

Independent Evaluation of Scottish Climate Action Hubs

November 2024

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Executive Summary

CAG Consultants were appointed by the Scottish Government to conduct an independent evaluation of two pathfinder climate action hubs, one in the Highlands and Islands (H&I), and one in the North East led by North East Scotland Climate Action Network (NESCOAN). The pathfinder hubs are community-led structures that are intended to build awareness of the climate emergency and facilitate a coordinated regional response to climate change.

The overall aim of this evaluation was to assess:

- Whether the hubs are adding value to the existing community space;
- Whether they are contributing to the shift to low-carbon and resilient communities; and
- What the impact of the hubs has been so far.

For the purpose of this evaluation, the intended results of the hubs were defined as follows:

- Build awareness of the climate emergency and widen participation;
- Stimulate climate action (mitigation and adaptation) (mainstreaming climate activity, developing local plans, identifying funding opportunities);
- Facilitate peer-to-peer learning and building tools and resources;
- Build strong relationships with key stakeholders;
- Ensure a joined-up approach is being taken to tackling climate change at a regional level;
- Support community resilience (supporting development of longer term plans around energy and food);
- Empower communities and support a just transition; and
- Support wellbeing economies and community wealth building.

The evaluation also included the development of recommendations that could be considered for the broader Scottish Government climate hubs programme going forward.

Findings

The Scottish Government posed a set of key questions about the two pathfinder hubs to help guide the evaluation. A summary of the findings for each of these key evaluation questions is provided below.

Did the hubs produce the intended results and to what extent?

Both the NESCAN and H&I pathfinder hubs have made significant progress towards producing the intended results. This has been achieved by actively engaging communities in climate action, building awareness, fostering resilience, stimulating community-level action, embedding cooperation and learning, encouraging regional collaboration, and developing approaches tailored to local circumstances and priorities.

However, there are opportunities for improvement in areas such as expanding geographical coverage, enhancing project-oriented approaches and strengthening partnerships with a wider range of stakeholders, including local authorities and businesses.

What unintended results—both positive and negative—did the activities of the hubs produce? How did these occur?

The activities of the NESCAN and H&I hubs led to positive unintended results, including providing emotional support leading to increased resilience-building and community empowerment, and establishing a de facto link between the community and the Scottish Government.

How valuable were the activities of the hubs to service providers, clients, the community, and/or organisations involved?

The pathfinder hubs are adding value to the existing community space. This is being achieved through a multilayered approach that encompasses the organisation of inclusive and educational events which foster widespread community engagement and learning. The development and dissemination of engaging materials and films empowers local organisations to initiate innovative climate action projects. By hosting citizens' assemblies and public meetings, the hubs create vital platforms for community voices, ensuring their ideas and concerns are heard and integrated into local and regional climate strategies.

"I think the value they've added in this area... has been immense."

Furthermore, the hubs' efforts in facilitating funding applications and providing tailored project management support help to address critical needs within community organisations, enabling them to navigate administrative challenges and secure essential resources. The strategic development of community networks enhances collaboration and knowledge sharing, amplifying the impact of climate initiatives across diverse groups. The hubs' role in bridging the gap between communities and the Scottish Government highlights their importance in incorporating a broad range of community interests into governance and decision-making processes.

To what extent did the intervention represent the best possible use of available resources to achieve the most valuable results for participants and the community?

Interventions facilitated by the NESCAN and H&I hubs largely represent the best possible use of available resources. This is evidenced by stakeholders' identification of high-value interventions such as community engagement and education, empowerment through funding and training, providing a platform for policy input and collaboration, personalised support and motivation, and flexibility and innovation in project implementation. However, stakeholders also noted areas for improvement (funding permitting), including the need for more professional support in administration and project management and increased collaboration with local authorities (amongst others).

Are any positive results likely to be sustained? If so, what circumstances will enable this?

With continued support from the NESCAN and H&I hubs, the results are likely to be sustained due to the foundational work the hubs have put in place. This includes promoting local ownership, emerging policy input and participating in decision-making structures. There is, however, the potential to focus on additional policy input and to focus more strongly on interventions that can be scaled up and replicated in the future.

Overall Impact

The pathfinder hubs' efforts in promoting sustainability, empowering grassroots innovation, and encouraging participatory governance have not only mobilised a diverse range of stakeholders but have also instilled a sense of ownership and proactive participation in climate initiatives. The hubs' role as a bridge between communities, national government, and the broader climate action network underscores their contribution to integrating local actions with regional and national sustainability goals. Their continued evolution and adaptation to the needs and challenges of the communities they serve will undoubtedly ensure their enduring impact on building a more sustainable and resilient future.

Risks

Three key risks were also identified through the evaluation. These risks are:

Potential loss of momentum

Stakeholders were concerned that any shift in focus or discontinuation of funding to the hubs could undermine the progress made to date. This could result in the loss of established momentum for climate action and leave communities without essential support.

Short-term funding constraints

The current annual budgeting model limits the hubs' ability for long-term planning, requiring them to prioritise immediate spending over sustained impact. A shift to longer-term funding could potentially assist with strategic planning and the sustainability of climate initiatives.

High staff turnover

High staff turnover, driven by short-term funding and the resulting annual contracts, undermines the hubs' ability to maintain consistent engagement and effectiveness. This is particularly important due to the critical role of community development officers in establishing local connections.

Recommendations

A number of recommendations were identified for both pathfinder hubs and the broader hubs programme going forward.

Expanding the audience

Diversify and expand the audience for climate issues by using various communication methods, engaging with non-traditional spaces, incorporating creative approaches, and collaborating closely with local authorities and partners.

Supporting and facilitating additional climate action

Accelerate direct climate action by fostering private-community partnerships, securing funding for scaling initiatives, supporting local resilience planning, involving community councils in preparedness efforts, and enhancing climate literacy training for impactful community projects.

Improving regional collaboration

Build stronger partnerships by defining stakeholder roles, engaging with diverse organisations to share initiatives and working with other hubs to share best practice.

Addressing risks

Extend funding to multi-year budgets for stability and identify diverse funding sources beyond the Scottish Government to ensure long-term planning and job security.

Introduction

Background information

In Scotland, the urgency to respond to climate change has been translated into a range of actionable policy measures. In recognition of the essential role of citizen action, the Scottish Government is supporting the development of a network of regional community climate action hubs with the aim of providing a strategic regional approach to climate change action.

The hubs are aligned with a range of national policies, including the Scottish Government's [Climate Change Plan](#), the [Scottish Climate Change Adaptation Programme](#), and commitments towards a [Just Transition](#) at a local level. The hubs will also assist in the implementation of the [Net Zero Public Engagement Strategy](#) by empowering communities to take initiative, with the hubs serving as reliable sources of information within their local areas. The hubs have also been established in line with [Scotland's 2045 net-zero reduction emissions target](#), which places significant emphasis on building resilient, low-carbon communities.

In 2020, the Scottish government initiated the [Scottish Government Climate Hub Programme](#). Shortly afterwards, a Request for Information (RFI) was published to gather input from third-sector and community groups about the design and implementation of the hub programme. Based on the [findings from the RFI](#), two pathfinder climate action hubs were launched in September 2021. One hub in the North Highlands and Islands (H&I) and one in the North East led by North East Scotland Climate Action Network (NESCAN). The pathfinder hubs were established with the intention of ensuring communities are informed, connected, engaged and empowered to develop and implement local climate action solutions that are most appropriate to their needs.

When the pathfinder hubs were established, the vision of the Scottish Government Climate Hub Programme was defined as follows:

A network of climate action hubs will provide a vehicle for communities to come together and engage in collective climate action, supporting the transition to low-carbon and climate resilient living, and driving wider behavioural change.

The pathfinder hubs' aims are as follows:

1. Build awareness of the climate and nature emergency across all communities;
2. Increase community resilience and knowledge of how to respond to climate change;

3. Stimulate community level climate action;
4. Embed cooperation and learning;
5. Encourage community groups to collaborate at a regional level and to work in partnership with other key local stakeholders; and
6. Allow an approach to be developed within each region that reflects local circumstances and priorities.

Since the establishment of the two pathfinder hubs, an additional twenty hubs have now been set up, which cover the greater part of Scotland. The remaining areas are expected to be covered by a small number of additional hubs in the 2024-2025 financial year.

Purpose of the evaluation

The Scottish Government commissioned CAG Consultants in October 2023 to undertake an independent evaluation of the two pathfinder regional community climate action hubs, the NESCAN Hub and H&I Hub. The overall aim of the evaluation was to assess the pathfinder hubs' progress to date, including:

- Whether the hubs are adding value to the existing community space;
- Whether they are contributing to the shift to low-carbon and resilient communities,
- What the impact of the hubs have been so far; and
- Recommendations for the future of the programme.

The evaluation was centred around the following research questions posed by the Scottish Government:

- **Intended results:** Did the hubs produce the intended results, and to what extent?
- **Unintended results:** What unintended results—both positive and negative—did the activities of the hubs produce? How did these occur?
- **Value to stakeholders:** How valuable were the activities of the hubs to service providers, clients, the community, and/or organisations involved?
- **Resource utilisation:** To what extent did the intervention represent the best possible use of available resources to achieve the most valuable results for participants and the community?
- **Sustainability:** Are any positive results likely to be sustained? If so, what circumstances will enable this?

The purpose of the evaluation, therefore, was to conduct an assessment of the two pathfinder community climate action hubs, focusing on their value addition and contribution to low-carbon and resilient communities.

Methodology

Methodological approach

A theory-based approach was used for the evaluation. This approach intended to understand how and why the hubs' activities worked (or did not work) towards achieving the overall vision of the programme. The research focussed on understanding the causal pathways between the processes and activities of the hubs and how that led to specific outcomes.

At the outset of the evaluation, an evaluation framework was developed specifically for the pathfinder hub assessment. This framework included a set of research themes, indicators, and data collection methods. The evaluation made use of a mixed methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data. Qualitative data was collected through an online survey, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, Quantitative data was derived primarily from progress reports provided by the hubs and the Scottish Government.

The research process was designed to include all stakeholders who were willing to participate in the research. Online options were made available for all engagements to accommodate stakeholders who were not able to attend in-person events. Engagements were also open for anyone to attend. This approach promoted a more comprehensive understanding of different perspectives.

Evaluation framework

It was necessary to develop a bespoke evaluation framework for the pathfinder hub evaluation as the monitoring evaluation and learning (MEL) framework for the broader hubs programme was not yet finalised. The evaluation framework outlined a process for assessing the broader impact of the hubs while taking into account the key research questions posed by the Scottish Government. To achieve this, the evaluation framework was structured as a Theory of Change (TOC) with an impact statement, outcomes, outputs, inputs and indicators. The full TOC model is provided in Annex 1: TOC Model.

Impact

For the purpose of the evaluation, 'impact' as a concept was defined as the long-term effects produced by activities, directly or indirectly. The impact of

the pathfinder Hubs, as defined through the research process, was described as:

The hubs are contributing to and adding value in the shift towards low-carbon and resilient communities.

Outcomes

For the purpose of this assessment, ‘outcome’ as a concept was defined as the achieved or likely short to medium-term effect of the outputs of activities delivered. In order for the above impact to be assessed, three outcomes were described as follows:

- The hubs are facilitating the necessary resources for climate response.
- The hubs are stimulating low-carbon and climate-resilient interventions.
- The hubs are enabling potential future climate response to take place.

Outputs

‘Output’ as a concept was defined as a tangible product or service produced as a result of programme or project activities. For the three outcomes to be assessed, a number of outputs were identified. These outputs are shown in figure 1 below.

Outcomes	Outputs
1) The hubs are facilitating the necessary resources for climate response.	1) Facilitating knowledge sharing 2) Building community awareness 3) Building relationship amongst stakeholders
2) The hubs are stimulating low-carbon and climate resilient interventions.	4) Stimulating climate action 5) Supporting climate resilience 6) Supporting regional response to climate change
3) The hubs are enabling potential future climate response to take place.	7) Supporting replication and scaling up 8) Promoting local ownership of climate response 9) Supporting policy input and decision making 10) Enabling access to climate finance

Figure 1: Pathfinder hub evaluation outcomes and outputs

It should be noted that the outputs were not exclusive to specific outcomes, and in many instances, outputs were linked to multiple outcomes. By way of example, the output “Enabling access to climate finance” was linked to both Outcome 3 and Outcome 1.

Inputs

Although the evaluation focussed primarily on the link between the output, outcomes and impacts, three key inputs were also identified at the outset of the evaluation. These inputs were:

- Funding from the Scottish Government for operational costs;
- A range of staff skills and expertise; and
- Physical office space for meetings and networking.

Indicators

A set of output and impact indicators were also developed for the evaluation. However, one of the primary limitations of the evaluation was the lack of adequate baseline data (see Section 0 Scope and limitations). This lack of baseline data was particularly relevant when developing indicators for the outputs. Without a reliable starting point, it was difficult to quantitatively assess impact through an increase or decrease in an output. To accommodate this limitation, qualitative indicators were developed to track the progress of the outputs. By way of example, for the output “Facilitating knowledge sharing”, the indicator that was developed was: “Evidence of increased knowledge sharing”, rather than an increased number of knowledge sharing activities. The full list of indicators is provided in Annex 2: Evaluation indicators of this report.

Data collection

There were four principal data collection activities undertaken during the evaluation: information review, focus groups, interviews and online survey.

Information review

Key documentation was reviewed to develop a comprehensive understanding of the climate action hubs programme. This review was the foundation for subsequent evaluation activities, ensuring an informed, data-driven approach to assessing the hubs' performance and impact.

Key documents included in the review were:

- **Hub programme documentation and websites:** The review commenced with an examination of the overall hub programme

documents to better understand the strategic objectives, operational guidelines, and milestones for each hub.

- **Pathfinder hub grant offer and contract documents:** These documents described the agreed scope and outcomes of the two pathfinder hubs and provided a detailed description of the specific ambitions, scope, and planned activities of the pathfinder hubs at key stages of development.
- **Annual, quarterly and interim progress reports:** Progress reports submitted by the two pathfinder hubs to the Scottish Government on an annual quarterly and interim basis were reviewed. These documents provided insight into the milestones achieved, challenges faced, and adaptations made during the programme.

