



SFC Carbon Management Plan: Our Net Zero Challenge



Scottish Funding Council
Comhairle Maoineachaidh na h-Alba

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Introduction

1. As a key national funding body for further and higher education, as an employer and as a corporate citizen, the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) has an important part to play in the climate emergency response.
2. We published our net zero route map in November 2022, [SFC's Net Zero & Sustainability Framework for Action](#). This plan, our Net Zero Challenge, acts as our current carbon management plan and commits us to reducing our own emissions and embedding climate-positive practices throughout our activities and operations. We will drive these focus areas with just as much determination as we do in supporting Scotland's universities and colleges activities to reduce their emissions and increase climate-positive change. There is also much we can learn from the sector as it is driving best practice on carbon reduction in several areas.
3. We recognise that our most valuable asset in achieving our net zero challenge is our staff. We therefore set out our approach to supporting SFC staff to think creatively and confidently about sustainability and implementation. We are also working collaboratively with other national and local public sector actors to support change on the ground, including, for example, our relationships with the Sustainable Scotland Network, and the members of the Scottish Cities Alliance.
4. This is a living document that will be informed by our own learning up to and beyond 2030 and 2045, including enhancing data on our own emissions and building an increasingly detailed picture of the ways in which we will reduce these. We are determined to promote resilient and adaptive behaviours in our organisation and in our further and higher education sectors as the climate crisis evolves.

