

UWS SUSTAINABILITY PLAN 2025-30

Embedding sustainability
in our practice, policy
and operations

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Foreword

Sustainability is at the heart of everything we do.

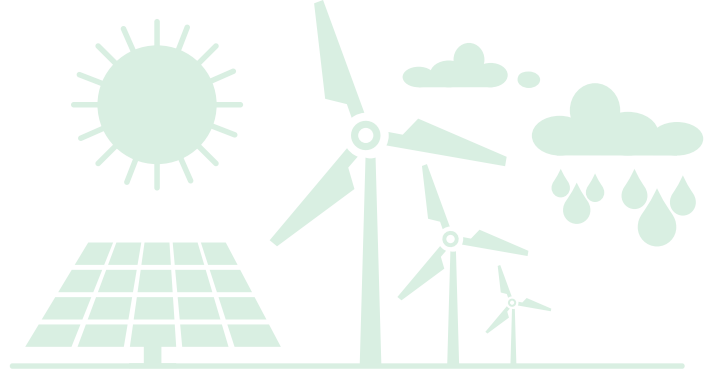
We take our responsibility to protect the global communities we serve seriously and recognise that we all have an obligation to act sustainably as colleagues and students.

We embed sustainability in practice, policy and operations across learning and teaching, research and innovation and ensure that we prepare our graduates to positively impact their communities.

We are committed to making a positive environmental impact and addressing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) and the Scottish Government's National Performance Framework. We are working to embed the UN SDGs across the University to ensure we are both a sustainable institution and making a sustainable impact in the community.

We are proud of the work we are doing to create a more sustainable environment at UWS. As we develop our Strategy 2030, sustainability, Net Zero and climate action will remain a core priority going forward.

This plan will be a living, organic document and builds on our [Institutional Sustainability Statement](#), setting out our high-level commitments across a range of themes and will be supported by detailed action plans to achieve these.



Professor James A. Miller FRSE
PRINCIPAL AND VICE-CHANCELLOR



UWS Sustainability Plan

University of the West of Scotland published its [Institutional Sustainability Statement](#) in October 2023 setting out the University commitments:

"The University recognises the criticality of embedding sustainability into our practices and our responsibility to minimise our impact on the environment whilst fostering social equity and promoting economic viability.

We strive to inspire and educate our students, staff, and wider community to become agents of positive change, working towards a more sustainable future."

The UWS Sustainability plan details UWS activities, commitments, and targets across all sustainability aspects and is a flexible, live document which will be continually assessed and updated over the period of its delivery.

The UWS Strategy and Sustainability Statement commit the University to embedding the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), while delivering our core functions of learning, teaching, research and innovation.



Achieving Global Change

UWS IS COMMITTED TO THE UNITED NATIONS
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



UWS is committed to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) and to being among the global leaders of excellent, relevant, and purposeful research aligned with the UN SDGs. UWS is a stand-out organisation, ranked in the top 300 universities in the world for the positive impact in achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and ranking 16th in the world for reducing inequalities (UN SDG 10) (THE Impact Rankings 2024).

The Scottish Government's National Performance Framework is Scotland's way to align Scottish public bodies actions to the achievement of the SDGs. The overall aims are to create a more successful country; give opportunities to all people living in Scotland; increase the wellbeing of people living in Scotland; create sustainable and inclusive growth; reduce inequalities and give equal importance to economic, environmental and social progress.

The UWS Sustainability Plan is mapped to these external measures, reflecting the national and global impact of the University and its actions.



UWS RANKING FOR REDUCED INEQUALITIES

source: THE Impact Rankings 2024

UWS Net Zero

UWS has set a target of becoming Net Zero by 2040, ahead of the Scottish Government target of 2045.

