

The role of Public Sector Bodies in tackling climate change: A Consultation

Consultation Questions

Scottish Borders Council Response

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

Training

In order to increase effective action on climate change public bodies require comprehensive training across a wide range of topic areas. With reductions in public sector spending over recent years, the capacity of organisations, particularly Local Authorities, to plan for and deliver significant carbon reduction programmes has been severely restricted. These restrictions continue and are being exacerbated in many Councils, which at a time of increased expectation on public bodies to lead and deliver carbon reduction activity, highlights issues of prioritisation and commitment to effective delivery.

There is a need for specific training in –

- Infrastructure project and capital programme carbon assessment and mitigation
- Carbon accounting to support low carbon business cases
- Corporate and leadership training in sustainability/climate change and low carbon organisational transformation
- Training for Elected Members and Board members in climate change impact and carbon reduction
- Carbon impact assessment for service managers
- Delivery of behaviour change actions embedded across organisations
- Carbon literacy to allow accurate assessment of progress against targets and clear accountability in reporting
- Overall increased commitment to CPD for all staff to ensure organisations are aware of low carbon and climate proofed innovations in project and service delivery
- Innovative solutions for very rural areas, particularly rural housing, business developments, infrastructure, transport and access to services

Training must include both carbon reduction and climate change impact/risk assessment and identify the need for adaptation activity across all sectors and service areas.

Information

Accessible and up to date Information is required on emissions at organisational level and area wide for geographically based organisations, principally Local Authorities, Health Boards, etc.

Information is also required on developing area-based wider energy systems information covering emissions from heat, electricity, transport and wider resource use mapping.

In addition, information on developing policy at international, European, UK and Scottish levels, changes in legislation and economic models. Good practice information on projects, case studies on innovative methods and new technologies. Network contacts of appropriate practitioners to support ease of collaboration and exchange of ideas, currently effectively provided by the Sustainable Scotland Network.

Guidance

Greater guidance is required on what level of accountability is likely to be expected; currently there are no direct consequences or follow up from inaction.

Clear and specific guidance is required on the definition of 'net zero' and what emissions sources should be included in reports and projects.

The status of guidance must be clearly expressed, with detailed examples of application of the range of government, NGO and sector bodies publications. Thus far, much guidance produced by the Scottish Government has not been presented at 'statutory', with many public bodies not taking guidance forward into practice. Public bodies require clear and consistent mandatory drivers, backed with robust monitoring, reporting, verification and accountabilities.

Clearer and stronger 'guidance' for public bodies would assist with the embedding of climate change action within Community Planning Partnerships, helping to deliver appropriate place based solutions and opportunities. The need to effectively engage with communities in the delivery of place based solutions also requires clear guidance, setting out good practice examples and methodologies to facilitate and resource such engagement.

Guidance is essential on what good governance within organisations looks like, supported by terms of references, practical arrangements, strategy and policy mapping. It is crucial to remove the silo approach to climate change action, ensuring that commitment to delivery is embedded across all service areas, being led from the top by senior management and boards.

Guidance is needed on aligning public body functions and roles with delivery of commitments in the Climate Change Plan and Climate Change Acts. This Guidance should clarify and improve understanding of the vertical alignment of public sector bodies with national emissions inventories and emission reduction plans.

Guidance should be developed for major public sector investments and projects, including public events (sporting, cultural and civil events), and major infrastructure projects, with existing ISO and PAS standards for infrastructure and event carbon management forming the basis of guidance and expected requirements.

One final point: this relates to concern over areas of policy conflict between for example education provision and buildings management in terms of school design and health issues, e.g. the use of mechanical ventilation for air quality reasons. Scottish Government must seek to align its own policy approaches across departments and sectors, so that there is a consistency of approach, and that all policy is reconciled to what policy objectives are paramount. The frequently unacknowledged tension between fuel poverty and carbon reduction is an obvious example of this issue.

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

A High Ambition Climate Network (HACN) should help develop engagement with senior public sector leaders who are already leading on climate change action. However, there is little detail proposed on how such a network would be developed, the selection of members of the network, and expected outputs, responsibility, purpose, scrutiny. It is not clear how such a network would ensure delivery without further support from a network of practitioners, such as the Sustainable Scotland Network (SSN). Indeed, we have some concern at the Scottish Government's decision to cease funding for the secretariat of SSN. While it makes sense to augment our individual and collective efforts by ensuring the engagement of key strategic leaders and decision-makers in our organisations, linking them to technical understanding of the issues, and those who are most expert on the subject in their organisations is a matter of practical sense. SSN provides a ready-made network in this respect, which it would make more sense to augment and build upon than to discontinue.