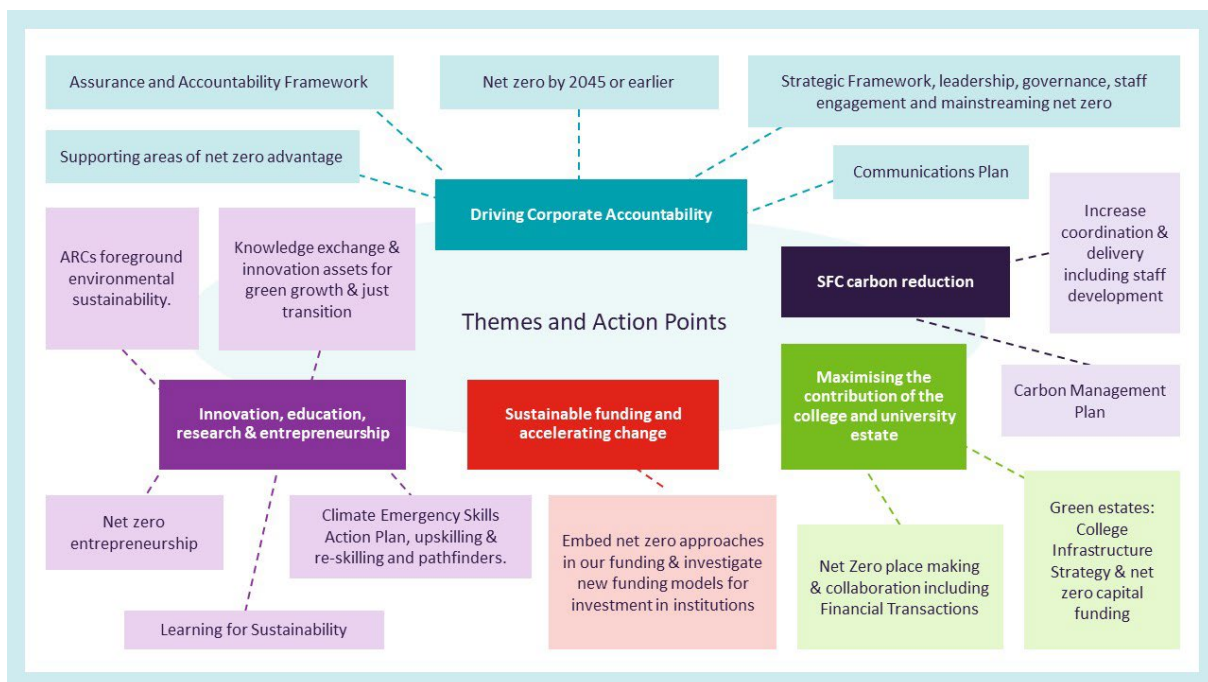
The Climate Emergency: The Response

The Climate Emergency

5. ‘The world faces a climate emergency and to solve it, public and private sector organisations all need to understand and reduce their climate impacts. Net zero carbon targets have emerged at all levels to galvanise and guide this global effort’. This is part of the opening statement of [Zero Waste Scotland’s own plan towards achieving net zero](#) and it describes how vital collaboration and partnership across public and private organisations will be if we are to, quite simply, solve the climate emergency.

SFC’s Net Zero & Sustainability Framework for Action

6. Our [Strategic Plan 2022-2027](#) sets out the ambition for Scotland to be an outstanding place to learn, educate, research and innovate – now and for the future; and our purpose of creating and sustaining a world-leading system of tertiary education, skills, research and innovation that enables students to flourish, changes lives for the better, and supports social, economic and environmental wellbeing.
7. We published our [Net Zero & Sustainability Framework for Action](#) in November 2022. As our strategic net zero route map it represents mainstreaming of net zero at SFC, building on our progress so far. It establishes a long-term plan and underlines our full commitment to responding to the climate emergency, reflecting improved corporate accountability and collective responsibility. It highlights net zero leadership and delivery by the tertiary education and research sector in Scotland. It provides a shared vision of our evolving role and actions needed around which SFC staff and our stakeholders can coalesce.



8. SFC's internal Net Zero & Sustainability Strategy and Delivery Group launched in 2022, supporting delivery of the Net Zero & Sustainability Framework for Action. The Framework for Action includes all aspects of our service delivery.

SFC Carbon management plan: Our Net Zero Challenge

9. This plan, "Our Net Zero Challenge" connects to and delivers theme five of the Net Zero & Sustainability Framework for Action entitled "SFC carbon reduction". It includes our own carbon reporting and carbon management plan. It also connects through theme one, "Driving Corporate Accountability" including leadership and staff engagement.
10. We have a duty to comply with the duties in Part 4 of [the Climate Change \(Scotland\) Act 2009](#) ("the Act") by reporting on our own estate and our own impact as an organisation.
11. The public sector has a crucial leadership role in the delivery of Scotland's climate change ambitions, including emissions reductions, biodiversity and [adaptation action](#).
12. SFC has been submitting its own annual carbon reporting return since 2015. The emissions targets in the Act have been strengthened by the [Climate Change \(Emissions Reductions Targets\) \(Scotland\) Act 2019](#). We are also moving to incorporate new public sector climate reporting duties heralded by the [Climate Change \(Duties of Public Bodies: Reporting Requirements\) \(Scotland\) Amendment Order 2020](#), and the [Public Sector Leadership on the Global Climate Emergency guidance](#) published in October 2021.
13. SFC is a strategic national public funding body for the tertiary education and research sector, with circa 128 SFC employees, no owned land, no fleet vehicles, no regional offices and a central (leased) office in the Haymarket area of Edinburgh. Between 2007-2008 and 2017-2018 we successfully reduced our own emissions by around 70%. We have developed successive carbon management plans. (See Annex A for a description of SFC's current emissions profile.)
14. The current carbon management plan "Our Net Zero Challenge" covers recent years and we expect to generate a new plan in financial year 2023-2024. The current plan is strongly contextualised by our experiences of hybrid working during and after the pandemic, and our evolving "new normal" in terms of our formalised hybrid working policy. For example, in financial year 2019-2020, with mostly full office working prior to the pandemic lockdowns, our baseline emissions were estimated at approximately 77 tCO_{2e}. In 2020-2021 with near full home working, our baseline emissions were estimated at approximately 54 tCO_{2e}. These figures are likely to represent a highest and lowest possible range in our current baseline, subject to further data gathering and processing improvements going forward.
15. We need to gain a greater understanding of our forward emissions profile once hybrid working is fully embedded.

