

Agenda Item	7
Report No	CCP/2/20

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Climate Change Panel

Date: 15th January 2020

Report Title: The Public Sector's Role in Tackling the Climate Emergency – Consultation Response

Report By: Climate Change Officer

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 This report provides a summary of the Council's response to the recent Scottish Government consultation on the public sector's role in tackling the climate emergency.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to note the contents of this report.

3. Implications

3.1 Resource – there are no resource implications arising from this report.

3.2 Legal – there are no legal implications arising from this report.

3.3 Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural) – there are no community implications arising from this report.

3.4 Climate Change/Carbon CLEVER – the Public Sector has a key role to play in supporting the Scottish Government's climate change ambition. The consultation response sets out some of the key challenges which are likely to be faced by local authorities in supporting this agenda over the coming years.

3.5 Risk – there are no risk implications arising from this report. However, it needs to be reiterated that there is increasing public focus and scrutiny of local government's response to the climate and ecological emergency, and there is an associated reputational risk to the Council by not taking sufficient and timeous actions to address it.

3.6 Gaelic – There are no Gaelic implications arising from this report.

4. Background

- 4.1 In September 2019, the Scottish Government opened a consultation seeking views on the future role of public sector bodies in ending Scotland's contribution to climate change, how the annual public bodies climate change reporting duties should be revised to support that, and how the Scottish Government and wider public sector could better work together to make a step-change in delivery.
- 4.2 This report provides a short summary of the key issues, and the officer response submitted can be found at **Appendix 1** to this report.

5. Consultation – Key Issues

- 5.1 Under the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, all public sector bodies are legally required to support the Scottish Government's climate change targets. These targets have recently been increased to a 56% reduction in emissions by 2020 (against a 1990 baseline) and to achieve net zero emissions by 2045. To achieve these targets, it is clear that closer collaboration between public sector bodies will be vital, and the first part of the consultation seeks views on proposals to support this.
- 5.2 To ensure that the public sector is contributing to overall emissions reduction targets, each public body is required to report annually on their greenhouse gas emissions and what they are doing to help to adapt to a changing climate. The second part of the consultation focuses on how the reporting arrangements could be improved to focus efforts on ultimately achieving net zero, whilst also seeking views on how reporting could be changed to reduce the administrative burden in completing the return each year.
- 5.3 The consultation closed on 4th December 2019, and the response submitted by officers can be found at **Appendix 1** to this report. However, the below provides a short summary of some of the key issues:
- **Training, Information & Guidance** – the consultation sought views on what additional training, information and guidance is needed to increase action on climate change. The response identifies that climate action is currently the responsibility of a small number of staff across most public bodies, and therefore, to increase action, mechanisms need to be developed to appropriately upskill senior and middle managers in respect of how the low carbon agenda impacts, and could benefit, the delivery of their individual services.
 - **High Ambition Climate Network** – the consultation proposes the establishment of a High Ambition Climate Network of Chief Executives and Elected Members in those public sector bodies who are committed to leading the way to a net-zero Scotland. The response sets out that whilst the principle of this network is to be welcomed, there is a danger that some of the actions and commitments which may fall out of this may not be achievable, given that most climate action is taken at relatively junior officer level. It is therefore suggested that the forum includes climate change and sustainability officers to ensure any proposals are reasonable, achievable and proportionate.
 - **Net Zero Targets** – at present, there is no requirement under the annual PBCCD reporting process for public bodies to report on the year by which they hope to achieve net zero emissions. To expedite efforts towards a net-zero Scotland by 2045, the consultation seeks views on whether public bodies should be required to report on the date by which they intend to achieve net zero. The response suggests that this would be a positive step, but that is tempered by a need for more transparency and consistency around the reporting of direct and indirect emissions. Consistency in reporting would aid scrutiny and

accountability of individual public bodies. In addition, the response highlights that the ability to set organisation-specific dates for zero direct emissions is essential from a geographic perspective. An area such as Highland will take longer and be much more challenging to completely decarbonise due to the size, scale and infrastructure restrictions of the region than a smaller, more urban local authority area.

- **Use of Resources** – the consultation proposes that one of the ways the public sector could demonstrate that it is using its resources to contribute to reducing emissions would be by requiring them to report on how they do this, as part of their annual reporting. The response sets out that this would have the potential to incentivise change, but would require very clear and consistent guidance and methodologies to ensure that it was applied correctly, as well as a clear definition around what resources are included. In addition, there is currently some uncertainty around which actions are deemed to contribute to emissions reduction. For example, a Council could elect to purchase 100% renewable electricity, but this is not currently accounted for or reflected under the PBCCD reporting.

