognisers
% reporting that they are much or slightly more motivated to take action to cut their emissions having seen the advertising	75%	43%	76%	49%

Net Zero social media channels have continued to grow, with engagement increasing year on year since their launch in June 2021. Total followers have increased by 24.9% overall, from 44,952 in November 2021 to 56,127 in December 2024, across all channels (Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn and X).

Ongoing engagement with partners has been a fundamental part of the Net Zero communications strategy. This has resulted in (from 2023-24 figures):

- A database of **600+** contacts who regularly receive Net Zero resources and campaign updates
- An average partner email engagement rate of **33%**
- An average of **414** partner asset downloads per campaign.

Finally, summary indicators of Net Zero Nation website performance to date include:

- Since its launch in June 2021, the Net Zero Nation website has attracted between **80,000 – 100,000** visitors annually.
- Over **7,500** people have subscribed to the Net Zero Nation email to date.
- The majority of the traffic to the site in 2024 has been driven through people naturally searching on Google, demonstrating the relevance of the site's content and importance outside of the LDNZ marketing campaign.
- The percentage of return visitors **doubled** in 2024 (compared to 2023), further indicating people's interest in the content.
- The percentage of referral traffic has increased to **11%** in 2024 (7% in 2023), suggesting partners and other messengers are including a link to the website in their communications, indicating the value of the content.

4.2 Climate Week

4.2.1 Background and summary of delivery

Scotland's Climate Week is a Scottish Government-led annual series of events that highlights the importance and urgency of tackling climate change and celebrates all the positive climate action being taken across the country to help inspire further collective, transformative change.

Established in 2016, Climate Week in support of the PES has grown from being an internally facing Scottish Government initiative to involving engagement from a wide range of stakeholders including local government, public bodies, the third and private sectors, as well as individuals and communities.

Climate Week has also expanded to become a cross-government initiative, incorporating policy areas such as health, culture and transport, that face

decarbonisation and climate resilience challenges. External activity is increasingly wide ranging, involving such organisations as the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, Caledonian Macbrayne and the Scotch Whisky Association. In addition, since their inception Community Climate Action Hubs have increasingly become engaged with the Week helping their local communities to participate.

Each year Climate Week has a different theme designed to inspire and engage the public. In advance and during Climate Week the Scottish Government delivers a marketing campaign to generate activity around the theme from individuals and organisations. The marketing programme encourages social media activity from partners using *#ScotClimateWeek* to showcase action from across the country on climate change. Marketing materials also include toolkits to assist engagement by trusted messengers such as schools, libraries, and third-sector organisations. Budget is typically spent on paid-for marketing to amplify this activity. Climate Week has also occasionally involved engagement events directly delivered by Scottish Government.

A summary of Climate Week activities for the past 3 years since the launch of the PES, and the associated budgets spent, is at [Annex A](#).



First Minister John Swinney announces the new Scottish National Adaptation Plan at Fife Renewables Centre during Climate Week 2024

4.2.2 Summary of outcomes and learning

Scotland's Climate Week 2024 proved to be the most successful yet, exceeding several of the engagement targets set:

Delivered	Target
Across the week, 4,489 unique visits were recorded to the Net Zero Nation website	3,500
396 downloads were made of the Climate Week toolkits	200
3,588 uses of the campaign hashtag	2000
2,417 new followers on social media (Instagram, Facebook and LinkedIn)	680

A key aim of Climate Week is to encourage external organisations to participate and amplify messages via social media and other platforms. Through experience of delivery Scottish Government has learned that wider themes on climate stories and conversations have typically resulted in more partner activity than narrower sector-specific themes such as transport and heating. Increased partner activity and interest can support a virtuous circle, as they provide early support to improve marketing resources the following year.

Close collaboration across climate engagement, policy, communications and marketing activities, including strengthening connections between Climate Week and the Let's Do Net Zero campaign, has improved efficiency and established Climate Week as a strong cross-government effort.

The aim of encouraging a wide range of engagement during Climate Week is not only to build understanding of the changes needed to become a net zero, climate ready nation, but to demonstrate the action the Scottish Government is already taking and the collective action taking place across public sector, business, local government, communities and individuals. This spectrum of activity, within and outwith government, can serve to ease climate anxiety and motivate further individual and collective action.

4.3 Climate Engagement Fund

4.3.1 Background and summary of delivery

Due to the importance placed on the role of trusted messengers within the PES, the Scottish Government re-considered its approach to awarding climate engagement grants in order to increase innovation in approaches, reach new audiences and drive value for money. This involved the development of a competitive annual funding programme, the Climate Engagement Fund (CEF), which launched with a pilot in 2023.

Whilst the CEF was in development, two trusted messenger organisations, Eco-Congregations Scotland and Climate 2050 Group, received grant funding under the PES in 2021 and 2022 to engage their audiences on climate change. Summary of their activities and impacts are at Annex B.

The Climate Engagement Fund (CEF) supports external organisations to lead engagement programmes with specific groups and communities that they have an established and trusted relationship with. The Fund seeks to deliver against the PES

commitment to maintain an inclusive and accessible approach to climate engagement, including working with these trusted messengers to reach people not currently engaged on the topic.

In 2023-24 the initial pilot of the Fund was launched with a budget of £550,000. 8 projects were selected from 129 applications received, with grants between £50,000 and £80,000.

In 2024 the total budget was £272,000. 8 projects were selected for funding from a total of 173 applications. Awards ranged from £26,730 to £47,111 with projects to be delivered between June 2024 and March 2025. A list of the funded projects across both rounds is at Annex C.

4.3.2 Summary of outcomes & learning

Since its inception, the CEF has funded 16 climate engagement projects, reaching over 8,000 people in 2023-24, and over 7,000 people between June and December 2024 (with 2024 projects still live at the time of writing). The projects have covered a diverse geographical spread of communities, including coastal, island, rural and urban areas, and have reached a huge range of audiences including children and young people in areas of deprivation, and scientists and academics leading the conversation on climate communication.

Following the pilot, a review considered the reporting provided by each project on their delivered activities in 2023-24. It concluded that all 8 organisations had a positive impact on communities across Scotland by engaging new audiences, increasing understanding of the climate emergency, and encouraging climate action.

Across the 8 projects, 6,000 people were informed about the action that Scotland is taking to tackle climate change and how it relates to their lives. The projects sought to improve understanding of climate change among diverse audiences using a range of engagement methods, from interactive arts exhibitions to social media. The review also indicated that, as a result of the 8 CEF projects, over 8,000 people were encouraged to take, or did take, action on climate change. This was often achieved through projects that included practical workshops (for example on improving sustainability of historic buildings) or that highlighted the economic opportunities of the net zero transition (such as promoting green skills and careers to young people). Participants in Edinburgh Science's Climate Leadership Courses for community leaders and teachers reported feeling more motivated, inspired, positive and ready to talk about climate action, and to take action themselves.

