

# **Environment, Sustainability and Biodiversity Report 2024-25**

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## Who we are

### About us

1. The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) has a wide remit, covering a variety of functions and services. The Ombudsman's powers and duties come (predominantly) from the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman Act 2002, which gives four distinct statutory functions:
  - the final stage for complaints about most devolved public services in Scotland including councils, the health service, prisons, water and sewerage providers, Scottish Government, universities and colleges.
  - specific powers and responsibilities to publish complaints handling procedures, and to monitor and support best practice in complaints handling.
  - independent review service for the Scottish Welfare Fund with the power to overturn and substitute decisions made by councils on Community Care and Crisis Grant applications.
  - the role of Independent National Whistleblowing Officer (INWO) for the NHS in Scotland, the final stage for complaints about how the NHS considers whistleblowing disclosures and the treatment of individuals concerned.
2. All of the SPSO's services are free and independent.

### Our vision

3. The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman contributes actively and positively to high performing Scottish public services. Recognised for our innovative world-leading approach, we put people and learning at the heart of all we do.

### Our strategic themes

4. We will live our values through four strategic themes that drive our activity and annual business plans:



## Our Values

5. We are committed to living our values to deliver our functions efficiently, effectively and economically. While our remit is wide, and expanding, we aspire to deliver our business coherently and consistently across all functions. We strive to continue to give great service to all who come to us; whether to make a complaint about a public body, seek our advice and support, ask for a review of a Scottish Welfare Fund decision or complain about how the NHS has handled a whistleblowing concern.



## Summary

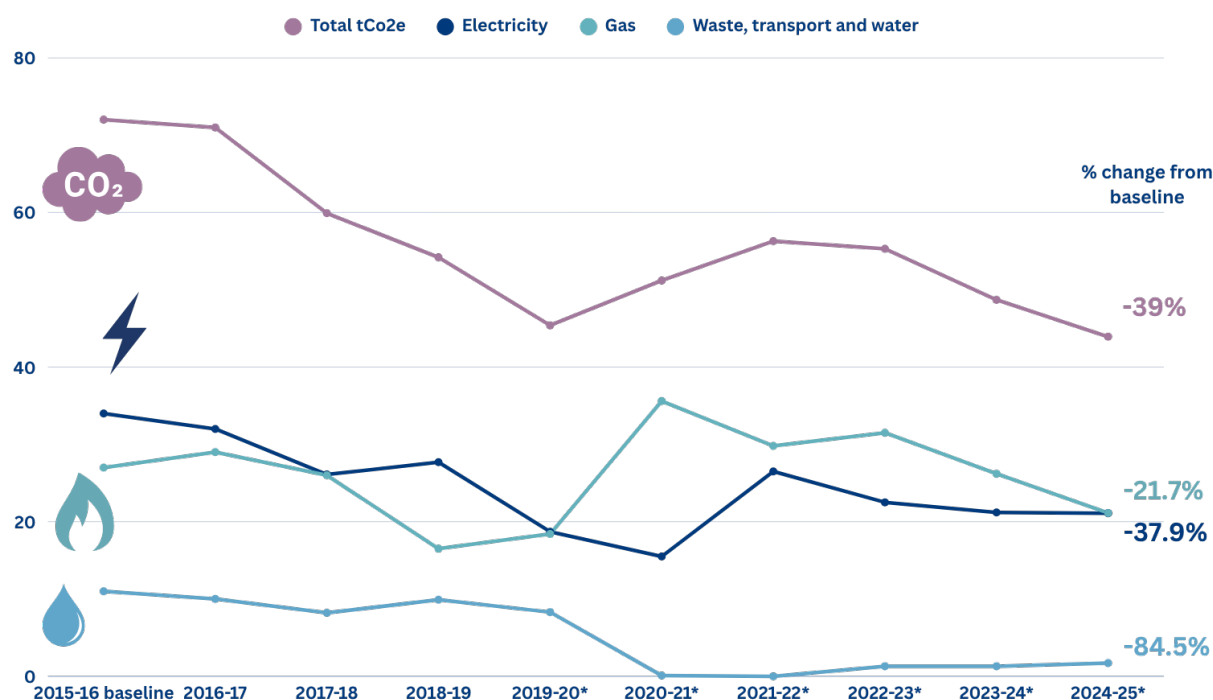
6. Scotland has ambitious targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and, along with other public-sector bodies, SPSO recognises its role in taking forward this agenda. In May 2019, the Scottish Government declared a climate emergency and in June 2019, the First Minister launched 'The Big Climate Conversation'.
7. Most of the SPSO's resources are dedicated to delivering its statutory functions. However, the SPSO can make a direct contribution to sustainability by ensuring that it implements policies and procedures that continue to reduce its carbon footprint, prepares for the future impacts of climate change and raises awareness amongst staff of climate change.
8. Critical to measuring progress against Scotland's action plan to reduce emissions and progress climate action, the Climate Change (Duties of Public Bodies: Reporting Requirements) (Scotland) Order 2015 requires an annual report to be submitted using the Scottish Government's online system. The SPSO has been voluntarily publishing these figures on an annual basis since 2011-12.
9. Additionally, the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 places a statutory duty on all public bodies in Scotland to further the conservation of biodiversity when carrying out their responsibilities. The Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011 introduced a further statutory requirement for public bodies in Scotland to provide a publicly available report every three years, on the actions which they have taken to meet this biodiversity duty.

