

# **Community Climate Action Hubs: Analysis of Responses (70) to the Request for Information (2020)**

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### Introduction:

Following the announcement of the Climate Action Hub programme in 2020, the Scottish Government undertook a request for information exercise. We received 70 responses from a wide range of third sector and community groups. From this the two pathfinder hubs were identified and the information was used to shape the climate action hub programme.

### Summary

Respondents identified a number of barriers to climate change action that the hubs can help to address including lack of knowledge, time, funding and challenges with what can be a cluttered and confusing funding landscape.

Hubs should:

- facilitate co-ordination and collaboration,
- provide relevant and tailored advice to groups,
- deliver training sessions on relevant topics,
- improve outreach and engagement for initiatives,
- help communities identify and apply for funding, and
- organise events and marketing campaigns to increase interest in climate action, focusing on positive and empowering messages as well as the co-benefits of climate action.

Communities must be involved in defining the objectives of regional hubs, as well as in assessing the success of the regional hubs. The hubs should aim to capture the wider benefits of the work delivered in their area, including sustainable behaviour change and uptake of low carbon living advice.

### **Question 1: What type of support could hubs provide to most effectively enable community and individual climate action?**

Respondents to the 'Request for Information' identified many different forms of support that they believed a regional hub could provide to help communities actively participate in climate action.

#### **1) Facilitate co-ordination and collaboration**

It is clear that, for many respondents, "collaboration is key" to delivering the objectives of community climate action. Therefore, a central role hubs could play is to support the **development of new and existing networks and collaborations** between regional stakeholders from public, private and third sectors:

“An approach which brings together community with local authorities, agencies and community councils which have a key role in local planning, transport, development, energy, waste, agriculture and the environment.”

It was suggested that hubs could help provide “the essential link between the public, relevant stakeholders and political decision makers” and enable “area-wide partnerships with joined up thinking”. The value of **coordinating community action with local and national government strategies and policies** was particularly highlighted as a valuable role for hubs. For example, ensuring alignment with local authority community planning priorities, place-based local development plans and Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategies (LHEES).

Respondents suggested that, in creating links to wider national campaigns, hubs will not only help community groups set a direction that aligns with national priorities, but will also allow communities and individuals see that they are **part of a national and international effort** to address the climate emergency:

“It is also extremely important that communities feel they are not working in isolation and that at regional, national and international levels work is also being done.”

Another key coordination role identified for hubs was to help **reach communities that are currently not engaged in climate change** issues. Several respondents highlighted the risk that, if the focus of the hubs is too narrow, this can result in “carbon blinders”, in which only those people and organisations already engaged in action on climate change are attracted and included. Therefore, it was underlined many times that hubs must engage proactively and widely, to break down barriers to involvement and nurture local interest, including with BAME communities and young people.

It was also noted by several respondents that a useful function of the hubs could be to draw together and maintain an online regional **database of organisations and initiatives** involved in community climate action, which could be easily accessed by all relevant stakeholders.

## 2) Empower local organisations & networks

Another key aspect of the hubs that was noted throughout the responses was that these are well connected to, and understand, local communities and organisations. It was suggested that the hubs should “tie into current activities where possible” and be as **locally-focused** as possible, “to relate, and be meaningful, to daily life and to provide local solutions to local needs”. Consequently, many of the responses emphasised that hubs should **build on and support organisations and networks that are already established** and embedded in local areas, rather than start from scratch:

“Ideally hubs would build on work of existing trusted community anchor organisations which can support local action with real local knowledge and understanding.”

Respondents identified anchor organisations, such as, development trusts and housing associations, and networks such as Community Planning Partnerships and Scottish Community Alliance, which **already have strong connections within communities** that could be tapped into to support wide community engagement on climate change:

“..there are more synergistic benefits to supporting groups who are already delivering good outreach work in their community and embedding the climate change message into their models.”

In terms of supporting community engagement and participation on climate change, respondents suggested “it is good to start from where there is already interest and work out from there”: Lots of different types of local networks and groups were identified as important to engage in the work of the hubs, including, youth work, the arts and cultural sectors, sports groups, voluntary organisations. A key role for the hubs would be **engaging with a diversity of local groups** and “dovetailing the climate engagement message around already existing delivery”.

A point raised several times by respondents was the potential for the hubs to be a “one stop shop” that takes a **holistic approach to community action and development** and ensures support for climate action intersects with other concerns:

“Any new approach needs to be integrated with other aspects of development – climate change mustn’t be seen as a standalone issue.”

This includes connecting climate change with other environmental issues, such as biodiversity, waste, and water, as well as with wider social, cultural and economic issues, such as land reform, social justice, and wellbeing.

### **3) Foster knowledge exchange**

Many respondents saw value in climate action hubs connecting key stakeholders to foster “learning and local knowledge creation and exchange”:

“A central task of the regional hub should be to promote and enable the exchange ideas and experiences across their region as well as nationally so that organisations can learn from each other.”

Particularly highlighted in the responses was the importance of fostering **peer-to-peer learning** and sharing of ideas and experiences between community groups:

“Whilst every community is unique, being in touch with other similar projects (in terms of size, experience, focus) to share experiences, ideas, suggestions has real advantages. It often feels like community projects have to reinvent the wheel...”

Respondents noted the role that hubs could play in helping to strengthen links between groups by sharing and promoting best practice and celebrating success. Several respondents suggested this could be delivered through creating “strong digital communities” and **online discussion forums**. It was also suggested that hubs could help set up **visits to more established community groups** to see how projects are being delivered. As one respondent put it: “seeing is believing”.

