

REPORT TO SUSTAINABILITY COMMITTEE – 13 NOVEMBER 2019

“BIG CLIMATE CONVERSATION: THE ROLE OF PUBLIC SECTOR BODIES IN TACKLING CLIMATE CHANGE. A CONSULTATION”

1 Reason for Report / Summary

- 1.1 On 11 September, 2019, the Scottish Government released ‘Big Climate Conversation: The Role of Public Sector Bodies in Tackling Climate Change. A Consultation’. The report contains a draft response to this consultation for consideration and comment by the Committee.

2 Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to:

- 2.1 Consider and comment on the draft Aberdeenshire Council response to the Scottish Government’s ‘Big Climate Conversation: The Role of Public Sector Bodies in Tackling Climate Change. A Consultation’ (Appendix 1); and**
- 2.2 Delegate authority to the Head of Economic Development and Protective Services to submit the final response to the Scottish Government, following consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of this Committee, and the main Opposition Group spokesperson.**

3 Purpose and Decision-Making Route

- 3.1 On 14 May, 2019, the Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform, Roseanna Cunningham MSP, declared a climate emergency to the Scottish Parliament.
- 3.2 In response to this, on 25 September, 2019, the Scottish Government agreed a new Climate Change Bill which has set emission reduction targets of 56% by 2020, 75% by 2030, 90% by 2040 and net zero by 2045.
- 3.3 The Scottish Government consultation [Big Climate Conversation: The Role of Public Sector Bodies in Tackling Climate Change. A Consultation](#) is seeking feedback on the role that public sector bodies currently have and could have in the future with tackling climate change and supporting Scotland in reaching these new targets.

4 Discussion

- 4.1 A summary of what is being considered within the consultation is as follows:
- Information and collaboration

- Additional information and guidance being supplied to public bodies to increase action
- A proposed new structure for a high ambition climate network of CE and elected members
- the end of Sustainable Scotland Network (SSN) funding
- Targets & Reporting –
 - Should we be required to set targets for when we will achieve zero direct emissions, and for reduced indirect emissions?
 - Should we report annually on how we use our resources to contribute to reducing emissions?
 - Proposed amendments to the reporting structure all public bodies currently use
 - How we make our own report available to the public

4.2 The draft response to the consultation is attached as Appendix 1. The closing date for submission of the consultation response to the Scottish Government is 4 December, 2019. Approval is sought to delegate approval of the final response to the Head of Economic Development and Protective Services, following consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of this Committee, and the main Opposition Group spokesperson.

5 Council Priorities, Implications and Risk

5.1 This report helps deliver Council Priority 11 - Protect our special environment, including tackling climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

5.2 The table below shows whether risks and implications apply if the recommendation(s) is(are) agreed.

Subject	Yes	No	N/A
Financial			X
Staffing			X
Equalities			X
Fairer Scotland Duty			X
Town Centre First			X
Sustainability			X
Children and Young People's Rights and Wellbeing			X

5.3 An equality impact assessment is not required because the reason for the report is simply for the Committee to consider and comment. There will be no differential impact, as a result of the report, on people with protected characteristics and it does not have a differential impact on any of the protected characteristics.

- 5.4 There are no financial, staffing or sustainability implications as a direct outcome of this report as it is a draft response to a consultation. However, if some of the suggested actions are implemented by the Scottish Government, there may be future financial and staffing implications with regards to meeting targets and reporting annually on how we use our resources to contribute to reducing emissions. Any improved action on climate change will have positive implications for sustainability.
- 5.5 This report, as a response to a consultation, will have no direct impact on town centres.
- 5.6 The following Risks have been identified as relevant to this matter on a Corporate Level:
- ACORP002 as it relates to changes in government policy, legislation and regulation Corporate Risk Register.

The following Risks have been identified as relevant to this matter on a Strategic Level:

- ISSR004 as it relates to Climate Change Directorate Risk Registers].

6 Scheme of Governance

- 6.1 The Head of Finance and Monitoring Officer within Business Services have been consulted in the preparation of this report and their comments are incorporated within the report. They are satisfied that the report complies with the Scheme of Governance and relevant legislation.
- 6.2 The Committee is able to consider this item in terms of Section S.1.1(b) of the List of Committee Powers in Part 2A of the Scheme of Governance, as it relates to responding, on the Council's behalf, to the Scottish Government and other relevant bodies regarding sustainable development and climate change issues.

