

Ariane Burgess MSP
Convener
Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee

23 January 2026

Dear Convener,

Thank you for inviting me to give evidence on the draft Climate Change Plan to the Committee on 20 January 2026. During the session, I committed to providing further information on a number of topics. This additional information is set out below and I hope that you find it useful in your ongoing scrutiny of the Scottish Government's Draft Climate Change Plan.

Whether there are any blocks (such as procurement issues) to local authorities becoming volume providers of (for example) heat pumps.

Public bodies are responsible for their own procurement decisions but in principle there is nothing to prevent a public authority from bulk buying. As ever, they should give due consideration to the procurement regulations, ensure this approach would offer value for money, and whether bulk-buying could limit or complicate their ability to utilise existing procurement routes available to them including Scotland Excel's frameworks.

Local authorities are already able to take advantages of economies of scale through our Area Based Schemes (ABS) programme. ABS projects target areas with higher levels of fuel poverty including whole communities, not least as part of our Carbon Neutral Islands scheme. This includes installing zero emissions heating systems and solar PV where these measures will help reduce energy bills, for example in off gas areas and targeting vulnerable households who use more electricity (e.g. due to caring needs, disability adaptations etc.).

We are exploring area-based approaches to heat decarbonisation to better understand whether activities – such as volume purchasing – incentivises greater uptake of clean heating, and any role that local authorities may have. Further exploration would be required to understand the implications of bulk purchase on ownership and warranties.

Notwithstanding the savings that might occur through bulk-buying, there is risk that the local authority makes this significant capital investment when demand for clean heating is still growing.

We are, through our Heat Network Support Unit, helping local authorities to commercialise heat networks, including the various procurement routes available to them to bring their projects to market. This will include consideration of costs for purchase of the technologies required for connection of buildings to the heat networks.

As part of any bulk purchasing, it would be important to ensure alignment with the Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategy and to consider the grid capacity to connect, for example a mass number of heat pumps.

Work underway to train additional planners

Our Future Planners Programme and Planning Bursary Scheme are both working to train additional planners and to address the shortage of planners in the profession. We have supported 30 students with our bursary scheme as they undertake professionally accredited planning degrees in 2025/6.

We have secured a path into planning for the 17 new Student Planners on our award winning Future Planners Programme. The Student Planners on the Future Planners Programme from 2025-2027 are working on three planning and consenting focussed work placements within the Scottish Government in the Planning, Architecture and Regeneration Directorate, the Energy Consents Unit and the Planning and Environmental Appeals Division, whilst undertaking a planning postgraduate degree funded by the Scottish Government.

The Future Planners Programme supports a much-needed increase in professional capacity in the planning system by creating a skilled pipeline and encouraging more people into the profession. The programme will improve performance, capacity and resilience in Scotland's planning system, creating greater certainty to support development delivery, increasing confidence and attracting investment in Scotland to help drive the wellbeing economy.

Update on the Planning Hub

The National Planning Hub is a Programme for Government commitment, led by Scottish Government working in partnership with the Improvement Service, tasked with providing direct and immediate additional support to planning authorities – with housing, renewable energy and local development plan delivery, as priorities.

The Hub is on track to provide over £1 million of support this year, with 43 projects across 17 planning authorities, alongside a cross-cutting programme of training and development and direct Scottish Government brokerage for stalled housing sites. A key focus has been supporting the transition to the fair, green growing economy and Net Zero targets, with support for new onshore wind development, the emerging hydrogen and battery energy storage solutions. This includes additional resources to progress Masterplan Consent Area development, resources to accelerate development delivery and strategically important infrastructure, and training support including on Environmental Impact Assessments.

Further information can be found at the Hub website – www.planninghub.scot. Support has been provided to planning authorities through direct engagement across the Hub priorities, working collaboratively to identify deliverable 'asks'.

The Hub also works closely with the National Planning Improvement Champion, who leads a Hub team at the Improvement Service, providing insight and evidence on performance improvement from the National Planning Improvement Framework to inform the support available.

Open to all in Scotland, funding has also been provided to Planning Aid Scotland this year to deliver free to access training for communities, designed to help individuals

and communities understand and engage with the planning process, including community-led planning and renewable energy developments.