Another common suggestion was the potential for hubs to facilitate **buddy or mentor relationships** between experienced, successful groups and new initiatives, to enable practical knowledge transfer and build confidence, capacity and efficiency:

“Having a more experienced organisation share their expertise, resources and files including organisational policies, HR documents and financial management knowledge would have enabled more seamless and effective delivery from the offset.”

It was identified that a key role for hubs could be to signpost, collate, and distribute this kind of practical information, including, templates, toolkits, how-to guides, case studies and other **tried-and-tested materials and resources** for community groups, which could be tailored to reflect the distinct needs of individual communities.

#### **4) Education, guidance, and training**

As well as supporting peer-to-peer knowledge exchange, respondents suggested ways in which hubs could also facilitate learning and development more directly, noting that “Education and awareness is a core element of the global response to climate change”.

Many identified a role for hubs in providing **training sessions**, workshops, and “regular educational events”. The most commonly cited suggestion was for hubs to deliver ‘climate literacy’ courses at different levels:

“We have been in discussion with partners about the need for climate/carbon literacy and there is strong support locally for a concerted push on this. The proposed hubs would play a key role.”

In addition to climate literacy, a range of other skills and subjects were identified for the hubs to deliver training on, from communication, public engagement, and leadership, to installing electric vehicle charging points and domestic energy efficiency measures.

There was also a call for hubs to be able to answer questions directly and provide access to **professional, trusted, expert advice** and support to community groups. It was suggested that this may be delivered in part via an online portal, but supplemented with regular face to face meetings with dedicated, skilled advisers/sponsors that can mentor groups. This could include support with technical aspects of project and people management, as well as feedback and guidance on ideas or projects.

Respondents highlighted the potential value of a physical centre for the hub which, when pandemic-related restrictions allow, could be a place to host workshops and training sessions and could also serve as a **drop-in centre** for people to go to for information and advice. Respondents noted that it is important that hubs are **safe spaces for people to learn**, explore their concerns, and understand issues. Therefore, the advice and support provided must be “accessible and user-friendly”, “free of jargon, easy to understand and not overwhelming”.

## 5) Awareness raising, communications, and recognition

Hubs were seen as presenting an opportunity to “be bolder in the way that we communicate the real emergency of climate change” and help **raise awareness of climate change** and emission reduction targets.

As well as raising awareness of climate change itself, the hubs were also identified as having a role to play in **communicating the value of community climate action**. This would include promoting the work of community groups locally among new audiences, for example, by supporting local influencers to “champion climate action and rally enthusiasm for initiatives” with the aim of encouraging a wider embrace the climate action agenda. In addition, hubs could play a role as a “voice for small environmental groups at a national level” to communicate the needs of communities to governments and inform policy.

It was suggested that part of this communications work is in creating “strong branding and marketing”, communicating **vision and values for the climate movement** that people will be able to buy in to. Another key aspect would be in **publicising inspirational examples** of what is being achieved by communities. This would not only help improve outreach and engagement for these initiatives, but it would also celebrate and recognise the hard work of individuals and groups, which can be important for sustaining motivation:

“Nobody wants to be soldiering on alone, especially when it comes to tackling complex problems like climate change. The knowledge that others in the area and region are working together helps galvanise further action across the area. It is a positive feedback loop.”

There was also the suggestion of the integration of some form **awards scheme** into the work of the hubs, to formally recognise skills and achievements – including a specific youth awards to encourage engagement from young people.

## 6) Access to funding

Another common role identified for the hubs was to help communities identify and apply for funding, from “micro grants” to large, multi-year funds:

“Point communities in the direction of funding and help them apply.”

The process of applying for funding was described by several respondents as “complicated”, “time consuming” and “onerous”, and therefore a potential role of the hubs is to provide **help with making funding applications**, “especially new groups who always struggle with this skill at first”.

Several respondents noted how valuable even very small amounts of funding can be for getting community projects off the ground. Consequently, there were calls for hubs to provide a simple and straightforward way to obtain **seed funding** for groups to “start their carbon journey”. One suggestion was to establish a funding stream specifically designed to get communities started, targeted at the types of activities that have proved successful in the past.

Respondents suggested that these small start-up grants should be relatively “light touch” (in terms of both the volume of paperwork required in the application process and the management from the funder) to improve accessibility and allow communities to get the most of the funding:

“The accessibility of this micro funding is important as groups often have to spend a disproportionate amount of time in applying for a couple of hundred pounds.”

It was suggested that groups also need access to **larger development grants** (greater than the £500 development grants available through the CCF) “to enable communities to fully develop project ideas” and encourage more ambitious projects. Many respondents highlighted the role that a hub could play in helping community groups access **longer-term funding for core costs**, particularly paid staff. It was suggested that “extended periods of funding are a key part of the solution” as it would increase the potential impact of projects and encourage more communities to take action:

“Longer term funding including realistic contributions to organisations core costs will increase the number of organisations willing to undertake community climate action projects.”

Linked to this, several respondents noted the importance of helping groups access “continuation funding” for successful projects to allow them to endure, evolve and extend beyond the initial grant period:

“Without the appropriate funding many projects similar to ourselves will risk losing the skill sets, knowledge, and the positive inroads made into community low carbon behaviours developed through the initial investment.”

In addition to accessing grant funding, there were calls for **support with alternative sources of finance**, including, community-owned assets and income generation, crowd funding, share offers, and private partnerships.