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7 October, 2019

List of Appendices

Appendix 1 – Big Climate Conversation: The Role of Public Sector Bodies in Tackling Climate Change Consultation Response

APPENDIX ONE: Big Climate Conversation: The role of Public Sector Bodies in tackling climate change consultation response

Consultation Questions

Q1. What additional training, information or guidance do you think Public Sector Bodies need to help them increase their action on climate change?

Public Bodies require a forum for open discussion such as is provided currently by Sustainable Scotland Network (SSN). Some examples of training, information or guidance required:

- realistic technological options to achieve targets
- further support on weaker areas of duties reporting submissions – clear, consistent and mandatory drivers, backed up with robust monitoring, reporting, verification and accountabilities
- locally delivered training – constantly being provided in the central belt which makes it costly for those public bodies north and south
- case studies, good practice across public sector to stimulate ideas and action as well as access to academic research
- how to encourage innovation, experimenting, limiting financial risks
- specific to types and services within the public sector – different challenges and opportunities for the different services being provided. This type of guidance could be co-developed with those working in these areas and could involve professional bodies so the buy-in is there from the beginning
- training provided specifically on carbon management and accounting aligned with international standards especially when capturing and monitoring local area wide emissions
- Project level carbon impact assessing is very challenging and should be key in developing projects and large procurement contracts (for example large builds like new schools) and therefore training and professional support in this area is also required

In the example of a local authority, currently all training, information and guidance is focused on very small sustainability teams within the organisation. Moving forward, training, information and guidance needs to be service specific so that everyone in the public sector regardless of what skill set and type of role they have has climate change mitigation and adaptation embedded in the work that they do.

Q2. What are your views on the proposed structure for the High Ambition Climate Network of Chief Executives and Elected Members?

The proposed structure for the High Ambition Climate Network of Chief Executives and Elected Members would be useful, and more work to fully engage public sector leaders is vital. There is a concern however that it may become just a talking shop. In reality the work is done at an officer level and it is connections made here through network events (such as those held by SSN) that stimulate ideas and action. The group would have to be an open forum for discussion with reportable action visible to

the extended network. There would need to be senior level training on understanding the problem, understanding the solutions, understanding the policy, economic, financial and social drivers of change, understanding risks and opportunities, developing and agreeing plans and investment/resource allocation. There is a concern that most work would be delegated down to officer level within represented organisations anyway and so their engagement is also imperative.

SSN provides a very valuable space for collaborative working, sharing challenges and opportunities and what is being offered within this consultation as an alternative does not seem to cover this requirement. Support with reporting is one very small part of the work that SSN does.

Q3. Do you agree that Public Sector Bodies should be required to set targets for when they will achieve zero direct emissions, and for reduced indirect emissions?

Yes / no / don't know

Please explain your answer.

We do agree that all Public Sector Bodies should be required to set targets however currently a meaningful and consistent set of measures has not yet been developed. The Scottish Government needs to be clear about what they mean by direct and indirect emissions. There is also a need to define clearly the concepts of absolute zero emissions and net zero emissions, as well as related accounting and terms such as off-setting, sequestration, and carbon neutrality. What emissions are to be included in this as currently public bodies are reporting different emissions, in particular what is chosen to be reported on under scope 3. This needs to be very clear across all bodies. It may be that different bodies are required to report different emissions, or we are provided a list of minimum emissions to consider. What needs to happen is consistency in reporting. Without everyone reporting the same data, publicly accessible analysis of reports which is suggested within the consultation document will be very challenging to do.

Also, what needs to be considered is baseline years, those public bodies who already have targets in place with baseline years completed, what data is available and how easily it can be accessed to ensure regional baselines are achievable etc.

Q4. Do you agree that Public Sector Bodies should report annually on how they use their resources to contribute to reducing emissions?

Yes / no / don't know

Please explain your answer.

Reporting annually on how Public Sector Bodies use their resources to contribute to reducing emissions could incentivise change across an organisation if done correctly. However, a clear definition of what is considered under 'resources' is

needed. Clear guidance on how this could/should be done would be required, for example if Marginal Abatement Cost Curves were to be considered a way to this then training and resources on how would be essential. In addition, clear guidance on what actions could be considered as contributing – for example, would offsetting programmes be included or purchasing of 100% Green Energy as currently these are not included in the required section of the Public Bodies Climate Change Duties Report.