Focus groups

Two focus groups were held, one per pathfinder hub. The focus group meetings used a hybrid format, allowing participants to join in person or online. The focus groups were held in Aberdeen (focussing on the NESCAN hub on 13th December 2023, with 18 participants attending) and in Inverness (focussing on the H&I hub on 14th December 2023, with 18 participants attending). Participants represented a broad cross-section of stakeholders, including board members, recipients of project grants, statutory agencies, local authorities, community members, SMEs and academics. The discussion was guided by the use of a semi-structured topic guide that had been agreed with the Project Steering Group (PSG).

Interviews

In-depth online interviews were held with 22 stakeholders (12 from the NESCAN hub, nine from H&I hub and one stakeholder for both hubs). These interviews provided qualitative insight into each hub's impact and the overall hub programme to date.

The interviews were guided by a semi-structured topic guide that had been agreed with the PSG. Each interview lasted for up to one hour and covered all the key research questions of the evaluation framework. The research questions used in the interviews are listed in Annex 3: Interview research questions.

Online survey

A short online survey was developed and circulated to stakeholders and members of both hubs to gain insights from a broad range of respondents. 50 responses were received, 27 relating to the NESCAN hub and 23 relating to the H&I hub. The survey contained the key research questions of the evaluation framework. A copy of the online survey is included in Annex 4: Example online survey form.

Recommendations workshop

A final round of online stakeholder workshops took place with each pathfinder hub in February 2024. The purpose of these engagements was to present preliminary findings from the evaluation and to discuss recommendations for each hub going forward. 31 people attended the engagements (15 for the NESCAN hub and 16 for the H&I hub). As with the focus group discussions, participants represented a broad cross-section of hub stakeholders.

A list of stakeholders engaged per hub per consultation type is provided in Annex 5: Stakeholder Consultation Summary.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis was carried out on the collected data. Four research themes were defined based on the primary research questions. These were:

1. Value-add
2. Shift to low-carbon and resilient communities
3. Resources
4. Sustainability

Within each primary theme, a number of topics or sub-themes were also defined (see Annex 6: Qualitative analysis themes). Interview and survey excerpts were coded using these themes and topics for each hub. Different types of responses were then categorised in each theme and topic.

Based on the findings of the evaluation, a set of recommendations was developed in consultation with stakeholders. The recommendations aimed to enhance the overall hubs programme's effectiveness and impact, focusing on immediate and long-term strategic improvements.

Scope and limitations

Scope

The primary intention of this study was to conduct a theory-based impact evaluation of the two pathfinder hubs. The evaluation focussed on understanding and measuring the changes that have occurred as a result of the hubs' activities in supporting communities' transition to a low-carbon resilient future. The evaluation aimed to assess the value added by the hubs in this transition.

Limitations

Several key limitations were acknowledged in the context of this research. Firstly, due to General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) restrictions, the research team relied on the hub managers to provide contact details for all stakeholders. This reliance may have influenced the diversity and range of participants engaged in the study.

Furthermore, the dissemination of invitations to workshops and engagement sessions was also managed through the hubs. This approach may have affected the participation and representation of stakeholders.

To mitigate these risk, during interviews and engagements, respondents were asked to identify additional stakeholders that could be contacted as part of the research. Stakeholder targets were set for different types of engagements, and when these were not reached, the hub management was engaged to ensure the required numbers were achieved. For example, the H&I online survey was sent out twice by the hub manager as the number of responses to the first publication of the survey was not high enough.

An additional limitation of the assessment was the absence of an existing monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) framework specific to the hubs' programme. The lack of an existing framework resulted in the research team developing an ad-hoc set of indicators based on the study's objectives and available data. A draft MEL framework for the hubs was developed in the final stage of this evaluation. The Theory of Change (TOC) for this MEL framework is provided in Annex 7: Draft Hub MEL Framework TOC.

Additionally, there was a lack of baseline data against which the progress and impact of the hubs could be easily measured. This limitation restricted the ability to quantitatively assess the impact of the hubs by monitoring changes over time or directly attributing outcomes to the hubs' interventions.

A final limitation of this research was that it was not possible (within the time and resource constraints) to conduct a full qualitative economic impact assessment to answer the question: "did the intervention represent the best possible use of available resources?". Rather, this question was answered through a combination of documentation review and stakeholders feedback and perceptions.

Hub Overview

NESCAN overview

History and structure

Aberdeen Climate Action (ACA) was established in 2014 as a community climate action group in Aberdeen, Scotland. Over the 2014 to 2020 period, several additional community climate groups were established in the Aberdeen area. In a move to better coordinate climate action across the different community groups, organisations and individuals, the North East Community Climate Action Network (NESCAN) was established in 2020.



Figure 2: NESCAN Logo

In March 2021, the Scottish Government approached ACA, as the coordinator of NESCAN, to set up a formal regional climate hub covering the Aberdeenshire area for a 6-month pilot period, building on their experience in setting up NESCAN. ACA revised the existing project plan and costings for piloting the NESCAN hub to align with the Scottish Government's requirements. Following approval by the Scottish Government, the NESCAN hub was set up as a Community Interest Companies (CIC) limited by guarantee with confirmation of the Scottish Government's Grant Offer in September 2021.

Vision, aims and objectives

Since the establishment and pilot period, the vision, aims, objectives and structure of the NESCAN hub have evolved to better reflect the needs of the stakeholders. The current vision, aims, and objectives are listed below.

Vision

A sustainable North East Scotland, with connected, empowered, active communities at its heart.

Aims

- To support and develop community led climate action throughout Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire.

- To support communities to be a part of a just transition to a sustainable North East Scotland, contributing to local, regional and national policy setting & decision making.

Highlands and Islands Hub overview

History and structure

The Thurso Community Development Trust (TCDT) was formed in January 2018 with the purpose of making Thurso a better place to live, work and visit for all, through community-led sustainable development. It adopted legal status as a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO) in January 2019 with the charitable objective of “The advancement of community development principally within the Community”.

In September 2021, the Scottish Government made an offer of a grant to TCDT to set up a regional climate hub, covering the Highlands, Orkney and Shetland, to run for the remainder of the 2021/22 year as a pilot period. Following the successful delivery of the pilot phase, and with the confirmation of further funding from the Scottish Government, the North Highlands & Islands Climate Hub Community Interest Company (CIC) limited by Guarantee was set up in April 2022 to take forward future work.

The North Highlands & Islands Climate Hub CIC has the aim to ‘support community-led climate action in the Highlands & Islands in all the stages it takes to design, develop and deliver a project’. In its daily activities and public marketing the hub refers to itself as the “[Highlands and Islands Climate Hub](#)”.



Figure 3: Highland and Islands Logo

Vision, aims and objectives

Since the establishment and pilot period, the vision, aims, objectives and structure of the H&I hub have evolved to better reflect the needs of the

stakeholders. The vision, values, aims and objectives currently stated on the hub website are shown in text box 2 below.

Vision

Our vision is for communities throughout the Highlands & Islands to be bold, collaborative and resilient by creating climate-friendly projects and initiatives which address the needs of their communities and lead to a transformational climate-ready region.

Values

- Inclusive - Welcoming to all and supporting a diverse and inclusive membership
- Collaborative - Working in partnership with community groups, networks and agencies across the region and nationally to create a community-led, climate-ready Scotland
- Empowering - Supporting, educating and empowering communities to take action.

Aims & Objectives

- Raise awareness of climate change and the actions communities can take to mitigate and adapt to climate change
- Provide groups with advice and support to take mitigation and adaptation actions
- Facilitate co-ordination and collaboration
- Seed fund and develop new community climate action
- Foster peer-to-peer learning
- Signpost to organisations & agencies who can offer support
- Identify funding opportunities
- Support local communities to design and develop carbon reduction and adaptation projects
- Facilitate learning and development through provision of training and support materials
- Provide a voice for local communities and the mechanism for policy setters to reach communities
- Influence and inform community-led climate action policy

NESCAN Hub Research Findings

The following section provides a summary of the research findings for the NESCAN hub. The section is divided into the three main outcomes from the TOC, which were described above. Each section includes a summary of the outputs under each outcome and lists the specific output indicator that was used for the assessment. An analysis of these findings is provided in the Evaluation Section of this report.

Outcome 1: The NESCAN hub is facilitating the necessary resources for climate response

The purpose of this first outcome was to assess whether there is evidence of the NESCAN hub developing and providing access to the appropriate resources (such as data, information, and funding) to enable effective and collaborative action on climate change response.

Output 1: Facilitating knowledge sharing

The first output and indicator shown in figure 4 below, was intended to provide an indication of the extent to which the NESCAN hub is facilitating knowledge and sharing information.

Output	Facilitating knowledge sharing
Indicator	Evidence of knowledge and information sharing facilitated by the hub

Figure 4: Output 1 Indicator Description

The NESCAN hub's progress and annual reports provide a historical record of activities that relate to developing and sharing information and knowledge. These activities include the development of communication materials, the development of the hub website, the publication of newsletters and an active social media profile. The documentation also notes the hub organises events such as community assemblies, 'Climate: knowledge into action' workshops, and film screenings. The documentation outlines how the hub provides advice and support to individuals and groups, both in person and through their online communication channels. The documentation details how hub staff actively participate in skill-sharing events, contribute to conferences and panels, and provide tailored advice to help others increase their knowledge and expertise. The documentation furthermore notes that the hub staff collaborate with community groups and other regional partners to promote knowledge exchange and collaboration.

Several stakeholders supported the view that the NESCAN hub has been effective in disseminating climate-related messages at a localised and regional level, making it easier for people to access information and understand its relevance to their area.

"The network is useful for allowing dissemination of information."

There was particular support for the interactive map on the hub's website, events such as the '[Climate Week North East](#)' and various educational and training initiatives.

Stakeholders additionally noted that the NESCAN hub's approach to communication is on making complex scientific information accessible and relatable, using human language to convey important messages without overwhelming the audience. They also noted that the NESCAN hub's approach to effective knowledge sharing involves collecting community narratives and translating them into meaningful conversations and strategies.

"...NESCAN talk to the community and gather their voice, their narrative, and then translate that into other important conversations... It really helps to give an independent and clear narrative of what the community's desires are."

In addition, a number of stakeholders noted that the NESCAN hub provides information not commonly available in traditional educational settings, especially for international students in Aberdeen.

"It's a great resource I wish more teachers utilised."

However, some respondents also noted that the NESCAN hub's efforts in sharing knowledge, in some instances, focussed on individuals already interested in this area. It was not clear how this audience reach could be improved. There was some acknowledgement that the hub's capacity to reach the broader public may be limited due to the resource challenges in engaging those not already interested in climate issues.

"It is a little bit of a room of the already-converted, but nonetheless, there's really important conversations happening there and it is bringing people together."

Output 2: Building community awareness

The second output and indicator, shown in figure 5 below, intended to assess in what ways the hub was working to raise the community's awareness about climate change issues. This output assessed whether the hub was helping to grow the understanding of climate issues.

Output	Building community awareness
Indicator	Evidence of the hub building community awareness of the climate emergency

Figure 5: Output 2 Indicator Description

The documentation provides a range of examples of ways in which the NESCAN hub is creating opportunities to build community climate literacy and awareness. For example, the hub has run community climate assembly sessions and workshops to increase climate knowledge and literacy. They also organised Climate Week North East, which was spread over 10 days with 173 different activities and events run by various different organisers which aimed to raise awareness of climate action. Additionally, the hub created a film that showcases local community climate action projects, which was screened in different parts of Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire.

However, despite the wide range and number of awareness-raising activities, there is limited explicit evidence in the hub's reports that clearly demonstrates an increase in climate literacy and awareness within communities. Therefore, there may be an opportunity for measuring and tracking changes in climate awareness within the community in future (e.g. through pre- and post-assessments at events).

Despite the lack of explicit evidence of improved awareness in the hub's documentation, many stakeholders noted the key role the hub is playing in building climate awareness in the community. Several stakeholders highlighted the hub's role in organising events such as community climate assemblies. These events often offered a broad range of learning experiences for participants, enhancing their understanding and engagement with various sustainability issues. The hub's role in advertising and supporting public events helped in raising awareness and drawing attention to environmental issues.

"Community Climate Assemblies...are a fantastic initiative for expanding understanding."

In addition, a number of stakeholders highlighted the important role the hub's community development officers (CDOs) play in facilitating a better understanding of climate issues. They noted that the fact that the CDOs are locally-based and understand the local context allows them to make the

information and resources locally relevant. Respondents also commented on the quality of staff and how approachable the staff were, which helped to enhance their own climate emergency awareness and response efforts.

"We have a much more climate-aware community through the work of NESCAN Hub community development officers."

Stakeholders highlighted the peer-to-peer learning exchange aspect of the NESCAN hub's activities, where the hub staff share their knowledge and experiences with other organisations. Stakeholders noted this approach not only builds relationships but also strengthens the capacity of various groups involved in climate action and sustainability.

"We're learning from NESCAN... in terms of mapping and things [...] we're looking forward to learn more [about these things] so that we can replicate that."

Output 3: Building relationships amongst stakeholders

Output 3, shown in figure 6 below, is intended to assess whether there was evidence of the hub building relationships between and across stakeholder groups.

Output	Building relationships amongst stakeholders
Indicator	Evidence of the hub helping to build relationships between stakeholders.

Figure 6: Output 3 Indicator Description

The progress reports highlight several ways in which the hub is facilitating partnership building. A key example is the Just Transition Fund Participatory Budgeting (JTPB) project, where the NESCAN hub has worked together with three third-sector interfaces and other organisations. The documentation notes how the NESCAN hub has worked with the local area partnership groups and hosted the Climate Week North East. The documentation also details how the hub has deepened connections through attendance at regional hub stakeholder meetings and developed relationships with other support services and stakeholders.

Stakeholders stated that the NESCAN hub played a significant role in bringing together various partners through collaborative projects. They moreover remarked on the NESCAN hub's capability to manage partnerships and adapt to feedback for successful collaboration.

"NESCAN has very ably brought together the various partners...and has also had the humility to accept feedback when things didn't maybe pan out the way they expected".

"Working with NESCAN gives me the chance to speak to other organisations and groups."

A number of stakeholders highlighted how the JTBP process was instrumental in introducing various stakeholders to each other, facilitating connections that might not have been made otherwise. Furthermore stakeholders noted that the hub actively works to connect people across different areas of Aberdeenshire who are engaged in similar climate-related activities. This networking fosters collaboration and sharing of best practices. The hub was also seen as instrumental in bringing together groups working on similar projects, such as village hall refits, encouraging collaboration rather than competition.