“My confidence has increased around climate change now. I know how to talk about it and how to get other people interested in making small changes”

Feedback from ‘Out of the Box’ project participant

Some projects reported impacts on achieving climate action would be felt beyond the lifetime of the project, for example where projects facilitated or inspired future collaboration at an organisational level between sectors and agencies in an area.

The use of the arts and other creative methods to engage and communicate on climate change was a recommendation of the People's Panel (which also called for more face-to face engagement), and was also highlighted by Millar et al (2025). There are examples of such approaches being used in the CEF projects. These could be built upon in future years to engage new audiences and ensure broad understanding of how climate change relates to people's lives in Scotland, in line with the Strategic Objectives in the PES.



Children enjoying the quilting exhibit (left) and the behaviour change pledge booth (right) at the National Museum in Edinburgh during CEF delivery 2023-24

4.4 Climate Action Schools

4.4.1 Background and summary of delivery

The PES outlines Scottish Government's commitment to embedding climate change education within Scotland's schools. This has been done through supporting and promoting the cross-cutting curriculum theme of Learning for Sustainability. The PES committed that Scottish Government would continue to support climate change education, empowering teachers, learners, and their wider school communities to take environmental action.

During the PES period, Curriculum and Climate Engagement policy have continued to co-fund the national Eco-Schools and Climate Ready Classrooms project run by Keep Scotland Beautiful (KSB), now named Climate Action Schools. The Climate Action Schools framework of education initiatives is designed to support Scotland's educators, young people and children to progress Learning for Sustainability and climate change education. It includes a wide range of activities for pupils, schools and educators including opportunities to share learning with schools across Scotland and internationally; professional learning and training; and engagement through arts and heritage.

4.4.2 Summary of impacts and learning

To date, achievements include:

- during the launch year 2019-20, the Climate Ready Classroom initiative was delivered to 798 young people across 44 schools. This grew to 1,129 pupils by 2020-23 and by 2023-24 over 6,990 pupils participated in the initiative. To date, over 10,500 pupils have taken part in Climate Ready Classrooms Primary or Secondary
- ‘Train the Trainer’ sessions, which qualify teachers to reteach materials to their students, has grown from 5 sessions in 2019-20 to 195 teachers trained in 2020-22.
- 21,125 pupils across all 32 local authorities attended live lessons (29 delivered) in 2023-24
- in 2023-24 1,160 schools were involved in at least one Climate Action Schools activity.

Keep Scotland Beautiful’s annual impact reports also include qualitative evidence from participants of Climate Action Schools, to demonstrate the positive impact of the programme on pupils, educators and local communities:

“I have learnt that taking care of our planet doesn’t only mean helping to sustain the natural environment, but also means helping to ensure all people have equality [and a better standard of living].”

High school pupil, Glasgow City, 2023-24

“Liked that [Climate Ready Classrooms for Primary] taught us something that is important to the world, and that change needs to happen now. Gave us the tools to solve the climate change problems in our school.” Educator, Loudon-Montgomery Primary School, 2022-23

Climate Action Schools has delivered continuous, national and impactful activities in support of climate education and action, to help children, young people and educators develop their climate literacy and identify opportunities to take positive climate action.

4.5 Understand: reflections and implications

The evidence presented above indicates that the Scottish Government has delivered on its commitments as outlined in the PES to communicate on climate change in a way that is positive and accessible, and to work through trusted messengers to reach wider audiences. The activities delivered under this pillar represent a mixed approach to achieving the PES objective. The approach combines mass communications with more in-depth work via trusted messengers to smaller, target audiences.

Available evidence on effective climate change public engagement indicates that this mixed approach is appropriate when seeking to communicate on and improve public understanding about climate change. The challenge, however, is determining the extent to which the activities undertaken represent the optimal way to deliver this approach. There is evidence to suggest there are some areas which could be further developed in the remainder of this PES delivery period and beyond.

The stakeholder survey, public engagement evidence review, and People's Panel report all suggest that the public want to see more mass communication and more visible leadership on climate change from the Scottish Government. People want clearer communication on the practical actions and local opportunities they can take to tackle climate change.

While the survey sample is not representative of the public, it is notable that the Let's Do Net Zero marketing campaign and Net Zero Nation website had low levels of recognition among the 67 respondents to the stakeholder survey, with around a third reporting having never heard of them. This suggests more could be done to improve the reach and frequency of Scottish Government communications on climate change particularly amongst trusted messengers who can refer to and share these with their audiences. This would strengthen the multiplier effect of the mixed approach taken under the PES.

On the types of messaging that help achieve the PES objective, evidence suggests that while positive messaging and success stories are seen as important, people want to hear more on the urgency of the situation from Government. In their public engagement evidence review, Millar et al. (2025) also suggests that this honesty about the climate crisis needs to be balanced with communication on the practical actions people can take, and the co-benefits of those. Close consideration of the findings of this review when developing the next phase of the communications strategy (including future marketing campaigns) will be important.

Working through trusted messengers as a means of communicating on climate change is supported by stakeholders and members of the public who participated in the research used for this review. Many see the value of engaging at a very local level to make messages relatable, particularly focusing on co-benefits and how climate action can impact poverty and inequality. Stakeholders however highlighted the need for more support, training and funding for trusted messenger organisations to provide meaningful leadership on climate change among their audiences. Scottish Government could do more to share resources and evidence, and communicate directly with trusted messengers on policy priorities and direction to help ensure engagement delivery is well-informed.

It is important to acknowledge that the scale of activity delivered through both marketing and trusted messenger funding was much reduced from the level initially envisaged. While evidence on improving public understanding on climate change at the national level is limited, and difficult to attribute to specific interventions, budget constraints are clearly likely to have limited what could be achieved.

5. Participate: Enabling Participation in Policy Design

Our Strategic Objective

People actively participate in shaping just, fair and inclusive policies that promote mitigation of and adaptation to climate change

The PES committed to improving the way people are able to participate in climate change policymaking, in line with Scottish Government's [Open Government Action Plan](#). The PES states: "*it is vital that constructive dialogue with people and communities is at the heart of developing climate policy*". The PES also outlined an ambition to deliver "*an innovative, comprehensive and consistent approach to participation in climate change policymaking*".