16. In 2022 we relaunched SFC’s internal group the Environmental & Sustainability Champions Group. This group is working on carbon management, staff engagement and corporate emissions in support of “Our Net Zero Challenge” (see priority workstreams diagram below). An early priority for the Environmental & Sustainability Champions Group is delivering carbon literacy training for staff as reflected within this plan.



17. As climate reporting evolves, we will be taking a more in depth look at our boundary. We will also take a more in depth look at our baseline, including improving data capture and understanding of our emissions under all three scope groups. This includes upstream and downstream emissions. We will investigate possible routes to reduce remaining emissions. We will improve our adaptation engagement as part of next year’s carbon management reporting cycle and plan.
18. We will ensure that staff are aware of ways to reduce their emissions while working at SFC e.g. active travel, energy efficiency and positive waste choices. Onsite access to bike stands and ready access to public transport into the city for business travel is available at our Haymarket office. Options such as cycling, recycling and video conferencing facilities and telecommuting are available. We will continue to evolve our carbon reduction plans including new suggestions from staff for further net zero projects.
19. Our key priority, in terms of mitigation, in line with Scottish Government guidance is to continue to take those measures that will have the greatest emissions reductions impact. This is inherently linked to upskilling our staff as well as project delivery.

Our Net Zero Challenge: Our Aims

20. To be an environmentally sustainable organisation putting our staff at the heart of our net zero challenge means that:
- We understand and are able to measure our impacts on the environment.
 - We have the capability to reflect and improve our response through tolerance, awareness and education, and are able to successfully navigate our own just transition to net zero.
 - We have the right tools to measure impact and review progress on an annual basis, identify areas of challenge, and deliver initiatives that will benefit our operations and activities and those of others.
 - We are able to keep up to date with new thinking and developments on environmental sustainability through active involvement across our communities both internally and externally, increasing staff confidence and engagement and improving the contribution our staff can make.

Our Net Zero Challenge: Our Reporting Cycle

21. We will collect data on specific impact areas and reflect annually on progress and areas of challenge. We will discuss and agree with senior management and staff the appropriate ways to contribute towards key requirements of us under the Scottish Government guidance for public bodies. This includes an annual workshop for all staff.

Our Net Zero Challenge: Our Focus Areas

22. We will report on three priority areas:
- Driving down our carbon emissions.
 - Putting our staff at the heart of our challenge.
 - Increasing our response as a climate-positive public body.
23. See Annex B for further details.

Further information

24. Please contact the SFC Environmental & Sustainability Champions Group, email: hdalgard@sfc.ac.uk.

Annex A

Driving down our carbon emissions across SFC

Operating years 2021-2022, 2022-2023		
Emissions source	Action	Monitoring our Progress
Areas of opportunity	Activities	Progress
	Target period	
Air conditioning systems (f gases)	Review/gather data.	E&SCG work together with SFC climate lead and directorates as needed.
Purchased electricity, heating	Improve understanding of our baseline, boundary and our hybrid working pattern	Review annually.
Water (supply and treatment)	in order to put actions in place to address key remaining emissions sources across Scope 1, 2 and 3 scope groups, including reviewing travel and procurement policies.	We will benchmark our performance relative to full office working prior to Covid-19, full home working during Covid restrictions, and the current emerging hybrid pattern in order to investigate future options and scenarios for reducing emissions.
Waste and recycling		
IT		
Business travel		
Impact of increased ventilation (Covid-19)		
Staff commuting/home working	Apply SSN's guidance on FTE calculation. Review/gather data.	