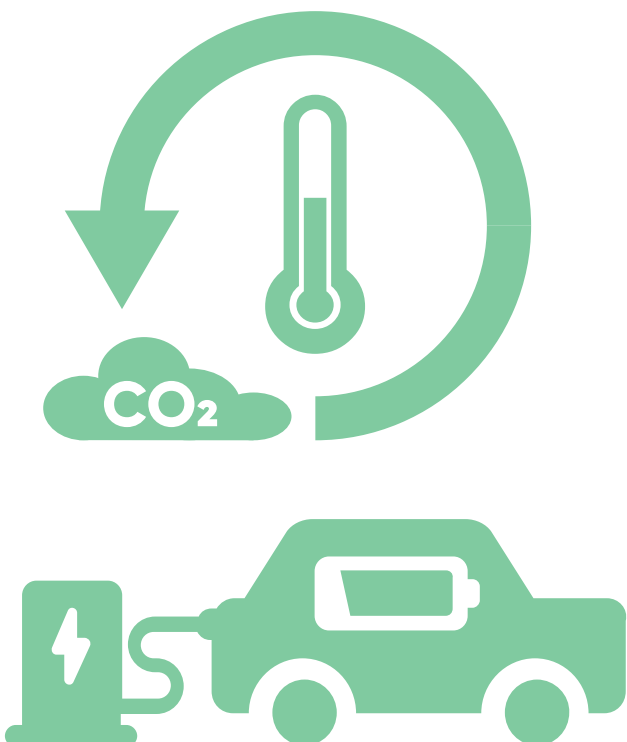
Net Zero is defined as not adding to the amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. This involves reducing emissions and taking action to remove greenhouse gases from the atmosphere.

Greenhouse gases are measured in three different ways:

- Scope 1 covers direct emissions from owned or controlled sources. This is primarily our emissions from heat generation and vehicle fuel usage.
- Scope 2 covers indirect emissions from the purchase and use of electricity, steam, heating, and cooling. By using the energy, an organisation is indirectly responsible for the release of these greenhouse gas emissions.
- Scope 3 includes all other indirect emissions that occur in the upstream and downstream activities of an organisation as part of its value chain. The values here include waste, water treatment and business travel.

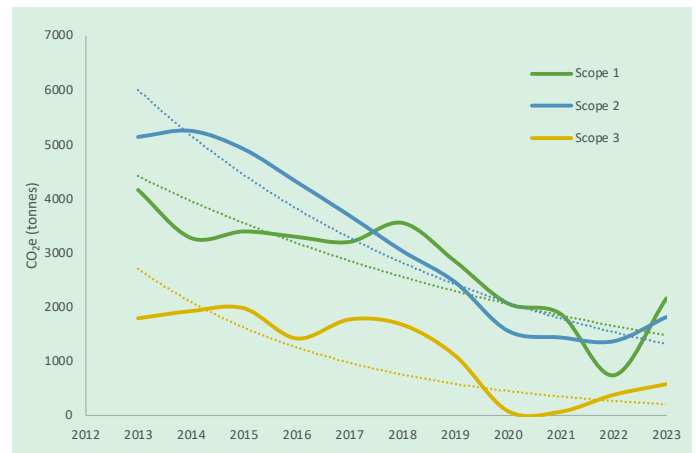
UWS activity will focus on ensuring the University is Net Zero from Scope 1 and 2 emissions, and Net Zero from Scope 3 emissions which are within the University's operational carbon footprint.

Across the sector, the breadth of emission categories included under Scope 3 is under continual consideration with emphasis on increasing the areas included. UWS' priorities remain on those closer tied to our operational footprint and work continues to be undertaken to enhance the monitoring and recording of other Scope 3 emissions.



UWS Carbon Journey

The University reports annually on its carbon emissions with figure 1 detailing the progress in reducing the institution's carbon footprint by over 70% from the 2012/13 baseline reporting year to 2022.



Individual Scope breakdown of GHG emissions

The significant reduction in carbon output (prior to 2022) was secured through strategic and operational, intentional actions including:

- Development of a local heat network for the Paisley campus and modern, efficient gas boilers in buildings which are not connected to the network system.
- Transitioning some of the University's fleet to electric vehicles.
- Decarbonisation of the grid as the proportion of energy generated from renewable sources increases.

This progress accelerated through 2020–22 with significant changes in campus use and travel impacted by Covid-19 and an inevitable increase in emissions in 2023–24 as the University has embraced a return to on-campus teaching, research and community.

This presents a timely opportunity to develop a long-term strategy for recovering and continuing progress to Net Zero.

Regulatory requirements and associated key timelines

UWS must comply with a number of Scottish Government mandated requirements across energy efficiency and climate action as part of the [Climate Change \(Scotland\) Act 2009](#).