## 7) Conduct research

The final major role that multiple respondents recognised for hubs was to support and carry out research with community climate groups. It was suggested that hubs should **guide communities through the ongoing cycle of learning-through-doing**:

“[Hubs] should see themselves as setting out to enable their local communities to learn how to mitigate climate change by taking action, reflecting upon it and its outcomes and, on that basis, deciding on their next set of actions in a continuous learning cycle.”

There was also a call for hubs to collect and analyse data themselves and publish and disseminate findings. In particular, several respondents suggested that hubs could develop a framework or **mechanism for measuring impact and success** which could be easily and effectively applied consistently across community projects to allow for knowledge to be generated on what works.

Respondents also suggested hubs could run **demonstration sites** and feasibility studies where people can test and learn new ways of doing things and then replicate these, adapted to their particular needs.



## **Question 2: What is the appropriate size of the regional hubs and the role that you think they can most effectively play?**

Respondents to the 'Request for Information' identified a number of various sizes that they felt would be appropriate for the hubs as well as the most effective means of identifying the number of hubs and locations across Scotland where hubs would be most impactful.

### **1) Identifying a 'region'**

There were four different ways that respondents felt the hubs should be organised across Scotland. The most agreed upon blueprint for the hubs was to have **an average of six to ten hubs based in Scotland's seven cities with an additional two to three hubs specifically dedicated to the Islands** (Inner Hebrides, Outer Hebrides, and Orkney and Shetland). Most respondents felt that centring hubs in these cities would most effectively cover all regions of Scotland while allowing collaboration between urban and rural communities. The respondents who supported this blueprint felt that regions should be identified **based primarily on geographical linkage**, larger than simple local authority areas, so that hubs represent communities that have shared experiences with climate change and thus can share knowledge, link projects, and support each other.

"It's important that hubs are not too large and that they connect cities with the surrounding rural area. They need to be geographically linked."

"The regional hubs should bring together similar geographical areas, reflecting the different climate challenges of rural and urban areas, coastal and island communities, mountainous areas and lowland and peatlands."

The second most suggested blueprint for the size and organisation of the hubs was quite the opposite, with respondents suggesting that there should be **as many as 32 hubs located within local authorities** or within one-hour from the communities that they serve. Some also specified that **there should be more hubs in rural areas versus urban areas**, where communities generally already have access to more climate action support and resources. Rather than identifying regions through the lens of geographical location, this method seeks to use local, ordinary, and natural boundaries to distinguish the areas that hubs support.

"A regional hub would be most effective at local authority scale. This is small enough to recognise the needs and priorities of the community, allow action to be tailored and localised, and give the community a sense of ownership, while large enough to allow shared learning, have a meaningful voice and significant impact."

Respondents who supported this blueprint for the hubs felt that **the proposed 5-7 hubs structure would be far too few** for the large-scale task of supporting climate action across Scotland. Respondents also highlighted that differing socio-economic factors, carbon intensive activity in specific communities, varying population density, and unique impacts from climate change in specific communities would mean that larger regional hubs would have less impact because they would group these distinctive communities together with a 'one-size-fits-all' approach.

“The size and role of any regional hub in our belief should not be a one size fits all approach, as the capacity of any hub to deliver against any agreed targets will be determined by many factors...”

The third and fourth suggested options were supported by significantly fewer groups with only a small number of organisations recommending them. The third option was to have a **flexible system for identifying regions and hub-size, looking at each hub on an individual basis based on unique area-specific factors** like what climate action activity is already happening in the area (how much support the area needs with implementing future action), the types of projects that would have the most impact in the area (energy generation projects versus smaller-scale adaptation projects), area population, and area-specific climate challenges. The few groups who recommended this approach did not detail the number of hubs or regions that would apply for this blueprint.

The last option, suggested by only a couple respondents, was to **centralise support online through the creation of virtual hubs**. These online hubs would be more accessible to communities across Scotland, especially rural, Highland, and Island communities, and allow for easier collaboration and centralisation of information, support, and resources.

“Physical hubs are limiting. An online network of communication applications, using sustainable servers and ethical software should be developed instead... [to] encompass area networks at local, regional and national level.”

## **2) Learn, support, collaborate, act**

The respondents' recommendations for the roles of the hubs was similar to their considerations of the type of support hubs can offer (see question one). Respondents widely agreed on a number of core roles that would enable hubs to support climate action effectively across Scotland and act as a **'one-stop shop' for all things community climate action**. These roles were to:

- provide relevant and tailored advice to groups on projects and funding opportunities,
- provide optional learning opportunities and training sessions to groups or individuals on relevant topics of such as sustainability, climate change, carbon literacy, and the environment,
- support local groups and create a strong network of community climate action in each local area,

- help groups connect with each other to network, share learnings and experience, and facilitate collaboration,
- monitor and evaluate community climate action and identify where action could be improved.

“The Hubs could provide a ‘one-stop-shop’ service for communities by linking them to funding opportunities, advice and support from expert staff, training opportunities, webinars, workshops etc. They could also provide links to successful projects by similar communities to help the learning process and follow the examples that led to a successful project.”