"They've been very helpful in saying that he is a key contact for this particular community, or you might want to get in touch with them. So just expanding the membership and people who potentially could come along to meetings has been very helpful. So that kind of formal and informal network has been helpful to us."

However, some stakeholders noted that the hub may not be building relationships as effectively beyond the community level. There was an impression that the hub does not strongly link with all local authorities or businesses inside the sector. Some stakeholders noted that the effectiveness in relationship building among a wider range of local stakeholders (those beyond the immediate community setting) could be improved. Furthermore there was an observation that the hub could engage more directly with local authorities to better understand what their needs are.

"They have their areas that they work on, but I don't think there's ever been a question from the hub, 'what's the local authority missing, what needs doing?'."

One respondent suggested the establishment of a forum between hubs and local authorities. They noted the hub could potentially employ someone (budget permitting) in a coordinator role who would be responsible for finding out the gaps in local climate action and determining what needs to be done to address them more effectively.

Outcome 2: The NESCAN Hub is stimulating low-carbon and climate resilient interventions

This second outcome aims to assess the extent to which the NESCAN hub has been successful in encouraging and facilitating interventions that contribute to a sustainable reduction in carbon footprints and enhance resilience against the adverse effects of climate change. The outcome builds on the foundation created through Outcome 1 and explores whether the support and resources provided by the hub have translated into tangible, climate-smart initiatives on the ground, marking a proactive step towards achieving long-term environmental sustainability and climate goals.

Output 4: Stimulating climate action

Output 4, which is shown in figure 7 below, is intended to assess whether there was evidence of specific climate change interventions taking place as a result of the support from the hub.

Output	Stimulating climate action
Indicator	Evidence of the hub stimulating climate action in the community.

Figure 7: Output 4 Indicator Description

The progress reports outline various ways in which the hub helped to stimulate climate action. These include project development and management support, signposting for project developers and the provision of and support to access funding. For example, the NESCAN hub provided support to community groups by offering one-to-one help, advice on project development, seed funding opportunities, and opportunities to publicise their projects and activities through various channels. The NESCAN hub organised a mapping event that led to the creation of the Climate Action Projects Map on their website. The hub also created and screened a film called “North East Scotland Communities: Our Green Journey” to showcase local community climate action projects.

Furthermore, the documentation outlines how the NESCAN hub has provided advice and support to community groups interested in setting up local community energy projects, and how the hub has funded projects that promote active travel, such as walking and cycling, as a means of reducing carbon emissions from transportation. The documentation also provides details on how the hub has supported projects focused on improving energy efficiency in homes and buildings by providing access to seed funding. This includes initiatives like retrofitting buildings with energy-saving measures and promoting the use of renewable energy sources.

However, the documentation does not provide details of how effective these activities have been in stimulating climate action and why certain activities by the hub have (or have not) stimulated climate activities. The focus in the reporting is rather on what has happened over a particular reporting period.

Many stakeholders noted that the NESCAN hub has been proactive in supporting climate action within local communities. Respondents note that the hub's staff support projects at different levels, from helping stakeholders to network and collaborate around the growth of local food in pot plants and allotments, to facilitating discussions and providing technical support on solar panel installations for self-sufficiency. A number of respondents specifically mentioned how the hub has provided key financial and resource-based support to organisations such as [NESFIT and Torry retrofit project](#).

"NESCAN jumped straight in, let's do solar panels and do all this kind of thing for self-sufficiency."

Many respondents highlighted how the hub has been instrumental in supporting grassroots climate-related projects by providing both participatory budgeting funds and seed funding. Stakeholders noted that this support has enabled local groups to either begin or expand their climate initiatives, as well as to seek additional funds through schemes like the Just Transition Fund. The hub's capacity-building role was also highlighted, noting the hub has empowered community groups with the skills and knowledge necessary for successful project implementation.

"It is a go-to for specialist advice on community projects."

In addition, stakeholders noted the NESCAN hub has actively encouraged community-led climate action by engaging with individuals across different sectors. This has included participative and deliberative processes, employing methods such as deliberative assemblies and climate cafes, critical for assessing community needs and crafting suitable interventions.

"Yes, absolutely. They're helping. The deliberative processes that, for example, are being supported through the just transition communities project aren't just an end in itself, although I would argue that how we engage with each other is going to be increasingly important. So, developing those skills for communities is very important. But they're not just an end in itself, in themselves. They lead to communities identifying areas where they want to take actions, developing plans to take action, and then taking those actions forward."

However, some respondents felt the NESCAN hub could have a more project-oriented approach. For example, one stakeholder believed NESCAN has in the past focussed strongly on building capacity and communicating issues rather than supporting and implementing actual climate change response projects.

"NESCAN do a lot of engagement activity, however it's actions that are needed."

Linked to the above point about a more project-orientated approach, was a view raised by one stakeholder that NESCAN could focus on more strategic interventions. This could be interventions at a larger regional level or interventions with a high climate response impact. This shift in focus could increase the overall impact of the hub's efforts in promoting climate resilience and low-carbon interventions.

"Litter picking, walks, are easy but what do they really achieve?"

Output 5: Supporting climate resilience

The purpose of output 5, shown in figure 8 below, was to assess whether climate change resilience was being promoted through the hub. For the purpose of this evaluation, the concept of resilience was broadly defined as both climate change adaptation-related interventions as well as building adaptive capacity.

Output	Supporting climate resilience
Indicator	Evidence of the hub supporting your community to be more climate resilient.

Figure 8: Output 5 Indicator Description

The NESCAN hub's project reports noted that a key mechanism for supporting climate resilience was through improved access to climate financing. As noted in the section above (Output 4: Stimulating climate action) the documentation outlines how the hub provided seed funding and facilitated access to the participatory budgeting fund for community climate action. This seed funding also supported a number of resilience related projects. An example of a community-led climate action resilience project is the [Deeside CAN](#), which created a forest with the help of over 100 community members. The project was funded by the NESCAN hub's seed fund and involved local schools and youth groups in discussions about climate change and biodiversity.

Additionally, the documentation describes how the NESCAN hub has held several events and engagements to promote climate resilience. For example,

the hub's involvement in the Community Resilience and Adaptation event in 2022 featured speakers and panellists from Adaptation Scotland, Climate Ready Aberdeenshire, and local adaptation and resilience groups. The NESCAN hub was similarly involved in a number of resilience planning and decision-making structures. For instance, the NESCAN hub was asked to be part of Aberdeenshire Council's Community Resilience Strategy Working Group. Furthermore, the documentation outlines how the hub was actively involved in providing key adaptation and resilience-related information to stakeholders. For example, the hub co-created a [Communities Climate Adaptation Route map](#) with references to guide communities on their journey from gaining an understanding of climate change resilience and adaptation to taking action.

Stakeholders noted that the NESCAN hub has been a key player in building community resilience to climate change. For example, some respondents noted that, in the wake of severe weather events like Storm Arwen, the NESCAN hub proactively organised workshops on resilience planning, equipping communities with the knowledge to prepare for and adapt to similar future challenges. These workshops served as a direct response to the immediate and long-term impacts of climate change. Other stakeholders noted that the hub, in partnership with the Scottish Communities Climate Action Network (SCCAN), have provided training to enhance soft skills, such as facilitation and conflict resolution. This capacity building is seen as central to empowering individuals and communities to engage in meaningful discussions about climate resilience.

"They've built some resilience in terms of the capacity of the communities. So, bringing those communities together, getting them to understand accessing finance, implementing projects, I think that builds resilience within the kind of human side of those communities."

Several stakeholders also commented on the hub's approach to integrating climate action with wider social and economic issues, thereby making climate resilience strategies more accessible and relevant to the broader community. They similarly note the language used by the hub in communicating climate issues and how the hub emphasises manageable actions that gradually build resilience.

"But they've been really careful about the messaging there. So, it's not about blaming people that don't have that agency to change it, but about supporting them [...] to look at the things that they can do and the things they can change."

Output 6: Supporting regional response to climate change

The purpose of this output, shown in figure 9 below, is to assess whether the hub is playing a role in facilitating a broader regional response to climate change. A regional approach is typically significant for climate change response as actions which will have a larger footprint often require collaboration with a wider regional audience.

Output	Supporting regional response to climate change
Indicator	Evidence of the hub facilitating a coordinated approach to regional climate change response.

Figure 9: Output 6 Indicator Description

The NESCAN hub's documentation notes that a core principle of the hubs is a regional outlook, which is demonstrated by the fact that the hub consists of a regional network of people and community-led organisations. The documentation also highlights that the hub aims to support and develop community-led climate action throughout Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire. Key examples of a regional approach in the hub documentation are the way in which the hub holds community climate assemblies in areas with little climate activity, the way the hub provides training and resources for climate literacy that can be applied across the region, and the support the hub provides to community-led climate change mitigation and adaptation projects, which leads to direct and indirect impacts at a regional level. An example is the [Torry retrofit project](#), which targets the North East Scotland region. The documentation furthermore notes that the NESCAN hub collaborates with other regional hubs and networks to deepen connections and contribute to learning.

Stakeholders highlighted that the hub is facilitating a coordinated approach to regional climate change response by participating in meetings with the climate and sustainability officers from neighbouring councils. This forum is used to share key topics, learnings, and actions taken by each council regarding climate change. By being involved in forums, NESCAN is able to share experiences from other areas as well as provide a voice for the Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire communities in these forums. Stakeholders noted that the NESCAN hub is a key coordinator of a regional response to climate change by actively engaging diverse groups and stakeholders across sectors and geographical boundaries. For example, the hub has collaborated with small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to foster carbon reduction and resilience through regional initiatives like the People, Planet, Pint and Pastry Network.

Stakeholders also noted that the hub advocates for interconnected strategies that consider the unique challenges of both urban and rural landscapes. The

hub facilitates knowledge sharing among individuals with varied experiences, such as those from communities affected by different climate-related issues like heavy snow or flooding, thereby creating a shared understanding and tailored regional climate response.

"They do absolutely push that narrative. And when we talk, they're like, you can't do this. Just as a city, you sit within this huge rural landscape. [...] And they are saying, we really need a regional approach. We really need a regional approach."

Some stakeholders noted that the NESCAN hub has helped to overcome the challenge stakeholders face in directly contacting different areas of the Scottish Government. They note that the NESCAN hub is often the only link for community groups to engage with the government, even when issues are not directly related to climate change.

However, there was acknowledgement of the complexity within the funding landscape, suggesting a need for clarity and improved coordination to prevent duplication of efforts among the NESCAN hub and other organisations.

"The landscape of funding coordinators is getting confusing."

Outcome 3: The NESCAN hub is enabling potential future climate response to take place

This outcome seeks to evaluate the extent to which the NESCAN hub has not only supported effective climate action but additionally laid the groundwork for these actions to be sustained into the future. This outcome considers the hub's approach to supporting interventions that can be replicated, whether the hub is impacting policy and decision making and whether the hub is helping to unlock climate financing.

Output 7: Supporting replication and scaling up

This output, shown in figure 10 below, is intended to assess whether the hub is laying the groundwork for future climate change interventions to take place.

Output	Supporting replication and scaling up
Indicator	Evidence of the hub facilitating a climate change intervention pipeline for your community.

Figure 10: Output 7 Indicator Description

The NESCAN hub's reports do not provide details of processes and activities that specifically intend to replicate and scale up existing initiatives. One example where the reports speak directly to replication is in the quarterly report for January 2022 – March 2022, which notes that one key objective during the pilot period was “To map, celebrate and prompt replication of local community-led climate action projects”. The reports do, however, highlight that the hub has created a publicly available database of projects and resources, including findings from project mapping events. This database provides details and lessons from various projects that stakeholders can use as a foundation when considering whether to replicate these initiatives within their communities.

Some stakeholders highlighted the [Torry retrofitting project](#) as an example of how the hub is facilitating the scaling up and replication of climate initiatives in communities across the region. Stakeholders noted that this project could be easily replicated in other regions as the technical elements have been resolved, and replication would just require funding and community buy-in support, areas that other hubs could be involved with.

“The best example would be the example of the retrofitting in Torry at the moment,...where the expertise was sitting...about 20 miles outside the city... a great worked example of a community retrofitting project which could be lifted and replicated elsewhere across the North East.”

However, some stakeholders noted that communities have their own unique challenges that need to be acknowledged. They suggested that not all initiatives could be directly “replicated”. They need to be adapted according to different communities' specific needs and circumstances. Stakeholders also noted that the successful expansion of initiatives hinges on the ability to attract a diverse group of stakeholders and secure adequate funding. They suggested that the NESCAN hub could explore new funding models that can support the sustainable growth of climate initiatives, ensuring they can be adapted and replicated to meet the varying needs of communities.

Output 8: Supporting policy input and decision-making

The purpose of this output, shown in figure 11 below, is to assess whether the hub's interventions are influencing policy input and decision-making processes. By providing informed contributions to policy discussions, the hub would aim to create an enabling environment where climate action can be effectively integrated into local governance, thereby securing the longevity and adaptability of its initiatives.

Output	Supporting policy input and decision-making
Indicator	Evidence of the hub activities resulting in an impact on local and national policy.

Figure 11: Output 8 Indicator Description

The hub's reports outline a number of ways in which the hub has been supporting policy input and decision-making. An example is that participants of the community assemblies organised by the hub have been invited to present their ideas and priorities to the monthly Priority Neighbourhood Partnership meetings. This process provided a platform for community voices to be heard by decision-makers. Additionally, the documentation notes that the hub has worked with members to prepare community consultation responses on various topics, such as the Just Transition Fund, the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy, and the proposed Wellbeing & Sustainable Development Bill.

This active role in supporting policy input and decision-making was likewise highlighted by a number of stakeholders. Respondents noted the NESCAN hub acts as a bridge between the distinct interests of local communities and industrial sectors in areas heavily reliant on industries like oil, particularly in Aberdeen. They also noted that the hub has brought a broader range of community interests into focus within local governance, representing a shift in the inclusion of diverse perspectives in decision-making.

"From a position of supporting and advocating for policy consultation response, the work of the Network in terms of supporting its members to be active on policy has created an impact through encouraging participation in responses. "

Some stakeholders highlighted how the community climate assemblies aimed to encourage more climate action and engagement in areas where little had been done before. One of the outputs from the assemblies was a consolidated request to decision-makers about changes that communities wanted to see take place. Stakeholders also noted that the ideas and actions generated during these assemblies were being incorporated into the Local Outcome Improvement Plan (LOIP).

