



# Multi-level Climate Governance in Scotland

*The Scottish Climate Intelligence Service*

Partners



# Multi-level Governance: From Theory to Practice

**Effective climate action relies on coordination across all levels of government, otherwise fragmentation, duplication and miscommunication hinder progress toward common goals.**



National governments establish the conditions for local climate action through ambition, leadership, legislation and regulation, policy and funding. In turn, local government also lead through high ambition and have multiple levers to implement action across key sectors, including energy efficiency, transport, buildings and waste management.

Impactful interventions by local government across these key sectors range from stimulating and subsidising energy retrofit, to improving uptake and installation of low-carbon heating systems in social houses and public buildings, investing in active travel infrastructure and increasing the availability and convenience of low-carbon and public transport, and innovative waste management and promoting the circular economy.

However, without alignment and active collaboration between these levels through a common language and standardised data structures and assumptions, multi-level governance remains an ideal rather than a reality.

Scotland has cut its emissions in half since 1990, and to help drive action further, the Scottish Climate Intelligence Service (SCIS) was established to enable coordination within and between local authorities, and between local and national government in Scotland.

At its core, SCIS aims to address one key question:

***How can we coordinate climate efforts across local government—32 local authorities in total—while also ensuring that these area plans align with Scotland's national net zero target of 2045?***

The answer was the creation of a capacity-building programme for all 32 local authorities, underpinned by a shared framework, common language and consistent emissions data structure to facilitate the translation of local insights into national progress.

This case study – a collaboration between the Scottish Government, COSLA, ClimateView, ICLEI and SCIS – highlights the power and potential of multi-level climate governance in action.

ClimateView has previously worked in Scotland with Glasgow City Council and Mott MacDonald to develop the city’s Net Zero Route Map, and supported the development of Sustainable Dundee’s [Climate Action Plan](#).

The Scottish Government and SCIS recognise the value of knowledge-sharing and engagement to advance global climate action and welcome the opportunity to engage with those interested in this case study and related themes.

## The Scottish Climate Intelligence Service: A National-Local Bridge

SCIS is a nationally coordinated but locally embedded initiative that supports the delivery of climate action by connecting Scotland’s net zero goals with transitions from high carbon to low carbon activities in every local authority. Delivered in partnership by the [Edinburgh Climate Change Institute](#) (ECCI) and the [Improvement Service](#) - and jointly funded by the Scottish Government and all 32 local authorities - SCIS is striving to ensure that local efforts are aligned, measurable, and capable of driving Scotland’s net zero by 2045 climate ambition.



Scotland’s net zero transition requires local implementation. Local authorities in Scotland have direct and indirect influence over multiple critical sectors, including heat in buildings, energy consumption, transportation and waste management. Recognising this, SCIS is working with each local authority to develop, manage, and execute tailored area-wide emissions reduction plans targeting all significant emission sources.

**“ SCIS ensure we’re being streamlined across councils and takes the burden of figuring out how to streamline off us. ”**

**Climate Change Officer,  
SCIS User**

The service assists local authorities by:

- Delivering training, peer-to-peer learning, and tailored, hands-on support through a dedicated capacity-building programme for local authority officers.
- Supporting use of a common data platform – ClimateView - to track progress on the actions required to reduce emissions.
- Providing a standardised annual dataset of local emissions by source, critical for collating insights across local authorities.
- Helping local authorities develop an emissions reduction pathway that best suits their local circumstances, geography, opportunities and constraints.
- Directing attention and investment to where interventions will have the greatest systemic impact.
- Providing insights back to national government about the level of ambition for different transitions and the scale and pace of policy delivery by mapping interventions to policy outcomes.
- Championing transparency by enabling citizens to see their area's emissions profile, planned actions, and progress in an online dashboard.

While reducing emissions remains the primary goal, SCIS also supports local authorities to evidence the role of climate action in delivering a broader social agenda.

The same platform and planning approach are used to highlight the co-benefits of climate action: improving public health, protecting nature, strengthening energy resilience, and reducing inequality. These aspects are crucial for ensuring a transition that is both rapid and fair.

By collaborating across local authorities, SCIS encourages shared learning, standardises methodologies, and develops capacity to speed up implementation and reduce duplicated efforts.





Created by ClimateView and founded on rigorous climate science, the TEF provides a standardized structure for defining the activity shifts and interventions needed to reach net zero. The TEF is now formalized as DIN SPEC 91637:2025-09, offering a recognized framework for consistent, comparable, and scalable transition planning. Beyond this, the ClimateView platform provides end-to-end support, encompassing emissions inventories, scenario modelling, dashboard creation and performance monitoring.

“ *Really useful tool - for monitoring, running scenarios, communication and engagement.* ”

Climate Change Officer, SCIS User

“ *ClimateView is an incredibly useful tool that visually evidences the changes that can be made and the positive impacts they will make.* ”

Project Manager, SCIS User

SCIS co-designed the procurement requirements with the local authorities and ClimateView was selected through a competitive procurement process to ensure consistency across Scotland's 32 local authorities and alignment with national targets.

SCIS uses the TEF and ClimateView platform to answer the following questions:

- What is the current situation? (Area-wide emissions inventory)
- How can we solve it? (Transitions)
- What are we doing? (Interventions)
- How is it going? (Indicators)

In future, we aim to provide answers for two supplementary questions:

- How much does this cost? (Investment)
- What are the wider system outcomes of this intervention? (Co-benefits)

These questions are answered as part of an iterative process, understanding that the 'right' intervention will differ according to context, and striving for **progress not perfection**.