**Question 3: What are the key barriers to climate change action/ behaviour change at a community level that you have identified during delivery of previous projects. How could hubs address these?**

Respondents to the 'Request for Information' identified a number of key barriers which have impacted their ability thus far to create meaningful, effective, and sustainable climate change action and behaviour change at a community level. There were nine main themes that the barriers recorded by respondents fell into which were: lack of knowledge, lack of time, lack of funding, low levels of engagement, insufficient or non-existent infrastructure to support work, a cluttered local and national funding landscape coupled with issues with governance and bureaucracy, multiple community-specific issues and obstacles to change, limits to groups' ability to effectively measure the impact of projects, and lastly, limited connections and communication with other groups and stakeholders.

In response to each of these themes, a number of solutions were suggested as to how the hubs can address these specific issues.

**1) Lack of knowledge**

Lack of knowledge was one of the themes that came up most frequently in responses and referred both to a lack of knowledge related to climate change itself as well as a lack of knowledge around how to run an effective programme and the skills that are required to do this. The sub-themes within the 'lack of knowledge themes' were a lack of knowledge around:

- climate change science and the severity of climate change,
- climate action, including:
  - other climate groups doing similar work,
  - existing services, resources, and funding,
  - how to access these services, resources, and funding,
  - project planning, early stage project support, and impact measuring,
  - how to effectively encourage climate action and behaviour change.

In response to the second part of the question which seeks to understand how hubs can help address these barriers, responses to issues related to a lack of knowledge centred primarily around providing additional support for groups. The main theme for what respondents expect hubs to offer is a resource to 'fill experience and skills gaps'. Specifically, suggested solutions included:

- providing an administrative core to provide ongoing project coordination and support,
- provide skills training courses and climate literacy courses,
- create 'off the shelf' project models that groups and communities can use as blueprints to replicate projects in their local areas,
- provide a library of successful project case studies, as well as approaches and messaging that have worked in past projects,

- provide a mentoring service to match communities and groups with mentors for the duration of their projects,
- provide a library of project planning and management tools like checklists, templates, and guidance on things like GDPR and professional indemnity,
- provide post-project support to preserve project legacies.

“People won’t change their behaviour if they don’t understand what they should be changing to and why. Hubs could address this by improving climate literacy through training, events and online campaigns.”

## **2) Lack of time**

Lack of time was another common barrier that was highlighted by respondents as many climate action groups rely on volunteer staff for their day-to-day operations. Because volunteers and staff are often limited, there is also limited time capacity for them to be as effective as would be desired. Respondents noted that on a day-to-day basis, other aspects of operating an organisation might take priority over climate change action so volunteers and staff are forced to juggle operating responsibilities with running projects. Specifically, these appear to be limited time for groups to seek funding for projects, apply for funding (which was highlighted as an overly complicated and arduous process), plan out projects, and create a meaningful online presence where projects and groups can attract attention for their projects.

The solutions that hubs can offer to help address these barriers were to advocate for a change in the competitive processes for funding application which ‘eat up time’ and don’t always result in a successful outcome for the groups, reduce the administrative and reporting burden for grants on groups, and lastly to offer examples and illustrations of activities that can both contribute to local needs as well as climate change as these can help groups focus on projects that tick multiple boxes.

## **3) Lack of funding**

Lack of funding was a barrier noted by nearly all of the respondents. But while the sub-themes that came out of this particular barrier illustrated a range of issues, the proposed list of solutions was equally substantial which shows that this is one area in which hubs could potentially have the greatest impact. The sub-themes were as follows:

- limited funding resources available,
- restrictions on funding,
- available funding favours disadvantaged areas which means higher income (and higher emitting) areas don’t receive as much,
- funders focus on a narrow range of activities that match their priorities which creates gaps in project objectives,
- funding is short-term so communities can’t explore legacy or income generation projects and have to continuously apply for more funding,
- there are many funding and resource cuts at local and national levels,

- expensive projects are generally first to have their funding cut even though they can have more significant impacts than smaller, less expensive projects (i.e. energy efficiency measures),
- lack of funding means that groups can't afford staff so they are forced to rely on volunteers,
- there is not enough flexibility for what approved funding can be used for and having funding tied to specific outcomes often means that projects can't be flexible as public opinion, national mood, or other variables change.

The solutions that respondents felt that hubs could support were largely reliant on the role of the hubs - as in, are hubs going to be facilitators for groups to access funding or are hubs going to be the source of funds, distributing funds directly to groups? With this question in mind, the solutions have been divided into two groups, firstly, solutions based on the premise of hubs as facilitators and secondly, solutions based on the premise of hubs as funders:

#### **Hubs as facilitators:**

- help identify available funding opportunities,
- align funding sources with local authority priorities,
- collate feedback to funders so that they can make the process easier for applicants,
- provide more information about projects that require less funding (ie. setting up re-use and sharing hubs, swap-shops, community growing projects, etc.),
- empower projects to be adaptive over funding periods.

#### **Hubs as funders:**

- give local councils, development and climate groups resources to act locally,
- increase investment in green recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic,
- allow funding to new groups without demonstrated experience of running larger programmes,
- allow longer-term funding,
- allow funding for higher impact, higher cost projects,
- reserve funding specifically for larger capital projects.

## **4) Low levels of engagement**

Tackling low levels of engagement is an area of particular interest to the Scottish Government as tackling climate change will require support and action from individuals, communities, and businesses across Scotland. Many of the barriers faced by respondents are obstacles that have been addressed in the Scottish Government's Public Engagement Strategy on Climate Change, which hubs can utilise to continue to engage areas of historically low climate change action.