Our targets

Reporting areas	Scope (See Glossary)	Direct/indirect	Net zero target
F gases	Scope 1	Direct	
Heating	Scope 2	Indirect	2045 or earlier
Electricity	Scope 2	Indirect	(N.B. Target including interim targets subject to implementation of the Public Sector Leadership on the Global Climate
Water & Waste	Scope 3	Indirect	Emergency guidance for public bodies.)
IT	Scope 3	Indirect	
Purchased goods and services	Scope 3	Indirect	
Business travel	Scope 3	Indirect	
Impact of increased ventilation	Scope 3	Indirect	
Staff commuting/home working	Scope 3	Indirect	
Investments	Scope 3	Indirect	

Annex B

Our Net Zero Challenge: Priorities, actions and progress monitoring

Operating year 2022-23		
Priority area 1: Driving down our carbon emissions:		
Priorities	Actions	Enabling progress
<p>Our operational carbon emissions, including our office space and working from home.</p> <p>Our carbon emissions because of business travel and commuting.</p> <p>Driving further improvement through our procurement policy.</p>	<p>Embed key compliance asks around travel policies immediately.</p> <p>Fully implement our hybrid working policy.</p> <p>Refresh our procurement policy towards strengthening delivery of our sustainable procurement obligations.</p>	<p>(See section below on undertaking procurement training.)</p> <p>Learn and take inspiration from APUC and JISC's approaches to sustainable procurement in the tertiary education and research sector.</p>
Priority area 2: Putting our staff at the heart of our challenge:		
Priorities	Actions	Enabling progress
<p>Empowering staff to prioritise the net zero challenge for SFC and to contribute ideas that will increase our environmental sustainability.</p> <p>Encouraging staff to consider their impact on the environment whilst employed at SFC including an appreciation of climate-friendly options available to them.</p> <p>Enabling our staff to communicate on net zero with confidence, including training and awareness raising resources on developments from institutions and our other stakeholders.</p>	<p>Online carbon literacy training for all staff.</p> <p>Online carbon literacy for procurement for staff involved. (Scottish Government Climate Literacy eLearning for Procurement Professionals)</p> <p>Provide internal guidance and resources to all staff on climate issues, environmentally friendly options, and climate emergency developments in the tertiary education and research sector. (Corporate digital space, staff sessions.)</p> <p>Provide ways for staff to contribute to our net zero and carbon management plans.</p>	<p>Prioritise carbon literacy course content and delivery mode relevant to SFC needs.</p> <p>Encourage and record uptake of staff carbon literacy training.</p> <p>Evaluate staff benefit of any and all climate related training courses.</p> <p>Continuously refresh membership of our E&SCG taking an inclusive approach.</p> <p>Monitor uptake by staff of opportunities described under this section.</p>

Priority area 3: Increasing our response as a climate-positive public body

Priorities	Actions	Enabling progress
Strengthen internal governance and leadership for the climate emergency response, linked under the Net Zero & Sustainability Framework for Action	Climate lead accountable to senior management who maintain oversight of our strategic approach, including regular updates on groups' priorities and activities with a target of senior management groups' engagement in cross-Council net zero issues at least once a quarter.	The Net Zero & Sustainability Strategy & Delivery Group and Framework for Action will guide cross-Council policy and decision making.
Continuously improve our carbon management trajectory to reducing scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions in line with Scottish Government expectations and duties on public bodies including strengthening data capture.	Improve data collection and profiling scenarios to reduce emissions to net zero.	E&SCG will work with the climate lead and teams across SFC to improve reporting processes, data integrity and maturity and to map out possible pathways towards net zero, and to fully consider the options to embed net zero through all operations.
Collaborate with other public bodies and our stakeholder community to ensure adoption of best practice at SFC including identifying our local community and becoming an active participant in net zero place making, adaptation and resilience.	Staff engage in active partnership building opportunities with key national and local stakeholders (e.g. ZWS, ECCI, SSN, Adaptation Scotland, City of Edinburgh Council (Sustainability Strategy) , Edinburgh Climate Commission (PCAN) or other organisations as needed.	E&SCG (reporting to NZ&SSDG) and senior management will implement the SFC Carbon Management Plan, "Our Net Zero Challenge." including reports on progress.

Glossary of terms

Absolute zero (sometimes called “zero zero”) means zero emissions, with no negative emissions options or meaningful “carbon offsets”. (See also “Science based targets”)

Adaptation (or resilience) is taking action to prepare for and adjust to both the current effects of climate change and the predicted increasing impacts in the future. (See also “mitigation” below.)

