

Climate Emergency and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Purpose of report

For decision.

Summary

In July 2019, the LGA General Assembly passed a motion calling upon the government to explore the domestic implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through funded partnership roles with local authority areas, encouraging councils to continue to link local priorities with the overall ambitions of the SDGs and declaring a climate emergency.

The Leadership Board set up a Climate Emergency Sounding Board to take forward the LGA's work over the summer. The Board met twice to identify the climate emergency challenges that councils are facing, good practice in addressing these and how the LGA can provide support through lobbying and improvement. This paper sets out the Sounding Board's recommendations to the Leadership Board and provides a steer for the LGA's future approach to climate emergency work.

Recommendation

That the Leadership Board supports the recommendations in this report to address the LGA's response to the Sustainable Development Goals and Climate Emergency issues.

Action

To support lobbying, policy, improvement and business planning recommendations 11-23

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Climate Emergency and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Background

1. At the LGA Conference in July, a motion was agreed in support of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the role of local government in delivering them. This included a declaration of a 'Climate Emergency' and committed to supporting councils in their work to tackle climate change by providing a strong unified voice for local government, and sharing best practice across all councils. There was unanimous cross party support for this declaration.
2. Councils have reported increasing public concern about climate change and this is reflected a recent survey by Ipsos MORI showed 85 per cent of adults are now concerned about global warming¹.
3. Following on from the Conference, the LGA Leadership Board set up a Climate Emergency Sounding Board which was tasked to shape how the LGA responded to the conference motion in practice and to make recommendations to develop a clear work programme for the organisation. The cross-party Sounding Board met over the summer and has examined the most effective work that the LGA can undertake to support councils in its lobbying and improvement roles (as directed by the conference motion).
4. Subsequently, Group Leaders have considered the issue. Leaders recommended that we need to continue to scope the big issues for localities, including examining and exchanging emerging best practice, understanding what work will make the biggest difference at a local level and clarifying where councils have the powers and responsibilities to make changes and where they have to influence other organisations and their communities. EEHT Board will be asked to develop the detail of our Climate Change work, with City Regions and People and Places asked to consider the specific urban and non-met issues. The Improvement and Innovation Board will lead on the improvement offer. To ensure that this issue is managed as a priority, the Leadership Board will receive regular reports to coordinate and commission work across the organisation.
5. This report provides recommendations from the Sounding Board for discussion at the Leadership Board.

¹ 12 August 2019 <https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/concern-about-climate-change-reaches-record-levels-half-now-very-concerned>

Councils' role in climate change and SDGs

6. It is important to state that local government has been responding to the environmental concerns of residents and businesses for a long time. In 2000, over 300 councils signed up to the Nottingham Declaration² on climate change. The LGA followed this up with a Climate Change Commission and a climate change survey. In 2012 the LGA worked with the Environment Agency to establish the Climate Local programme to support council action on climate change. Throughout this period councils across the country have been working on various initiatives to deal with climate change with many of them working towards being zero carbon. To date 230 councils in the UK have declared a climate emergency³.
7. Equally, councils have been leading the way on adapting the Sustainable Development Goals⁴ (SDGs) to the local level. These are a collection of 17 global goals set by the UN General assembly for the year 2030. The SDGs provide an overarching international framework to measure progress on environmental, economic and social sustainability policies. The SDGs are not an implementation plan and will be applied differently between, and within, countries.
8. Given the breadth of the SDGs, they need to be translated into a domestic and local context, identifying those most appropriate for action in each place. This necessitates local political leadership and civic engagement. The UK Government's Voluntary National Review of the SDGs in June 2019 has estimated that 65 per cent of the 169 targets need local involvement⁵. The Review singled out climate change and a sustainable approach to adult social care as urgent issues for local work. Councils have a vital role to play in the planning, implementation and monitoring of these and many other SDGs in local areas.
9. Many councils have incorporated SDGs into local planning and delivery. For example, Bristol City Council has developed the Bristol One City plan outlining how they want to create "a fair, healthy and sustainable city by 2050".⁶ Each aspect of the delivery of the plan is mapped to the SDGs. Other council areas who have explicitly addressed the SDGs include Kent, Redbridge, Coventry and Derby. All of these councils responded to the Voluntary National Review to highlight their efforts.

² https://friendsoftheearth.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/nott_dec_principles.pdf

³ [Climateemergency.uk](https://climateemergency.uk)

⁴ <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/>

⁵ Voluntary National Review, p16

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/813501/UKVN-R-web-accessible.pdf

⁶ Bristol One City Plan. Press release (January 2019). <https://bristolgreencapital.org/bristol-launches-first-ever-one-city-plan/>

10. SDGs have not been an explicit policy driver for central government. Thus many councils are incorporating sustainability issues into their plans through other policy drivers. For example, local areas developing Local Industrial Strategies have used this plan to drive sustainable and inclusive growth.

