
BRIEFING NOTE

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

31 January 2020

Climate Change Action/Climate Emergency/Sustainable Development

1. Background

This is the first meeting of the Scottish Borders Council Sustainable Development Committee. The Committee was established by Council at its meeting of 29th August 2019 following consideration of a report on '[Embedding Sustainable Development](#)' -

At this meeting, the Council agreed:

- a) formally to commit to implementing the [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#) as they relate to local government;
- b) that a Sustainable Development Committee be established in order to drive and monitor the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals as they relate to local government:
 - (i) that the Committee be constituted with a membership of 9 members, comprising 5 members of the Administration and 4 members of the Opposition;
 - (ii) that the Committee review recent decisions and actions of the UK and Scottish Governments, UK local authorities and Borders wide voluntary sector initiatives, with a view to making recommendations as to how the Council can exercise leadership in tackling climate change; and
 - (iii) that the Committee shall report to Council annually on progress;
- c) to note that, to support implementation of sustainable development, the Sustainable Procurement Policy Group would be renamed 'the Sustainable Development Group' and its role extended to ensure that appropriate practice was adopted and followed in how the Council undertook the full range of its activities; and
- d) that the appointment of Members for (b)(i) above be considered at the next Council meeting in September.

Subsequently, at the Council meeting of 26th September, 9 members were appointed to the Sustainable Development Committee with Councillor Aitchison being appointed as Chair.

It was intended that the first meeting of the Committee take place during the second week of December 2019, but this was impacted by the calling of a General Election.

2. Agenda

The main business for the first meeting of the Committee are

- i. a presentation by Dave Gorman, Director of Social Responsibility and Sustainability at Edinburgh University, on embedding sustainability within large, complex organisations, and
- ii. a presentation on climate change and the need for action by the Council.

3. Sustainable Development Group

Comprising both Executive Directors, the Director for Assets and Infrastructure, and officers from across Council services, the SDG has met twice to agree the details of its remit and membership, and to consider priority areas of Council activity and methodologies for assessment of sustainability and carbon appraisal.

The SDG has also co-ordinated Council responses to 3 recent Scottish Government consultations (attached and accessible through the following hyperlinks) –

- [The Role of Public Sector Bodies in Tackling Climate Change](#)
- [Scottish Government's Local Energy Policy Statement](#)
- [Circular Economy: Proposals for Legislation](#)

4. Performance Indicators

A key step in ensuring that the Council delivers improved sustainable development performance is ensuring that we can measure progress. Some appropriate indicators already exist but it is clear that there are gaps. A vital task of the SDG will be to develop a suite of performance indicators, which can support improvement. Some potential measures, such as energy savings, and street cleanliness are already reported. Consideration will need to be given to which indicators should be reported where, as well as to the refinement of existing indicators and the development of new indicators. Reflecting the salience of climate, including the targets established by the recently passed Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets)(Scotland) Act 2019, particular attention will need to be paid to monitoring the Council's action on climate change.

It is expected that updates on this activity will be reported to the next meeting of the Committee.

5. Priorities

A presentation later in the Committee agenda considers the urgency of climate action by governments, other public bodies (including the Council) and of society as a whole.

Other priority areas identified by officers include– energy, transport and biodiversity. Clearly, there is considerable overlap between these, and the priority on climate action.

The Council has been investing in energy saving projects for a number of years, and this programme will continue producing carbon savings and cost savings. With changes to electricity and gas networks, increasing embedding of renewable energy generation, SMART local networks and increasing adoption of electric vehicles, our ability to engage and obtain benefits from these changes are increasingly crucial.

Low carbon, effective and accessible transport is a critical challenge and highly resonant in rural areas like the Scottish Borders. The creation of the South of Scotland Enterprise agency provides the Council with a vital ally in addressing that challenge across the South of Scotland.

Climate change is one of two existential and profoundly interrelated threats to current life on earth. As reflected in the May 2019 report of Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), the other is biodiversity (and ecosystems) loss. It is as urgent and consequential as climate change. The IPBES Report finds that around 1 million animal and plant species are now threatened with extinction (see Australia), many within decades, more than ever before in human history. This is the sixth global extinction event, and the first to be perpetrated by mankind. The work of David Attenborough and the BBC's Wildlife Unit notwithstanding, biodiversity loss has not had the degree of public focus that has climate change. Radical change to how public bodies and citizens act and their expectations are needed, including dramatic increases in tree planting, sustainable land use and farming practices and habitat and species protection.

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