

# **Environment, Sustainability and Biodiversity Report 2022-23**

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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 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'. This conversation will look at how Scotland becomes a net-zero emissions nation.
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<sup>1</sup>.
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.spsso.org.uk/sustainability-reports>

## Performance in carbon emissions

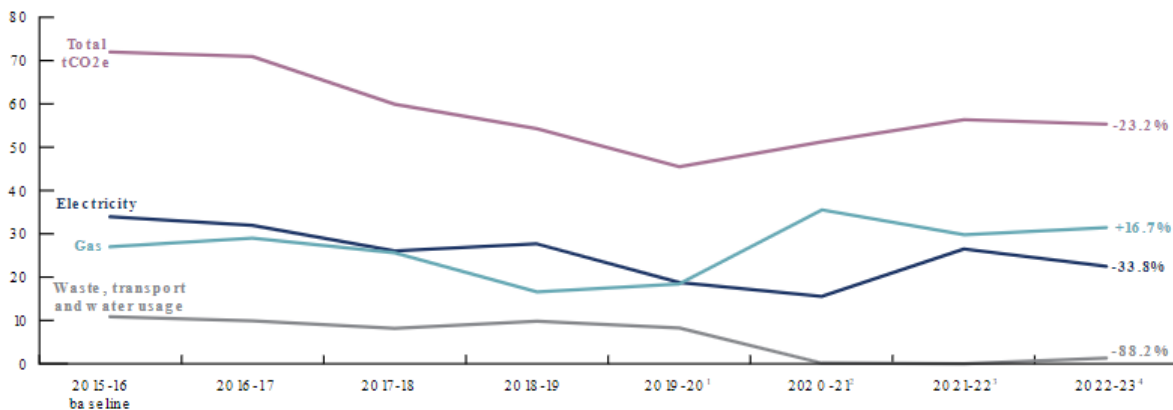
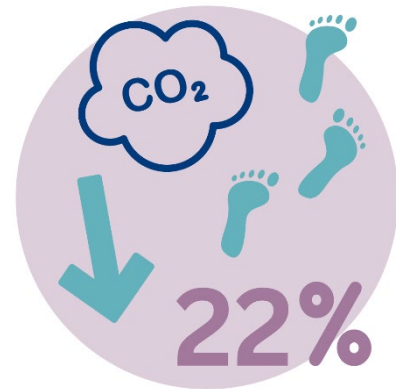
11. The SPSO became the leaseholder for Bridgeside House in August 2018 on behalf of three office-holders – Children and Young Person’s Commissioner Scotland (CYPCS), the Scottish Human Rights Commission (SHRC) and the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO). In 2022, Bridgeside House also began to accommodate the Scottish Biometrics Commissioner (SBC). 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.

12. **In 2022-23, the SPSO introduced a hybrid working trial, with staff working both from home and the office.**

13. In 2022-23, we reduced our office emissions by 21.79 tCO<sub>2</sub>e from the 2015-16 baseline figure.

14. We have reduced our office carbon footprint by twenty-three percent against our 2015-16 baseline, and by thirty-five percent since 2009-10 (85.3 tCO<sub>2</sub>e).

15. 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. However, our gas emissions have increased from the baseline year. We believe this is due to lower numbers of staff being present in the office due to the hybrid working trial, meaning more energy is required for the building to meet the set temperature. We also began incorporating gas emissions from communal areas of the building in our reporting in 2021-22. We hope to minimise the effect of this in future years by decreasing the temperature of the building and taking additional measures to conserve heat (e.g. shutting windows, using trickle vents for ventilation).