Delivery against this objective has been achieved through several routes. Scotland's Climate Assembly took place over 2020-2021 with legacy work continuing into 2022. This legacy project involved £20,000 funding in 2022-23 for support to establish a members network. The project provided training and mentoring for members for a short period of time, to enable their work as ambassadors for the process and their recommendations, and to continue to increase wider awareness and impact of the process. Following that, the Climate Change Participation Programme has worked to inform the development of specific Scottish Government climate policies and plans. Facilitation of the Climate Policy Engagement Network (CPEN) has also provided opportunities for participation and dialogue with a range of climate and non-climate civil society organisations.

5.1 Learning from Scotland's Climate Assembly

5.1.1 Background

A citizens' assembly is a group of people who are brought together to learn about and discuss an issue, and reach conclusions about what they think should happen. The Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2019 required Scottish Ministers to establish a citizens' assembly on climate change. Scotland's Climate Assembly brought together over 100 individuals, representative of the Scottish population, to learn about, discuss, and make recommendations in response to their agreed question: 'how should Scotland change to tackle the climate emergency in an effective and fair way?'

The Assembly published their [report](#) on 23 June 2021, which included the Statement of Ambition, 16 goals and 81 associated recommendations with supporting statements, as well as 42 Calls to Action from the Children's Parliament. As per the Climate Change Act, the Scottish Government was required to respond by 23 December 2021 and the response was published on 16 December 2021.

The PES committed to apply lessons from Scotland's Climate Assembly to develop further deliberative approaches to public engagement across climate change and environmental policy. A summary of these lessons is outlined below.

5.1.2 Summary of outcomes and learning

Independent [research](#) was conducted into the Assembly. This research had several objectives including to: support continuous improvement in the delivery of the Assembly whilst in process; evaluate the success of the Assembly as a deliberative process; and assess the impact of the Assembly on climate change debate and policy in Scotland.

The research concludes that, on the whole, the Assembly was successful as a deliberative process. It also flags that many features of the Assembly were designed to optimise its impact, noting:

- The Secretariat remained in post beyond the end of the Assembly enabling them to promote the Assembly recommendations within the Scottish Government.
- The Civic Charter mobilised some stakeholders and civil society groups to support the Assembly recommendations.
- Assembly members and Government Ministers were brought into discussion together, via a Q&A session, over the government response to the Assembly as part of an additional Assembly session after the response was published.

However, the review makes clear the limitations of the Assembly in terms of its impact on subsequent policy decisions: *“The Scottish Government response is comprehensive, but the way it is written makes it difficult to identify exactly what impact the Assembly has had on policy, and no evidence of Assembly impact was found in other policy documents analysed.”*

The review notes that the timing and scope of Assembly recommendations are likely to have limited its policy impact, i.e. they were very wide-ranging and the time of publication did not align with the development of climate policies which could have integrated them. The report also highlights that the Assembly made recommendations for policies which already exist, or are outwith devolved competency, and suggest including a critical review of existing Scottish Government climate change policy within the Assembly process could have avoided this.

Overall the independent report concluded that the Climate Assembly was a successful deliberative process from which valuable learning was taken which could help shape and strengthen future participation activities. However, the lack of ability to track the impact of the outcomes on Scottish Government climate change policy is a significant weakness in terms of progress towards the Participate objective of the PES. The Assembly recommendations will continue to be a source of evidence for climate policy development.

5.2 Participation Programme

5.2.1 Background and summary of delivery

The Climate Change Participation Programme (begun in December 2022) has involved a series of participative projects delivering events and engagements to

gather views and ideas from people across Scotland. It has a distinct aim of encouraging wide participation in policy-making particularly from people who are likely to be significantly impacted by the net zero transition. The outputs from the programme have fed into the development of specific Scottish Government climate change policies and plans. Between 2023 and 2024, over £400,000 was provided to support participative activities to inform climate policy.

In 2023 and 2024, the Participation Programme followed three phases and had a particular, but not exclusive, focus on just transition planning (JTPs) in three key sectors – transport, the built environment and construction, and land use and agriculture. Phase 1 focused on identifying key principles and objectives of a just transition in these sectors as well as key issues, challenges, and opportunities. Participants were drawn from a wide range of representative organisations to help policymakers develop an understanding of the needs of different groups across society. Further details on these workshops are available [here](#).

Scottish Government then published a series of [discussion papers](#) that drew on the findings from these workshops, set out the learning, and included questions to address in future events. This led to Phase 2 of the Participation Programme where Scottish Government worked with a number of partners to deliver an extensive programme of online and in-person events. This included workshops with the public sector; business; the construction sector; and representative organisations supporting people with specific protected characteristics or interests. The aim of this phase was to draw out the priorities and needs of different groups affected by the net zero transition, and ensure that the Just Transition Plans, and wider Scottish Government policy, draw on a diverse range of perspectives.

Phase 3, undertaken in early to mid-2024, sought to build on the outcomes of Phase 2, and to consider specific issues in more depth.

Over 2,000 people were engaged throughout the three phases of the programme . This included approximately 460 young people, at least 50 from “hard to reach” groups, and over 50 Gaelic speakers. An estimated 30% of individuals were rural residents, based on available participant data. At least 270 organisations were represented across public and private sector.

In addition to facilitated events, the Scottish Government’s Climate Participation and Engagement Network (CPEN) was used to seek views from a wide network of representative organisations. ClimateXChange also commissioned Ipsos to undertake a [deliberative research project](#) with a focus group to consider how the costs and benefits associated with the net zero transition may be fairly distributed. A Just Transition Engagement mailbox was also set up for written submissions.

The Just Transition planning process is still underway. The JTPs that were the focus of the participation programme are under development, taking into account the outputs of the engagement, with the participation programme continuing to operate in support of climate policy across just transition, mitigation and adaptation.

The Scottish National Adaptation Plan (SNAP3) was published in draft in January 2024 for a 12 week period of public consultation. Over 50 stakeholder events were

arranged, with support through the Participation Programme, to allow groups across Scotland, particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, to feed into the draft and to respond to key consultation questions (post publication). The Glasgow Disability Alliance hosted a workshop with over 40 of its members to consider the impacts of climate change on disabled people. Events were also held with residents in five places around Scotland– Annan, Montrose, Golspie, South Uist and Glasgow - with support from local community climate action hubs,. This extensive approach helped triple engagement levels compared to the previous Adaptation Plan, and ensure that the new Plan met its strategic approach to have a community-led, place-based focus to the overall policy package and implementation period.

