

**SCOTTISH  
PUBLIC  
SERVICES  
OMBUDSMAN**



People Centred Improvement Focused

# **Environment, Sustainability and Biodiversity Report 2023-24**

## Contents

Who we are .....	3
About us.....	3
Our vision.....	3
Our strategic themes .....	3
Our Values .....	4
Summary.....	4
Performance in carbon emissions .....	5
Environmental and sustainable development .....	7
Actions to protect and enhance biodiversity .....	8
Climate Change & Green Group .....	9
Working in partnership and communications.....	10
Looking ahead.....	10

## 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 her 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

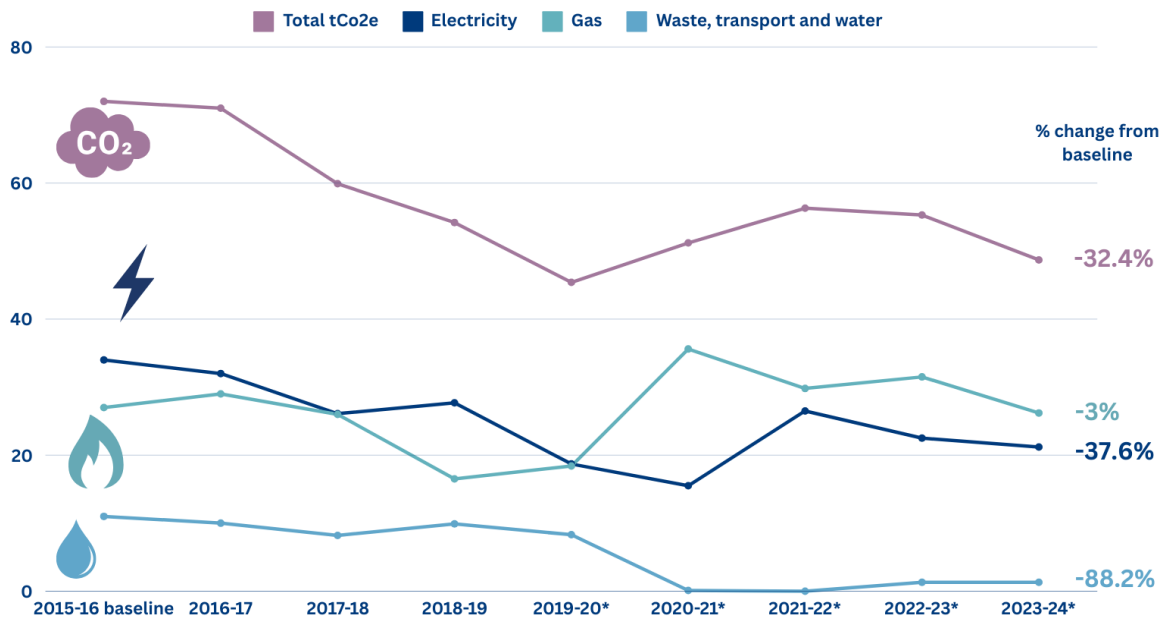
6. Scotland has ambitious targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and, along with other public-sector bodies, SPSO recognises its role in taking forward this agenda. In May 2019, the Scottish Government declared a climate emergency and in June 2019, the First Minister launched 'The Big Climate Conversation'.
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.
10. This report is our response to these duties.

---

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

## 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 2023-24, we reduced our office emissions by 23.35 tCO<sub>2</sub>e from the 2015-16 baseline figure. We have reduced our office carbon footprint by thirty-two percent against our 2015-16 baseline, and by forty-three 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. Last year our gas emissions increased from the baseline year. We believe this was due to lower numbers of staff being present in the office due to the hybrid working, meaning more energy was required for the building to meet the set temperature.
16. In 2023-24, we have taken additional measures to conserve heat by closing windows and careful monitoring the building temperature. This has led to a drop in our gas emissions from 2022-23 of 5 tCO<sub>2</sub>e. In 2024-25, gas emissions should decrease further following the installation of smart thermometers in Bridgeside House.



\* 2019-21: SPSO plus CYPCS and SHRC , 2021-24 SPSO plus CYPCS, SBC and SHRC

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

## Environmental and sustainable development

### *Facilities*

18. 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.
19. 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.
20. 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.
21. 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.
22. 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*

23. 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.

24. 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.
25. In 2023-24 emissions from business travel showed a slight increase. This is still significantly lower than pre-pandemic business travel due to the use of video conferencing tools for meetings and conferences where possible. SPSO has installed video conferencing facilities in Bridgeside House meeting rooms to allow staff and external stakeholders to access Bridgeside House meetings remotely, further reducing indirect travel emissions.
26. As part of Scotland's Climate Week 2023 (25 September – 1 October 2023), the SPSO Climate Change & Green Group ran an active travel competition amongst staff, tracking the distance staff could travel in a week using sustainable travel methods (walking, running, cycling) to encourage staff to travel to the office in an environmentally friendly way.

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

27. The Ombudsman is committed to supporting the Scottish Government's policies on environmental and sustainable development and understands her 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.
28. 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 (to be completed next in 2024-25);
  - 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.

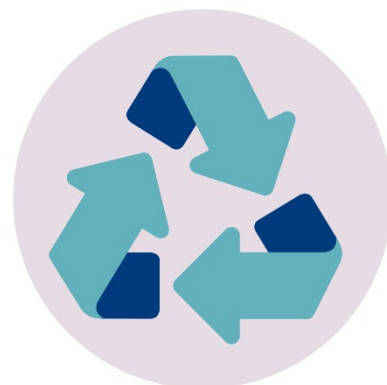
## Climate Change & Green Group

29. 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.
30. During Scotland's Climate Week 2023, the group also organised a staff litter pick in our local area, ran a nature and wildlife photography competition and circulated a daily flyer to raise awareness of climate change and the nature emergency, including the actions staff can take to lower their personal emissions and contribute to SPSO's commitment to reducing organisational carbon emissions.
31. 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 would be addressed in the following year's business plans.
32. The remaining actions from this Climate Change Assessment Tool assessment which were completed in 2023-24 included:
  - publication of our Climate Change Strategy to set out SPSO's road map and interim targets for achieving Net Zero emissions;
  - completing a climate change risk assessment to assess the SPSO's risks in relation to climate change and capability to adapt to the projected impacts of climate change;
  - completing the Sustainability Exchange's Flexible Framework Assessment Tool to assess the sustainability of procurement activities. We are working towards meeting the 'Foundation' level in the coming year, with staff involved in procurement responsibilities completing external sustainable procurement training.
33. The SPSO will repeat these CCAT workshops in 2024-25 to identify further actions we can undertake on our improvement journey.



## Working in partnership and communications

34. The SPSO's stationery and paper shredding suppliers are accredited to the ISO14001 international standard for environmental management systems. The paper we use in the office is recycled and sourced from a local supplier. We also work with Changewaste Recycling who have won awards for environmental best practice. 100% of the SPSO's shredded paper is delivered to paper mills in Scotland where it is recycled into low-grade tissue products.
35. We have invested in software to reduce paper use wherever possible, including PDF editing software, purchasing a secure digital file-sharing software and increasing digital file size limits on our case management system so large files can be stored online.
36. The Ombudsman publishes a Climate Change Duties Report on an annual basis that provides specific detail on her office's wider environmental sustainability efforts. These can be found on the [SPSO's sustainability reports webpage](#).



## Looking ahead

37. So far the SPSO have significantly reduced our carbon emissions by 23.4 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.
38. 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 early 2025

### *Behaviours*

39. 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.
40. 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.