Specific reasons that respondents highlighted as being why they are unable to increase levels of engagement were that:

- climate action in their local areas is ‘preaching to the converted’,
- there is a lack of enthusiasm around climate action,
- climate change is considered a middle-class cause and climate action messaging is often over-technical and ‘preachy’,
- communication around climate change and climate action can be seen as disengaging, shaming or guiltig, and doesn’t resonate with average peoples’ day-to-day concerns,
- people feel overwhelmed by the climate emergency,
- people are naturally resistant to changing their behaviour,
- climate change is not individuals’ problem to fix,
- climate change feels like a ‘far away’ problem (both in time and geography),
- people feel powerlessness and like things are being ‘done to them’ rather than with them/ for them.

“Disadvantaged communities may consider they have more pressing concerns than ‘the environment’, perceived to be middle class, over technical, remote or ‘preachy’.”

Solutions to these barriers included:

- linking climate action with co-benefits (including improved health and wellbeing, money saving advice)
- stronger and more positive/ motivating climate change messaging,
- stronger, clearer policy from government,
- provide information about how climate change initiatives can also have a positive impact on other aspects of life including health and wellbeing or food and fuel poverty, especially for disadvantaged communities,
- provide information about climate change is exacerbating existing problems and why it is important to mitigate future impacts,
- create local positive visions for the future,
- coordinate local advocacy and lobbying groups to give people more power,
- focus on multiple age groups, not just the younger age groups who are typically more engaged,
- increase room for innovation and engagement, don’t just focus on experts,
- encourage people to take small steps,
- incentivise engagement, action, and behaviour change,
- tailor climate action to local areas,
- involve communities in decision-making to increase the feeling of local ownership and buy-in,
- organise events that engage the community like litter-picks and beach cleans,
- focus messaging on converting smaller numbers of disinterested people rather than just engaging larger numbers of already engaged people.

“We very much find that if running a project or an event which is specifically labelled as ‘Climate Action’ we will attract only people who are interested in

‘Climate Action’ this has certainly been the case of the conversation events we have held under both the Big Climate Conversation and through CCF funding. Yet, when the event or project fulfils another need such as learning a skill, saving money or has entertainment value, we secure much greater engagement levels.”

## **5) Insufficient or non-existent infrastructure**

While only mentioned by a few respondents, issues related to infrastructure presented a significant barrier where hubs could potentially lend support and create a more effective backbone for climate action. Specific issues centred around insufficient infrastructure at a regional level to make change, private sectors having significantly more power so climate change action can feel like a one-sided, uphill battle against large corporations, and the misuse of vacant and derelict land which should be made available to groups for projects like food growing.

There was only one suggested solution for this issue which was that community climate action needs to be supported by regional and national infrastructure, although there was no detail as to how this could be done.

## **6) Cluttered funding landscape and issues with governance**

While this theme was related to issues of funding, it was important to draw out as a separate theme as respondents highlighted that there was a significant and specific barrier caused by the funding landscape being cluttered and confusing. This barrier was strengthened by issues presented by bureaucracy and governance structures. Specific barriers within this theme include:

- low trust in statutory services and complacency in these services,
- lack of transparency from government and funders,
- government sending mixed messages related to climate change,
- the required risk assessments for projects make even simple projects difficult to get started,
- the bureaucratic process stifles ideas and initiatives,
- young peoples’ voices are not included in development services,
- there is a systematic neglect of community voices,
- funding applications are determined by remote and unreachable bureaucratic measures,
- there are too many consultations which don’t lead to meaningful action,
- there is a lack of respect for communities which results in people coming into local areas to start projects that the communities themselves have not fed into,
- the continued support from the government for high emitting industries (i.e. oil and gas) which undercut community climate action.

“Activists are discouraged by bureaucratic hurdles and the slow pace of movement. A powerful, easily accessible, portal would enable connection to the bodies with the power to assist in making change.”



The solutions for the hubs to support include removing intermediate governing entities and instead using this funding for local climate action staff, facilitating discussions between communities and agencies about local issues, appoint dedicated leaders and facilitators with previous relevant experience to be contacts for projects, support local authorities who demonstrate good practice, and engage communities more in decision-making and planning.

## **7) Community-specific issues and obstacles**

While climate change is a significant and pressing issue, many respondents highlighted that there are many other community-specific issues that are happening alongside the climate emergency. Issues like poverty, poor mental health and climate anxiety, and lack of a local focus for collective action were the most prominent issues. Additionally, more specific obstacles included the reluctance of estate owners to allow volunteers to participate in environmental projects on their land, the lack of available volunteers as people are taking on extra work or limiting interaction due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and that deprived communities need more encouragement and support to participate in climate action than others might.

“Young people with pressing personal issues can feel detached from global issues. Ensuring that the work of the Hubs is relatable and meaningful to local communities along with the participation pathways and increasing engagement as discussed above will support engagement. The cost of participating in climate action is a particular barrier for young people. Travel costs, as well as public transport limitations, are frequently cited as a barrier by young people in rural areas.”

Some effective solutions that hubs could facilitate to address these issues include:

- reflect the needs of the most vulnerable and marginalised, ensuring inclusivity,
- have an up-to-date assessment of which areas have community climate action groups already and establish where there are gaps,
- give more resources and support to groups in poorly represented areas, or support the creation of groups in areas where they are none,
- create opportunities for work within hubs for local people,
- help communities take ownership of their places and the future of those places,
- be proactive with deprived communities rather than just wait for these communities to get involved themselves,
- create an easy-to-follow route map for action and engagement for communities with limited experience in climate action.

