

The UN Sustainable Development Goals

Purpose of report

For discussion.

Summary

Following the amended motion on the UN Sustainable Development Goals agreed at General Assembly, this paper sets out the work being undertaken to develop a draft LGA work programme.

Recommendation

That the Leadership Board comment on the actions proposed in this paper, and commission a full report to be brought to its September meeting.

Action

Officers to review the LGA's Business Plan and work programme as directed by the Board.

Contact officer: Ian Hughes
Position: Head of Policy
Phone no: 0207 664 3101
Email: ian.hughes@local.gov.uk

The UN Sustainable Development Goals

Background

1. There are 17 Sustainable Development Goals, set by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015 for the year 2030 and covering the three different domains of sustainability: environmental, economic and social.



2. These Goals are underpinned by 169 targets, with progress measured by 241 indicators. For example, Sustainable Development Goal 8 – *promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all* - has 10 targets and 15 indicators.
3. Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals started in 2016. This process is referred to as *Localising the SDGs* and it is here that local government, alongside other civic and commercial actors, has a role in turning the global Goals into legislation, action and funding priorities.
4. Progress against these Goals is reported annually on a thematic and country-specific basis to the UN's High Level Political Forum. In 2019, 6 goals¹ will be reviewed in depth and 47 countries, including the UK, have volunteered to undertake and present a Voluntary National Review.
5. The UK's Voluntary National Review was published in June this year² and the findings will be presented to the UN at the High Level Political Forum held in New York between 9 July and 15 July 2019. We will update members on any further details emerging at this Forum.

¹ SDG4 Quality Education, SDG8 Decent Work and Economic Growth, SDG10 Reduced Inequalities, SDG 13 Climate Action, SDG16 Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions, SDG17 Partnerships for the Goals

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uks-voluntary-national-review-of-the-sustainable-development-goals>

6. The Review notes that while progress had been made, more remains to be done, particularly in the areas of climate change and an ageing population. On the matter of local involvement in delivering the SDGs, it states:

6.1. "It is estimated that 65% of the 169 Global Targets need local stakeholders to be involved if they are to be achieved."

6.2. "Local authorities are often responsible for many of the services and environments people interact with daily. From providing social care (Goal 3) to safe education (Goal 4) to effective transport planning (Goal 11), local authorities are vital to the domestic delivery of the Goals. In return, the Goals offer an effective framework to support local authorities with developing plans, strategies and supporting overall progress on sustainable development. Local authorities are well placed to provide the vital link between local communities and businesses and the Goals by connecting local priorities with the Goals and raising awareness of their importance amongst stakeholders. They can also reflect the needs and unique circumstances of their residents and communities to ensure resources are directed in the most effective ways."

The SDGs and the LGA

7. The LGA has been engaged with the SDGs and the development of the Review at an officer and member level. This has included attending engagement events, including an 'emerging findings' session in the House of Lords. This event was chaired by the DfID Secretary of State, and we were represented by Lord Porter, who subsequently asked a written question on the Government's support to local partners.³

8. We have sought to publicise the Review and raise awareness amongst councils through contributions to the LGA Chief Executive's Bulletin and in an article in First Magazine.⁴ We have also worked with the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF), the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) and United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) to advise on progress within an international context and to inform domestic lobbying work such as a submission to the Environment Audit Committee.⁵

9. This month, the LGA's General Assembly voted in favour of a motion (included at **Appendix 1**) raising awareness of the SDGs and committing the LGA to:

³ <https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2019-04-02/HL15013/>

⁴ <https://www.lgafirst.co.uk/features/global-goals-local-solutions/>

⁵ <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/environmental-audit-committee/sustainable-development-goals-in-the-uk/written/38341.pdf>

- Call upon Her Majesty's Government to explore supporting domestic implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals through funded partnership roles within each local authority area;
 - Encourage councils to continue their work on linking their local priorities with the overall ambitions of the SDGs; and
 - Declare a 'Climate Emergency', and commit to supporting councils in their work to tackle climate change by providing a strong unified voice for councils in lobbying for support to address this emergency, and sharing best practice across all councils.
10. These proposals, in combination with the need for local engagement set out in the Review, provide a framework for the LGA's future activity. The SDGs touch on many, if not all, of the LGA's priorities. A thorough review is required to understand the alignment of the SDGs with our current work programme; areas of opportunity for further development, and those elements that are less relevant to the LGA and local government in England. We would need to be clear that the language of 'targets' is not interpreted as imposing a centralised reporting structure on councils, but an opportunity to coordinate international ambitions with local priorities, backed by local data.
11. For example, Goal 5 – *Achieve gender equality and empower women and girls* – includes the following target: 5.3) Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation. The LGA has an established position in supporting the work of the National FGM Centre and it would be relatively straight forward to include a reference to the relevant SDG to underline the importance and global relevance of this work. However, not all elements will be so clear cut.
12. To best understand how we might align our work programme, officers propose to review the SDGs and their indicators over the summer. The results of this work would be brought together into a comprehensive paper to Leadership Board in September that includes recommendations for areas of focus and next steps. In some cases, we could choose to use the SDGs to bolster the case for greater localisation of powers and resources to support communities.
13. As part of this process, officers will review the LGA's Business Plan and bring a draft amended version to the same meeting. This will ensure that the LGA's priorities complement the SDGs and councils' role in ensuring successful delivery of the UK's ambitions.
14. Alongside the LGA's review of its own work, it is proposed that officers consider ways to share good practice between councils. Where relevant, they will also consider any specific improvement needs arising from meeting the individual SDGs. These proposals will be included in the paper for discussion by Leadership Board.