The Scottish Government sets an ambition for public bodies to be Net Zero by 2045.

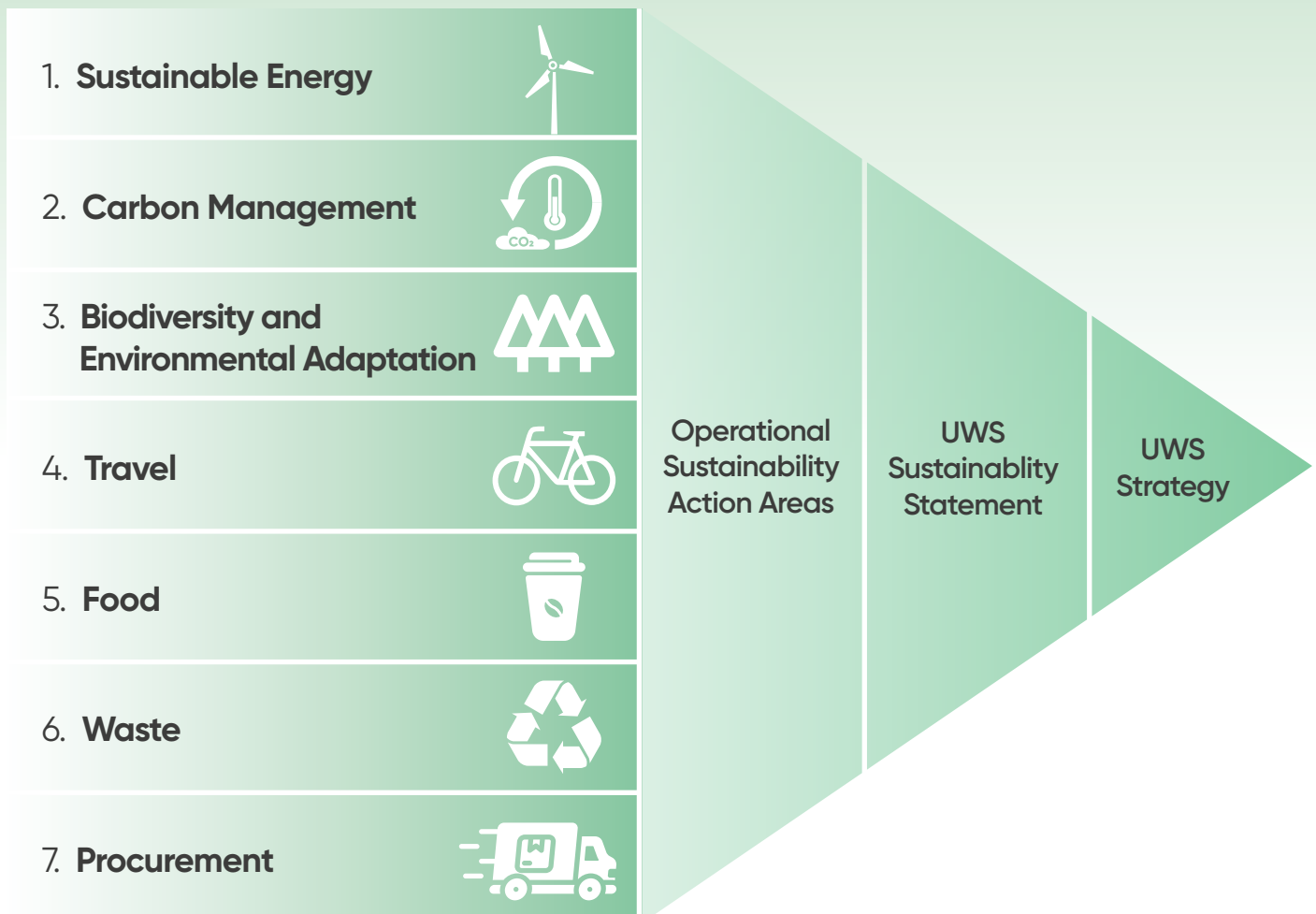
Sustainability Action Areas

Introduction

The UWS Sustainability Plan sets out in more detail how Sustainability Action Areas will help UWS towards Net Zero by 2040 by reducing emissions and continuing with environmentally friendly practices.