## **8) Limits to impact measuring**

Respondents noted that limits to effective impact measuring have multiple knock-on effects including difficulty gaining future funding, issues with illustrating the success of projects where impacts are not as tangible, and the impact of the 'stop-start' nature of community climate action (due to short-term funding) on impact measuring. More specific barriers include:

- lack of continuity and resilience of projects due to the stop-start nature of funding,
- lack of feedback loops that can inform people what has been achieved,
- only defining 'impact' in terms of carbon reduction,
- difficulty measuring the impact of some projects (related to behaviour change, community engagement, learning, or nature returning).

"The CCF growing project we were involved in concentrated on producing potatoes rather than salad crops because potatoes were heavier and therefore gave higher carbon saving figures. Salad crops would have been more useful locally, healthier and better environmentally due to the packaging and wastage associated with commercial salad crops."

Respondents suggested that hubs could help address these issues with impact measuring in the following ways:

- provide clear and consistent measurement tools for groups to use,
- create external recognition awards for hard-to-measure impacts,
- encourage more people to think about the longer term impacts of projects rather than just focussing on the immediate results,
- explore and share effective evaluation frameworks,
- encourage a more holistic approach to impact measuring rather than just carbon saving,
- create a thorough process for feedback whereby groups can articulate outcomes, receive recognition for efforts, communicate lessons learned, and share next steps.

## **9) Limited connection and communication with other groups and stakeholders**

A final theme related to barriers faced by respondents was a lack of connection and communication between different climate and community groups as well as with stakeholders. The main barriers highlighted were poor links between social and environmental interest groups which hinders collaboration and results in duplication of efforts, a lack of strategic alignment between groups and key partners and local authorities, and a lack of understanding about what is happening across Scotland in other areas which again presents a risk of overlap and duplication as well as not being able to identify where there are gaps in action.

Respondents suggested that hubs can help address these issues in the following ways:

- create diverse networks and signpost groups to them,
- increase the publicity and visibility of projects to increase engagement and networking,
- provide opportunities and space for collaboration,
- create clear local net-zero action plans that align with other planning processes and strategies and help guide local climate action,
- produce marketing materials such as factsheets, leaflets, engagement activities, etc. that communities can use for free,
- create a contact database for other climate groups to facilitate communication.

#### **Question 4: How can hubs catalyse the development and strengthening of climate action networks, embedding cooperation and learning at a regional level?**

Respondents suggested a wide range of ways in which the hubs can catalyse the development and strengthening of climate action networks, embedding cooperation and learning at the regional level.

This question in particular was interpreted in a wide range of different ways, the below structure is a reflection of the recurring themes.

##### **1) Establishing the hubs**

The recommendations from the respondents include principles that should guide the selection of the hubs as well as the resources needed for successful development of the hubs network.

- Avoiding duplication

Almost all respondents mentioned that focus should be given on supporting and enhancing existing networks rather than creating new ones.

A mapping exercise of existing services and active environmental organisations and networks would be useful as a first task to be completed by the hubs in each region. This would enable the hubs to identify the gaps and signpost people to existing services.

“The Third Sector already has strong networks, and a sense of sharing and collaboration through the already established Social Enterprise Networks, Development Trust Associations Scotland, Community Resource Network Scotland and their localised forum meetings.”

- Timescales

Respondents recommended to allow time for meaningful engagement, enabling the hubs to establish local priorities, build their own networks and establish their own decision making processes involving the community groups they will be supporting. The funding provided to the hubs should be long term funding. This will also increase confidence in the value of the work delivered from people engaging with the hubs.

“They should be set-up and funded for a minimum of three years, ideally five years.”

- Knowledge and resource needed

It was widely recommended that each regional hub should have at least one full time regional hub network coordinator as well as additional support staff. More generally, it was suggested that the hubs should have capacity to assist local organisation with:

- Event facilitation

The hubs should have the staff capacity and budget to regularly organise best practice workshops and networking events, drawing in external speakers as well as accessing both online and physical venues. One respondent suggested that the hubs don't necessarily need to own a venue to host the event themselves but could rely on members to host events:

“I also believe the “rolling hosting” of any in person networking events should be encouraged to see examples of good practice in action, rather than having the same designated host venue/s.”

- Enabling the transfer of knowledge and experience

As well as identifying and sharing best practice with climate networks, many respondents believe hubs should initiate and contribute to the publication of case studies, interactive maps of local climate action, online knowledge repository for members at regional and national scale.

“Crucial to the effectiveness of the network both locally and nationally will be the sharing of information. To do this a shared digital space should be created that enables members to share information.”

“This might be done through something like a regional portal for the HUB which allows members of different & similar projects types to interact, engage and share this practice.”

- Providing training

Several respondent recommended that the hubs should provide training to support the growth of climate action networks. Training provided could related to improving governance, project management and climate change awareness. Climate literacy will be particularly important in areas with less historic climate engagement. One respondent even suggested that a formal staff mentorship scheme should be created as part of the support provided by the hubs.

- Marketing and communication

It was presented as essential that regional hubs should have their own website and communications channels, so that they can fulfil the dual role of sharing information and resources within and between networks and engaging with the wider public.

“Climate action networks would benefit from support to increase their capacity to hold more events and communicate with their members, and more outreach events, external marketing and communication. In our experience, as many climate action networks are voluntarily led by the groups and organisations making up their membership, they often lack the time and resources to put into this. This can mean that members aren't as engaged

and that networks are often not widely known outside the environmental sector.”