Use of Park and Ride schemes and the role of Regional Transport Partnerships

Strategic Park and Ride across Scotland was considered within the appraisal process that supported the second Strategic Transport Projects Review (STPR2), published in 2022. However, the establishment of new park and ride sites was not deemed to form part of the 45 recommendations, instead STPR2 recommended the development of a framework for Mobility Hubs.

Where the creation of a recognisable network of high-quality multi-modal mobility hubs across Scotland will support the priorities of the National Transport Strategy (NTS) by increasing the attractiveness and visibility of public and shared transport, through bettering connectivity, improving links between public, active and shared transport options, and providing seamless travel opportunities, particularly for those without access to a private car. The recommendation for Mobility Hubs is also more in line with Sustainable Travel Hierarchy, included in the NTS, which is firstly about giving consideration to measures that discourage the need to travel unsustainability.

However, it is recognised that in certain regional or local circumstances new Park and Ride sites may have a part to play in the wider transport system. Regional Transport Partnerships continue to provide overarching direction on the requirements for any new Park and Ride sites, through the delivery of their Regional Transport Strategies, whilst working closely with their local authorities and transport operators.

How Scottish Government is looking into integrated ticketing at national level

The 2024 Smart Delivery Strategy set out plans to explore options for a national integrated ticketing system that could be adopted by operators and local transport authorities to support and improve smart integrated ticketing across operators and modes.

Proposal development is progressing. The National Smart Ticketing Advisory Board (NSTAB) will shortly publish a Standards and Technology Advisory Report (STAR) which will inform options development and steps to support an integrated system. This builds on the benchmarking review of current smart ticketing practice published by NSTAB last year.

Information on the Climate Action Hubs

The Scottish Government is providing up to £6 million of funding in 2025/26 for our network of Climate Action Hubs alongside a support package to ensure it can deliver effectively. The national network of 24 regional Climate Action Hubs supports communities to address local priorities through impactful and positive climate action. The programme provides a crucial framework through which we can support communities to meet their net zero ambitions and build local place based initiatives to support climate resilience.

The Hubs are community led and run by local experts connected to community organisations and cross-sector partners, such as councils, health boards, and education providers. The key aims of the hubs are to:

- Raise awareness of climate and nature emergencies;
- Build capacity for local climate action, including mitigation, adaptation, and biodiversity initiatives;
- Support communities to design and deliver projects that reflect local needs and circumstances;
- Amplify community voices and influence local and national policies and plans; and
- Build and strengthen local partnerships to deliver against shared goals.

From the outputs achieved to date, we can evidence strong progress with greater reach, climate solutions being embedded and mainstreamed in wider work, and through the type and scale of projects being delivered. The Hubs also deliver across a huge range of areas inspiring action in local communities, including energy, active travel, community growing, reuse initiatives, nature restoration and supporting climate resilience efforts.

They work closely with local authorities, for example, the Moray and the North East Hubs deliver funding on their behalf, the Argyll and Bute Hub has created and delivered climate resilience training to support the delivery of local place planning and the East Lothian Hub supported East Lothian Council with its public consultation on their Climate Change Strategy.

In 2024/25 the climate hubs delivered over 1,500 workshops reaching at least 34,000 people, provided 1-1 support to over 1,200 community groups, distributed seed funding to 700 projects, gathered over 1,000 climate stories showing the impact of climate change in their local areas, supported conservation efforts through the planting of more than 8,000 trees (planted by young people and vulnerable individuals through partnerships with social justice groups) and undertook engagement on a number of consultations at a local and national level such as LHEES and Active Travel.

The Hubs are working collaboratively across a number of themes to learn from and support each other's work. This has included work in the energy space and expansion of community heat teams across the Lothians. The South East Hubs are working together to explore heat districts, solar energy and community energy generation.

Hubs vary in size, from single local authority areas like Inverclyde to multi-authority regions like Forth Valley and the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park, which includes Clackmannanshire, Falkirk and Stirling.

Development of the Hubs was supported by regional coordinators who worked with communities to identify what they would need from a hub, its priorities, and the

organisation best placed to lead it. This determined whether the applications were at a local or multi-local authority level.

There are various models but grant is predominantly used to employ staff who can work to drive forward identified priorities across the region and work directly with community groups to support their goals.

Yours sincerely,

Shona Robison
Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government