The plan structures these around 7 'action areas' which have been defined as representing the breadth of areas of focus in delivering sustainable initiatives, projects and developments. These are linked to relevant SDGs, allowing for a whole organisational perspective.

Within each action, there is a focus for delivery (short-term), institutional commitments (medium-term) and identified leads. The actions will be underpinned by detailed, time-specific action plans.



1. Sustainable Energy



INSTITUTIONAL SUSTAINABILITY STATEMENT COMMITMENT: we will work towards having a decarbonised source of energy for heating and powering the UWS estate.

The University requires a step-change in the energy sources used to heat and power our campuses which are currently dominated by fossil fuel sources, a challenge faced collectively by organisations around the globe.

The decarbonisation journey is different for all campuses with each requiring a specific approach. These changes will require significant infrastructure projects and capital expenditure. There are areas of progress which include:

- UWS Paisley heat network with a significantly reduced carbon footprint.
- UWS Lanarkshire built with sustainable credentials including 100% renewable energy power and water recovery.
- EV fleet vehicles.

Focus for delivery (short-term)

- Development of a building decarbonisation route-map which outlines a programme of delivering works which decarbonise the heating and powering of campus buildings by 2025.
- A feasibility study on heat recovery from wastewater as a low carbon heat source for Ayr and Paisley campuses during 2024-25.
- Engagement with external partners on the development of proposals for area-wide heat networks with the opportunity for the University to be a party to regional plans in 2025.

Institutional sustainability commitments (medium-term)

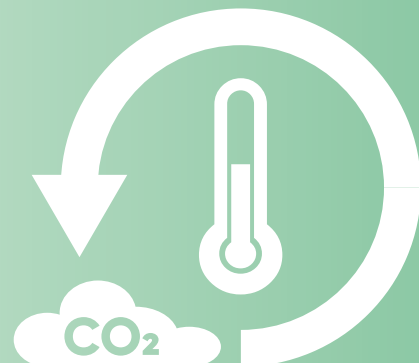
- Agreement to the building decarbonisation route-map for implementation from 2025-26.
- Assessment of Solar PV installations where appropriate on campuses with proposals submitted in 2025-26.
- Development of further external sustainable energy partnerships with key stakeholders such as energy suppliers, local authorities and other public sector bodies by 2027.
- Exploring local renewable generation on campuses by 2030.

Stakeholders to lead delivery

- Estates
- Strategic Planning



2. Carbon Management



INSTITUTIONAL SUSTAINABILITY STATEMENT COMMITMENT: we will invest in new technologies that improve the efficiency of operations and in turn reduce emissions.

The University's buildings vary significantly in their age, architecture and usage. Each of these aspects influences the ability to manage carbon emissions. Our modern campuses in Ayr and Lanarkshire maintain a significant lifespan with Paisley requiring the greatest level of strategic consideration for its future.

Carbon management can be seen as an institutional responsibility, but staff and student behaviours play a significant role in affecting carbon management with the University community having a role to play in supporting saving energy too. There are areas of progress which include:

- Control systems employed across campuses to monitor and control building performance.
- On-going Laboratory Efficiency Assessment Framework (LEAF) programme to reduce emissions and waste from operations in laboratories.

Focus for delivery (short-term)

- Development of a building 'digital twin' allowing for improvements to information held on building performance and a data driven approach to support informing building decarbonisation strategies by 2024.
- Development of a building decarbonisation route-map during 2025 which outlines a programme of delivering works which decarbonise the heating and powering of campus buildings.
- Collation of greenhouse gas emission inventories for key sites, particularly laboratories by 2024.

Institutional sustainability commitments (medium-term)

- A building utilisation survey across campuses in 2025.
- Formal integration of sustainability best practices into building capital expenditure across all levels with a process and work-plan in 2025-26.
- Formalisation of a plan for laboratory decarbonisation in 2025-26.
- Investment in improved monitoring and control technologies to better track energy and water usage, and waste output by 2026.

Stakeholders to lead delivery

- Estates
- Strategic Planning



3. Biodiversity & Environmental Adaptation



INSTITUTIONAL SUSTAINABILITY STATEMENT COMMITMENT: we will assess and manage climate impacts on UWS campuses and invest towards becoming biodiversity positive, expanding the wealth in UWS' greenspace.