The HACN should function as a leadership group, not simply a discussion forum, members should ensure effective delivery of clear actions both within their own organisations and at a strategic sectoral level. Peer support and facilitation across public bodies must be a key role for the network, as well as lobbying of government to strengthen policy, legislation, guidance and resource. The question of membership, in terms of officers, elected members and board members needs to be clarified.

Support and management of the network needs to be clarified, and linkages of such a network to existing groups such as SLAED, Heads of Planning, etc, to ensure no duplication. A first step is clearly to consult on a detailed remit, with role profiles for network members. Details of communication management for the network are required as well as key outputs and work plans.

The network must provide essential additional benefit to existing structures, not reduce the impact of officer level networks. The networks should identify which public bodies should be prioritised for support with emphasis on those less ambitious organisations.

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.

The setting of targets is perhaps premature. If public bodies are to be able to set meaningful targets, then, first, we must have a clear understanding of the relationship between national targets and the contributions required of different sectors in meeting those objectives. As matters stand, stakeholder requirements, including those for public bodies, are opaque, and many public bodies currently have limited knowledge of the exact levels of emissions which their indirect activities produce. Guidance is needed on aligning public body functions and roles with delivery of commitments in the Climate Change Plan and Climate Change Acts. In short, Scottish Government guidance must clarify and improve understanding of the vertical alignment of public sector bodies' responsibilities with national emissions inventories and emission reduction plans.

Much greater training and guidance is required from the Govt. This should include information and details on external drivers which direct service provision, such as new building standards, decarbonisation of the grid, procurement legislation, etc.

Public bodies require clarity around offsetting in terms of strategic and financial approaches, definitions and rules and requirements of schemes. This applies to all types of partnership working which public bodies are involved with, and which will clearly have to increase significantly to deliver the required level of emissions reductions. Behaviour change as well as physical infrastructure and systems changes will also be essential, and will require to be costed to balance emphasis on which activities will provide the greatest levels of carbon reductions.

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.

We have some concerns with respect to the Government's proposal for a requirement to report on how spending plans align with emissions reduction targets. This potentially cuts across Local Government's democratic mandate, and its utility is not entirely clear.

Having said this, we also acknowledge that there is risk that, in a focus on governance and process, we overlook the nature and extraordinary demands which responding to the climate crisis demands. As already mentioned, overarching all is the need for much greater clarity from Scottish Government on the correlation between national ambitions and local delivery. This means being explicit about the link between national level programmes and local level impacts and actions, for example, grid decarbonisation, infrastructure management, and transportation. Implicit in this is the need to recognise that, while public bodies can and should be expected to stretch themselves, they represent a comparatively small element of total national carbon emissions, and we will not progress far if expectations in one sector outstrip all others, especially when a significant contributions are required from all sectors.

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.

As a matter for practicality this should be statutory guidance. Statutory guidance is more flexible than pursuing legislation. It can respond more quickly to changes, such as new information, proposed improvements. Thus, guidance can be enhanced as we proceed, based on the evidence of delivery and progress.

An on-going standard setting, compliance and updating process must be established, to give the statutory guidance authority and to ensure that it is maintained and implemented well across the public sector.

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.

A system for annual review and updating of the list needs to be put in place. Legislation that reforms, abolishes and establishes new public bodies needs to be reflected and used to inform the maintenance of the Major Players List, with the criteria being regularly reviewed

Training, guidance and support for new bodies within the list must be readily accessible, with details of the associated with responsibilities communicated immediately.

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.

Questions associated with the proposals are:

- The proposal only addresses a limited scope of emissions, when much wider understanding of emissions is essential to deliver reductions
- Deleting metrics and verification/validation appear to be an unnecessary step in the wrong direction;
- The section on Governance is crucial to ensure senior corporate commitment
- The proposal provides no detail on how the sections on Adaptation, Procurement or Wider Influence will be dealt with.
- The proposal could limit organisational understanding of overall footprint impacts and emission sources, and also reduces understanding of how public bodies can use their functions to address climate change and reduce emissions;
- The proposal could be considered to be counter to Part 4 of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act, which relates to the functions of public bodies, not narrowly defined to public body use of fossil fuels directly on their estates and in their owned vehicles.