5.2.2 Summary of outcomes and learning

Outputs from the programme have been, and continue to be taken into consideration for just transition planning and policy development. For example, outputs on reducing private car usage through such mechanisms as road user charging and car sharing, helped to inform [the 20% car km reduction route-map](#) and the draft Transport Just Transition Plan. In addition, questions set out in the consultation on the draft Transport Just Transition Plan seeks to build on the outputs of the participation programme and test policy solutions.

Scottish Government has also recognised the benefits of capacity building among participants, noting that more deliberative engagement approaches allowed for deeper discussions, and input from experts, leading to more informed stakeholder input. This was observed in the approach adopted by Ipsos in their research.

It should be noted that a lack of demographic data on participants in the Participation Programme makes it difficult to determine how far all groups have been represented.

Finally, Scottish Government recognise the need for more consistency in how the results of these engagements, and responses to the recommendations produced, are communicated back out to participants and the wider public. There is opportunity to improve this through delivery of phase 4 of the Participation Programme which will involve engagement and events in support of formal consultations on the draft Just Transition Plans.

5.3 Climate Policy Engagement Network (CPEN)

5.3.1 Background and summary of delivery

CPEN represents Scottish Government’s climate commitment within the [Open Government Action Plan 2021-25](#) to “*establish a stakeholder network to deliver on participation and engagement requirements across key milestones for climate change policy*”.

Scotland is a member of the Open Government Network, an international collaboration of governments across the world committed to openness, transparency and public involvement.

CPEN, originally also known as the Open Government Network, was launched in January 2023. An initial core group of stakeholders co-created the network’s Terms of Reference. CPEN currently has around 130 representatives from both climate and

non-climate organisations, including the public sector, equalities groups, community organisations and academia. As such, they collectively represent a range of geographies and demographics in Scotland.

The purpose of the network is to enable members to:

- Participate directly in engagement activities to support policy development, on behalf of the audience and memberships they represent
- Advise on Scottish Government engagement plans, based on their expertise and experience of previous engagement activity

The objectives of the network are to:

- Reach diverse audiences via representatives of trusted messenger organisations
- Provide a forum for direct engagement between these organisations / individuals and climate policymakers
- Consolidate stakeholder networks into a single, streamlined network that allows for collaboration between organisations with different interests and of different size

Communication with the network is undertaken via a dynamic online platform where members can share information and feedback on opportunities, put forward by Scottish Government officials.

5.3.2 Summary of outcomes and learning

Delivery of CPEN is measured against a series of milestones, included within Scotland's Open Government Action Plan 2021-25 and published on the [Open Government page](#) of the Scottish Government website.

Milestone: Deliver biannual network meetings

Progress: Biannual online network meetings provide space for discussion, feedback, review and forward planning. The first biannual members network meeting was held in February 2024, attended by 27 members. The second was held on 10 December, with 11 attendees.

Milestone: Ensure a robust network

Progress: Officials continually evaluate the progress and success of the network including by listening to member feedback, ensuring continued engagement, relevancy and assessing Scottish Government/members' satisfaction with the network's functions.

Milestone: Develop opportunities for CPEN members to contribute to the Scottish Government's wider climate change policy development

Progress: Since its inception in 2023 CPEN members have contributed to the following policy areas/publications:

- Climate Change Adaptation/[Scottish National Adaptation Plan 3](#)
- Water/Wastewater and Flooding/[National Flood Resilience Strategy](#)
- Circular Economy/single use disposable cups levy

- Climate Change Engagement/[Climate Engagement Fund](#)
- Just Transition planning

Officials are engaged in a programme of internal promotion of CPEN to increase opportunities available to members to contribute to Scottish Government policy development.

Milestone: Develop opportunities for CPEN members to contribute to Scottish Government Just Transition Plans

Progress: During 2023, CPEN members made early contributions to just transition engagement plans and shaped SG approach to place-based engagement.

During 2024, CPEN members contributed to the sectoral Just Transition Plans on Land Use and Agriculture, and Transport. Activity covered place-based engagement, plus business and public sector, and industry-specific engagement sessions. This included a session on the engagement plan for the Transport Just Transition Plan, delivered in September 2024.

Milestone: Develop opportunities for CPEN members to contribute to the Scottish Government Climate Change Plan

Progress: The Scottish Government announced a delay to the draft CCP publication in November 2023. Prior to this, plans were under development to involve CPEN members in early engagement on defining key issues and shaping CCP engagement plans.

Following the passage of the Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2024, the next CCP will be published as soon as possible after SG receives CCC (Climate Change Committee) advice and carbon budgets have been set.

CPEN is a key CCP stakeholder network that will feature in engagement plans for CCP development during 2025.

CPEN has mostly delivered against its objectives and milestones. Members have received feedback on the tangible impact that their contributions have made, including on the engagement plan for the Transport Just Transition Plan.

An [independent mid-term appraisal](#) of the Scottish Government's progress against its Open Government commitments was undertaken in Spring 2024. The report notes that CPEN has been successfully established and a wide range of members engaged. The network faced several challenges to clarify the purpose and value to members. The report also identified key barriers including internal promotion of the network, and capacity available for the management of CPEN. The report supported CPEN as a valuable opportunity for dynamic engagement within the PES delivery programme, with a wide range of stakeholders and their respective networks.

Members have also offered feedback on the progress and value of the network. In particular, members consistently highlight the need for feedback on how their contributions have been considered by officials or impacted upon policy development and engagement plans. There have also been requests for more opportunities to engage early in the policy development process, rather than make contributions at the consultation stage, and members have welcomed input into engagement planning.

There are also differences in how members consider the role of CPEN as a vehicle for feeding in to climate policy development and engagement. Officials expect that smaller or non-climate organisations will see greater value in inter-member engagement on the network. Larger organisations, perhaps already involved in other climate networks, may not realise the same benefits.

CPEN is an agile, low-cost engagement tool that allows direct communication between officials and key stakeholders. For the CPEN to further develop in support of the delivery of the PES, further resources and capacity from Scottish Government, civil society and members would be needed to increase activity and drive content that would be beneficial to the climate engagement and policy community.

5.4 Participate: Reflections and Implications

The evidence outlined above shows some progress has been made to achieving the 'Participate' objective and delivering commitments in the PES under this pillar.

Since the publication of the PES, significant lessons have been learnt on the theory and practice of participatory and deliberative methods of public engagement for climate change policy-making. Evidence suggests care has been taken to ensure events are accessible, inclusive and well-facilitated, and steps are being taken to make further improvements going forward. The importance of the participant experience is emphasised in Millar et al.'s (2025) public engagement evidence review, and it is apparent that Scottish Government has done this well. Respondents to the stakeholder survey noted that they appreciated being involved early on in the policy making process.