6. Looking Ahead

- 6.1 Following the Scottish Government's declaration of a climate emergency in May 2019 and the subsequent increase in ambition with a view to Scotland achieving net zero by 2045, it is anticipated that there will be a number of key consultations and proposals which will have an impact on the Council and its own efforts to tackle climate change. These will include:
- Consultation on legislation to require public bodies to set out how they will meet climate change and circular economy obligations;
 - Consultation on Scotland's ambition to zero or ultra-low emission city centres by 2030;
 - Consultation on a revised Climate Change Plan for Scotland following the declaration of a climate emergency and advice from the Committee on Climate Change.
- 6.2 It is proposed, subject to appropriate timescales, that responses to consultations will be presented to the Climate Change Panel as well as relevant strategic committees for approval, going forward.

Designation: Climate Change Officer

Date: 6th January 2020

Author: Keith Masson

Consultation on Role of Public Sector Bodies in Tackling Climate Change

Consultation Response – The Highland Council

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

Whilst the Sustainable Scotland Network (SSN) provides an extremely useful forum for discussion and training in respect of climate change, this is necessarily limited to a relatively small number of officers from across the public sector in Scotland. In order to meaningfully address the climate emergency at a public sector level, mechanisms need to be developed to appropriately upskill senior and middle managers in respect of how the low carbon agenda impacts, and could benefit, the delivery of their individual services. This could include the following:

- Specific training (potentially mandatory) relevant to key areas of public service delivery, addressing the key challenges and opportunities provided by the low carbon economy;
- The development of business cases, case studies and examples of good practice from across the public sector to ensure that good projects can be established and implemented quickly, without individual organisations having to go through these processes countless times;
- Better mechanisms to commission and access academic research relevant to specific regions;
- The identification of weak performance areas from the annual public bodies climate change duties report for individual organisations, with tailored solutions or recommendations.
- Increased clarity around what public sector organisations ‘must’ do, and what they ‘should’ do. Clear and consistent mandatory drivers are critical, supported by the reporting process and feedback from the Scottish Government regarding areas of good practice and where performance must be improved.
- Clarity around the alignment of public sector functions with delivery of aspirations under the Climate Change Act.

The most fundamentally important issue to address is how we move from climate action being worked on by small teams within the public sector, to being embedded throughout all levels of service delivery. Whilst this is a challenging aspiration, it starts with providing basic, service-specific training and materials to the correct level of management. Climate change and sustainability teams can undertake this to a point, but a set of nationally-produced, consistent and regularly update guidance would make this task very much easier.

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

The principle of the High Ambition network is to be welcomed. However, there are some considerations which need to be considered prior to establishment of this group:

- There is a risk that this forum may end up as a talking-shop. Climate change work is largely undertaken at (relatively junior) officer level, and it is the connections made through these officers which generally stimulate ideas and action.
- The network would likely need to be an open forum for discussion and development of reportable targets and actions – it would then be expected that this work would be

assigned to climate & sustainability officers. It would therefore be useful, if not essential, for these officers to be involved in High Ambition meetings to ensure that proposed actions are reasonable, proportionate and can be adequately resourced. This would aid the network's credibility and accountability.

- To maximise value, the network will require well-facilitated discussions, agendas and workshops to support and enact decisions. This will necessarily require input from relevant officers or SSN.

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

The Highland Council agrees that all public sector bodies should be required to set targets, but more clarity and consistency is required across all public sector bodies regarding which emissions are classed as direct and indirect emissions. This is a particular challenge for emissions often reported under scope 3.

References to net zero often conflates national targets with organisational emissions and targets, and further clarity is required around the relationship and interdependencies involved in net zero organisational targets and net zero national targets.

Consistency in reporting means that all public sector bodies can be benchmarked and can accurately monitor and compare performance against other bodies, whilst allowing the public to properly understand and scrutinise performance, or lack of.

Finally, the ability to set organisation-specific dates for zero direct emissions is essential from a geographic perspective. An area such as Highland will take longer and be much more challenging to completely decarbonise due to the size, scale and infrastructure restrictions of the region than a smaller, more urban local authority area.

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

Yes

Reporting in this way could definitely incentivise change across public sector organisations, but would require very clear and consistent guidance and methodologies to ensure that it was applied correctly, as well as a clear definition around what resources are included.

In addition, there is currently some uncertainty around which actions are deemed to contribute to emissions reduction. For example, a Council could elect to purchase 100% renewable electricity, but this is not currently accounted for or reflected under the PBCCD reporting.

Q5. Do you agree that 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

The Highland Council would be supportive of this approach. However, high quality statutory guidance is required to ensure that public bodies fully and positively comply.

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

Yes, The Highland Council agrees with the revised list and is pleased to note that more public bodies will be required to report.

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

Yes

The Highland Council broadly agrees with the proposals set out in respect of the reporting requirements. However, we would be keen to see more detail around how adaptation and procurement sections will be strengthened given their importance to addressing the climate emergency.

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

For most public sector organisations, in order to reach net-zero emissions, they will need to consider how and where best to offset any portion of their footprint which they cannot reasonably achieve either through changes in practice or improvements to infrastructure. To this end, the report will need to capture information about how individual organisations are addressing this, and section 3 of the report would be the most appropriate area to include this.