Reporting must engender and reflect good practice in monitoring, reporting and verification, based on recognised and trusted standards and methods such as the GHG Protocol standards.

An improved reporting platform could drive efficiency and effectiveness as much as a revision of the reporting questions, a platform able to facilitate ease of data inputs, would vastly improve the efficiency, effectiveness and value of reports; value to public bodies themselves, to national stakeholders and decision-makers, and to the wider public and communities of interest.

The process needs to ensure integrated reporting across the organisation, to strengthen understanding of climate change and emissions reductions in all service areas.

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

There is an opportunity for Scottish Government to lead with a joined-up policy approach to reporting duties. Organisations that are involved in reporting on a number of different fronts to Scottish Government would welcome a more efficient form of return e.g. currently one organisation is preparing separate reports on Procurement, Biodiversity, Performance Framework, Climate Change.

Reporting duties must have the scope to mature, develop and expand in order to address:

- The Sustainable Development Goals and the National Performance Framework
- Biodiversity and Ecosystem services
- Circular economy activities and policy objectives
- Sustainable procurement, linking up statutory reporting requirements

Projects should be included in the reporting as these act as valuable case studies and highlight successful actions to both internal and external audiences.

Detailed analysis and feedback on reporting is essential.

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, but there is also great benefit in having a central website and central repository for reports.

Reporting and analysis should communicate insights, contribute commentary and statements on status, progress, implications/gaps, and actions required to meet targets and better deliver action. A platform (physical and digital) for sharing reports and assessing peer progress and challenges is critical.

Reporting should be seen as one part of a wider performance management/improvement ecosystem, which includes information on what the reports say, the implications and actions arising, and how actions are going to be taken forward to drive action and delivery.

Maintaining and building a common, clear platform for net zero is critical, and can bring clarity and central commitment and support for action across public bodies.

Better visualisation of data approaches is needed. This needs to invest in scaling up use and transparency of reports from the basic posting of static documents online through to data visualisation, to organisational/independent assessment of performance and forward plans, actions and commitments. We are data rich but knowledge, insight and action poor, so presentation and use of the data in reports needs to change, including the public presentation of reports.

Other comments

There are a number of strategic points we wish to highlight.

As noted in our response to question 3, much greater clarity is required from Scottish Government on the correlation between national ambitions and local delivery. If Scottish Borders Council and other public bodies are to meet the climate challenge, then councils must set ambitious plans and 'will' the means to deliver on those plans. However, the efficacy of those local plans depends on their relationship to the national effort. In this respect, public bodies are at risk of flying blind, not knowing whether or how their

plans contribute meaningfully to that national effort. Scottish Government must provide much greater clarity in this respect. There needs to be a clear understanding of the alignment between public sector bodies' responsibilities and national emissions inventories and emission reduction plans. Without this, the risks of failing to deliver are substantially increased.

As noted in answer to question 2, training is essential. However, highlighting a theme which runs through our responses, we contend that appropriate levels of resource are also essential. There are two aspects to this.

- Firstly, there is a straightforward reality that the increased planning, delivery and monitoring which comes with accelerated and enhanced effort in response to climate change has to be resourced. Routinely, there is not existing capacity to facilitate this. Initiatives such as LHEES have a resource requirements. If delivery is to be assured, then that resource requirement will have to be met.
- Secondly, it must be recognised that the kinds of activity which are necessary to deliver on climate action are typically areas of service unprotected from the efficiencies which flow from reductions in local government resources. According to figures from CoSLA, whereas 34% of budgets were protected in 2013/14, the figure for protected budgets for 2019/20 is 61%. The effect of this is that a 4% reduction in local government funding equates to an at least 10% saving which has to be made from non-protected areas. The consequence is that officers and parts of councils (and other parts of the public sector) which would be expected to address the issue of climate change are already stretched.

It would be expected that, as the Scottish Government has declared a Climate Emergency, this would require a fundamental reassessment of priorities for Government and for public sector spend and service provision, with consideration to which actions should be regarded as mandatory.

In order to understand the route to assess, scope, plan and resource the recommendations within this consultation, other related consultations and the wider Climate Change Plan, Scottish Borders Council is very keen that Scottish Government maintains an active dialogue with it and other local authorities.