Climate Action Committee

Submission from Audit Scotland – Thursday 27 August 2026

Introduction

1. The Auditor General for Scotland, working with Audit Scotland and the Accounts Commission, helps make sure public money is well spent to meet the needs of Scotland's people. Through the audit process he works to provide clear, independent and objective assurance on how effectively public money is being managed and spent. He does this by reporting in public on spending and financial management, by examining what public bodies are doing to address short- and longer-term issues, and by considering how services are designed and delivered. This is more important than ever given the challenges and uncertainties facing Scotland's public services and public finances.

2. With its unique view of public services, public audit considers the complex relationships and connections across the public sector, and how the challenges and opportunities people face in their lives span organisational and sectoral boundaries. It can put Scotland's people – the citizens who pay for, use and rely on public services – at the centre of understanding how well those services work and how well money is spent.

Recent audit work relevant to the Committee's remit

3. Audit Scotland published "Transforming the approach to climate change: lessons from public audit" in March 2026. This report brings together our findings from recent audit work on how the Scottish public sector is responding to the climate emergency and how public money is being used to help achieve Scotland's climate change ambitions. Our audit work has shown that climate change is a complex challenge that spans most areas of public policy. Significant sums of public money will be invested in activity to tackle and adapt to it. It requires a transformation in approach to enable effective cross-sector collaboration over several years. This applies to public bodies' role in implementing national policies and delivering services, as well as how they manage their own environmental impact.

4. The report identifies five key areas of challenge that the public sector needs to address to ensure an effective approach to tackling climate change. These challenges are interlinked and need to be considered together, taking a whole-system approach to ensure each element is working effectively to support the others. The key challenges are:

    - Leadership and collaboration;
    - Planning for delivery;
    - Financial planning;

- Governance; and
- Public engagement.

5. The report on lessons from public audit builds on the findings of performance audit findings from Session 6 of the parliament, including:

    - "Flooding in communities: moving towards flood resilience" (August 2025) – this report examined how well the Scottish Government, councils, central government bodies and their partners are working together and with local communities to address flooding in communities. It found that the Scottish Government's National Flood Resilience Strategy is a positive step forward, but there are gaps in the leadership, data, resources, skills and capacity required to tackle flooding. The funding mechanism for major flood schemes is not fit for purpose. Costs are increasing with fewer homes than planned to be protected.

    - "Sustainable transport: reducing car use" (January 2025) – this report looked at the progress the Scottish Government and councils were making towards the target in place at the time to reduce car kilometres by 20 per cent by 2030. The audit found that the Scottish Government set an ambitious but very challenging target, with no clear delivery plan or milestones for how to achieve it. The Scottish Government removed the target in April 2025.

    - "Decarbonising heat in homes" (February 2024) – this audit focused on the Scottish Government's approach to reducing emissions from heating homes. It found that unless the scale and pace of activity significantly increased, the Scottish Government's ambition will not be met.

Future audit work relevant to the Committee's remit

6. The Auditor General is due to report on arrangements and progress to deliver the Scottish Government's Offshore Wind Investment Programme in October 2026. The audit will assess how robust the decision-making arrangements are to support the investment programme in delivering value for money.

7. The Auditor General is considering his future work programme, which will be developed in line with a broad set of priorities that reflect public services including environmental sustainability and climate change.