- Secretariat functions
- Troubleshooting project issues
- Identifying and sharing funding streams

## **2) Strengthening climate networks**

The recommendations included in the responses detailed the functions they envisioned for the hubs as well as the ways in which they could most effectively provide assistance to local community organisations and strengthen climate networks.

- Engagement and participation

For the hubs to be successful in their role to establish and support climate networks, a key dimension of the suggested role for the hubs was to engage directly with the general public to increase climate change awareness and involvement in climate action, as building interest for climate action within the region would in turn strengthen the development of local climate action networks, with more people being interested to participate in them.

“Although awareness of climate change is widespread, understanding and behavioural engagement are often far lower.”

To lead successful public engagement, it was recommended that the hubs organise events and marketing campaigns to increase interest in climate action focusing on positive and empowering messages as well as the co-benefits of climate action. The messages should focus on concrete action.

- Remunerating participation

Many of the respondents, some with practical experience in implementing this, suggested that participation in the climate networks should be remunerated in order to increase participation and send a positive message on the value added by the member’s contribution. This would also address the limitations associated with relying solely on volunteering.

“A network should be inclusive and encourage participation. We have made our work at South Seeds a success by valuing people’s time. We propose £25 for each participant who joins the network and completes the initial survey. This approach could establish a network of well over 100 active participants within 3 months. It would also set a tone of valuing the input of participants.”

- Linking climate networks with other actors

Several respondents suggested that the hubs should look at creating synergies within the wider community sector and not limiting their role to connecting climate action groups with each other. This was also seen as enabling factor in creating a sense of regional identity.

“Climate action networks also need resources to engage with ‘non-climate’ groups. They need to make links with other community networks to reach established community groups not currently working on climate change and work more with local partners across all sectors to embed action at a regional level.”

- Linking climate networks with local businesses

The hubs could strengthen regional networks by encouraging links with local businesses.

“Encouraging a non-competitive ethos; encourage groups to work with businesses; particularly building relationships across climate groups and farm / crofting groups would be useful for rural areas.”

- Linking climate networks with funders

One respondent suggested that the hubs should not only actively identify, map out and share relevant funding opportunities with their climate networks, but they should also actively connect and engage with the funders to encourage them to take on a more climate-orientated focus.

“Changing the focus of funds like Wind Farm Benefit money should be an action the hubs lead.”

- Linking climate networks with national advice bodies

The hubs could then further strengthen local climate networks by linking them with national advice bodies like Sustrans or Zero Waste Scotland, and fostering collaborations so they can deliver projects jointly without losing the link with the community.

- Linking climate networks with local authorities

The hubs could assist local climate networks navigate local authorities organisational structures and rules, as well as increase collaborations between them by making the link between the work delivered by community organisations and local authorities priorities. The hubs could provide them with support in implementing carbon emission reduction monitoring.

“Hubs can assist community organisations make the link between action and area based strategic objectives.”

- Linking climate networks with schools

The hubs could facilitate the dialogue between schools and local climate action networks. The hubs could provide them with support in implementing carbon emission reduction monitoring and drawing the link between their engagement activities and how they could contribute to the schools' Curriculum for Excellence.

“Connect schools with charities and design programmes for schools, resource lists, appropriate equipment purchases, funding and grant streams for schools, early years, private schools and settings, plus childminders.”

### **3) Fostering collaboration and learning at a regional level**

Most of the respondents were broadly supportive of the approach presented in the proposal. Some respondents envisioned the hubs as being deeply rooted and active within the community, going above and beyond the role of network facilitator, with climate action activities being delivered for the local community. Another respondent suggested the hubs should have office spaces that can be leased out to other organisations.

“Local hubs are where stories are told, produce shared, visits arranged creating the environment where change takes place.”

However, one respondent highlighted issues with the focus being on regions and suggested to move away from a strictly place-based approach. Not all regions might have a strong regional identity or be well connected transport-wise which will make the setup of a hub difficult.

Many respondents echoed this concern and suggested alternative and/or additional areas of focus to remediate this issue, including:

- Networks across regions

The recommendations also included suggestions of enhancing collaboration and facilitating networking across regions. The different regional hubs should meet regularly and organise events across regions. Several respondents mentioned that a nation-wide event should be organised annually.

Many respondents also suggested that knowledge should be shared at the national level across Scotland through a joint platform.

“Create a national database of successful community projects, their actions, outcomes and results, and use this to promote and strengthen climate action in communities at a regional level. The various Hubs would access and feed into this database providing a consistent method of recording the various actions and results from different projects. This could be used to help stimulate other communities to take action if known results have been achieved and recorded elsewhere.”



- Thematic networks

Several respondent suggested that more focus should be given on thematic networks and events (i.e. food growing, active travel) rather than geographically defined ones. This could be done both at the national scale and at the regional scale.

“Topic based (food, energy, circular economy, etc.) cooperation and shared learning would be popular if well facilitated by a Hub and tailored to groups.”

- Virtual networks

Almost all respondent highlighted the importance of accessibility and inclusivity and the need for the hubs to hold their activities both online and in person. One respondent felt strongly that virtual networks should replace physical one altogether, as they present numerous advantages in terms of efficiency, cost, and associated carbon footprint.

“In the past, the confidence to use this kind of technology for networking might have been an issue but post-covid there is much greater confidence to use video meetings and web forums for sharing.”

Other respondents mentioned the limits associated with virtual spaces:

“Covid has accelerated the growth and familiarity of on-line connections. This can be built on. The educational and networking meetings with SCCAN and HiTSI have been excellent, as is the Keep Scotland Beautiful Climate Literacy for Community Leaders course. However, as mentioned, broadband provision is still lacking in many rural areas. Further exclusion may occur with resistance to using new technology and financially.”