The approach taken to delivering the Participate objective has largely been Scottish Government-led, often with support from external organisations to enable the views of target audiences, interest groups, and under-represented voices to inform the development of specific climate policies. Taking such an approach, as Millar et al. (2025) suggest, is more likely to produce outcomes which impact policy-making than deliberative methods with a broader remit and over which the participants arguably have greater ownership.

A clear challenge to this approach is evidencing impact on policy outcomes. Millar et al. (2025) underline the importance of policy makers meaningfully engaging with the outputs and recommendations from participatory activities and explaining to participants how these will be acted upon. It is notable that less than half (45%) of the 67 respondents to the stakeholder survey felt they had had meaningful opportunity to participate in policy development, and many commented negatively on their experience of participation. This included feelings of over-consultation and a lack of clarity on how their participation in the design-stage led to meaningful action by Scottish Government.

There is a need to improve communication about the purpose and outcomes of participation back to participants and the wider public. To achieve the Participate objective of the PES, there is also a need to consider the barriers to maximising impact of public participation on policy outcomes. This includes how far participation exercises are designed to align with and feed into specific stages of policy-making processes.

In their public engagement evidence review, Millar et al. (2025) reflect that participatory and deliberative methods often help to improve participants' understanding of climate change and increase motivation to take action. While use of these methods has been focused on delivering the Participate objective within the PES, it may be worth considering how they could also be applied to strengthening delivery against the Understand and Act objectives.

Engagement led by representative bodies as trusted messengers has also provided valuable insights on the challenges that climate change could pose to specific groups in society, and in enabling broader participation in policy development, including from people who would be unlikely to engage directly with Government.

Climate Policy Co-design in Action

Another example of stakeholder organisations participating in climate change policy design was provided by a respondent to the stakeholder survey. This involved the co-production of statutory guidance for Public Bodies Climate Change Duties¹ which the respondent described as:

“a really successful endeavour. Bringing together various public sector bodies in open discussion with Scottish Government has meant shared learning, appreciation of unique sector challenges, opportunities for collaboration”

There is also evidence to suggest the value of a more localised approach to delivering the Participate objective alongside the national programme of activity. As described in more detail in the 'Act' section of this report, there is evidence that the Community Climate Action Hubs have played an important role in facilitating connections between community voices and decision-making platforms. Capacity building for participation in local democracy is an area which could be built upon. Many respondents to the stakeholder survey referenced more local engagement, particularly in rural areas, and involving local authorities, third sector, communities and volunteers.

Finally, a commitment within the PES was to deliver a new strategic approach to including children and young people in climate change policy-making. Several respondents to the stakeholder survey mentioned a need for more engagement with young people. While much engagement work has involved hearing from children and young people, including the work with the Children's Parliament as part of the Climate Assembly and specific policy engagement with the Scottish Youth Parliament and Children's Parliament, there is work to be done to ensure a strategic approach to this PES commitment as part of the Participate objectives.

¹ Climate change duties were placed on public bodies by the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, and applied from 2011. The statutory guidance is about how the duties should be implemented, and how bodies can demonstrate compliance with them. The draft guidance is open for [consultation](#) from 24 February to 23 May 2025 with the aim to publish the final guidance by the end of 2025.

6. Act: Encouraging Action

Strategic Objective

Taking action on climate change is normalised and encouraged in households, communities and places across Scotland

The PES recognises that change often starts at a local level and that there is a critical role for community action to play in achieving our objective of shifting social norms and increasing climate literacy across the population.

To help achieve this strategic objective, the PES committed to continue to champion and fund community-led and trusted messenger-led climate action, and promote a place-based approach to behaviour change.

While much of the activity outlined under the Understand and Participate objectives above will impact on the Act objective, this section largely focuses on the community and place-based work delivered since the publication of the PES. This is because the Community Climate Action Hubs programme specifically has become a key vehicle for delivering climate change public engagement, working with communities across Scotland.

The Climate Action Towns initiative, which ran between 2021 and 2024, and was delivered by Architecture and Design Scotland, provided important learning on place-based climate action. A summary of delivery and learning is outlined at 6.1 below. The Climate Action Hubs programme is discussed at 6.2. The available evidence provides rich learning on the theory and practice of community climate action.

6.1 Climate Action Towns

6.1.1 Background and summary of delivery

The aim of the Climate Action Towns initiative, as outlined in the PES, was to empower and support communities to take action on climate change in a way that takes account of the unique challenges and opportunities each town faces. The project received a total of £721,000 across the 3 years of delivery. Architecture and Design Scotland (ADS) worked with communities and other stakeholders in nine small towns across Scotland to identify the best ways to embed climate actions in those places. The towns were selected using a data-driven approach that took account of such factors as population, level of existing climate action, climate risk, and level of deprivation. The project used creative approaches to deliver workshops and events and bring partners together. There was a focus on developing the conditions and capacity needed to enable community-led place-based climate action.

6.1.2 Summary of outcomes and learning

The Climate Action Towns project highlights the value of place-based working in identifying climate action that reflects differing local circumstances and capacity. Across the 9 towns, climate action was interpreted very widely and strong local interests emerged in diverse aspects including bio-diversity and active travel. Using a local lens to consider climate impacts was felt to be important as these were considered more tangible and of a scale on which people feel they can act.

In relation to working from where people are at, ADS highlighted the value of engaging communities on climate action in the context of their wider priorities, notably the cost of living crisis, which may feel more relevant to people's daily lives.

Embedding climate action in a Local Place Plan or Community Action Plan was seen as crucial for maximising and sustaining impact. Relatedly, ADS flagged the value of working across sectors to produce greater impacts on climate aims.

From delivering the programme, ADS produced a [Toolkit](#) which provides a range of ideas and activities to support place-based community-led climate action. These work through different stages of the process, from "tools for getting started", which include resources to help with stakeholder mapping and understanding local climate risks, to tools for "making climate action happen". These tools include advice on how to develop workable plans within the perimeters of local decision making structures to ensure a greater chance of making climate actions happen.

Case Study:

"[ADS] engaged with the community using methods like the Place Standard with a Climate Lens and games that encouraged idea generation. West Lothian Council saw the value of this approach and, as a result, the questions from the Place Standard with a Climate Lens have now been rolled out in Community Action Plan surveys...Working collaboratively with Community Action Blackburn and West Lothian Council, [ADS] supported the inclusion of climate actions in the Blackburn Future Plan and a consideration of adaptation in the Blackburn Place Plan."
Blackburn, West Lothian: a Climate Action Town

It is clear from the project reports that doing this kind of intensive, ground-up, place-based engagement is impactful but can be challenging and time-consuming. In some areas, the project encountered local 'gatekeeping' which proved a barrier to engaging with the local community. ADS learnt that having a presence in the community and taking time to build trust was an important starting point.