A respondent noted the NESCAN hub's strategic inclusion of a Member of Scottish Parliament on their board as an example of their commitment to integrating community voices into political processes. Collaboration with institutions like Aberdeen University has amplified marginalised voices in policy discussions, ensuring a diverse range of inputs in policy-making. Stakeholders also noted the key role the hub played in the 'empower' component of the Net Zero Aberdeen climate plan. The hub led the process

on the empowerment theme, which includes aspects such as community engagement and communication.

"They have brokered those really important conversations and made connections and raised awareness... NESCAN had a pivotal role in helping to challenge and shape the empowerment strategy within that wider Net Zero Aberdeen framework."

Output 9: Enabling access to climate finance

The last output, shown in figure 12 below, within the third sustainability-related outcome, is how much the hub is mobilising additional climate finance. By mobilising additional climate finance, there would be an increased probability of interventions being sustained in the future.

Output	Enabling access to climate finance
Indicator	Evidence of additional funding been unlocked with support from the hub.

Figure 12: Output 9 Indicator Description

The hub's reports highlight the key role the hub has played in unlocking finance for climate interventions in Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire. This is primarily through support to the Just Transition Participatory Budgeting (JTPB) process and a separate initiative to provide seed funding to climate interventions. The NESCAN hub received funding to provide support for Aberdeen Council of Voluntary Organisations (ACVO) and Aberdeenshire Voluntary Action (AVA) to help run the Participatory Budgeting process. As co-administrators of this fund, the NESCAN hub was involved in distributing significant amounts of money across multiple local authority areas. The process also promoted participatory decision-making in distributing these funds. This included support to enable community groups to submit applications to the JTPB and to encourage community stakeholders to vote on applications to the fund. The purpose of the seed funding provided by the NESCAN hub was to support community climate action and biodiversity projects within Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire. The funding was aimed at projects that encourage sustainability, community climate action, a just transition, and projects that mitigate climate change and increase biodiversity.

Many stakeholders highlighted the key role the hub has played in improving access to funding for climate initiatives. Respondents noted the significant contribution the hub played in the co-administration of the JTPB Fund and how important this fund was as a catalyst for climate interventions in the area.

"The capacity building and support to organisations for the just transitions PB fund, we saw a number of organisations that weren't quite ready for year one who were actually given that development support and that capacity building support over the course between year one and into year two to be able to apply."

Many stakeholders highlighted the important role the hub played in creating awareness of existing funding opportunities. Several stakeholders also highlighted how the NESCAN hub has built their capacity to apply for and manage funding and provided targeted training around fund applications.

"We would not have been aware of this or been able to build a good application without NESCAN's support."

"Their workshops on fundraising were very helpful in seeking larger grant funding."

One stakeholder noted that the hub is involved in redirecting existing local authority funding to make it more targeted and effectively utilised, enhancing its impact.

Impact

In addition to the output indicators listed above, two impact indicators were developed to help better understand the overall impact of the hub. The first indicator, shown in figure 13 below, was aimed at assessing whether there was evidence of the hub facilitating a just transition. For the purpose of this evaluation, the definition of a just transition was adapted from the [Scottish Just Transition Commission](#) and defined as interventions that “ensure the benefits of climate change action are shared widely, while the costs do not unfairly burden those least able to pay”.

Indicator | Evidence of the hub supporting a just transition.

Figure 13: Impact Indicator 1 Description

The NESCAN hub’s reports and documentation note that a just transition is a core principle of what the hub is aiming to achieve. As a result, most of the hub’s activities could be considered as contributing to a just transition. However, the documentation provides some specific instances of the hub's involvement in driving a just transition. For example, the NESCAN hub’s involvement in the Just Transition Communities Project aims to develop tools and resources to help communities understand their local situation and take steps towards a just transition. As noted above, the hub plays a role in the

JTPB Fund. The hub has been involved in various activities such as community assemblies, filmmaking, and climate-focused events to increase community engagement and empowerment in climate action. The hub furthermore provides support, advice, and training to community groups and individuals, helping them develop skills and knowledge in areas such as climate change, sustainability, and funding applications.

Stakeholders have noted that the NESCAN hub is fostering a just transition by employing an approach that includes broadening engagement through hybrid events, amplifying community voices, and leading research collaborations. A key point from stakeholders is the role the hub is playing in amplifying local community voices. Stakeholders noted that the hub's collaboration with major private sector partners on research projects underscores their commitment to integrating community perspectives into actionable just transition initiatives. Additionally, respondents noted that the NESCAN hub's leadership in the Just Transition Partnership project, particularly in youth engagement, highlighted their dedication to involving young people as key stakeholders in the climate transition.

"NESCAN have helped to provide a voice for that community... they're allowing structures to take place and people to step into that and to find a way to communicate what they see as their issues."

Stakeholders additionally noted that the NESCAN hub adopts an intersectionality approach, connecting climate action with social justice and inequality. They note that the hub has also helped diverse community groups align their projects within the just transition framework, ensuring local actions are part of broader sustainable change. Stakeholders have noted that the NESCAN hub's events, accessible both online and in-person, have increased inclusivity for individuals with barriers such as childcare responsibilities. By ensuring that these events are open to all, the NESCAN hub facilitates equitable access to conversations about climate issues.

However, although these observations about improved access were made by stakeholders, there was no specific evidence in the hub's documentation that demonstrates there has been an increased number of people who typically experience barriers attending these types of events.

The second impact indicator, shown in figure 14 below, is aimed at assessing the hub's role in supporting wellbeing economies and community wealth building.

Indicator | Evidence of the hub supporting wellbeing economies and community wealth building

Figure 14: Impact Indicator 2 Description

The NESCAN hub's documentation indicates that supporting wellbeing economies and community wealth building is also a core guiding principle of the hub's activities. The documentation highlights how the NESCAN hub actively promotes and works towards sustainable places, and better life outcomes for people and communities. The documentation likewise describes how the hub facilitates the growth of strong, resilient, and proactive communities by connecting, supporting, representing, and promoting the third sector in Aberdeenshire.

The documentation similarly outlines how the NESCAN hub is part of various steering groups and bodies focused on climate action, fair food, and local resilience. Through their community development work, they promote the work of the NESCAN hub members at various events, forums, and meetings, which has led to the creation of new opportunities for collaboration and partnership.

In general, stakeholders were not that familiar with the concepts of "wellbeing economies" and "community wealth building". Stakeholders did note that the key way in which the NESCAN hub fosters wellbeing economies and community wealth building is by distributing funds to third-sector organisations for impactful local projects. They noted that the hub empowers small organisations to innovate and take risks through seed funding, which are key elements of a wellbeing economy.

"And I think with some of the projects we've seen with NESCAN, there's a bit more awareness there about, well, let's try something a little bit different, let's do things in a different way. And I think that absolutely helps get people into the kind of wellbeing way of thinking rather than doing what we've always done."

Respondents noted that the hub's focus extends beyond financial support to developing relationships that enhance community wellbeing and economic resilience, indicating an approach that values emotional support and local entrepreneurship. By way of example, the NESCAN hub promotes initiatives like bike reuse projects to connect local actions with broader networks, extending their impact beyond the initial target audience. Additionally, some stakeholders highlighted the hub's engagement and capacity-building efforts, especially during challenging times like the COVID lockdown. They emphasise the importance of community engagement in addressing and overcoming issues, thereby laying the groundwork for more resilient and prosperous communities.

Highlands and Islands Hub Research Findings

The following section provides a summary of the research findings for the Highlands and Island Hub. As with the NESCAN research findings section above, this section is divided into the 3 main outcomes from the evaluation theory of change above. An analysis of these findings is provided in the Evaluation Section of this report.

Outcome 1: The H&I hub is facilitating the necessary resources for climate response

The purpose of this outcome is to assess whether there is evidence of the H&I Hub developing and providing access to the appropriate resources, such as data, information, and funding, to enable effective and collaborative action on climate change response.

Output 1: Facilitating knowledge sharing

The first output, shown in figure 15 below, is intended to provide an indication of the extent to which knowledge and information sharing is being facilitated by the H&I hub.

Output	Facilitating knowledge sharing
Indicator	Evidence of knowledge and information sharing facilitated by the hub.

Figure 15: Output 1 Indicator Description

The H&I hub progress and annual reports provide a record of activities that suggest knowledge and information sharing is an important aspect of the hub. The reports suggest that by connecting and supporting communities, the hub facilitates collaboration and knowledge sharing among community groups, public, private, and third-sector partners. This helps to strengthen and increase collaboration and knowledge sharing across the region. The hub also delivers training to increase community climate literacy and empower communities to discuss climate change and associated environmental and social issues. There is evidence of regular digital engagement through social media and the development of a short film which raises awareness and widens participation in climate action.

The majority of stakeholders were also supportive of the view that the H&I hub had been effective in disseminating climate-related messages at a local level, making information relevant to communities and their existing interests and concerns. There was often mention of the newsletters, the direct contact from

development officers, the Climate Festival event and various educational and training initiatives.

"Regular contact via email, regular digital and website updates, good old fashioned word of mouth and posters. The hubs activities have raised awareness of the climate change situation and support groups and people to make the changes we need to make."

One-to-one support from development officers has been very positively received by community groups. The hub has helped groups write climate action plans for buildings and facilities. Stakeholders noted that the information shared is often more about climate action and forward-focussed on how to mitigate, rather than dwelling on the "doom and gloom" of climate change-specific information "which can be overwhelming".

"The hub has provided newsletters and information on the website detailing members' activities and projects dealing with real-life issues arising from the climate crisis."

Output 2: Building community awareness

The second output, shown in figure 16 below, is intended to assess in what ways the hub is working to raise the community's awareness about climate change issues. This output assessed whether the hub is helping to grow the understanding of climate issues.

Output	Building community awareness
Indicator	Evidence of the hub building community awareness of the climate emergency.

Figure 16: Output 2 Indicator Description

The H&I hub's documentation and website provide a range of examples of ways in which the hub is creating opportunities to build community awareness of the climate crisis. Engagement is reported with existing networks across the region, including Community Planning Partnerships, Climate Action Networks, Community Councils, and the Development Trust network. They offer support and advice on community-led climate action, community engagement, and the benefits of a holistic and partnership approach to climate projects. The H&I hub also conducts regular digital engagement through social media platforms and develops resources such as a short film and climate literacy training. However, the hub's reports do not explicitly outline how, and to what degree, the awareness of community stakeholders has improved.

Stakeholders reported that there was previously a gap in climate action and activity in the region, and most agreed that that hub was playing a key role in building climate awareness in the communities it was engaged with. Messaging was said to be clear and concise, and the social media presence was impressive.

“The hub has definitely filled a big gap in terms of their knowledge, experience, funding etc.”

The showcasing of community projects, particularly via an online film, was noted by many stakeholders. There was mention that the hub focuses on showcasing groups and projects to the community, allowing people within the communities to generate awareness and action themselves.

Stakeholders from partner organisations noted that the hub is reaching new sections of the community with climate information and said “they are really valuable” for accessing new areas.

The hub’s activity on building community awareness appears very strong in the areas they are engaged with. Many survey respondents, however, did not feel that their local communities had any contact with or benefit from the hub yet, so there is an opportunity to broaden the reach of the hub further into more communities across the full H&I area.

Output 3: Building relationship amongst stakeholders

The third output, shown in figure 17 below, examines how the hub is helping to build relationships between stakeholders. It assesses to what extent the hub is facilitating partnerships in the region.

Output	Building relationships amongst stakeholders
Indicator	Evidence of the hub helping to build relationships between stakeholders.

Figure 17: Output 3 Indicator Description

The H&I hub’s progress reports highlight a number of ways in which the hub is facilitating partnership building by engaging with various community planning partnerships, subgroups, and organisations in the region. They have attended meetings and networking sessions with community planning partnerships, poverty action groups, and destination tourism networks, The hub has also established partnerships with agencies such as Highlands Adapts, Zero Waste Scotland, Changeworks, Local Energy Scotland, and Home Energy Scotland.

Some stakeholders provided examples of ways in which the hub had connected them with representatives of other organisations, which had led to beneficial exchanges of information and gains of volunteers and funding. One stakeholder highlighted initiatives taking place in Badenoch and Strathspey and how, based on linkages made by the hub, the stakeholder is now intending to link up their own projects.

“The hub has given us information on other climate organisations which we can utilise when organising events or sharing information locally.”

The hub’s community development officers (CDOs) were noted to be very active in local networks and forums such as community partnerships. The local knowledge of the CDOs allows for the appropriate types of connections to be made.

“[The hub is] connecting me with others who might wish to take part in the project's research, development and/or eventual (hopefully) delivery.”

The Climate Festival, in particular, was highlighted as providing a platform for organisations to bring together various stakeholders and engage in a manner they hadn’t been able to before. Other mechanisms highlighted included the website, emails and climate café events.

"Regular communication with all local groups, events, information sharing, signposting to funding, training and other opportunities. The hub has made it much easier for me to meet, build and strengthen working relationships with other groups and individuals in my area."

It is notable, however, that approximately half of the respondents to the online survey gave positive responses to this question. Negative or neutral comments highlighted that some stakeholders were unaware of the potential opportunities for this support and had not been approached/invited to engage in networking activity.

Outcome 2: H&I hub is stimulating low-carbon and climate resilient interventions

This outcome aims to assess the extent to which the H&I hub has been successful in encouraging and facilitating interventions that contribute to a sustainable reduction in carbon footprints and enhance resilience against the adverse effects of climate change. The outcome builds on the foundation created through Outcome 1 and explores whether the support and resources provided have translated into tangible, climate-smart initiatives on the ground,

marking a proactive step towards achieving long-term environmental sustainability and climate goals.

Output 4: Stimulating climate action

Output 4, which is shown in figure 18 below, is intended to assess whether there was evidence of specific climate change interventions taking place as a result of the support from the hub.

Output	Stimulating climate action
Indicator	Evidence of the hub stimulating climate action in the community.