Changes to the climate and a growth in extreme weather instances creates risks to UWS' operations. These impacts affect the health and quality of the natural environment across our campuses along with the security and resilience of delivering day-to-day University activity.

The University has a responsibility to consider adaptations to address this and to re-think the approach to landscaping and grounds maintenance so that our external spaces are more 'nature positive.' There are areas of progress which include:

- The development of a Biodiversity Action Plan. The plan outlines a number of activities designed to support our local environment including surveying, monitoring, landscaping and maintenance activities, and opportunities for student involvement.
- The launch of iNaturalist platform to allow students and staff to record viewings of plant and animal life on campuses with a webpage created.

Focus for delivery (short-term)

- Creating a register of climate driven risks across the University's operations and environment and linking this with the established central risk management system during 2024-25
- Delivery of an established climate risk assessment process, embedded into University operations in 2025.
- Continued partnership work between Estates and Health and Life Sciences on active student and staff environmental research projects.

Institutional sustainability commitments (medium-term)

- Development of ecological expertise to improve understanding of our natural environment to support an improved strategic management plan from 2025 onwards.
- Launch of biodiversity projects, and education and guidance resources with initiation in 2025.
- An increase in greenspaces across our campuses and investment to protect and restore habitats with a management and assessment framework carried out from 2025 to 2030.

Stakeholders to lead delivery

- Estates
- Campus Services (Facilities)
- Academic Schools



4. Travel



INSTITUTIONAL SUSTAINABILITY STATEMENT COMMITMENT: we will prioritise and incentivise sustainable transport modes for travel.

Travel affects all members of the University community, and its impact is broad: from the home-to-campus commute by students and staff; staff travel between campuses; and students relocating from home to their term-time address.

Reducing carbon emissions from travel is the responsibility of all UWS staff and students – and increasing information and understanding of individual choices on carbon-output is critical in influencing and changing behaviours and decisions.

There are areas of progress which include:

- A sustainable travel analysis report, which considers the environmental and resource impact of varying forms of travel. This outlined the University's performance in delivering support for sustainable travel options and made a number of recommendations.
- Increased EV charging points across campuses.
- Delivery of projects, initiatives and activities as part of Cycling Scotland's Cycling Friendly Campus programme including having hosted a Campus Cycling Officer.

Focus for delivery (short-term)

- Promotion of sustainable transport campaigns in partnership with local authorities and engagement with local transport operators from 2024.
- Linking a sustainable travel information pack with the online booking platform for the University's fleet vehicles, during 2024-25
- The introduction of a tariff for the University's electric vehicle charging network with the revenue to support its further development for launch in 2025.

Institutional sustainability commitments (medium-term)

- An increase in the visibility and awareness of the carbon impact of journeys for students and staff through assorted projects and engagement with these initiated in 2025.
- Establishment of and tools to build understanding of the options for more sustainable transport choices for students and staff during 2025-26.
- A reduction in the emissions from business travel through an increase in the number of public transport journeys taken replacing air travel across the 2025-2030 period of this plan.
- An increase in the number of students and staff commuting by active travel and public transport across the 2025-2030 delivery period of this plan.
- An increase in the number of fleet vehicle journeys taken, replacing grey vehicle mileage across the 2025-2030 period of this plan.

Stakeholders to lead delivery

- Estates
- Academic Schools
- Finance
- People and Wellbeing



5. Food



INSTITUTIONAL SUSTAINABILITY STATEMENT COMMITMENT: we will continually assess the role of University catering delivery, diversifying the choices and educating on the impact of food choices.

The University catering operation is significant and comprises a variety of catering outlets including cafes, canteens and vending, as well as hospitality at University events. There are a range of sustainability-led measures currently implemented across the catering delivery which aim to reduce waste and to allow consumers to make informed choices about the products they buy. This area is associated with Action Area – Waste through the natural relationship between the waste created as part of the preparation, disposal and deliveries of food.