ADS also worked to create connections between different parts of a local authority area and community groups. These connections and working relationships were found to be essential to delivering a whole place collaborative approach, and to avoid climate action sitting in a silo.

ADS identified that strong community capacity is critical for delivering climate action in a place. As a result, ADS spent a lot of time on capacity building in order for climate action to be instigated. They noted that, while communities are interested in climate action, many struggle to maintain momentum in the face of different

priorities. Where funding is available to support a dedicated resource, they found action to be more consistent.

6.2 Climate Action Hubs

6.2.1 Background & summary of delivery to date

Since the launch of the PES the Scottish Government has supported the development of a network of Climate Action Hubs in communities across Scotland.

To test the hubs concept two “pathfinder” hubs were launched in September 2021: one in the Highlands and Islands, and one in the North East. Since then, the hubs network has grown to 24 hubs covering all local authority areas of Scotland, with the final two approved in October 2024.

The hubs provide a vehicle for communities to come together and engage in collective climate action. The approach and activity in each area is tailored to local circumstances and has evolved as the hubs have developed. This has included delivering public events, training and workshops; providing advice, support, and seed funding to local groups; collaborating with local agencies in policy design; and contributing community views to local and national consultations.

Hubs are local experts with direct connections to thousands of community organisations and cross-sector partners like local authorities, health boards, and education bodies.

While the hubs' primary focus is climate action, encompassing areas like energy, transport, and waste, their work is deeply people- and community-centered. This approach broadens the potential for joint outcomes across sectors such as health, employability, resilience, and tackling inequalities.

With support from Scottish Government officials, the hubs also have opportunities to learn from each other and feed insights and concerns back to Government.



Acting Minister for Climate Action, Dr Alasdair Allan, visited East Lothian Climate Action Hub to learn how they are helping the local community to take action in tackling climate change.

6.2.2 Summary of outcomes & learning

Since the work of each hub is focused on delivering priorities identified locally, and given that the hubs are at varying stages of development, there is currently limited quantitative evidence on the outcomes of the hubs programme as a whole.

The network expanded in 2023-24 with each hub working to its own specific deliverables based on the requirements of their area. In 2023-24:

- **18 of the 20 hubs** undertook extensive mapping of existing groups and activity, gaps analysis and in depth engagement with groups to understand local priorities and where they could add the most value
- They delivered over **190 workshops** and in depth climate literacy training to more than 3,700 community representatives
- 3 hubs held festivals with over 290 events reaching at least **12,000 people**
- Over 590 groups were provided with 1-1 support and advice
- £700k was distributed in seed funding or via community delivery partners to **425 projects** covering a range of themes including climate engagement, climate anxiety among young people, community growing, biodiversity, learning and skill sharing, climate and the arts, green health, and the circular economy.
- They built **local resources** such as on active travel, nature and biodiversity, district heat networks, community energy schemes and flooding.
- The hubs worked to amplify **community voices** by supporting the development of local place plans and engaging on consultations such as SNAP3, the Heat in Buildings Bill, and Good Food Nation.

Their outputs have helped achieve a range of outcomes closely tied to the strategic objectives of the PES including:

- Improving climate change understanding and engagement to build confidence and capacity
- Increasing community level adaptation and climate mitigation action
- Empowering local communities to influence policy and decision making
- Driving possible future innovations or opportunities

A Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework was developed at the end of the 2023/24 financial year and will guide the work of the hubs going forward. The key outcomes are linked to the PES objectives, and data gathered using this framework will inform the end of PES review.

The most detailed learning and insights on the impacts of the hubs to date comes from an [independent evaluation](#) of the two pathfinder hubs completed in 2024. The study reviewed data from progress reports and gathered qualitative data from a range of stakeholders. Key evidence from the report is summarised below: -

- **Community education:** the report concludes that the hubs do extremely well in organising climate events and using innovative methods to engage the public, also noting: “the hubs’ educational initiatives and training programmes significantly enhance the community’s capacity to understand and tackle climate change, with a special emphasis on developing skills for effective action”

- **Influencing policy:** the report notes a key role of the hubs in facilitating connections between community voices and decision-making platforms
- **Engaging community voices:** by organising citizens' assemblies and public meetings, the hubs are “fostering a sense of ownership and active participation in climate action”
- **Connecting communities with Scottish Government:** the report flags: “Many stakeholders have reported challenges in establishing direct contact with various departments within the Scottish Government, and identified the hubs as crucial intermediaries in this respect, enabling community groups to voice their concerns, proposals, and feedback directly to the government.”
- **Community capacity building:** the report highlights the effective role of the hub development officers in providing “motivation, direction, and personalised support that catalyses community and organisational activities.. and increased community involvement and enthusiasm for climate initiatives.”
- **Seed funding:** providing seed funding and facilitating funding applications are also flagged as crucial activities, empowering local organisations to initiate and sustain climate action projects

Crucially in terms of the effectiveness of the hubs as a means of achieving the objectives of the PES, the pathfinder evaluation suggests that the hub approach is a particularly impactful delivery model, noting:

“The strategic development of community networks enhances collaboration and knowledge sharing, amplifying the impact of climate initiatives across diverse groups.”

Significantly, the report also highlights the hubs’ ability to work creatively and innovatively, and to achieve considerable impacts with limited resources.

The evaluation indicates that the hubs have achieved significant impacts to date and are clearly helping deliver across all of the strategic objectives of the PES, most notably on ‘Act’. The evaluation makes some key recommendations for the climate hubs which have been built into the programme as it has expanded: to reach out to non-traditional audiences; to seek additional funding and support to scale up successful initiatives and to increase support for place-based resilience planning; and to improve regional collaboration by strengthening relationships with local authorities and key partners. Some key risks are also identified, in particular the short-term funding environment which ultimately limits what the hubs can achieve. This was noted as leading to a high-turnover of staff and risking a loss of momentum in what the hubs are delivering.

6.3 ACT: Reflections and Implications

Through the delivery of the Climate Action Towns programme, and principally the development of a national network of Climate Action Hubs, Scottish Government has delivered against the commitment outlined in the PES to continue to invest in community-led activities and place-based working in order to encourage and normalise climate action at a local level.

