Local Government and Communities Committee

The Draft Climate Change Plan (RPP3)

Submission from the 2050 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 Local Government and Communities Committee:

The sectors covered by this committee converge strongly on some central themes within the Plan: behavioural change, wider impacts, benefits to people and transformational change. With these in mind, and considering the carbon envelopes assigned through TIMES to the relevant sectors, it is clear that the scale of the targets is ambitious. The services sector in particular has seen almost no net change in the past 25 years and yet has an emissions reduction target of 96%.

While we applaud this ambition, we question to what degree such changes are deliverable through the policies and proposals set out. The policy outcomes that will
deliver the bulk of the emissions reductions in buildings, for example, are through heat supplied using low carbon technologies. While we agree that such a transition is crucial, we recognise that uptake of any technology is dependent in no small part on public attitudes towards them as well as effective partnerships between key stakeholders involved. We are concerned that the importance of addressing these aspects is not reflected within the Plan or explicitly supported by policies or proposals.

The limited attention paid to the role of the planning system is also of concern to us. Planning decisions made today play a huge part in determining the trajectory of emissions in the future, particularly through its impacts on future modes and demand for transport. We regretfully note that this crucial role of planning was not sufficiently recognised within policies and proposals for the transport or other sectors.

The planning system is also a key means by which better and wider outcomes and benefits can be achieved for people in Scotland. This includes strong potential to address issues such as fairness, multiple deprivation and, most significantly, the sense of ownership within communities that is necessary for transformational change to take place. We feel strongly that these issues can only be effectively addressed if effective community engagement in planning, including for example through the Government’s placemaking approach, is implemented and framed in a people-centred way that recognises the interconnectedness of sustainable development. We also believe that there is an important place in the planning system for an increased role of young people to participate in the making of decisions that are designing their future.

Given the importance and complexity of the role of planning in delivering many aspects of the Plan, as well as addressing other Government priorities such as fairness, inequality and a vibrant economy, we see that a large amount of pressure is placed upon Local Authorities to deliver. Hence, we would like to see greater support for the planning authorities and clear and sustained efforts to embed the concept of sustainable development within local government – including explicit responsibility across all departments.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Dirth
Chair, 2050 Climate Group