There are areas of progress which include:

- A takeaway beverage cup charge which incentivises consumers towards re-usable cups.
- A partnership with a local milk supplier with which has allowed for a reduction in plastic container waste.
- A partnership with our coffee supplier which provides a social, Fairtrade benefit.
- Growing levels of local suppliers and collaboration between departments to promote re-use.
- Changes in hospitality arrangements to allow for a reduction in single-use consumables.
- Development of a catering initiatives tracker and reporting tool to provide greater visibility of the assorted initiatives and performance assessment.

Focus for delivery (short-term)

- Research into platforms and tools which better allow students and staff to be informed of the impact of their food choices with a proposal for a platform in 2025.
- An increase in local suppliers and a subsequent reduction in delivery food miles.

Institutional sustainability commitments (medium-term)

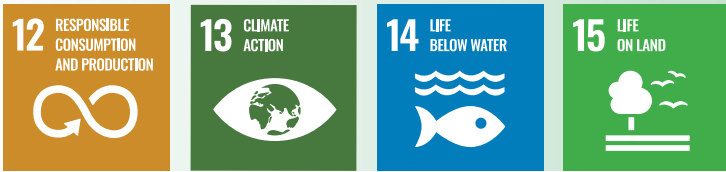
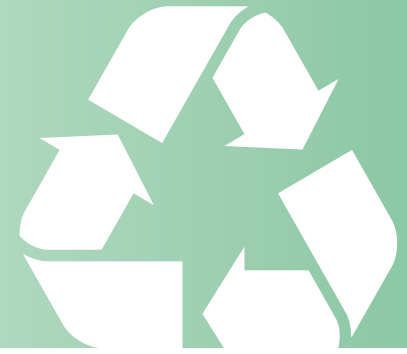
- A reduction in food waste through improved process such as menu streamlining.
- A reduction in single-use consumables as part of food preparation and service.

Stakeholders to lead delivery

- Estates
- Campus Services (Catering)



6. Waste



INSTITUTIONAL SUSTAINABILITY STATEMENT COMMITMENT: we will incentivise and collaborate on waste reduction and management.

The University produces a significant volume of waste across all its area of operations: this includes but isn't limited to operational waste from offices, teaching and research space, residences, catering, building and maintenance works, and landscaping.

More efficient practices and changes in behaviour can result in less waste. There are areas of progress which include:

- The University's waste contractor managing much of the process on our behalf with the result that no waste goes to landfill.
- Programme to increase recycling of daily-waste through the use of communal waste bins.

Focus for delivery (short-term)

- Continued collaboration with suppliers to re-use certain cleaning products and their associated waste containers.
- Engagement with suppliers on new, more sustainable products from 2024, ensuring that internal procurement processes support development in this area.
- Embracing the circular economy with active circularity between/across teams of un-used items.

Institutional sustainability commitments (medium-term)

- Reduction in waste produced through a waste monitoring programme, with the programme to be launched in 2025.
- Introduction of a training to improve student and staff understanding of waste disposal from 2025-26.
- Increasing the number of sustainability focused partnerships and reporting with a resulting continual reduction in carbon impact across the 2025-2030 period of this plan.

Stakeholders to lead delivery

- Campus Services (Facilities)
- Estates



7. Procurement



INSTITUTIONAL SUSTAINABILITY STATEMENT COMMITMENT: we will prioritise sourcing goods and services that create positive impact on UWS communities as well as reducing the negative impact on the UWS environment and community.

The university has established procurement protocols which allow for sustainability criteria to be embedded in purchasing and contract management processes. Further developing responsible procurement practices will ensure that we are monitoring and mitigating against the impact of the university's acquisition of goods and services. The university's Procurement Plan 2025 contains assorted measures to embed sustainability.

Focus for delivery (short-term)

- Publicise and implement internal and external procurement support available, linking from established sector body strategies from 2024.
- Increase awareness of social and economic wellbeing focus already embedded into procurement procedures through training and support.
- Delivery of category-specific workshop sessions with stakeholders to improve awareness of the impact of buying at a local level during 2024-25.
- A reduction in procurement card purchasing and a growth in centrally managed buying.

Institutional sustainability commitments (medium-term)

- Integrating responsible procurement assessments into financial investments by 2026.
- Publish Scope 3 Supply Chain emissions, working with external programmes and suppliers to create an emission led database, as opposed to a cost-based model, by 2028.

Stakeholders to lead delivery

- Procurement
- Finance



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