Environmental protection and the climate emergency

15. Protection and improvement of the environment is an issue which councils have an important role in addressing. As well as working with government to shape the national agenda, councils are uniquely placed to address the environmental, social and economic aspects of this agenda in a coherent way. Climate change is an increasing priority. Many councils together with the LGA have acknowledged the urgency of the issue by declaring a climate emergency; with some agreeing a target date for achieving zero net carbon emissions.
16. The LGA has an important role in supporting councils to achieve their ambitions on environmental protection and improvement. We are working with councils and Government on the emerging Environment Bill which will give legislative underpinning to the Government's 25 year Environment Strategy.
17. The LGA's Environment Economy Housing and Transport Board (EEHT) has discussed this issue at its recent meetings. An LGA summit is now planned for October, bringing together councils, Government and other partners to consider the challenges in this agenda, including achieving zero net carbon by 2050 or sooner. The summit will be an opportunity to understand current good practice and the additional powers and resources that councils will need to meet the carbon and biodiversity challenges. The EEHT Board recognises that this agenda will be a significant priority for the LGA that will require senior political leadership, and the research undertaken to inform discussions at the summit (including the powers and resources needed by councils) will be presented to Leadership Board in September.

Implications for Wales

18. The LGA continues to work with all UK local government associations on this issue. While many of the policy areas covered by the SDGs will be devolved to Wales, we will work with the WLGA over the summer to understand areas of shared concern. In particular, to learn from their work developed under the Well-being of Future Generations Act (2015), which imposes a statutory duty on public bodies to take into account the needs of future generations when making decisions.

Financial Implications

19. Any budget implications above and beyond resources already set aside for the LGA's work programme will be highlighted in the September report.

Next steps

20. Officers to undertake a review of the Business Plan and work programme in line with members' comments.

Appendix 1 – Motion (as amended) and LGA Response

Motion Proposer: Mayor Marvin Rees, Bristol City Council.

Motion Seconders: Cllr Judith Blake, Leader, Leeds City Council.
Mayor Joe Anderson, Liverpool City Council.

Amendment Proposer: Cllr Peter Box CBE, Wakefield Metropolitan Borough Council

Amendment Seconder: Cllr Nick Forbes CBE, Newcastle upon Tyne City Council

Propose that:

The Association values the importance of the [UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) that address the global challenges we face including poverty, inequality, climate, environmental degradation and prosperity. We welcome the work being done ahead of the upcoming Voluntary National Review (VNR) in July that will consider how the UK's programmes and policies are contributing to achieving these Global Goals. The Association also welcomes the importance placed by HM Government that all levels of government work together and that its partnership with local government is a key component to successful domestic implementation of the SDGs.

Local government has a vital role to play in terms of the planning, implementation and monitoring in local areas, work that will be key in delivering the UK's progress on meeting the ambitions of the Agenda 2030.

SDG Goal 13 calls on partners to take urgent action to combat climate change. The Association recognises that a growing number of UK local authorities have already passed 'Climate Emergency' motions with cross-party support, in recognition of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPPC) warning that urgent action is required in order to avoid runaway global warming and climate breakdown.

If implemented properly, each of the SDGs has the potential to be transformative in moving our areas toward a more sustainable society with many of the Goals best supported by local co-ordination and delivery through local government and its partners. Our role can also help raise awareness of these challenges by engaging our areas through local partnerships and with our citizens.

Whilst the Association agrees with Government that such partnerships are a vital component and members have supported work on developing models that engage local stakeholders as effectively as possible, this engagement needs sustainable funding and support in order for councils to effectively share research and engagement with our networks, partners and citizens, particularly given our sector's continuing funding pressures.

The benefits of exploring SDG partnership co-ordinators would be to provide a focal point for activity in our areas and demonstrate the need for local perspectives to be embedded in the delivery of the SDGs, as well as improve the capacity for councils to deliver on the Goals.

Supporting such positions would also provide a common language and common roles across different areas, would facilitate the sharing of best practice and further enable the delivery of global and local priorities at the same time.

This Association therefore:

- Calls upon Her Majesty's Government to explore supporting domestic implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals through funded partnership roles within each local authority area;
- Encourages councils to continue their work on linking their local priorities with the overall ambitions of the SDGs; and
- Declares a 'Climate Emergency', and commits to supporting councils in their work to tackle climate change by providing a strong unified voice for councils in lobbying for support to address this emergency, and sharing best practice across all councils.

LGA Response

The LGA would like to pay tribute to Mayor Rees, Councillor Blake and Mayor Anderson for bringing this motion forward and thank Members who have contributed to this timely and helpful debate.

The LGA supports this motion and is committed to playing its part in enabling local government to contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals. If the Government is committed to delivering on our commitments to improving economic, social and environmental sustainability, it must be embraced across all Whitehall departments. Councils have a crucial role to play in shaping more prosperous and inclusive places, but they must be empowered and funded sustainably if we are to achieve our shared ambitions for the country, whether that is putting funding back into preventative services or enabling a more devolved employment and skills service.

We will set out to the new Prime Minister how councils can be a powerful ally in delivering on our shared priorities, and will use the upcoming Spending Review and all other opportunities to do so. We will also work with our member councils to share the excellent work that is already taking place around the Sustainable Development Goals and help other councils develop their activity.

This morning we have declared a climate emergency and the LGA will work to support councils taking this step, and in some cases committing to specific timescales for achieving net zero carbon. Councils are already mitigating and helping communities to adapt to climate change on matters such as air quality, flooding, transport and energy. The LGA will work with our membership and Government to understand the additional powers and resources that councils will need to achieve their ambitions. We will keep Members informed as this work progresses.