- Multiple locations

There was a suggestion that the hubs should not be constituted in one single physical space, but rely on a team of community leaders based in different locations:

“A hub as a geographical collaboration, not based at one site. Hosted by many local established projects with room and clear pathway for new projects or organisations to participate.”

## **Question 5: How should the performance and effectiveness of the regional hubs (including the community climate action within each hub) be assessed?**

Respondents to the 'Request for Information' identified a series of indicators that would allow the performance and effectiveness of the regional hubs to be assessed, as well as some overarching principles which should guide the development of a monitoring and evaluation framework for the regional hubs and the initiatives supported by them.

### **1) Overarching principles**

Respondents set out some overarching principles which should guide monitoring requirements set out for community climate action supported within each hub's region.

- Light touch monitoring requirements

Respondents felt it was important to ease the administrative burden on community climate action to allow organisations to focus on delivery.

“The Covid crisis has shown that community responses can be fast and effective when given resources and freed from bureaucracy. We would like to see similarly rapid approach to the climate emergency as there was to the Covid emergency.”

- Flexibility

Respondents suggested monitoring requirement should allow for unexpected outcomes to be captured, especially considering the experimental nature of the regional hubs.

“It is important to set targets and monitor performance, but it is also important to collate unplanned results because these can often lead to new ideas and opportunities.”

- Transparency

It was suggested that digital and local notice boards on the work achieved so far would enable greater transparency and accountability for the hubs, as well as increase the confidence from the general public in the work delivered by the hubs.

- Participation

It was suggested that community groups should be involved in defining the objectives of the regional hubs as well the metric in which the success of the regional hubs will be measured. This is particularly important if regional hubs take on different objectives and support different local priorities.

“We think it’s important for community groups to be able to play a key role in determining the basis on which the success of a hub will be assessed; and play a key role in the process of assessment itself.”

## **2) Community engagement and direct support provided**

Respondents suggested a number of quantitative indicators to track engagement, participation and progress on the outcomes set out for the hubs, including:

- number of queries received,
- number of people reached,
- number of events held, number of participants,
- number and size of organisations supported,
- number of projects initiated and level of funding accessed by supported organisations,
- number of job created/improved employability.

Equally important to respondents was the perceived quality of the engagement which would be measured through actively collecting feedback both on the information provided online and on the engagement conducted in person.

## **3) Learning and resources**

- Climate change awareness

Respondents suggested that the hubs should seek to evaluate the impact of training delivered. This could include improved climate change awareness and involvement in climate action as a result of Carbon Literacy Training provided by the Hubs. This would be measured through participant questionnaires.

- Resources shared

As part of their role to facilitate knowledge exchange between communities, the hubs should monitor the number of resources provided by organisations for sharing and hosted on the Hubs’ websites.

## **4) Carbon emissions reduction**

Carbon emissions reduction monitoring was by far the most controversial theme amongst respondents for this question. Some respondents appeared to be highly in favour carbon emission reduction monitoring being mainstreamed and made accessible to community organisation in order to help monitor progress and highlight the community sector’s contribution to the Scottish Government commitment to make Scotland a Net Zero Nation by 2045.

“The Climate Challenge Fund already has well developed and proven measuring tools for CO2 reduction. The hubs could cascade the tools to the

smaller organisations and monitor and evaluate and hold the information to pass back to ScotGov.”

While the majority was in support of widening and enabling the use of carbon monitoring tools, some respondents highlighted the limitation of carbon emissions reduction monitoring in a community setting and warned against making this a requirement.

“We don’t think that it is appropriate to expect community groups to be able to assess carbon savings in any meaningful way. In areas with higher levels of poverty where people may be dealing with more immediate concerns it may be more difficult to achieve as high levels of behavioural change. In order to create an inclusive scheme which isn’t just led by the middle classes, the wider benefits to a community should be considered and not just the carbon saved.”

The consensus amongst respondents would be for the hubs to provide support to community climate action groups in accessing carbon monitoring tools, but to take away as much as possible of the associated complexity and administrative burden. The carbon monitoring tool should be free and made available to organisations that request it. Zero Waste Scotland offered support in developing and encouraging uptake for this tool.

“We recognise that reporting of carbon reduction is difficult, particularly for small community-based organisations. However, we think this is a key performance measure for the hubs.”

## **5) Wider benefits and indirect support provided**

Respondents have also made suggestions that the hubs should aim to capture the wider benefits of the work delivered in their area including:

- Sustainable behaviour change and uptake of low carbon living advice

“Ultimately the degree to which hubs are able to engender and normalise permanent change to low carbon behaviour in the communities they serve will be central. To enable this, some sort of baseline assessment of each hub area according to some metrics widely seen as indicators of behaviour would be required. This is difficult as it requires access to data which may be difficult to come by, or dis-aggregate from national-level statistics (such as use of public transport; membership of EV car clubs; uptake of low carbon heating etc). A nationally coordinated longitudinal research effort could help with this.”

- Wider social, economic and health benefits

“The key is to engage people, so a measure of the number of people actively involved is useful. If projects engage people for social, economic and health benefits that have backdoor carbon savings it’s more important that this is

recognised and a qualitative report is produced so that we can gain a better understanding of how to engender behaviour change and share that with wider networks. This could be written or visual reporting something that is engaging and interesting for the wider population.”



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