<sup>1</sup> SPSO Sustainability Reports: <https://www.spsso.org.uk/sustainability-reports>

10. This report is our response to these duties.

## Performance in carbon emissions

11. The SPSO is the leaseholder for Bridgeside House on behalf of four office-holders – Scottish Biometrics Commissioner (SBC), Children and Young Person’s Commissioner Scotland (CYPCS), the Scottish Human Rights Commission (SHRC) and the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO). All office-holders operate a hybrid-working policy.
12. The carbon emission figures contained in this report include the waste and utility figures for all public sector office-holders accommodated in Bridgeside House, and transport figures for SPSO only.
13. In 2024-25 we reduced our office emissions by 28 tCO<sub>2</sub>e from the 2015-16 baseline figure. We have reduced our office carbon footprint by thirty-nine percent against our 2015-16 baseline, and by forty-nine percent since 2009-10 (85.3 tCO<sub>2</sub>e).
14. We remain committed to further reducing our carbon emissions and working more sustainably. We have made significant progress in reducing emissions from electricity, waste, transport and water usage.
15. In 2024-25, we continued our efforts to reduce gas emissions by implementing key energy efficiency upgrades. A new Building Management System (BMS) was installed to enable more precise monitoring and control of gas usage. Additionally, we upgraded the heat pump at Bridgeside House to improve heating efficiency. These measures have resulted in a reduction of over 5 tCO<sub>2</sub>e in gas consumption compared to 2023-24.