It is clear from the evidence outlined above that much has been learnt about the benefits of supporting community-level climate action which confirms and builds upon the evidence base of the PES. This approach to delivering on the 'Act' objective of the PES makes issues relatable, providing a sense of local ownership over climate action. The importance of working through established local networks or embedded organisations to galvanise action was emphasised in the Climate Action Towns learning, an approach which the Hubs model puts into practice.

There is also much learning from what has been delivered in this period on the challenges of working at a community level. Enabling meaningful community-led action is long-term and intensive, requiring significant support to build capacity in some areas to ensure equitable coverage.

Evidence from the stakeholder survey, focus groups for the public engagement evidence review, as well as the People's Panel report, all indicate that investment in local action is popular and people would like to see more funding and support for work at this level. The short-term funding environment was flagged as a challenge by the Hubs Pathfinder evaluation, and this is reiterated by the People's Panel report and stakeholder survey respondents. The People's Panel specifically call for "*longer-term funding in a timely fashion to help the expansion and increase of climate hubs. This should guarantee secure funding to adequately resource climate hubs – with a minimum of 3-5 years*".

To increase impact on the Act objective, for the remainder of the PES implementation period it will be important to consider how to maximise the sharing of learning and stories of success and inspiration between the Hubs and beyond.

7. Conclusion

This mid-point review has provided an opportunity to consider progress; take stock of achievements, lessons, and challenges; and reflect on the overall approach being taken to deliver the strategic objectives in the Public Engagement Strategy.

To address the first research question set out at section 1, this report has provided an overview of the key activities delivered over the period since the publication of the PES in September 2021, up to December 2024 (where data has been available). To address research question 2, this report has brought together available evidence on the outcomes achieved across the different areas of work and proposed how these have helped progress towards the three strategic objectives of the PES. While there are clear limitations in the extent to which this impact can be measured at a national level (as detailed at section 3.1), it is possible to draw some conclusions as to the effectiveness of the approach taken to delivering the PES. The findings largely confirm that the approach taken by Scottish Government to deliver the PES is consistent with the wider evidence base, while also providing suggestions on ways to improve and develop.

To deliver the **understand** objective, this review has highlighted that the approach taken by Scottish Government to date combines mass communications with more in-depth work via trusted messengers with smaller, target audiences. The wider evidence base, including recommendations from the People's Panel and the public engagement evidence review by Millar et al (2025), confirm this to be an effective and popular approach. However, this review of delivery and these wider sources of evidence also suggest some areas which could be further developed in the remainder of this PES delivery period and beyond to strengthen impact on this objective, including:

1. Communicate more on the practical actions and local opportunities people can take to tackle climate change
2. Significantly increase the message reach and frequency of Scottish Government communications on climate change. Paid-for media will be critical to achieving this goal
3. Establish consistent support, training and funding for trusted messenger organisations to enable them to continue to provide meaningful leadership, based on latest evidence, on climate change among their audiences.

The approach taken to delivering the **participate** objective has largely been Scottish Government-led, primarily involving work with external organisations to bring the views of target audiences, interest groups, and under-represented voices to inform the development of specific climate policies. Evidence suggests the process of delivering the programme of participatory activities since PES publication has been effective, in line with wider evidence on good practice.

A clear challenge to this approach is evidencing impact on policy outcomes. The evidence base for this review emphasises the importance of meaningful engagement from policy makers with subsequent explanation on how the outputs from participatory activities will be acted upon. Other aspects which the available evidence suggests could be further developed include steps to:

4. Clearly communicate the purpose of engagement at the outset of participative processes
5. Commit to reporting on the outcomes of participation back to participants and the wider public as a requirement for conducting any participative process
6. Ensure sectoral climate policy has considered and planned for the role of public engagement in policy development at a sufficiently early stage to enable it to inform key decisions to support policy efficacy and acceptance.
7. Support a localised approach to delivering the Participate objective alongside the national programme of activity, building on the achievements of the Community Climate Action Hubs
8. Consider using participatory and deliberative methods to help deliver the Understand and Act objectives of the PES, given the evidence of the impact of these methods on participants
9. Develop a consistent and strategic approach to including children and young people in climate change policy-making.

On **act**, the focus of this review has been the investment Scottish Government has made in community-led climate action. This has principally been achieved through the development of a national network of Climate Action Hubs, as well as the 21-23 Climate Action Towns programme. Findings from the review of this delivery, and supported by the wider evidence base, confirm place-based, community-led climate action to be an effective and popular approach. Moving forward, this review has highlighted ways in which this work could be strengthened, including to:

10. Provide longer-term funding for Climate Action Hubs which would ensure greater security and stability, and therefore enable meaningful work to be embedded and expanded upon to achieve greater change
11. Maximise the sharing of learning and stories of success and inspiration between the Hubs and beyond. This would help deliver what Millar et al. (2025) call measures to “build collective efficacy” and which they highlight as important for achieving the **act** objective of the PES.

The evidence, learning, and reflections brought together for this mid-point review will be taken into account for the remainder of the PES delivery period (to end of 2026), and will help inform the development of what will come next for Scottish Government’s strategic approach to engaging the public on climate change. It is clear from this review that improvements could be made to how activities delivered under the PES are monitored and evaluated. More consistency in data gathering and reporting, aligned to the PES Theory of Change, would help strengthen the conclusions that can be drawn. There is opportunity to take action on this for the remainder of the PES delivery period, and to reflect on it in the end of PES review.

12. The review recommends that a new method is developed for monitoring, evaluating and reporting the activities delivered under the PES.

Overall, as Millar et al. (2025) conclude, Scotland is already leading the way, not only in having a Public Engagement Strategy on Climate Change in place, but also in seeking to review and evaluate its progress. Millar et al. (2025) suggest that the PES should continue to provide a clear and positive vision for the future and include

multiple approaches, including coordinating large-scale engagement and supporting smaller local engagement.

As outlined at section 3, it is not possible to attribute changes in public attitudes on climate change at a national level to specific actions within the PES. However, these measures and trends should be taken as an indication of progress being made towards the strategic objectives of the PES, as well as a source of evidence to inform how PES aims and activities are designed and delivered. This data makes clear that concerted efforts, consistent support, and greater investment will continue to be needed at all levels to inform, inspire, and galvanise people across Scotland to better understand, participate in, and take action on climate change. Achieving these objectives is imperative if we are to achieve our collective ambition of becoming a Net Zero Nation by 2045 and to successfully adapt to the unavoidable impacts of climate change.