Figure 18: Output 4 Indicator Description

Overall, there is evidence that the H&I hub’s approach to stimulating climate action involves outreach, engagement, support, mapping, and resource development. The documentation reports that the hub has made progress on identifying and mapping existing climate action projects in the region, as well as keeping track of local funding sources that welcome climate action projects. This has helped to create an overview of ongoing initiatives and funding opportunities, allowing for better coordination and collaboration.

Stakeholders highlighted how the hub encourages communities to see climate action as a solution to other community needs. They mentioned the constructive and motivating influence of the hub, taking conversations out of the “doom loop” and moving people towards positive action.

“...by working with a positive and community-building attitude which encourages participation through optimism, rather than through scaremongering.”

The hub’s staff were repeatedly highlighted as being “highly motivated”, “enthusiastic”, “encouraging” and “inspirational”, causing a “snowball effect” on other people’s motivation.

“Climate Hub staff are very proactive at contacting organisations with information on opportunities and funding that might support projects and climate action.”

Within the survey, positive responses referred to resources provided to communities (funding, contacts, knowledge) and to the confidence and positivity that hub staff share. Specific examples included supporting a local

community fridge with publicity and aiding the formation of a local gardening group.

"Having someone to talk projects through with or just pop in and have a cuppa is a such a benefit. It has led to more confidence in our community and more groups taking on projects that they may not have done without the professional support and friendship of the Hub and its staff."

In areas where the hub is active, stakeholders cite examples of existing groups becoming more prominent and new groups being supported in climate action initiatives. However, slightly less than half (approximately 40%) of the respondents to the online survey responded negatively or neutrally to the question: "In what way the hub was stimulating climate action in the community?". Many stakeholders suggested that hub engagement was not yet taking place in their community or geographical area, some commenting as "Not noticeably" or "I don't think it is".

"I've not seen any interaction with our community, although I am involved with various charitable groups."

Output 5: Supporting climate resilience

The purpose of this output, shown in figure 19 below, was to assess whether climate change resilience is also being promoted through the hub. For the purpose of this evaluation, the concept of resilience was broadly defined as both climate change adaptation related interventions as well as building adaptive capacity.

Output	Supporting climate resilience
Indicator	Evidence of the hub supporting your community to be more climate resilient.

Figure 19: Output 5 Indicator Description

The grant offers and project reports of the H&I hub state an aim to support community-led climate action in the region in its broadest sense, including community-led climate change mitigation, adaptation, and biodiversity projects. The hub works with communities to develop climate action plans in a place-based approach, which includes varying levels of adaptation and resilience focus, depending on local priorities. The hub also reports developing contacts, research, and partnerships, particularly with Highlands Adapts, and in the area of community land ownership and carbon credits to provide guidance and best practice.

Stakeholders reported positively that hub events focus on how to deliver activities in ways that address the mental and emotional aspects of climate resilience and help develop resilient, well-connected communities that are better equipped to pursue sustainable development and wealth building from within. For example, one stakeholder mentioned how the [Velocity project](#) supports mental health because it encourages physical activity but also allows people to meet up and socialise.

“People drop in for a chat, [the Velocity project has created] somewhere for people to go. That social element is quite important. The physical activity is important for people as well.”

Few projects were highlighted explicitly by stakeholders, but one was referenced by many from throughout the region. Many stakeholders were aware of the hub’s facilitation work in [Golspie](#), an area of coastal retreat and flooding, where the hub has been facilitating conversations between community groups with concern and the Highlands Council.

“And one big one I've become really aware of is the flooding in Golspie, the village that I actually live in as well. The climate hub has been doing quite a lot of work to raise awareness of the impacts of the coastal erosion in that area.”

Output 6: Supporting regional response to climate change

The purpose of this output, shown in figure 20 below, is to assess whether the hub is playing a role in facilitating a broader regional response to climate change. A regional approach is typically significant for climate change response as actions often require collaboration with a wider regional audience.

Indicator	Evidence of the hub facilitating a coordinated approach to regional climate change response.
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Figure 20: Output 6 Indicator Description

The H&I hub documentation suggests they are increasingly striving towards supporting the regional response to climate change by engaging with more and wider communities throughout the region. Over the pathfinder pilot period, they report on increasingly working collaboratively with local authorities, statutory agencies, third-sector organisations, and community groups to develop, support, and deliver community-led climate action. Through their work, the hub aims to create strong networks of support and assist communities in forming climate action plans aligned with local place plans.

The hub staff see the hub as sitting in the middle of a “massive web” of organisations, with a key role being making connections and signposting. Many stakeholder responses agreed with this view. There is a risk, however, of a key-person dependency here, with much of this knowledge and connection reported as coming directly from the hub manager.

“Without the hub this would all be much more disparate. They serve such a huge area and provide connection across it.”

Overall, the hub plays a growing role in empowering and enabling communities to take positive climate action in the region. Stakeholders reported a “huge amount more going on than previously”, with a landscape of competing over funding, changing to collaboration, and an increased recognition that the hub covers the whole region, rather than just the main urban areas.

There is an opportunity to develop this area further, though, as stakeholders also highlighted geographical gaps in coverage, particularly in the Shetland and Orkneys, and the potential to develop more strategic partnerships with local authorities and other statutory agencies in all areas.

Outcome 3: H&I hub is enabling potential future climate response to take place

This outcome seeks to evaluate the extent to which the H&I hub has not only supported effective climate action but also laid the groundwork for these actions to be sustained into the future. It considers the hub's approach to supporting interventions that can be replicated, whether the hub is impacting on policy and decision making or whether the hub is helping to unlock climate financing.

Output 7: Supporting replication and scaling up

This output, shown in figure 21 below, is intended to assess whether the hub is laying the groundwork for future climate change interventions to take place.

Output	Supporting replication and scaling up
Indicator	Evidence of the hub facilitating a climate change intervention pipeline for your community.

Figure 21: Output 7 Indicator Description

The H&I hub's reports throughout the pilot phase show work on establishing itself in the community ecosystems of the H&I and forming key stakeholder relationships with local authorities, Highlands & Islands Enterprise, third-sector interfaces, and other organisations. The H&I hub has also been building strong relationships with agencies working in the climate action realm, such as Circular Communities Scotland, Sustrans, Cycling UK, Keep Scotland Beautiful, Scottish Communities Climate Action Network, Highlands Adapts and others. With this groundwork in place, the hub is now better positioned to increase the work being done in communities and raise the profile of community-led climate action throughout the region, laying the groundwork for future climate change interventions.

Many stakeholders interviewed felt less able to give a view on this aspect than on others discussed. However, some did make reference to the increasing number of similar projects, spreading organically from community to community after initial support and seeding from the hub, in particular community fridges.

"Film nights, networking sessions, climate cafe style events etc. are all easily replicable across the country."

"The Pride initiative that I am working on with the hub can absolutely be replicated and scaled. It could be the pilot for a new Green Pride movement across Scotland if the manifesto, action plan and associated support are made available to the other prides".

The hub was praised for its ability to transfer practice from one area to another. This included applying knowledge learned from one area and describing it in a way that made it seem possible in other areas.

"There is a real skill of saying "we tried this here and it worked, let's take the principles and adapt them to X" ... Knowledge of how to pitch things to communities is strong in the hub."

Stakeholders also noted that the successful expansion of initiatives was dependent on many external factors to the hub, and in particular, the funding landscape.

"By building capacity in local community organisations, they can pass their expertise to newer organisations. However, this will depend on the capacity of the existing organisations - The hub is an additional resource, and it is unrealistic and unfair to assume that third sector organisations can assume this role without dedicated resource."

Output 8: Supporting policy input and decision making

The purpose of this output, shown in figure 22 below, is to assess whether the hub's interventions are influencing policy input and decision-making processes. By providing informed contributions to policy discussions, the hub would aim to create an enabling environment where climate action can be effectively integrated into local governance, thereby securing the longevity and adaptability of its initiatives.

Output	Supporting policy input and decision-making
Indicator	Evidence of the hub activities resulting in an impact on local and national policy.

Figure 22: Output 8 Indicator Description

The H&I hub's documentation suggests that it aims to support policy input and decision-making by engaging with communities and Community Planning Partnerships in all areas across the Northern Highlands & Islands region, though reports highlight challenges in ensuring full geographic coverage in practice. Additionally, the hub reports working collaboratively with Climate Action Towns projects to support the development, design, and delivery of community-led climate action projects. This includes providing carbon literacy and net zero policy training to community and third-sector organisations. The hub aims to empower communities to actively participate in policy setting, decision-making, and local place planning by fostering collaboration and providing resources.

Hub staff noted that they have not focussed on influencing national policy upwards yet but are feeling increasingly confident to do and intend to be a larger focus in the future, starting with increasing participation in policy consultations.

Stakeholders were generally unaware of any examples of this nationally or at local authority level. Some did highlight very local influence, where the hub had been encouraging communities to think more about sustainability and develop environmental policies for local annual events such as chain sawing contests.

“Local events are developing sustainability policies, and the Hub reviewed these for them.”

Only a few online survey respondents few were able to cite specific examples or policy input. Those mentioned were engagement with Highland Council

climate policy development and influence with the Scottish Rural Islands Parliament.

Output 9: Enabling access to climate finance

The last output, shown in figure 23 below, within the third sustainability-related outcome is how much the hub is mobilising additional climate finance. By mobilising additional climate finance, there would be an increased probability of interventions being sustained in the future.

Output	Enabling access to climate finance
Indicator	Evidence of additional funding been unlocked with support from the hub.

Figure 23: Output 9 Indicator Description

The H&I hub documentation suggests it has provided a range of resources and support to help community-led climate action projects access additional funding, including:

- Mapping Exercise: The hub has conducted a mapping exercise to identify local funding sources that welcome climate action projects.
- Promotion and Support: The hub actively promotes climate action funding opportunities and offers support in developing funding applications. The hub has provided guidance and training on how to navigate the funding landscape and connect community groups with relevant funding opportunities.

Some stakeholders were able to cite specific examples of how their projects that had received seed funding from the hub were able to go on to use this as match funding from other sources, such as local authority grant schemes.

It is not possible to quantify the scale of additional funding being unlocked by the hub's activity, but a number of stakeholders highlighted how the hub has built their capacity to apply for and manage funding and provided targeted training around fund applications. Stakeholders describe funding masterclasses they had attended as "fantastic", helping them understand how to raise and match funds, as well as the "nitty gritty" of project management. The support that the community development officers have provided (workshops and conversations) to assist groups with developing funding applications was praised.

"They have enabled groups like mine (to) access funding. They help and support applications with staff time and knowledge. The Hub have a local staff presence in my area. It is brilliant for small groups to have that expertise and access to support that isn't available normally to small charities, individuals or even larger groups where volunteers are the main staff."

Impact

In addition to the output indicators listed above, two impact indicators were also developed to help better understand the overall impact of the hub. The first indicator, shown in figure 24 below, was aimed at assessing whether there was evidence of the hub facilitating a just transition. For the purpose of this evaluation, the definition of a just transition was adapted from the [Scottish Just Transition Commission](#) and defined as interventions that “ensure the benefits of climate change action are shared widely, while the costs do not unfairly burden those least able to pay”.

Indicator | Evidence of the hub supporting a just transition.

Figure 24: Impact Indicator 1 Description

The H&I hub’s reports and documentation note that the hub is supporting a “just transition” in the region by encouraging community-led climate actions to be inclusive and beneficial to the local populations. It strives to engage communities, local authorities, and other stakeholders in collaborative efforts to accelerate climate action at a community level and achieve a fair and equitable transition to a net-zero future.

Stakeholders reported that the hub makes a deliberate effort to engage communities that may not typically have the resources to engage in climate action. This was particularly evident in their role with the Climate Action Towns initiative. The hub is said to be providing these communities, especially those ranking higher on the SIMD index (Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation), with the necessary tools, space, and resources to engage in climate action.

Stakeholders also noted that hub staff take a holistic approach to supporting communities, first asking “what are the community’s needs?” and then considering how that priority can be tackled, with a solution that has a climate co-benefit.

“Not just what is good for the planet but what is good for people as well.”

“We can’t do climate justice without social justice.”

Some stakeholders praised the hub’s ability to engage parts of communities that other statutory bodies are not engaging with. They felt the hub is able to advocate for communities that other organisations don’t usually see and can share the needs of that community with regional stakeholders.

The second impact indicator, shown in figure 25 below, aims at assessing the hub's role in supporting wellbeing economies and community wealth building.

Indicator | Evidence of the hub supporting wellbeing economies and community wealth building

Figure 25: Impact Indicator 2 Description

The H&I hub is primarily focused on supporting community-led climate action across the region. While the programme documentation does not set out or report on explicit work on wellbeing economies and community wealth building, there is much evidence of progress on community engagement and climate action that contributes to the broader goals of sustainable and inclusive development. The hub supports a variety of projects that promote sustainable places and improve life outcomes, such as energy and waste reduction projects and resilience initiatives. This support can come in different forms, including funding, personnel, or simply signposting information.

Stakeholders highlighted the hub's role in sharing information and promoting what can be done as crucial in stimulating new ideas and actions in the field of climate change.

“Without the Hub it is less likely that much of this would have happened. The Hub provides a go-to place for advice, direction, good practice.”

Stakeholders also noted the benefits of having regionally-based support and local access to Development Officers saying that “The hub really understands the landscape of the H&I.”

“It's great that we have access to a climate hub and that isn't centralised in Glasgow or Edinburgh. The Highlands doesn't always get representation. The interventions are tailored to communities in the Highlands.”

Stakeholders also noted the hub facilitates the growth of strong, resilient, and proactive communities by connecting, supporting, representing, and promoting the third sector across the Highlands. Hub staff are part of various steering groups and bodies focused on climate action, fair food, and local resilience.

"The hub is providing additional community learning and development in areas across Highland where there is very little additional on the ground support for community groups."

Evaluation

As noted in the research methodology, the Scottish Government posed a set of key questions about the two pathfinder hubs to be explored through this evaluation. This section of the report provides a summary response to each of these key evaluation questions based on the findings from the research.

Did the hubs produce the intended results and to what extent?

For the purpose of this evaluation, the intended results were defined as the original aims of the pathfinder hubs, as outlined in the [hub application document](#). These aims are as follows:

- Build awareness of the climate emergency and widen participation;
- Stimulate climate action (mitigation and adaptation) (mainstreaming climate activity, developing local plans, identifying funding opportunities);
- Facilitate peer to peer learning and building tools and resources;
- Build strong relationships with key stakeholders;
- Ensure a joined-up approach is being taken to tackling climate change at a regional level;
- Support community resilience (supporting development of longer term plans around energy and food);
- Empower communities and support a just transition;
- Support wellbeing economies and community wealth building.

