

### Climate Change

#### **Summary and Recommendations**

This report updates the Board on recent developments in climate change, seeks initial feedback on the Scottish Government's consultation on climate change and further develops our position based on a recent climate change event which brought together our member Councils.

The Board is invited to:

- i. Welcome the Climate Change (Emissions Reductions Target) (Scotland) Bill and its improved interim targets
- ii. Agree that we must also consider the loss of biodiversity and an increased focus on adaptation within our policy response to climate change, and
- iii. Provide initial views on the Scottish Government proposals for a change to public sector reporting duty and the establishment of a 'National Forum on Climate Change' and a 'High Ambition Climate Network' for the public sector.

#### **References**

Previous relevant reports:

- COSLA Leaders February 2017 - Draft Scottish Climate Change Plan
- [Environment and Economy Board September 2017 – Climate Change](#)
- [Environment and Economy Board April 2018 – Climate Change](#)
- [Economy and Environment Board December 2018 - Climate Change Bill](#)
- [Environment and Economy Board June 2019 – Climate Change](#)
- [Environment and Economy Board September 2019 – Climate Change and Future Economic Policy](#)

**Silke Isbrand**  
**Policy Manager - Environment and Economy**  
[silke@cosla.gov.uk](mailto:silke@cosla.gov.uk)  
**0131 474 9266**

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## Climate Change

### **Purpose**

1. The purpose of this report is to update the Board on the Climate Change Bill, the Scottish Government's consultation on climate change, and a recent event in which SSN (Sustainable Scotland Network) and COSLA organised for member Councils on climate change.

### **Current Position**

2. COSLA supports an ambitious approach to tackling climate change in Scotland and the Scottish Government's 'net zero' emissions target for 2045, which was based on the recommendations of the Climate Change Committee. This Board has also previously raised the need for interim targets and made a strong call for early action on climate change mitigation.
3. In assessing the previous climate change plan and wider policy, the Board has consistently stressed the need for local action, and for Local Authorities to be empowered, equipped and resourced to effectively tackle climate change, in line with the Paris agreement.
4. The recent report on climate change and economic development considered at the last meeting of this Board put a strong argument forward that a major refocussing of economic development aims, policies and measurements of success on genuine sustainability is needed, if we are to meet the climate change targets.
5. Climate Change is also one of four key priorities for the spending review alongside inclusive growth, wellbeing and child poverty.

### **What is Changing?**

#### *Programme for Government*

6. [The Scottish Government's Programme for Government](#) has a substantial focus on climate change. It proposes a range of interventions across policy areas, and we will return to this Board with more specific reports where they affect Council services at future meetings.

#### *Climate Change Bill*

7. [The Climate Change \(Emissions Reductions Target\) \(Scotland\) Bill](#) passed Stage 3 in the Scottish Parliament on Wednesday 25 September. It focusses predominantly on the numerical greenhouse gas reduction target. A number of amendments were made to the bill, most importantly an amendment to ensure early action, by increasing the interim target of 70% reduction in greenhouse gases to 75% by 2030 (compared to 1990 levels). An amendment to give the Just Transition Commission a firmer legal basis did not receive a majority.
8. Within six month of Royal Assent, the Scottish Government is required to publish a Climate Change Plan, with firm proposals of how these targets will be reached. We

anticipate that this Board will want to have a detailed consideration of this plan, as was done with the previous plan.

An overview of the principal messages from these meetings is attached as Appendix A.

9. When responding to the Climate Change consultation, we are proposing to stress the vital role of Local Government, both as a sphere of government and a key delivery body, and that this needs to be reflected in any governance arrangements.

### **Next Steps**

10. Political ambitions and attitudes have shifted significantly in the past few months and there is a clear challenge of how to translate these into a practical way forward. We are proposing to develop a dialogue and scope out potential action around the following headings from our recent meeting with Councils:

- Leadership – in all spheres and at all levels
- Education – within organisations and the wider public
- A ‘concrete’ local delivery plan – linked to the national Climate Change Plan
- Clear duties and responsibilities
- A uniform methodological approach (consistent data and performance measures, to facilitate action that is more accurately measurable and deliverable)
- Capacity and resources

11. Any dialogue with the Scottish Government on capacity and resources will be linked to the spending review. Clearly, for Councils to focus on removing emissions from their own estate is vital. However, the net zero target will require more fundamental change in local areas and society more broadly.
12. Perhaps more importantly therefore are Councils’ much wider regional and civic leadership role, which can allow Councils to drive and facilitate climate action in their local areas. This can include supporting or developing local partnerships and initiatives. It could however also extend to addressing how Local Government with investment policies and pension funds can influence the behaviour of larger corporations, and their ‘polluter-pays’ obligations.
13. Going forward, Members may wish to have an open discussion about whether there is appetite for Councils’ regional and civic leadership role to be further enhanced, and what the implications and opportunities would be.
14. Drawing these themes together, we are still pursuing a meeting of the spokesperson with the Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform, to start the process of agreeing a joint response to the climate emergency. Work with Councils and Scottish Government officials is ongoing and a report to Leaders still planned before the end of the year.

**Key messages from COSLA/SSN meeting with Member Councils on Climate Change, September 2019**

- Local Government recognises that climate change is a global emergency and the obligation this puts on both Scottish and Local Government;
- Local government is collectively keen to make a significant contribution to climate action and needs to be empowered to do so;
- The loss of biodiversity and adaptation need to gain greater attention in the climate change agenda;
- Behaviour change remains a crucial component of sustainable climate action;
- Local Government has a critical role to input local, regionally and nationally into how we meet the climate change ambitions, and will reach across the entirety of Local government in Scotland to establish how best to approach this;
- This needs to be reflected in the governance arrangements at the national level, as well as in the development of policy and practice;
- To make the most effective contribution to climate action, Local Authorities need a stronger set of tools and powers to develop effective local action;
- Strong corporate support within Councils is essential for effective progress.