Work of the LGA Sounding Board over the summer

11. Following the motion at LGA Conference, the LGA's Sounding Board was asked to meet over the summer to consider the most effective work that could be developed by the LGA. The Sounding Board was made up of six members (Con: Cllrs Seccombe and Renard, Lab: Cllrs Forbes and Blake, LibDem: Cllr Morris, Ind: Cllr Cooper). Members considered the specific roles of the LGA as a lobbying/policy-making organisation and as provider of support to councils. They also considered the range of policy initiatives being developed across Whitehall, by other national agencies and through councils,

Recommendations to the Leadership Board

12. The recommendation below related to both the broad range of SDGs and a more specific set of recommendations relating to climate emergency.

SDGs

13. The motion agreed at LGA Conference asked councils to consider how they incorporated SDGs into their planning and with local partners. Therefore, it was important in the first instance to revisit the LGA's own business plan and consider how the SDGs should be reflected more specifically. Over the summer, officers have reviewed the current themes of the business plan and incorporated a wider consideration of how our work can help achieve the SDGs.
14. The revised business plan is in a separate paper on this agenda. This paper sets out the revised objectives and additions. Many of the LGA's existing policies and priorities reflect the SDGs. The business plan maps the SDGs against our proposed priorities and includes an additional theme specifically relating to the climate emergency (SDG 13). The business plan will form the basis of the work programmes of the LGA Boards in the year to come.
15. A wider review of the LGA's work has been initiated which is mapping more detailed Board activity against the SDGs and their relevant targets. This analysis is intended to provide more detailed intelligence on (a) whether our LGA work covers the SDGs comprehensively, (b) if there are further gaps, (c) those SDGs where the Government must rely on local government to deliver and/or are currently assigned to the national

level, but which would benefit from devolution and (d) SDGs where additional powers and resources for councils are required in order to meet the expectations arising from the Goals.

16. We are working with the European and Commonwealth LGAs to look at best practice abroad. We have also engaged with councils and other stakeholders in the UK to facilitate the sharing of emerging practice and identify barriers to the localisation of the SDGs, such as the availability of data suitable for monitoring progress towards them.
17. As stated earlier, SDGs have not been a major policy driver with Government to date and we are also examining where SDGs will be achieved or driven by other policy agendas (e.g. the Industrial Strategy mentioned earlier). However, national policy drivers may change. For example, the Prime Minister's anticipated speech to the UN on SDGs in the autumn may place SDGs higher on the government agenda. Our research and data-base should provide the intelligence for the LGA to respond very quickly to changing agendas.

Climate Emergency

18. In developing the suggested LGA work programme to deliver the Conference declaration of a climate emergency, the Sounding Board considered a range of issues and recent policy papers in a number of councils. The discussion concentrated on where the LGA's policy-making/lobbying work and improvement support could add value to the work at councils' front line.

Lobbying and policy development

19. It was noted in discussing the LGA's lobbying work that the LGA and councils had already engaged with various Government departments on many of the major policies which will impact on climate change. For example work with DEFRA on the Resources and Waste Strategy, our involvement in the development of the Industrial Strategy with BEIS, our continuing work on longer-term transport solutions with DfT and work with MHCLG on housing and planning frameworks. It is clear that many Whitehall departments and agencies are involved in developing work on climate change and separate national initiatives need harnessing at a local level. There are a range of separate Whitehall funding streams which need to be accessed locally in order to make these projects deliverable.
20. In order to achieve national climate change goals, local government is needed as a coordinating *agent of change* at the local level as it is the only body that has the credibility to bring national and local interests together with the community. This is the role local councils are best placed to take. Councils already bring partners together whether it be for LEPs, safeguarding panels or health and wellbeing boards. In this

scenario we are the agent of change – not just a tier of government. Only councils have the mandate to bring partners together to deliver meaningful local change.