“ *[The ClimateView platform] has supported us thinking in more depth about our pre-defined climate objectives and policies which I foresee will enable a stronger step forward in achieving these aims. It has also encouraged us to begin a well needed data collection and querying exercise from internal data owners.* ”

Climate Change Officer, SCIS User

# Impact

In the 2024–2025 programme year, the Scottish Climate Intelligence Service has made significant measurable progress across all 32 local authorities, enabling consistent, trackable, and comparable climate action planning and delivery.

## Programme reach and participation

### 100% participation

All 32 Scottish local authorities engaged in the SCIS “User Journey,” with over 150 local authority climate change officers actively involved.

### Cross sector engagement

Targeted engagement with over 100 delivery partners and key stakeholders, including public and third sector, industry, utilities and government.

### Capacity building programme

Platform training workshops, drop-ins, one-to-one meetings, independent work, ‘User Group’ meetings, educational resources, and the SCIS ‘Roadshow’ - three in-person engagement events with local authority officers and elected members in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Inverness, hosted in Spring 2025.

## Data and platform use

### 32 standardised area-wide emissions inventories

Each authority received the SCIS area-wide emissions inventory for 2005–2022, as well as an Annual Emissions Inventory Report, which explored the local area’s emissions profile and provided considerations for further area-wide emissions reductions

### 100% dashboard access

All Scottish local authorities have been set up with a ClimateView dashboard.

### 114 local authority platform users

Local authority officers set up with individual ClimateView accounts.

### 543 interventions logged\*

Entered by local authority officers, linked to delivery of activity shifts and measurable outcomes (\*at time of writing). Interventions are specific and measurable actions designed to target sources of emissions within a local authority area.

**“ This support is allowing my organisation to understand it’s wider impact better, and to have new conversations with partners about this. ”**

Climate Change Officer, SCIS User

## Future Insights

The SCIS is only two full years into programme implementation and is already seeing demonstrable improvements in coordination and delivery both within and between local authorities. It is also finding and developing new and emerging evidence and insights into the effectiveness and delivery of local and national policy and supporting better coordination of activity between local and national government.



Some of the impacts we are already seeing are:

- **Enhanced alignment** between local action and national carbon budgets, and better coordination between local and national government
- Improved awareness and visibility of **the scale of Scottish local authority climate action**
- Improvements in the **knowledge and confidence** of local authority officers and decision makers, because they have data and evidence to support them
- Increased **coordination across local authority service areas** and with external delivery partners
- **Peer-to-peer learning** between local authorities on embedding ClimateView and on the monitoring and delivery of local climate change plans
- Engagement from many of the **critical stakeholders** who will be essential to the delivery of local plans
- Recognition of wider **co-benefits of climate action** across multiple policy priorities, and their importance in building support for local action and investment
- Use of platform insights for **improved decision-making**

Deeper insights and future impacts are emerging and developing as we collate and analyse more data and insights on local interventions.

Use of a common approach and methodology gives SCIS the ability to aggregate data across local authorities and to start building a national picture. This can support coordination between local and national government, and with other key stakeholders, by giving:

- Insights into where progress is being made against which local emissions sources, and where further support is needed
- Insights into the effectiveness of local and national policies, which can inform targeted policy development and implementation
- Transparency on progress being shared with local stakeholders to support impact and engagement, through the publication of local boards
- Data and evidence which can support local authorities to prioritise and attract investment into local climate interventions

# Lessons for Practitioners

**Scotland's experience offers valuable lessons for others seeking to operationalise multi-level governance.**



## **1. Build a shared mandate from the start**

The program is funded equally by the Scottish Government and all 32 local authorities. This co-investment model promotes shared ownership, strengthens accountability at every level, and guarantees alignment from the beginning.



## **2. Establish legitimacy through trusted networks**

A critical part of gaining the support for a shared, central, collaborative programme was to build trust through established practitioner networks for leadership, coordination and knowledge sharing. The need for a national approach was agreed through engagement with the Scottish Cities Alliance, COSLA, and the Sustainable Scotland Network.



## **3. Standardise without centralising**

The Transition Element Framework offers a standardised structure for defining shifts, interventions, and metrics. However, local authorities can decide how they plan and deliver climate action within this framework, allowing for consistency without losing localisation.



## **4. Pair technology with institutional support**

Technology alone does not change governance. SCIS integrates the ClimateView platform into a comprehensive service model that encompasses capacity building, peer-to-peer learning, and responsive, hands-on support, transforming data into informed decisions and plans into tangible progress.



## **5. Enable two-way data flow to align top-down and bottom-up**

By standardising language and data, SCIS supports effective two-way communication; national governments can start to understand the specific local ambition for different transitions and focus funding more effectively, and local government can better understand and align with national policy and carbon budgets.



## **6. Design for system-wide engagement**

The shared framework and platform are not limited to government actors. They can also support collaboration across different sectors, from utilities and transportation providers to academic institutions and community groups, enabling climate action to be coordinated both horizontally and vertically.

# Conclusion

For the Scottish Climate Intelligence Service, the real innovation lies in a combination of the technological and data framework, the capacity-building programme and the whole system institutional buy-in.

The incorporation of a common framework into a service model that combines technical infrastructure with training, peer-to-peer learning, and tailored, hands-on support ensures the framework is actively embedded into local authority climate action planning, delivery, monitoring and reporting.

Through this triad of platform, methodology, and institutional setup, SCIS has established the conditions necessary for multi-level governance to operate effectively. It facilitates alignment both vertically (across national, regional, and local governments) and horizontally (across departments, sectors, and fellow local authorities). Local realities influence national decisions, while national ambitions are articulated through measurable, locally owned delivery plans.

The SCIS programme is continually developing and there is plenty more to do. However, Scotland's example demonstrates that with the proper foundations, climate governance can be coherent, collaborative, and operational. Ultimately, creating the connections between national goals and local implementation is critical to efficient, just and equitable climate action across the world.



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