\* 2019-21: SPSO plus CYPCS and SHRC , 2021-25 SPSO plus CYPCS, SBC and SHRC

16. Further details of these reductions are in our [sustainability reports on our website](#).

## Environmental and sustainable development

### *Facilities*

17. Bridgeside House accommodation has enabled us to continue to reduce the total emissions for all four Scottish Parliament supported organisations. This is especially clear when compared to previous years when SPSO were the sole occupant of a townhouse building. The savings equate to 0.03 tCO<sub>2</sub>e per square metre (m<sup>2</sup>) floor space we occupy.
18. The features of Bridgeside House that support these energy savings include:
  - an Energy Performance Indicator (EPC) of C+, with lower ceilings to allow better conservation of energy;
  - full wall to ceiling double glazing on the north wall for natural light, and motion-sensor LED lighting to reduce electricity use;
  - fresh-air mechanical ventilation, and windows with trickle vents to allow temperature control for energy efficiency and good health; air-cooling facilities are only installed in the large, shared meeting spaces, to complement the mechanical ventilation when the room is used at full capacity;
  - heating is regulated using thermostats timed to operate only during office hours.
19. Decisions were taken during the design and fit out of the office to reduce the environmental impact of the office use. These included the installation of zip heater water boilers in tea points, combi-ovens and induction hob in shared kitchen, no use of chrome in any fittings, and a 'follow me' document printer system requiring an ID card to print documents, significantly reducing our volume of paper waste.
20. Each tea point and printer station has recycling facilities, and as part of the Health and Safety induction, new staff are advised of SPSO's recycling procedures and commitment to reducing carbon emissions/waste. All of the SPSO's general waste is recycled, alongside items such as soft plastic, food, toner cartridges, batteries, pallets and electrical appliances such as heaters.
21. As part of Display Screen Equipment (DSE) training, staff are also advised, if possible, to use the stairs in the office for their own health and well-being, while also reducing energy use.



### *Transport and travel*

22. Our Travel and Expenses Policy encourages staff to travel on public transport wherever possible for work related business. Bridgeside House contains bicycle storage for up

to twenty-two bikes, and a purpose built shower block to support sustainable transport options for staff.

23. In order to encourage bike travel, the SPSO also offer a bicycle and safety equipment loan, which has been met with great interest and moderate take-up.
24. In 2024–25, emissions from business travel saw a slight increase. However, levels remain significantly lower than those recorded before the pandemic, largely due to the continued use of video conferencing for meetings and events. To support this, SPSO has equipped meeting rooms at Bridgeside House with video conferencing facilities, enabling staff and external stakeholders to participate remotely and helping to reduce indirect travel emissions. Additionally, SPSO has developed online e-learning modules for certain external training sessions, further minimising the need for travel.

## **Actions to protect and enhance biodiversity**

25. The Ombudsman is committed to supporting the Scottish Government’s policies on environmental and sustainable development and understands the obligation to publish a biodiversity report. The SPSO does not own or manage land, regulate land use, or have responsibilities linked to biodiversity. Therefore, we have limited opportunity to carry out activities for biodiversity. The main functions of the SPSO are carried out from a single location in central Edinburgh.
26. We support biodiversity through making positive efforts to reduce the organisation’s carbon footprint and encouraging staff to reduce their personal carbon footprints. Some of the actions to support this include:
  - running Resource Efficient Scotland’s Climate Change Assessment Tool to assess our response to climate change duties and identify areas for improvement;
  - minimising waste and reducing waste to landfill through recycling, such as switching to using glass bottles for dairy and non-dairy milk;
  - using products made from recycled material including office supplies such as Ecolabel certified paper and pens;
  - providing filtered mains tap water to reduce plastic bottle use;
  - using fully biodegradable and fragrance-free cleaning products in Bridgeside House;
  - using local and environmentally-minded suppliers wherever possible;
  - installing video conferencing facilities in meeting rooms to encourage staff/stakeholders to attend meetings remotely;
  - supporting ‘paper lite’ meetings and introducing an electronic file-sharing platform and PDF editing software to reduce our reliance on paper;
  - raising awareness of biodiversity and sustainability issues through the activities of our Climate Change & Green Group;

- supplying recycling outlets throughout the office, including soft plastic and food waste recycling; and
- exploring opportunities to reduce emissions from deliveries by choosing less impactful delivery options e.g. when ordering laptops we choose an option to dispatch by sea, rather than by air.