21. Local government cannot work alone. Much of the policy, legislative and financial changes that are needed require action at the national level. The partnership between local and national government is critical and could bring together all the Whitehall departments with local leaders to coordinate action and drive change.
22. Therefore the first recommendation would be to offer the Government a joint national taskforce between local leaders and relevant Whitehall Departments (at least including BEIS, MHCLG, DEFRA, DfT and Treasury) to consider the most appropriate actions, funding, coordination and collaboration needed to drive the UK's climate change agenda.
23. To underpin this offer to Government, the Sounding Board considered the most effective policy/lobbying programme for the LGA. It is suggested that work is developed in the following areas:
 - 23.1. To work with Government departments to establish jointly the funding and policy changes needed to deliver zero net carbon by 2030. Our submissions to the Treasury for September's spending round has initiated this work and we will need to develop more detailed work in this area.
24. The Sounding Board also considered areas where more detailed work was needed. The following are suggested:
 - 24.1. To work with Government to address the need for greater energy efficiency in the built environment and how this can be achieved through regulatory changes and through planning practice which builds on the evidence of recent inquiries.
 - 24.2. To continue working closely with Government, as it implements its Waste and Resources Strategy to identify ways to reduce the total level and the level of unrecyclable waste entering the system and the investment priorities for waste disposal and processing of recyclates, considering the investments that have already been made by councils.
 - 24.3. To work on longer-term transport solutions including: establishing the resource needs and regulatory changes to support the move to electric vehicles (EV) including the provision of charging points on new housing developments. The implications of the development of hydrogen fuel cell technology for the mix of local transport and infrastructure provision and the incentives and investment required to support a shift towards public transport and walking and cycling (recognising that modal shift will need to be part of the solution to reducing carbon emissions).

- 24.4. To review and update the LGA position on energy, examining, for example, the national and regulatory issues on solar energy and any lobbying that needs to be developed.
- 24.5. To review the Environment Bill (once published) for any further requirements which may need to be managed alongside the SDGs and climate emergency actions.

Improvement

25. The Sounding Board was aware of increasing demands from councils for support in developing their local work. The Improvement and Innovation Board has already discussed this issue. The Sounding Boards recommendations is that the following needs to be considered by the LGA:
26. Develop a wide-ranging improvement offer to support councils in addressing the issue of climate change which could include:
 - 26.1. Leadership support, by incorporating climate change issues into programmes for councillors and officers (for example a number of councillors have requested a leadership essentials course on taking responsibility as a leader/portfolio holder after declaring a climate emergency).
 - 26.2. Support for long term action-planning and setting strategic objectives, for example through the deployment of 'climate experts'.
 - 26.3. Accelerated learning pilots in partnership with experts in the field, including leading academics and institutions, to offer practical suggestions to the sector.
 - 26.4. Support for communications approaches including engaging with residents and local activist groups and managing expectations.
 - 26.5. Support to the sector in understanding best practice and most effective actions at the local level, for example through a bank of case studies.
 - 26.6. Support through 'Don't be left in the dark' guidance and more detailed toolkits to help councils take immediate action.
 - 26.7. Workshops and events to help councils develop a better understanding of climate change issues and how these can be tackled.
 - 26.8. Working with the LGA's research and information team to explore the possibility of conducting a climate change survey to follow up on the survey commissioned in 2010.
27. We will continue engaging with the sector about the support they need to help inform the offer and conversations with central government.

Next Steps

28. There are several stakeholders and partners that are engaging with local government on climate change activity. These include Local Partnerships, the newly formed Climate Emergency Special Interest Group, the Association of Directors of Environment Planning and Transport (ADEPT); Association of Public Service Excellence (APSE) and a range of voluntary and community sector organisations. It will be important to ensure that where possible there is a coordinated approach and the LGA complements this range of activity with its own offer, both in its policy and improvement work.
29. The ability of local government to take the lead on climate change is restricted by financial constraints on councils, a lack of devolved powers, challenges with monitoring and implementation and a lack of awareness of the agenda. A snapshot of this is the challenges faced by councils when tackling air quality and pollution. They do not have control over all roads, as some are operated by Highways England, limiting their ability to take action. The Government should use the Spending Round and other key opportunities such as the Queen's Speech, to place councils on a more sustainable footing. Our *Councils Can*⁷ proposal sets out how a new localism settlement could strengthen communities and allow them to deliver on climate change, with locally-led public service reform.

Implications for Wales

30. We will be looking to share learning with our WLGA colleagues and work collaboratively on any common issues.

Financial Implications

31. The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for 2019/20, which helps shape the improvement programme, has been agreed with MHCLG and does not currently include deliverables relating to climate change. Some of the programme can be adapted under the current arrangement (i.e. an additional Leadership Essentials programme) however, more substantial changes would require agreement from MHCLG or funding from elsewhere. Consideration should also be given to MoU negotiations with MHCLG for 2020/21 to ensure that climate change is included in the deliverables.

⁷ <https://www.local.gov.uk/councils-can-2019-conference-paper>