Below is a summary of the analysis for each of the pathfinder hub aims in terms of the progress towards achieving these aims.

Summary of assessment of whether the hubs achieved the intended results

Hub aim: Build awareness of the climate emergency and widen participation

The NESCAN hub

The NESCAN hub significantly contributes to building community climate literacy and awareness through a variety of initiatives, such as hosting community climate assembly sessions and workshops and organising events such as the Climate Week North East. These efforts, supported by the hub's community development officers' approachable manner and the peer-to-peer exchange aspect, have enhanced community engagement and understanding of climate issues.

The H&I hub

The H&I hub has created opportunities to build community awareness of the climate crisis by offering support and advice on community-led climate action and conducting regular digital engagement through various media platforms. There was previously a gap in climate action and activity in the region, which the hub is now starting to fill, and the hub is progressively reaching new sections of the community with climate information.

Hub aim: Stimulate climate action (mitigation and adaptation) (mainstreaming climate activity, developing local plans, identifying funding opportunities)

The NESCAN hub

The NESCAN hub has played a crucial role in stimulating climate action through a variety of support such as project development, management, funding, and organising events. It has provided comprehensive support to community groups, including one-to-one advice, seed funding for climate-related projects, and efforts to promote sustainable practices like active travel and energy efficiency. There is, however, a potential need for a more project-oriented approach to enhance tangible climate resilience and low-carbon interventions.

The H&I hub

The H&I hub's approach to stimulating climate action involves outreach, engagement, support, mapping, and resource development. The hub encourages communities to see climate action as a solution to other community needs. The hub's staff were repeatedly highlighted as being a hugely positive driver and inspiration for action. In areas where the hub is active, existing groups are becoming more prominent and new groups are being supported into climate action initiatives. However, there are significant

geographical gaps in coverage of hub activity, particularly in the northern island groups.

Hub aim: Facilitate peer-to-peer learning and building tools and resources

The NESCAN Hub

The NESCAN hub effectively disseminates climate-related information and fosters knowledge exchange through a variety of channels, including the development of communication materials, active social media engagement, and organising events. Stakeholders confirm the hub's role in making climate information accessible and engaging, highlighting interactive tools like their website's map and various educational initiatives that cater to diverse audiences, including international students. However, there is an acknowledgement of the challenge of reaching individuals not already engaged in climate issues.

The H&I Hub

Knowledge and information sharing is an important aspect of the H&I hub's activities. The hub facilitates collaboration and knowledge sharing among community groups and public, private, and third-sector partners via a range of activities, including training and 1-2-1 support. The hub has been effective in disseminating climate-related messages at a local level, making information relevant to communities and their existing interests and concerns.

Hub aim: Build strong relationships with key stakeholders

The NESCAN Hub

The NESCAN hub has effectively facilitated partnership building and collaborative efforts, notably through initiatives like the Just Transition Fund Participatory Budgeting project, working alongside various organisations and participating in regional events. Stakeholders confirm the NESCAN hub's role in linking partners for collective projects and its openness to feedback, enhancing its partnership management. However, there is a potential need for improved relationship-building with stakeholders beyond the community level, including local authorities and businesses.

The H&I Hub

The H&I hub is facilitating partnership building by engaging with various community planning partnerships, subgroups, and organisations in the region. Some stakeholders provided strong examples of ways in which the hub had connected them with representatives of other organisations, which had led to beneficial exchanges of information and gains of volunteers and funding. However, many other stakeholders were unaware of the potential opportunities for this support and had not been approached/invited to engage in networking activity.

Hub aim: Ensure a joined-up approach is being taken to tackling climate change at a regional level

The NESCAN Hub

The NESCAN hub prioritises a regional approach to climate action, fostering a network of community-led organisations across Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire, and supporting community-led climate change initiatives through assemblies, training, and project support. It enhances regional collaboration by sharing resources and experiences among neighbouring councils and engaging diverse groups, including SMEs, to address climate challenges in both urban and rural settings. Despite its key role in connecting communities with government and fostering regional strategies, stakeholders recognise the need for clearer coordination within the funding landscape to avoid duplication of efforts.

The H&I Hub

The H&I hub is increasingly striving to support the regional response to climate change by engaging with more and wider communities throughout the region. The hub aims to create strong networks of support and assist communities in forming climate action plans aligned with local place plans. There is an opportunity to develop this area further, though, as stakeholders also highlight geographical gaps in coverage, particularly in the Shetland and Orkneys, and the potential to develop more strategic partnerships with local authorities and other statutory agencies in all areas.

Hub aim: Support community resilience (supporting the development of longer-term plans around energy and food)

The NESCAN Hub

The NESCAN hub enhances climate resilience through improved access to climate financing, providing seed funding and facilitating access to participatory budgeting for community projects in Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire. Additionally, the hub plays a crucial role in building community resilience by organising workshops on resilience planning, contributing to resilience and adaptation strategies, and integrating climate action with broader social and economic issues, thereby making resilience strategies more relatable and actionable for communities.

The H&I Hub

The H&I hub works with communities to develop climate action plans in a place-based approach, which includes varying levels of adaptation and resilience focus, depending on local priorities. The hub is progressively developing contacts, research, and partnerships on adaptation and resilience. Hub events focus on how to deliver activities in ways that address the mental and emotional aspects of climate resilience and help develop resilient, well-connected communities that are better equipped to pursue sustainable development and wealth-building from within.

Hub aim: Empower communities and support a just transition

The NESCAN Hub

The NESCAN hub centres on a just transition as a fundamental principle, with activities spanning from the Just Transition Communities Project which develops tools for community understanding and action, to the Just Transition Participatory Budgeting Fund which aims at empowering community engagement in climate action. Stakeholders highlight the hub's efforts in amplifying local voices, engaging youth, and integrating social justice with climate action, demonstrating its commitment to fostering a just transition through inclusive events and strategic collaborations that align local initiatives with broader sustainable goals.

The H&I Hub

The H&I hub is supporting a “just transition” in the region by encouraging community-led climate actions to be inclusive and beneficial to the local populations. The hub makes a deliberate effort to engage communities that may not typically have the resources to engage in climate action. Hub staff take a holistic approach to supporting communities, first asking, “What are the community’s needs?” and then considering how that priority can be tackled with a solution that has a climate co-benefit. The hub is increasingly advocating for communities that other organisations don’t usually engage with and can share the needs of that community with regional stakeholders.

Hub aim: Support wellbeing economies and community wealth building

The NESCAN Hub

The NESCAN hub is guided by the principle of supporting wellbeing economies and community wealth building, actively working towards creating sustainable places and improving life outcomes for communities in Aberdeenshire. By distributing funds, promoting initiatives like bike reuse projects, and facilitating community development work, the NESCAN hub fosters strong, resilient communities. Stakeholders highlight the hub's role in integrating climate justice with economic development, providing seed funding to encourage innovation and risk-taking among small organisations, and developing supportive relationships that contribute to community and economic resilience.

The H&I Hub

The H&I hub is making progress on community engagement and climate action that contributes to the broader goals of sustainable and inclusive development. The hub supports a variety of projects that promote sustainable places and improve life outcomes. This support can come in different forms, including funding, personnel, or simply signposting information. Hub staff are part of various steering groups and bodies focused on climate action, fair food, and local resilience.

In summary, to answer the question: “**Did the hubs produce the intended results and to what extent?**”, it is clear from the analysis that both the NESCAN and H&I hubs have made significant progress towards producing the intended results. This has been achieved by actively engaging communities in climate action, building awareness, fostering resilience, stimulating community-level action, embedding cooperation and learning, encouraging regional collaboration, and developing approaches tailored to local circumstances and priorities. However, there are opportunities for improvement in areas such as expanding geographical coverage, enhancing project-oriented approaches for tangible climate resilience, and strengthening partnerships with a wider range of stakeholders, including local authorities and businesses.

What unintended results—both positive and negative—did the activities of the hubs produce? How did these occur?

Given both pathfinder hubs' comprehensive approaches to climate action, which integrate various strategies from education and awareness campaigns to direct community support and project funding, distinguishing unintended results can be challenging. This complexity arises from the interconnected nature of the hubs' work, where actions designed to address one aspect of climate change inadvertently affect other areas, making it challenging to isolate and identify unintended outcomes directly. Nevertheless, two additional unintended results did emerge from the research.

Emotional support leading to increased resilience and community empowerment

A notably positive unintended outcome observed is the hubs' role in providing emotional support to communities. Beyond their primary function of facilitating climate action, the hubs have become a vital source of general emotional support for communities, engaging in discussions that span a wide range of activities. This support has played a crucial role in giving a voice to communities and helping to articulate their concerns, aspirations, and ideas. Moreover, by actively involving community members in discussions and decision-making processes, the hubs have contributed to building confidence among community stakeholders. This empowerment enables communities not only to tackle climate-related challenges more effectively but also to address broader social and economic issues with increased resilience and autonomy.

De facto link between community and government

An additional unintended yet significant outcome of the hubs' activities is their emergence as a de facto direct link between the community and the Scottish Government. 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. This role of the hubs facilitates a vital communication channel, enabling community groups to voice their concerns, proposals, and feedback directly to the government.

In conclusion, to answer the question: “**What unintended results—both positive and negative—did the activities of the hubs produce? How did these occur?**”, the research has shown that the activities of the NESCAN and H&I hubs led to positive unintended results, including resilience building and community empowerment, and establishing a de facto link between the community and the Scottish Government.

How valuable were the activities of the hubs to service providers, clients, the community, and/or organisations involved?

As noted throughout the research findings section of this report, there is significant evidence demonstrating how the activities of the hubs have proven to be of

significant value to a wide range of stakeholders. This value manifests in various forms, addressing the multifaceted needs and goals of these groups within the context of climate action and community development.

Community members have found the hubs' activities very valuable in providing access to crucial information, resources, and support networks. The hubs have played a critical role in empowering individuals and community groups, equipping them with the knowledge and tools needed to undertake climate action initiatives. This empowerment has led to increased engagement in sustainability practices, a greater sense of agency in addressing climate change, and improved resilience among communities facing environmental challenges.

The activities of the hubs have also been key in fostering a coordinated, community-centred approach to climate action. By acting as facilitators, connectors, and supporters, the hubs have enriched the capacity of service providers, empowered clients and communities, and enhanced the collaborative potential of organisations engaged in climate change mitigation and adaptation.

In answering the question: “**How valuable were the activities of the hubs to service providers, clients, the community, and/or organisations involved?**”, there is extensive evidence that shows the hubs' interventions are viewed as extremely valuable by a wide range of stakeholders. Stakeholders have highlighted the hubs' role in building resilience, empowering communities, and serving as a crucial link between communities and government, underscoring the multifaceted value of their activities.

To what extent did the intervention represent the best possible use of available resources to achieve the most valuable results for participants and the community?”

Two lines of enquiry were pursued through the evaluation to assess whether interventions represent the best possible use of resources. These were whether there were particular interventions that stakeholders viewed as significantly impactful or valuable, and the second query was whether there were interventions by the hub that could have been done differently or not at all.

High-value interventions

Stakeholders listed a range of interventions facilitated by the hubs that they considered of particularly high value. High-value interventions were those interventions that stakeholders considered had the biggest impact in their community. These were:

- **Community engagement and education:** The hubs do extremely well in organising climate events such as climate café events and Climate Week North East. These events are seen as pivotal in facilitating discussions, learning, and engaging communities. The hubs' use of innovative tools such

as filmmaking to engage diverse groups, especially from more deprived areas, highlights their commitment to broad and inclusive outreach.

- **Empowerment through funding and training:** Providing seed funding and facilitating funding applications also stand out as crucial activities, empowering local organisations to initiate and sustain climate action projects. Additionally, 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.
- **Platform for policy input and collaboration:** By hosting citizens' assemblies and public meetings, the hubs provide a platform for community voices in climate discussions, fostering a sense of ownership and active participation in climate action. Their role in facilitating collaboration, whether through developing community networks or partnership work, underscores their effectiveness in bringing together diverse stakeholders for common goals.
- **Personalised support and motivation:** The placement of development officers passionate about their local areas has been a game-changer, providing motivation, direction, and personalised support that catalyses community and organisational activities. This personal touch, coupled with the hubs' role as a "knowledgeable friend", enhances motivation and inspires a "snowball effect" of increased community involvement and enthusiasm for climate initiatives.

"I think the most valuable thing is having community development officers that have sufficient time and expertise to be able to provide that one-to-one help."

- **Flexibility and innovation:** The hubs' broad definition of climate change activity and their open approach to projects have allowed for a wide range of initiatives, from sustainability in local events to the installation of cigarette collection bins. This flexibility supports a wide interpretation of climate action, encouraging innovation and allowing communities to tailor initiatives to their unique contexts.
- **Ability to work with limited resources.** It is also worth noting that many stakeholders highlighted the hubs' "remarkable" impact despite their limited resources, emphasising the substantial impact they have managed to deliver under constrained conditions.

Areas for improvement

Stakeholders also highlighted areas where the hubs' interventions could change or be improved. These include:

- **Professional support and funding assistance:** There was a need for the hubs to strengthen support in administrative, funding application, and project management aspects for community organisations. Professional support, possibly through funded project managers, could significantly aid

organisations that struggle with the administrative burdens of climate initiatives, especially when many grants do not cover staff costs.

- **Climate assemblies and engagement:** Suggestions from stakeholders include improving the planning, scheduling, and engagement strategies for climate assemblies to ensure broader and more diverse community participation. Addressing timing and scheduling challenges, and allowing longer lead times for planning and outreach, could also help in reaching beyond the usual attendees and engaging difficult-to-reach audiences more effectively.
- **Stakeholder engagement and scaling initiatives:** Expanding efforts to engage a wider array of stakeholders, including underrepresented groups, and scaling up successful local initiatives to have a broader regional or national impact are seen as critical steps forward. Implementing continuous feedback mechanisms to gather community insights could also inform ongoing improvement and adaptation of initiatives.
- **Resource management and strategic focus:** Ensuring balanced resource allocation to prevent staff burnout and maintaining a clear strategic focus to avoid spreading efforts too thinly are essential for sustainable operations. Balancing localised solutions with broader regional and national climate goals is important for aligning the hubs' efforts with larger environmental objectives.
- **Increased collaboration with local authorities:** Strengthening collaboration with local councils and other strategic partners was also highlighted by stakeholders as a key area for future attention.

