Climate Change Plan Update (CCPu)

Introduction
1. COSLA welcomes the opportunity to provide evidence on the CCPu and on Local Government’s role in the decarbonisation of the Scottish economy and society. The following submission focuses on those key issues which we will return to when giving oral evidence to the Committee on Wednesday 17 February.

Summary
2. There is no precedent to what we need to achieve in the next 20-30 years in terms of the decarbonisation of society and the economy. The Just Transition to a net zero economy and society will therefore take all of our collective effort and ingenuity to achieve. It will require unprecedented cooperation between different parts of the public sector, the private sector, communities and all of Scottish civic society. No part of Scottish public life can achieve this goal on its own. We cannot see a pathway to achieving our net zero goals fairly which does not include a central role for Local Government. This role must extend from being a delivery partner for national programmes and must build on the strengths of Local Government which have been exemplified during the COVID-19 pandemic response. We fully support the ambition shown by the CCPu but our focus must now be on delivery and taking carbon out of our economy as quickly and as fairly as possible.

Key Points
3. The following are the key points which we want to make to the Committee in advance of session on 17 February:

- COSLA strongly supports the Just Transition to net-zero by no later than 2045. Achieving a Just Transition will require urgent, concurrent work to take place on the sectors with the largest emissions.
- Consequently, we support the ambitions of the CCPu and the overall goal of achieving a net zero economy and society as soon as possible but we strongly believe this will only happen in time if Local Government is empowered and has the resources to invest beyond those set aside for national programmes.
- Local Government is central to the Climate Change response and is active across many areas of the CCPu, including arguably the three biggest transitions, namely transport, the decarbonisation of heat and buildings and land use.
- The challenge presented by Climate Change is immense and we don’t have all the solutions. However, we are committed to Local Government playing a critical leadership role on all aspects of the Just Transition. The role of Local Government was recognised in the Paris Agreement and COP 26 later this year will be another opportunity to show what Local Government can achieve when working with communities, partners and national Governments.
- We must now focus on delivery of the Climate Change Plan and believe we should look to the COVID-19 pandemic response as an example for how Local and Scottish Government have worked together to achieve a common goal in
an emergency. While the timeline for dealing with the Climate Emergency is longer than the pandemic we need to consider what our collective emergency response structure should be for the next decade and more.

- It is important to recognise that the pandemic has put incredible strain on Local Government finances. We are committed to decarbonisation but recognise we are not in a position of strength financially. Decarbonisation across all aspects of the economy and society will require new public sector investments but it will also ask the public sector to take on new roles to enable the private sector to play its fullest role possible. An example of this is on the future direction for the operation of electric vehicle charging infrastructure in Scotland. While some low carbon investments will pay off quickly others will take longer to show a return in investment, so we will need to consider our collective attitude to risk. We are clear, however, that a financially robust Local Government is more likely to be able to balance risk than one which is in a comparatively weaker financial position.

- Investment in decarbonisation will also require an investment in people. Local Government is both a supplier of skills to the Scottish economy through the education system but also one of Scotland’s largest employers. The future skills needs of both young people and businesses is therefore of keen interest to us. It is not just technical skills which we will need to invest in as a country, we will also need to look at leadership skills and carbon literacy if we are to chart our way through an age of unprecedented change. Again this is something which Local Government can help support with Scottish Government and its agencies.

- We recognise that the Just Transition will require difficult decisions and that we will be asking all aspects of Scottish society to make sizeable changes to their everyday lives. Perhaps the biggest challenges will lie in the decarbonisation of heat and transport but other sectors will be just as challenging. We must be honest with ourselves and with the Scottish public that our goals won’t be achieved by small tweaks to the status quo. This messaging will require strong and consistent political leadership and engagement at the local and national level. Facilitating behaviour change is something which we believe Local Government is in a good position to help with but we think this is best achieved by exemplifying parity between Local and Scottish Government. We need to show we can work together effectively as equals if we are to ask members of the public to make important changes to their lives.

**Conclusion**

We support the ambition of the CCPu but we believe we must now be focused on delivery. The CCPu was published on 16 December so we are still in the process of assessing its implications for Local Government. Nonetheless, we do believe that that Local Government is central to the delivery of much of the CCPu and we are happy to return to these points and expand upon the arguments made in this submission at the evidence session on 17 February. In the time we have had available we have had to focus this submission on the key messages but we have also had a good response from Local Authorities and professional associations in preparation for the evidence session so we have more detailed information to draw upon if the Committee requires it.