Q5. Do you agree that the details of what Public Sector Bodies are required to report on should be set out in statutory guidance instead of on the face of secondary legislation (otherwise known as an Order)?

Yes / no / don't know

Please explain your answer.

Aberdeenshire Council is happy with the suggested approach.

Q6. Do you agree to the proposed changes to the list of Public Sector Bodies that are required to annually report their emissions?

Yes / no / don't know

If you answered no, please specify which aspect of the proposal you disagree with and why.

In particular the removal of IJB reporting. This is a time consuming process with little meaning as all information is already being reported through the public sector body members of local IJBs.

This may be a good time to also review the Major Player list criteria.

Q7. Do you agree with our proposals for amending the reporting requirements as set out above?

Yes / no / don't know

If you answered no, please specify which aspect of the proposal you disagree with.

Part 1: Aberdeenshire Council is happy with suggested amendments for Part 1.

Part 2: A better summary of Governance and Management could be considered as this information is important for the organisation, communities and Scottish Government to understand. Other structures in other public bodies could be considered as useful models for adoption by other public bodies so removing this completely is not ideal.

Part 3: Aberdeenshire Council is happy with suggested amendments especially around target setting. This is one of the weakest areas when you look at reports across all public bodies, but this could simply be the wording of the questions. When each is presented in a different way – for example as an actual number or as a percentage it makes it hard to benchmark.

- Guidance on what Scope 3 emissions should be included at sector level

Part 4 & 5: No detail has been provided on amendments to Part 4 and 5.

With regards to Procurement:

It might be the case that the procurement information cannot be benchmarked but it doesn't mean the information is useless. How can we agree/support the initiative if we don't know what is involved and which department/function will be responsible? This may make it less of a corporate responsibility and entirely a procurement responsibility. Climate Change duties do not apply to private contractors so what if the Council is unable to secure co-operation? It isn't the Council's fault/failure if suppliers ignore or are not progressive in their approaches. This is unlikely to be grounds to terminate the contract or apply other remedies. There is concern that we do not know if procurement reporting will be in a general overarching sense (as it is now) or procurement by procurement irrespective of value and procurement of all types. Procurement Annual Returns are already extremely long, detailed and onerous. Cramming this into procurement reporting could have unforeseen consequences if this is the way forward.

Part 6: Validation removal could be controversial for some public bodies who rely on peer to peer support and review to ensure data presented is accurate.

Q8. Is there anything else you think should be added to the reporting duties, or anything else you think should be removed?

With net zero targets needing to be considered by public bodies a space to report on offsetting/sequestration needs to be included in section 3 of the report. There also needs to be scope to expand reporting to include other important areas, for example, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), biodiversity, and circular economy.

Is there a way to consolidate reporting in public bodies to reduce the overall reporting burden.

Q9. Do you agree that Public Sector Bodies should each make their own report on emissions reductions publicly available?

Yes / no / don't know

Please explain your answer.

Yes – Aberdeenshire Council already does this on its external webpage. However, in addition to this one platform sharing all the Public Body reports as it is done now

on the SSN website is very beneficial. This allows for quick and easy access to all completed reports all the way back to 2015. It also allows other public bodies and the public easy access reports.

Other comments.

It is unclear in this consultation why analysis and communication of reports cannot be done through SSN like it has been done previously? An excellent example of this was 2015/16 feedback that happened after the first year of reporting. The feedback was taken on board and helped Aberdeenshire Council officers to improve reporting the following year.

Would the Scottish Government consider developing a new operating model for SSN that delivers better value and impact? The SSN Steering Group (of which an Aberdeenshire Council officer is a member of) is fully committed to working with SSN's members, partners and stakeholders to develop a model which would achieve the new ambitions of the Scottish Government.

As a minimum, it will be important to put in place some form of funding for 2020/21, to enable the SSN Steering Group to work with its members and partners to chart a way forward that provides improved support to public bodies on the Climate Emergency, the shift towards Net Zero Emissions, and towards sustainability. The support that SSN provides members with all things climate change and sustainability is invaluable. The networking between officers across public bodies is also an essential element of SSN. Ways that this could be delivered more locally too could be one way to improve the format of SSN.