Annex A: Detail of Climate Week activities 2022 – 2024

Activity stream	2022	2023	2024
Ministerial programme	10 Events across 10 Ministerial portfolios	13 Events across 7 Ministerial portfolios	12 Events across 8 Ministerial portfolios (plus the Permanent Secretary)
SG engagement activity	280 Attendees at 4 internal engagement events. 323 attendees at 3 SG-delivered public events	346 Attendees at 4 internal engagement events	514 Attendees at 11 internal engagement events
SG marketing activity	5058 #ScotClimateWeek mentions (2242 unique users) Website 6548 views	2647 #ScotClimateWeek mentions Home Energy Scotland fieldwork in Edinburgh and Perth reached c.2500 people	3588 #ScotClimateWeek mentions
Partner activity	KSB – Climate Action Week (15000 pupils, 660 primary classes, 32 LAs) 459+ contacts reached with campaign information, messaging and assets to share with audiences. 1,590 partner asset downloads achieved.	KSB – Climate Action Week (4750 pupils, 300 schools, 29 LAs) 600+ contacts reached with campaign information, messaging and assets to share with audiences. 1,419 partner asset downloads achieved.	KSB – Climate Action Week (>8000 pupils, 30 LAs) 100s of partners involved including in priority area of culture 600+ contacts reached with campaign information, messaging and assets to share with audiences. 3,194 partner asset downloads achieved.
Budget Spent*	£7,500	£0	£8,000

*funding to support KSB's Climate Action Week included in Climate Action Schools grant and represented in these figures

Annex B: Legacy Trusted Messengers Activity

Eco-Congregations Scotland

Eco-Congregations Scotland is an ecumenical environmental charity which helps churches address climate change. Scottish Government supported Eco-Congregations Scotland with core funding between 2003 and 2023, with their most recent grant of £61,000 in 2022-23. Member churches commit to climate actions and serve as environmental champions in their communities, spreading best practice and encouraging action.

Over the funding period 2022-23, Eco Congregations Scotland's outcomes also included:

- increased number of registered eco-congregations in Scotland from 586 to 651
- increased commitment by Scottish churches to achieving net zero emissions in their church by the end of the decade, with over 75% of eco-congregations and at least 62% of churches overall across Scotland making commitments and starting to plan towards this goal.

2050 Climate Group

Scottish Government provided core funding to the 2050 Climate Group between 2014 and 2022-23 to support its work to empower Scotland's young people to take action on climate change. The group has been an important vehicle for engaging young people in the development of climate change policy within Scottish Government and has been the focus of a case study within the PES.

In 2022-23, the organisation received £65,000 from Scottish Government. With this funding, it delivered a range of networking, training and awareness raising activities. Outputs included:

- A Young Leader Development Programme through which 150 young people developed their understanding of climate change and the confidence to take action.
- A range of projects relating to sustainable fashion, eco-anxiety, rewilding and other themes
- Climate-related policy consultation which supported young people to respond to Scottish Government policy proposals

Following its 2022-23 core funding award, the 2050 Climate Group then applied for, and was awarded, grant funding through the Climate Engagement Fund in 2023-24.

Annex C: Summary of CEF Funded Projects

2023-24 CEF Funded Projects: £550,000

Organisation: UHI Moray

Region: Moray

Grant funding: £70,773

Summary of delivery:

To enable students to become confident climate change communicators (trusted messengers) and to drive positive climate action within their local communities.

Organisation: Loco Home Retrofit

Region: Glasgow

Grant funding: £74,274

Summary of delivery:

To engage homeowners and trades people on the impact of home energy on greenhouse gas emissions and how to reduce these emissions.

Organisation: Outside the Box

Region: Nationwide

Grant funding: £54,116

Summary of delivery:

To engage with communities, focussing on equalities groups, to help build understanding of Scotland's climate ambition and policies.

Organisation: Rowanbank Environmental Arts and Education

Region: Central Scotland

Grant funding: £56,115

Summary of delivery:

To will help young people and their educators build a better understanding of climate change through theatrical storytelling and creative climate education and communication tools.

Organisation: Edinburgh Science

Region: Edinburgh and Dundee

Grant funding: £99,751

Summary of delivery:

To inspire audiences, through the 'Consumed' exhibition and the training of climate leaders within community groups and schools.

Organisation: Scottish Library and Information Council

Region: Nationwide

Grant funding: £75,000

Summary of delivery:

To build climate literacy through workshops, climate conversations and art activities to encourage practical and affordable action on climate change.

Organisation: Building Futures Galloway

Region: Dumfries and Galloway

Grant funding: £77,441

Summary of delivery:

To improve awareness within the Whithorn community of how to improve the energy efficiency in traditional homes and heritage buildings, whilst educating young people about the skills and opportunities connected to this market.

Organisation: 2050 Climate Group

Region: Nationwide

Grant funding: £58,300

Summary of delivery:

To improve connectivity and collaboration between young people across Scotland and empower them to take action to help address the climate emergency.

2024-25 CEF funded projects: £272,000

Organisation: Scottish Alliance for Geoscience, Environment & Society (SAGES)

Region: N/A (Nationwide with rural issues reflected in content)

Grant funding: £29,700

Summary of delivery:

10-part podcast series – produced by world-leading scientists - making climate science accessible and promoting action

Organisation: National Museums Scotland

Region: Edinburgh

Grant funding: £33,594

Summary of delivery:

Climate Change for all workshops supporting behaviour change pledges

Organisation: SWAN Autism

Region: Nationwide (Edinburgh based)

Grant funding: £28,100

Summary of delivery:

Coaching programme to help people halt and reverse nature loss

Organisation: The King's Trust

Region: Glasgow, Edinburgh and Dundee

Grant funding: £30,629

Summary of delivery:

Sustainability workshops and Generation Green Festival focused on green skills and career opportunities

Organisation: Loco Home Retrofit CIC Ltd

Region: Glasgow

Grant funding: £39,926

Summary of delivery:

Identifying climate impacts in Glasgow and providing practical advice on adapting to extreme weather

Organisation: Dundee & Angus College

Region: Dundee

Grant funding: £36,880

Summary of delivery:

Empowering students to develop resources on climate and energy that can engage and help the local community

Organisation: Lairg and District Learning Centre

Region: Lairg and Sutherland

Grant funding: £26,730

Summary of delivery:

To use bird migration as a vehicle for climate engagement through carbon conversations, events and workshops in Lairg and throughout Sutherland

Organisation: Scottish Association for Marine Science

Region: Oban, Tiree, Barra (Inner & Outer Hebrides; coastal communities)

Grant funding: £47,111

Summary of delivery:

To explore with children and community elders how climate change affects coastal and island communities and the whales and dolphins that live in the waters around



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