Written Submission from 2050 Scotland’s Youth Climate Group

Introduction:

The 2050 Climate Group aims to engage, educate and empower future leaders in Scotland to take action on climate change. We want to inspire young people to get involved not only in the Group, but also in the design of policy, acting as catalysts for change to ensure a sustainable future beyond the year 2050.

In providing evidence to the committees scrutinizing the draft Climate Change Plan (CCP), we do so not as technical experts in the subject matter (although we do have such expertise within our network of young leaders), but as experts in our area of work: leading a social movement to a low carbon Scotland. We also consider ourselves as representatives of the next generation of leaders in Scotland.

General comments:

Firstly, we applaud the Government’s success in leading the UK in greenhouse gas emissions reductions and achieving targets early. We are proud to live and work in a country that takes action on climate change seriously and that seeks to be progressive in its approach. In particular, the Cabinet Secretary Roseanna Cunningham’s comment that it is of the highest importance that the CCP is supported and owned by the people of Scotland resonates strongly with us. However, it is in this regard that we feel more could – and should – be done to engage and consider young people in the policy process. We acknowledge that the Climate Change Hub has made commendable efforts towards this, but we are concerned that similar efforts are lacking across other government departments.

We work to ‘mainstream’ climate change within our generation and create a ‘new normal’ whereby the low carbon transition is seen as everyone’s remit and we would like the government as a whole to follow our lead in this.

Integration of the Plan and a strong sense of ownership for its success across government departments is an area that we recognise as also being critical for ensuring Scotland’s sustainable future. Specifically, ensuring coherent and joined-up thinking between the interrelated areas of transport, infrastructure and planning, finance and economic, and innovation must go beyond the coherence provided by the TIMES model – the policy drivers and priorities of the teams and individuals responsible for them must be aligned. Hence we feel the Plan’s importance should be addressed more effectively within the CPP.

While we understand that the strategic framework of Scotland’s Economic Strategy and details given in Section 3.1 go some way to addressing the collaborative and coherent approach needed, we are concerned that it does not go far enough. We feel strongly that the concept and narrative of sustainability must be embedded across government departments and policy areas. This would both tie together themes such as fairness, prosperity, health and the environment, and provide a means to focus cross-government priorities in a people-centred way. In turn, this would allow links between climate solutions, well-being and equality, and a resilient economy to be communicated clearly and coherently. We believe this is key to creating a future that we, as young people, want to see.
We believe that a clear people-centred narrative of sustainability is not only key for embedding cross-government coherence, integration and ownership of the CCP, it is also necessary for realising wider benefits, avoiding unintended consequences, and achieving the necessary behaviour changes. This is because framing climate action in such an integrated way – with benefits to people as the ultimate goal – opportunities for wider benefits are built-in and multiple reasons are provided for people to change their habits. After all, climate change is not only a ‘green’ issue, it is an equalities issue, an economic issue, a public health issue, a national security issue, and so on. It also provides a means of framing the climate targets as everyone’s responsibility – something we also believe needs to be made clearer in this Plan.

The framework already provided by the Sustainable Development Goals and the Open Government Partnership – both of which have been laudably committed to by the Scottish Government – is a potentially powerful means of achieving this mind set and narrative. However, we note with disappointment that the Sustainable Development Goals are only mentioned within the CCP in relation to waste targets, and the Open Government Partnership is not mentioned at all. This is despite their strong relevance across all sectors and importance in achieving support and ownership through greater transparency and citizen empowerment.

**Written evidence to the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee:**

While we appreciate the direction that the Government has taken on public engagement, we do not feel that the scale of ambition and action is commensurate with what is required. We see that greater public engagement is necessary for understanding the approaches needed to nudge behaviours in the direction of sustainability. It is also necessary for understanding how the values and concerns of people in Scotland align to the concepts of climate change and sustainability, which in turn is crucial for informing how related policies can enable a fairer and more cohesive society. But far beyond these benefits, greater and sustained public engagement is critical for generating the social consensus necessary for permitting the huge transitions needed to achieve the climate targets set to 2032 and beyond to 2050.

It is for these reasons that we strongly advocate more ambitious action and support of public engagement. This action and support should enable a range of communicators to provide the engagement, including those beyond the ‘usual suspects’ of environmental advocacy groups. We note that, despite its pivotal role in the success of the Plan, funding is currently limited for programmes of public engagement on climate change and sustainability.

We are also concerned over whether the Government is taking proportionate steps towards embedding the concept of sustainability across its departments and ensuring that priorities are aligned accordingly through effective internal governance. These actions, we believe, are crucial for delivering coherent and effective policy on climate change.

Finally, the 2050 Climate Group is extremely grateful for the support that we have received thus far from the Scottish Government and particularly the partnership with
the Climate Change Hub, however, the desire to integrate the perspective of young people (and future leaders) into decision making has not yet been translated into reality across all areas of government. There is possibility for this to be improved to then in turn improve the crucial delivery of the plan across sectors and regions if this is taken advantage of.