In summary, to answer the question: “**To what extent did the intervention represent the best possible use of available resources to achieve the most valuable results for participants and the community?**”, and considering the limitations of this research, it appears that interventions facilitated by the NESCAN and H&I hubs largely represent the best possible use of available resources. However, it must be noted that a quantitative economic impact assessment was not carried out as part of this assessment. This conclusion is based on the feedback provided by stakeholders. This is evidenced by stakeholders' identification of high-value interventions such as community engagement and education, empowerment through funding and training, providing a platform for policy input and collaboration, personalised support and motivation, and flexibility and innovation in project implementation. Stakeholders also noted areas for improvement, including the need for more professional support in administration and project management, and increased collaboration with local authorities (amongst others).

Are any positive results likely to be sustained? If so, what circumstances will enable this?

This evaluation explored whether interventions by the hubs will likely be sustained, through a number of lines of enquiry. These include whether the hubs were supporting projects that could be replicated, whether they were intervening in policy and decision making and whether they were promoting ownership at a local level.

Supporting replication and scaling up

The hub's progress reports indicated that the hubs did not explicitly recognise the need for replication and scaling as a key outcome of their activities. However, stakeholders noted that the foundations are being laid by the hubs to promote replication and scaling up. For example, the creation of a publicly accessible database of projects and resources, derived from mapping events, plays a pivotal role in showcasing existing projects and outlining pathways for their replication. Establishing key relationships with local authorities, enterprises, and climate action organisations, was also seen as a way in which the hubs were building a foundation for replication and scaling up. Stakeholders also emphasised the importance of tailoring initiatives to meet the unique needs and challenges of each community, suggesting a nuanced approach to replication that considers local contexts and the necessity of securing diverse stakeholder engagement.

Supporting policy input and decision-making

The hubs have had some influence on local and national policy and decision-making. One key role the hubs are playing is facilitating connections between community voices and decision-making platforms. For example, by organising community assemblies and assisting in the preparation of community consultation responses on significant policies, the hubs have ensured that diverse community perspectives, especially from areas with heavy industrial reliance, such as Aberdeen, are considered in local governance. This effort includes presenting ideas at Priority Neighbourhood Partnership meetings and influencing the inclusion of community-generated actions in the Local Outcome Improvement Plan (LOIP), showcasing a commitment to integrating community voices into political and policy-making processes. Additionally, strategic efforts like incorporating a Member of Scottish Parliament into the hub's board and collaborating with academic institutions have amplified marginalised voices, further enriching policy discussions.

Despite these achievements, challenges remain in achieving full geographic coverage and influencing policy at national levels, with the hub planning to focus more on national policy influence in the future. Collaborative projects and training initiatives aimed at empowering communities for local climate action reflect the hubs' commitment to fostering active community participation in policy setting.

Promoting ownership

A key observation from the research was that both pathfinder hubs have a deliberate focus on encouraging ownership of climate change interventions within communities. One of the key strategies employed by the hubs is assisting community groups in identifying actionable steps they can take towards addressing climate change. While the hubs provide the necessary support and resources to kickstart these actions, there is a clear intention to ensure that community groups possess the knowledge and capacity to carry forward these actions independently. This transfer of ownership not only empowers communities but also fosters a sense of responsibility and commitment towards the climate action initiatives they undertake.

"This kind of community development approach is avoiding building dependency. It's about building capacity."

The H&I hub, in particular, is working towards moving community groups away from a reliance on grants. This suggests an approach focused on building long-term, sustainable models for climate action initiatives, which inherently requires community ownership.

The hubs are also facilitating community ownership by exploring energy and community benefits and how they can be best distributed and used locally. This involves speaking with local energy suppliers to help build community-owned energy initiatives. The hubs' role in capacity building and empowering communities points towards their goal of enabling communities to take independent action on climate change initiatives.

In conclusion, to answer the question “**Are any positive results likely to be sustained? If so, what circumstances will enable this?**”, the research indicated that with continued support from the NESCAN and H&I hubs, the results are likely to be sustained due to the foundational work the hubs have put in place. This included promoting local ownership, emerging policy input and participating in decision-making structures. There is, however, potential to focus on additional policy input and focus more strongly on interventions that can be scaled up and replicated in the future.

Risks

Over and above the key questions posed at the outset of the evaluation, it is also worth highlighting a number of risks for the hubs that have emerged through the research.

Potential loss of momentum

Stakeholders expressed concerns regarding the risk of losing the momentum that the hubs have built over the past two years in establishing a foundation for climate change response across the region. Through the hub's efforts in creating capacity, enhancing communication, providing seed funding, and more, the hubs have played a crucial role in laying the groundwork for effective climate action. However, there is an evident risk that a shift in focus or a discontinuation of funding could lead to the loss of this groundwork, undermining the progress made and leaving communities without the necessary support to continue their climate action efforts. This potential loss of momentum would potentially stall current initiatives and erode the enthusiasm and engagement levels among stakeholders, making it challenging to rekindle momentum in the future.

“I don't think it's there yet. I don't think it's been in place long enough for that momentum to keep going on its own. I think because groups are still learning, and groups are still having ideas about what they can do and what they can implement and they don't know how to do that.”

“I don't think the momentum is high enough... I'm not entirely convinced that the projects and activities would keep going without the hub in place.”

Short-term funding constraints

A second significant risk identified is the limitation imposed by the current funding model, which primarily relies on annual budgeting. This approach severely restricts the hubs' capacity for long-term planning and strategic foresight. The requirement to operate within the confines of a yearly budget often compels the hubs to overcommit in their annual financial plans, focusing on spending their budgets rather than establishing effective management systems and strategies for sustained impact. A shift towards longer-term budgeting, for instance, adopting a three-year financial planning horizon, could help address this risk. A longer-term funding cycle would enable the hubs to adopt a more strategic approach, allowing for comprehensive planning, the implementation of robust management frameworks, and the initiation of projects with longer gestation periods, thereby enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of climate action initiatives across the region.

“But I think some of these things that could have been done differently are actually a product of the short-term funding situation. They're given a pot of money, they have to spend it by a certain date, they have to deliver a project, which means sometimes it's... not the best possible shape it could be.”

High staff turn-over

Linked closely to the risk posed by short-term funding constraints is the challenge of recruiting and retaining skilled staff, particularly when positions can only be guaranteed for one year at a time. This risk is especially critical considering the pivotal role that community development officers play in forging and maintaining local connections with stakeholders. Their ability to understand and engage with community needs is fundamental to the hubs' success. Furthermore, in more remote regions, finding staff with the appropriate skills poses an additional challenge, and the limitation of offering only annual contracts exacerbates this issue. The uncertainty and lack of job security associated with short-term contracts may deter potential candidates, leading to high turnover rates and gaps in the hubs' ability to maintain consistent, effective engagement with communities. This turnover not only disrupts ongoing projects and relationships but also places additional strain on the hubs' resources, as time and effort must be diverted to continuous recruitment and training processes.

“There is high turnover within the hub. I believe it's all contract, short term contract work. So, you maybe build up that relationship, but then someone new coming in doesn't know who's who or doesn't have that relationship anymore.”

Conclusion

The overall intention of this evaluation was to assess the impact of the two pathfinder hubs and, in particular:

- whether the hubs are adding value to the existing community space?
- whether they are contributing to the shift to low-carbon and resilient communities?
- what the impact of the hubs have been so far?

Adding Value

It is clear from the research that the hubs are adding value to the existing community space. This is being achieved through a multilayered approach that encompasses the organisation of inclusive and educational events which foster widespread community engagement and learning. The development and dissemination of engaging materials and films empower local organisations to initiate innovative climate action projects. By hosting citizens' assemblies and public meetings, the hubs create vital platforms for community voices, ensuring their ideas and concerns are heard and integrated into local and regional climate strategies.

"I think the value they've added in this area... has been immense."

Furthermore, the hubs' efforts in facilitating funding applications and providing tailored project management help to address critical needs within community organisations, enabling them to navigate administrative challenges and secure essential resources. The strategic development of community networks enhances collaboration and knowledge sharing, amplifying the impact of climate initiatives across diverse groups. The hubs' role in bridging the gap between communities and the Scottish Government highlights their importance in incorporating a broad range of community interests into governance and decision-making processes.

Shift to low-carbon and resilient communities

The research has also shown that the hubs are playing a key role in the shift to low-carbon and resilient communities. This is being realised through the promotion of sustainable practices (e.g. the encouragement of bike reuse projects), which not only foster environmental stewardship but also contribute to local economic resilience. Educational programs and training sessions provided by the hubs enhance community understanding of climate change and equip individuals with the skills needed for effective climate action, thereby building a foundation for resilience. Additionally, the hubs' efforts in supporting local projects with seed funding illustrate their commitment to supporting innovation and the empowerment of communities to develop and implement solutions tailored to their unique challenges. By organising citizens' assemblies and facilitating public meetings, the hubs ensure that community members have a platform to express their views and participate actively in climate discussions, fostering a sense of ownership and commitment to the transition process.

Impact

The research has shown that the hubs' efforts in promoting sustainability, empowering grassroots innovation, and encouraging participatory governance have not only mobilised a diverse range of stakeholders but have also instilled a sense of ownership and proactive participation in climate initiatives. The hubs' role as a bridge between communities, government, and the broader climate action network underscores their integral contribution to integrating local actions with regional and national sustainability goals. Their continued evolution and adaptation to the needs and challenges of the communities they serve will undoubtedly ensure their enduring impact on building a more sustainable and resilient future.

Recommendations

The final section of this report is forward-looking and includes recommendations for the pathfinder hubs going forward. These recommendations were developed based on stakeholder input to the draft evaluation findings.

Expanding the audience

- Broaden communication channels used to reach people who are not on their newsletter or social media accounts, such as local newsletters, community markets, or trade unions.
- Reach out to non-traditional audiences and spaces, such as festivals, events, or other platforms, where people who are not already interested in climate issues might be engaged.
- Use creative and fun methods, such as games, theatre, or videos, to showcase the work of the hub and inspire others to get involved.
- Work more closely with local authorities and other partners to ensure that the community voice is heard and integrated in the existing systems and projects, and to explore opportunities for collaboration and funding.

Supporting and facilitating additional climate action

- Act as a catalyst for fostering partnerships between private sector organisations and communities, enabling the sharing of expertise through volunteer involvement.
- Identify additional seed funding and support for applying for additional funding to scale up successful initiatives.
- Increase support for place-based resilience planning, aiding local communities in developing tailored strategies for climate resilience-building.
- Involve community councils and centres in resilience initiatives, strengthening community preparedness and response to climate challenges.
- Provide more training on climate and carbon literacy for community groups so that they can measure and communicate the impact of their projects.

Improving regional collaboration

- Build stronger relationships with local authorities and other partners.
- Clearly define roles and responsibilities across the region and communicate these roles to stakeholders.
- Engage with different regional partners and organisations to share messages and showcase projects (e.g. National Park Authorities).
- Support the development of a regional vision and plan for a just transition that can align the efforts of different stakeholders and secure long-term funding.
- Increase efforts to coordinate community and stakeholder input into national policy.

- Work with other hubs to share best practices, resources, and expertise, and to leverage the lessons learned from different contexts and projects.

Addressing risks

- Extend annual funding to multi-year budget to assist with long term planning and job security.
- Identify funding sources and business models that do not rely solely on the Scottish Government