## Climate Change & Green Group

27. A Climate Change & Green Group has been operating since 2016-17, made up of staff representatives across the four organisations. The group aims to share best practice, think creatively about sustainability opportunities and lead on new green initiatives.
28. To mark Scotland's Climate Week 2024, the group organised a series of activities aimed at raising awareness and encouraging sustainable action among staff. These included a local litter pick, the setup of a clothes donation point to give second-hand garments a new lease of life, and a nature and wildlife photography competition. A daily flyer was also circulated throughout the week, highlighting the climate and nature emergency and offering practical tips on how staff can reduce their personal carbon footprint and support the SPSO's commitment to lowering organisational emissions.
29. In 2020-21, the Climate Change Group took part in running Resource Efficient Scotland's Climate Change Assessment Tool (CCAT) alongside volunteers from all teams within the SPSO. This supported the identification of areas for improvement in the SPSO's climate change response and generated a list of actions that were completed between 2021 and 2024.
30. In 2024-25, we reassessed our climate arrangements against the CCAT to check our progress. In 2020-21, our score on the Tool was 25%, in 2024-25 this had increased to 59%
31. The Tool also generated a new list of actions to further improve the SPSO's climate change arrangements. These have been approved by SPSO's Leadership Team and will be taken forward between 2025 and 2027:
  - develop a communication plan to ensure awareness and understanding of SPSO's strategies and policies surrounding climate change are embedded across the organisation;
  - update Leadership Team cover sheet template to encourage stronger consideration given to various areas of potential environmental impact and associated cost;

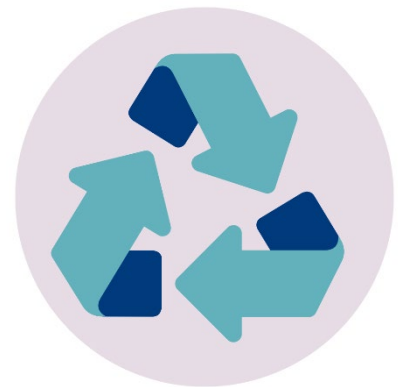




- update supplier contracts to further embed environmental and sustainability considerations into our procurement process;
- develop climate project risk register to ensure any projects taken forward are assessed for their impact on emissions and the whole life cycle of the project is considered;
- review climate change risk assessment (completed in 2023-24) to ensure it is accurate and provides suitable mitigation actions for adaptation to climate change;
- update SPSO policies to further embed climate change and sustainability considerations across the organisation;
- update the competency framework to encourage a culture of organisational responsibility for climate change; and
- revise annual declarations to include environmental considerations.

## Working in partnership and communications

32. The SPSO's stationery and paper shredding suppliers are accredited to the ISO 14001 international standard for environmental management systems. The office uses recycled paper sourced from a local supplier, supporting both sustainability and the local economy. We also partner with Change Waste Recycling, recognised for its award-winning environmental best practices. All shredded paper is sent to Scottish paper mills, where it is recycled into low-grade tissue products, ensuring a closed-loop recycling process.



33. To further reduce paper consumption, SPSO has invested in digital solutions including PDF editing software, secure digital file-sharing platforms, and enhancements to our case management system that allow for larger digital file storage. These tools support a more efficient and environmentally conscious approach to document handling.

34. The Ombudsman publishes a Climate Change Duties Report on an annual basis that provides specific detail on the office's wider environmental sustainability efforts. These can be found on the [SPSO's sustainability reports webpage](#).

## Looking ahead

35. So far the SPSO have significantly reduced our carbon emissions by 28 tCO<sub>2</sub>e since 2015-16, mostly through adaptations to the physical office environment and updating IT applications and processes to allow us to work paper-lite. We will continue to identify ways to further reduce our carbon emissions through the implementation of actions generated from the CCAT and the promotion of environmentally friendly behaviours.

36. Further opportunities to share the Bridgeside House accommodation with other Scottish Parliament Supported Bodies will be supported, with the new Patient Safety Commissioner for Scotland joining us in 2025.

#### *Behaviours*

37. As new working practices have resulted in significantly more working from home for all staff, the Climate Change & Green Group will continue to raise awareness amongst staff to further reduce emissions and work towards decreasing their personal carbon footprints, by reducing energy use and making environmentally conscious decisions at home. For example, this may include encouraging staff to consider switching to renewable green energy tariffs, switching off unused electrical items, reducing food waste, or reducing thermostat temperatures.
38. Going forward, the SPSO will aim to continue reducing emissions wherever possible and embed awareness of environmental issues and the need to mitigate climate change, as well as considering our wider social impact.