1 SPSO plus CYPCS and SHRC (shared accommodation in BH)  
 2 SPSO plus CYPCS and SHRC (shared accommodation in BH)  
 3 SPSO plus CYPCS, SBC and SHRC (shared accommodation in BH)  
 4 SPSO plus CYPCS, SBC and SHRC (shared accommodation in BH)

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

## Environmental and sustainable development

### *Facilities*

17. The move to Bridgeside House in December 2018 was a leap forward in assisting SPSO to manage its carbon emissions, whilst also progressing the shared-services agenda with other office-holders. The new facilities have enabled us to continue to reduce the total emissions for all three organisations, even when compared with SPSO sole output in previous years. This equates to 0.04 tCO<sub>2</sub>e per square metre (m<sup>2</sup>) floor space we occupy.
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18. The building has an Energy Performance Indicator (EPC) of C+, with full wall to ceiling double glazing on the north wall for natural light, windows with trickle vents to allow temperature control, motion-sensor lighting to reduce electricity use and lower ceilings to allow better conservation of energy.
19. The air-conditioning provided throughout the building is tempered fresh-air mechanical ventilation, for energy efficiency and good health, and the temperature is regulated using thermostats timed to operate only during office hours. 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.
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 toner cartridges, batteries, pallets and electrical appliances such as heaters. 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.

22. In 2022-23, the SPSO completed a project started in 2020-21 to further reduce the emissions from lighting, by replacing all existing lighting in communal areas with LED bulbs in banks, reducing the use of lights in areas where staff aren't working. We also installed occupancy sensors in corridors to ensure lighting is only on while needed. This helped contribute to the reduction in electricity usage in this reporting year.

### *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 2022-23, staff were able to attend in-person meetings and training, resulting in an increase in emissions from business travel (emissions from business travel in 2020-21 and 2022-22 were zero). This was 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 2022, 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:
  - reducing our carbon footprint;
  - encouraging staff to reduce their personal carbon footprints by sharing a carbon footprint calculator;
  - 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;
  - 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; 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 was introduced during 2016-17, made up of staff representatives across the organisation. The group aims to share best practice, think creatively about sustainability opportunities and lead on new green initiatives.
30. Notably, with encouragement from colleagues in the Climate Change & Green Group, staff make a variety of annual pledges each Climate Week. Pledges focus on changing behaviour, and include individual commitments to cut down on food packaging, take food waste home to compost and to upgrade all lightbulbs at home to energy saving versions.
31. During Scotland's Climate Week 2022, the group also organised a staff litter pick in our local area, ran a nature and wildlife photography competition and circulated resources 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.
32. 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 allowed the group to identify areas for improvement in the SPSO's climate change response and generated a list of actions.
33. A number of these actions were completed in 2022-23 including:
  - Completing the 'Manage Your Climate Risk' tool to assess the SPSO's risks in relation to climate change and capability to adapt to the projected impacts of climate change; and
  - Updating the procurement strategy to embed the SPSO consideration of the carbon cost of products and services.
34. In 2023-24, SPSO plan to complete the following actions:
  - Staff with procurement responsibilities will undertake external sustainable procurement training;
  - Staff job descriptions will be updated to include carbon management responsibilities;
  - Switch to using glass bottles for milk and providing oat milk;
  - Implement soft plastic and food waste recycling to further reduce waste;
  - Complete the Climate Change Assessment Tool again to review the progress made and identify areas we can make further improvements.



## Working in partnership and communications

35. 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.
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 16.8 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.

### *Policy and strategy development*

38. The SPSO will also work to further develop our Climate Change & Green Group. The group are drafting a climate change strategy incorporating actions resulting from the CCAT over the coming year, this is expected to be published in 2023-24. The strategy will provide carbon emission targets, cover actions to improve biodiversity, and promote sustainable working practices.

### *Working practices*

39. In 2022-23, the SPSO introduced a hybrid working trial which involved staff working both from our Edinburgh-based office and from home. In addition to attending all meetings and conferences by video conference, it also created an urgent need for paper documents received by the office to be scanned and shared with staff electronically wherever possible. This has led to 'paper-lite' working for the majority of staff, and moving most of our casework to electronic files only. We also implemented PDF editing software into our casework management system to improve 'paper-lite' working for casework staff in 2021.
40. In August 2020, the SPSO moved to a secure, electronic file-sharing platform for sharing casework documents to reduce printing and our reliance on couriers for casework, thereby reducing indirect travel emissions, electricity emissions and paper

waste. This software was integrated with our casework management system in 2021-22 to enhance its usability for case workers.

41. Additionally, all staff have been provided with laptops, which collectively use less energy than traditional desktop computers.



### *Behaviours*

42. 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.
43. 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.