Carbon dioxide equivalent or CO₂e describes different greenhouse gases in a common unit. For any quantity and type of greenhouse gas (GHG), CO₂e signifies the amount of CO₂ which would have the equivalent global warming impact.

Carbon footprint is the total amount of greenhouse gases (including carbon dioxide and methane) that are generated by our actions.

Carbon literacy is an awareness of the carbon costs and impacts of everyday activities and the ability and motivation to reduce emissions, on an individual, community and organisational basis.

Carbon removal/sequestration – the process by which through either natural or industrial means carbon is removed from the atmosphere and can be stored safely. (See also “offsetting” below.)

Direct emissions are from sources owned or controlled by the reporting entity.

Environmental & Sustainability Champions Group is an informal network of staff members who support SFC in achieving our environmental targets and goals.

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is an assessment of a project's likely significant environmental effects. (**SEA** or **Strategic Environmental Assessment** is related.)

Environmentally sustainability describes the responsibility of interacting with the planet to maintain natural resources and avoid jeopardising the ability for future generations to meet their needs.

Greenhouse gas (GHG) is any gas in the atmosphere which absorbs heat, and thereby keeps the planet’s atmosphere warmer than it otherwise would be. For the purposes of this report, GHGs are the six gases covered by the UNFCCC: carbon dioxide (CO₂); methane (CH₄); nitrous oxide (N₂O); hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs); perfluorocarbons (PFCs); and sulphur hexafluoride (SF₆).

Indirect emissions are emissions that are a consequence of the activities of the reporting entity but occur at sources owned or controlled by another entity.

Insets are activities within an organisation's operational boundary, such as enhancing the carbon sequestration of their own land holdings. (See offsetting below and carbon removal above.)

Just transition means ensuring fairness is integral to securing support for the scale and pace of societal and economic net zero transition required, including leaving no-one behind, nor creating disproportionate financial or inequalities burdens in the net zero transition.

Mitigation describes efforts to reduce or prevent emissions of greenhouse gases. It can mean using new technologies and renewable energies, making older equipment more energy efficient, or changing management practices or consumer behaviour. (See adaptation above.)

Net zero (emissions) is when the GHG emissions released into the atmosphere by an organisation or country are balanced by removals over a specified period (e.g., by mitigation, or carbon removal/sequestration). (See "Science Based Targets" below.)

Net Zero & Sustainability Strategy and Delivery Group is the SFC's cross cutting policy group supporting and implementing our overall net zero strategy (across all our service delivery and our operations).

Offsetting refers to activity offsite usually attained through natural or industrial sequestration to store or sequester GHG emissions in order to compensate for GHG emissions produced by an organisation. Offsetting may involve paying another party, somewhere else, to save emissions equivalent to those produced by your activity.

Operational reporting boundary is the boundary that determines the direct and indirect emissions associated with operations owned or controlled by SFC.

Place-based net zero transformation/development/planning – planning using place-based principles promotes a shared understanding of place, and the need to take a more collaborative approach to a place's services and assets to achieve better outcomes for people and communities.

Science based targets refer to net zero pathways and targets that prioritise emissions reductions in line with the 1.5 degrees Paris Agreement and deprioritise offsetting. (See mitigation, carbon removal and offsetting above.)

Scope 1 emissions are emissions from operations that are owned or controlled by SFC. Scope groups are defined in the latest Scottish Government Guidance.

Scope 2 emissions are emissions from the generation of purchased electricity, steam, heating or cooling consumed by SFC.

Scope 3 emissions are all indirect emissions (not included in scope 2) that occur in the value chain of SFC, including both upstream and downstream emissions.

Upstream/downstream: Upstream applies to suppliers of the organisation. Downstream, to the organisation's customers. For example, employee commuting and procurement are upstream scope 3 emissions. Investments by SFC are scope 3 downstream emissions.