Appendices

Annex 1: TOC Model

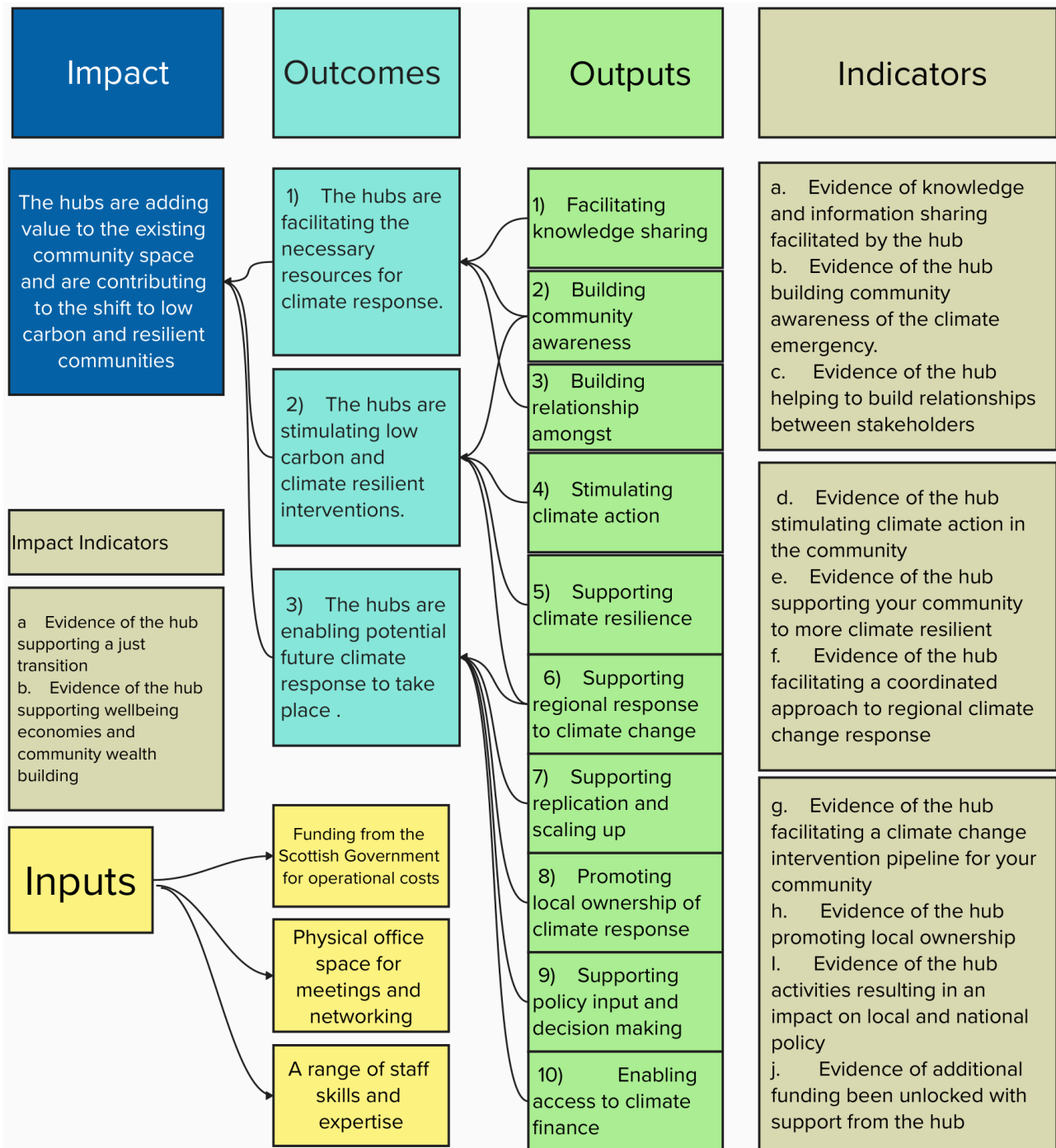


Figure 26: TOC Model

Annex 2: Evaluation indicators

Table 1: Evaluation Output Indicator Descriptions

Outcomes	Outputs	Indicators
1) The hubs are facilitating the necessary resources for climate response	1) Facilitating knowledge sharing 2) Building community awareness 3) Building relationship amongst stakeholders	a. Evidence of knowledge and information sharing facilitated by the hub b. Evidence of the hub building community awareness of the climate emergency. c. Evidence of the hub helping to build relationships between stakeholders
2) The hubs are stimulating low-carbon and climate resilient interventions	4) Stimulating climate action 5) Supporting climate resilience 6) Supporting regional response to climate change	d. Evidence of the hub stimulating climate action in the community e. Evidence of the hub supporting your community to be more climate resilient f. Evidence of the hub facilitating a coordinated approach to regional climate change response
3) The hubs are enabling potential future climate response to take place	7) Supporting replication and scaling up 8) Promoting local ownership of climate response 9) Supporting policy input and decision making 10) Enabling access to climate finance	g. Evidence of the hub facilitating a climate change intervention pipeline for the community h. Evidence of the hub promoting local ownership i. Evidence of the hub activities resulting in an impact on local and national policy j. Evidence of additional funding been unlocked with support from the hub

Impact indicators

In addition to the output indicators listed above, two impact indicators were also developed. These are:

1. Evidence of the hub supporting a just transition
2. Evidence of the hub supporting wellbeing economies and community wealth building

Annex 3: Interview research questions

Table 2: Semi structured interview questions – Adding value

Topic	Theme	Key Research Question
Adding value	Building community awareness	In what way is the hub building your or community awareness of the climate emergency?
Adding value	Knowledge sharing	In what way is the hub facilitating knowledge sharing and learning for you?
Adding value	Relationship building	In what way is the hub helping to build relationships between you and other stakeholders?
Adding value	Supporting a just transition	In what way is the hub supporting a just transition?
Adding value	Supporting wellbeing economies	In what way is the hub supporting wellbeing economies and community wealth building?

Table 3: Semi structured interview questions – Facilitating climate response

Topic	Theme	Key Research Question
Facilitating climate response	Stimulating climate action	In what way is the hub stimulating climate action in your community?
Facilitating climate response	Supporting climate resilience	In what way is the hub supporting your community to more climate resilient?
Facilitating climate response	Regional response to climate change	In what way is the hub facilitating a coordinated approach to regional climate change response?

Table 4: Semi structured interview questions – Sustainability

Topic	Theme	Key Research Question
Sustainability	Intervention pipeline	In what ways has the hub facilitated a climate change intervention pipeline for your community?
Sustainability	Potential for scaling up	Can existing initiatives be scaled up or replicated in other communities?
Sustainability	Ownership	Is there evidence of stakeholders taking ownership of the climate change initiatives started or supported by the hub?
Sustainability	Policy and planning impact	Have activities by the hub resulted in an impact on local and national policy?
Sustainability	Unlocking additional finance	Has additional funding been unlocked with support from the hub?

Table 5: Semi structured interview questions – Best use of resources

Topic	Theme	Key Research Question
Best use of resources	High value interventions	Were there activities by the hub that provided particularly high value?
Best use of resources	Less effective interventions	What could have been done differently (in hindsight) by the hub?

Annex 4: Example online survey form

Highlands and Islands Climate Hub Evaluation Form

The Highland and Islands (H&I) Climate Hub is currently undergoing an independent evaluation. The Scottish Government has commissioned CAG consultants to assist with this research. The results from this questionnaire will be used to understand the impact of H&I on the broader community. The survey should take about 10 minutes to complete. This survey will close on the 31st of January 2024

Section 1 - Data Processing

Please review our data processing notice here: <https://cagconsultants.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/SG-Hubs-Data-Processing-Notice.pdf>

1. I have read the Data Process Notice and give consent.
 - Yes
 - No

2. How would you best describe your relationship with H&I.
 - H&I Member

- Delivery Partner
- Community Member
- Local Authority

3. What organisation/s do you represent?

Type in your organisation name or "Individual" if this is in your personal capacity

Section 2 - Value Add

We would like to better understand in what way the hub is adding value to the community

4. In what way has the hub built your or your community's awareness of the climate emergency?

In what ways has the hub's activities changed your or your community's understanding of CC?

5. In what way is the hub helping to build relationships between you and other stakeholders?

Have the hub's activities led to new partnerships or strengthened existing ones within your organization?

6. Are there other ways in which the hub is adding value to the community?

Section 3 - Shift to low-carbon and resilient communities

We would like to understand in what way the H&I hub is contributing to a shift to low-carbon and resilient communities

7. In what way is the hub stimulating climate action in your community?

Has there been an increase in community-led climate action initiatives since the establishment of the hub?

8. In what way is the hub supporting your community to be more climate resilient?

Do you feel that the community is more resilient and better prepared for climate change because of the hub's efforts?

Section 4 - Use of Resources

For the next session we would like to explore the resources used by H&I

9. Were there activities by the hub that provided particularly high value?

For example, what activities implemented by H&I would you suggest other hub focus on.

10. What could have been done differently (in hindsight) by the hub?

For example, what activities implemented by H&I would you suggest other hub avoid

Section 5 - Sustainability

For the final session, we would like to understand the potential for the outcomes from H&I being sustained

11. Can existing initiatives supported by the hub be scaled up or replicated in other communities?
12. Have activities by the hub resulted in an impact on local and national policy?
13. Has additional funding been unlocked with support from the hub?

Section 6 - Closing

14. Is there anything else you think the Scottish Government should be aware of regarding the hub?

15. Are you happy for us to follow up with you if we have any additional questions?

- Yes
- No

16. Your email address

We will store and use your email address in line with our privacy statement above

Annex 5: Stakeholder Consultation Summary

Table 1: Stakeholder Consultation Summary

Consultation Type	Hub	Number Stakeholders
Focus groups	NESCAN	18
	H&I	18
Interviews	NESCAN	12
	H&I	9
	Both hubs	1
Online survey	NESCAN	27
	H&I	23
Recommendations workshop	NESCAN	15
	H&I	16

Annex 6: Qualitative analysis themes

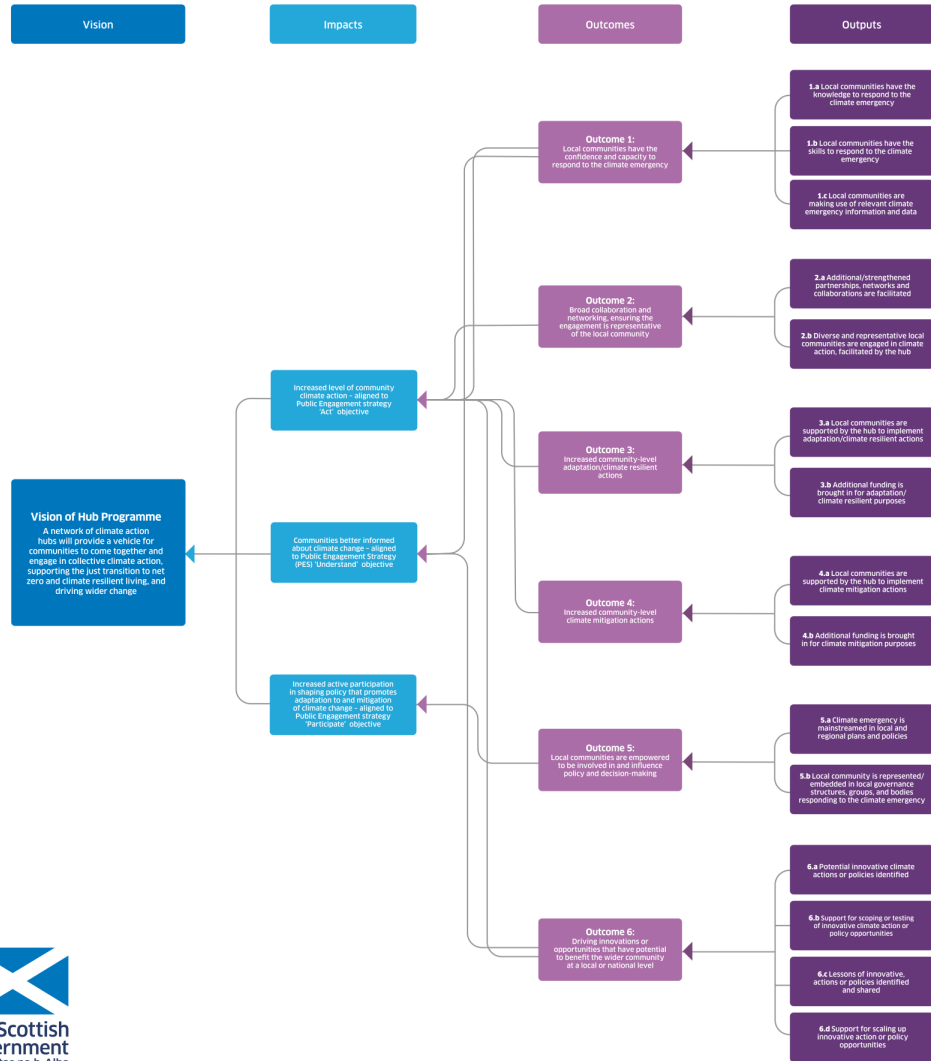
Table 2: Qualitative Analysis Themes

Theme	Topic
Value Add	In what way is the hub building community awareness of the climate emergency?
Value Add	In what way is the hub facilitating knowledge sharing and learning?
Value Add	In what way is the hub helping to build relationships between stakeholders?
Value Add	In what way is the hub supporting a just transition?
Value Add	In what way is the hub supporting wellbeing economies and community wealth building?
Shift to low-carbon and resilient communities	In what way is the hub stimulating climate action?

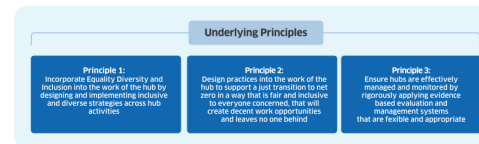
Theme	Topic
Shift to low-carbon and resilient communities	In what way is the hub facilitating a coordinated approach to regional climate change response?
Shift to low-carbon and resilient communities	In what way is the hub supporting communities to be more climate resilient?
Sustainability	Are there examples of ways in which the hub facilitated a climate change intervention pipeline for the community?
Sustainability	Can existing initiatives be scaled up or replicated in other communities?
Sustainability	Is there evidence of stakeholders taking ownership of the climate change initiatives started or supported by the hub?
Sustainability	Have activities by the hub resulted in an impact on local and national policy?
Sustainability	Has additional funding been unlocked with support from the hub?
Resources	Were there activities by the hub that provided particularly high value?
Resources	What could have been done differently (in hindsight) by the hub?

Annex 7: Draft Hub MEL Framework TOC

The image below shows the MEL Framework TOC, followed by a summary description of the TOC.



Enablers	Barriers	Assumptions
Strong Leadership and Hub Governance: Effective, committed leadership and clear governance structures within the hubs ensure strategic direction, accountability, and the efficient management of resources.	Single Source of Funding: Reliance on exclusive funding from the Scottish Government may restrict financial flexibility and sustainability.	Communities are willing and able to engage with the activities of the hub.
Collaborative Networks: Established networks and partnerships with local communities, 3rd sector, government, academia, and the private sector provide a foundation for collaborative efforts, sharing of best practices, and leveraging of resources.	Capacity and Skill Gaps: Insufficient capacity and skills among stakeholders, including hub staff, partner organizations, and community members.	Hubs are able to access the necessary resources (budget and staff) in order to implement their proposed activities.
Community Engagement and Empowerment: Active involvement and empowerment of local communities in planning, decision-making, and implementation processes increase ownership, relevance, and sustainability of climate action initiatives.	Resource Allocation Competition: Competition for resources both within and outside the climate action sector.	There will be a supportive and stable policy and regulatory environment that encourages and facilitates climate action, including relevant legislation and incentives.
Adaptive Management Practices: The ability to adapt and respond to changing conditions and new information through flexible planning and implementation practices ensures the resilience and relevance of climate action efforts.	Overlapping Initiatives: A crowded landscape of organizations with similar climate action agendas can create confusion, shifting impacts, and complicating coordination efforts.	Effective collaboration and partnerships can be established and maintained among all relevant stakeholders, facilitating coordinated action and leveraging of resources.



The TOC consists of several interlinked components. These key components can be grouped into the following questions:

What is the hub doing?

- Inputs (including financial, staff or expert advice and or material resources)
- Activities (daily, monthly and annually)
- Outputs (the results from the activities)

What difference is the hub making?

- Outcomes (what difference the hub is making in the short to medium term)
- Wider impact (what difference the hub is making in the long term)

What is the overall vision for hub programme that the hub is contributing to?

What are the guiding principles that will inform all of the hub's work?

The different components of the TOC are linked in a casual pathway. The pathway shows how the hub's activities will result in a particular output, which in turn will result in an outcome, which then leads to an impact that contributes to the achievement of the overall vision. This casual pathway is key to monitoring, evaluation and learning, as it allows a hub to identify what the possible causes are of achieving (or not achieving) a hub's goals. The TOC also helps the hub understand how its activities fit into the broader vision of the Scottish Government's hub programme.



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