



**UNISON Scotland response:
BIG CLIMATE CONVERSATION
The role of Public Sector Bodies in tackling climate change**

December 2019

Introduction

UNISON is Scotland's largest trade union with members across the public, private and voluntary sectors. We welcome the opportunity to respond to this consultation.

However, we want to state at the start that the title/billing of this consultation is somewhat misleading. The consultation appears potentially to be about the very big issue of the role of public sector bodies in tackling climate change – an enormous and very important question as the world attempts to face up to and respond to the climate emergency. Governments and councils are declaring a climate emergency in Scotland, the UK and internationally. Schoolchildren around the world are going on strike. Climate action is rightly a major issue in the UK General Election. World leaders meet in Madrid this month for the UN climate conference COP 25, with Glasgow due to host next year's crucial COP26. It is crucial to limit global temperature rise to no more than 1.5C above pre-industrial levels, the target in the Paris Agreement. Scotland has new legislation and a Just Transition Commission due to advise government on transitioning fairly to meeting targets for net zero.

But the first question in this consultation is about training, information and guidance.

The thrust of the consultation is about improving arrangements on annual reporting on the public bodies climate duties to reduce the administrative burden and "to drive action", more than about what is required from public bodies to contribute to Scotland making the just transition to a net zero economy.

Surely the first question, if this is truly about the role of public bodies in tackling climate change, should be along the lines of whether they are effectively engaged with coherent, well resourced climate, adaptation and sustainability strategies and plans, demonstrating results that show contributing to the targets is embedded in all they do, internally and externally? If not, how do we work together to make that happen?

It seems that the scope of the consultation is not quite as big as the billing at first implies, although of course the mandatory reporting on the duties is something that UNISON sees as extremely important and we are pleased to comment on the various reporting proposals.

What is crucial is that however the arrangements and training and collaboration between public bodies is organised, the need for urgent action is treated as the emergency that it is, with sufficient funding to deliver the action required. We want to see public bodies working together and leading by example and we want to emphasise the important role of trade unions in how the public sector does this.

Consultation Questions:

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

UNISON is very concerned that the austerity funding cuts which have hit public bodies so hard over the last decade have impacted work to date on tackling climate change and ensuring it receives the priority necessary. Local government has taken the brunt of the cuts, but NHS services are clearly also under severe strain. Given the scale and urgency of the climate emergency, the funding of public services is an absolutely crucial aspect of the role of public bodies in securing a just transition to a net zero Scotland. See this, and more, in the further comments section below, re funding. **We need government at all levels to ensure sufficient funding for the magnitude of the climate emergency.**

Training is vital, across the public sector. This has to be treated as an emergency, as an urgent health and safety issue across the board.

The Climate Solutions qualification is welcome. Training is needed urgently at all levels and it is important that this is reviewed in consultation with trade unions and with Skills Development Scotland as part of overall skills and training needs for the future changing needs of a transitioning economy (through a Just Transition) and demands on the workforce in both the public and private sectors. Some of this will rightly be considered by the Just Transition Commission during 2020, but clearly planning underway now in the meantime has to comprehensively address the climate emergency, with Fair Work and Just Transition principles firmly embedded.

The public sector must lead by example. Additional funding for trade unions, through the Scottish Union Learning Fund, to deliver training to workers on the climate emergency and promote responses and changing attitudes, would address the need to get workforces on message and assist with developing creative solutions in the workplace. Training needs to ensure that good examples are shared so that people are made aware of possible initiatives – this includes small actions as well as major projects.

Trade unions, through the TUC Green Workplaces project, developed a range of green workplace policies, materials and local initiatives around the country, through UK Government funding under the last Labour government¹. There needs to be funding for similar, updated further work by trade unions and joint work with employers on green workplaces.

Trade unions want to see statutory rights for environment reps, i.e. rights to time to fulfil their role and for training etc, in the way that health and safety officers and other trade union reps have statutory rights. While this is a reserved power, we will be lobbying the UK government for this and we call on the Scottish Government to support such calls and to do everything within its powers to ensure that employers in Scotland in the public and private sector are required, where possible, and strongly encouraged where not, to engage with trade union environment/green reps and provide appropriate support and resources for them in their work on such union business. The climate emergency gives added impetus to the need for this longstanding call from trade unions.

Joint climate action by employers with trade unions has been shown to increase effectiveness of the action. We want to see negotiated green workplace agreements. These should include voluntary agreements on facilities time for environment reps. As the earlier TUC work showed, work on adaptation² must look, as well as at outward facing adaptation, at inward adaptation, looking at the welfare of people at work – at the impact of severe

¹ See e.g. <https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/extras/gogreenatwork.pdf>

² <https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/extras/adaptation.pdf>

weather on conditions for staff, including shift patterns, workwear, absence management (see the Severe weather Fair Work charter³) etc.

All of these would make a big difference to helping public sector bodies increase their action on climate change.

Updated statutory mandatory guidance on the climate change duties is urgently needed.

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

We note that the consultation document refers to the creation of a National Forum on Climate Change that “brings together government, Public Sector Bodies, the private sector, third sector organisations and the wider public.” We look forward to hearing about how trade unions will be involved in this and how it is proposed to operate.

A High Ambition Climate Network sounds potentially very positive as senior management and political buy-in is very important, but we have long made criticisms of a top-down approach⁴. We would want to know more about how this will embed climate action into public sector bodies’ mainstream work. Will up to 15 people meeting twice a year be up to leading and embedding action across all Major Players? How will the Network link with other existing or new groups working on climate and public bodies’ delivery? And will the electronic network proposed be sufficient for sharing lessons learned etc? The Sustainable Scotland Network has done important work and we would not want to see expertise and enthusiasm and experience from that lost. There is an implication the Scottish Energy Officer Network will continue, but not SSN.

There is mention of support for public bodies completing their mandatory reporting duties but not of any analysis of responses here. Although analysis is mentioned on p16, with a commitment to ‘improvements to analysis and communication’, we would stress that there needs to be funding for this. There was some limited analysis through Keep Scotland Beautiful, but it is so important to make use of the responses and all the data about what public bodies are doing. (All reports should also be available on one website, as well as on the bodies’ own websites.) These kinds of points were made in 2015 in Friends of the Earth Scotland research⁵, which helped demonstrate the need for the reports to be mandatory.

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. It is clear that the urgency of the need for action in the coming decade requires this. As noted in the consultation document, these would not be legislative targets and may need to be refined/amended, but we agree that targets should be set. Each body should have a plan with intermediary targets to get to zero carbon on time. We want to see public bodies also

³ <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/agreement/2018/11/severe-weather-charter/documents/severe-weather---fair-work-charter/severe-weather---fair-work-charter/govscot%3Adocument/Fair%2BWork%2BSevere%2BWeather%2BCharter%2B-%2Bfinal.pdf>

⁴ http://www.unison-scotland.org.uk/briefings/b015_PolicyBrief_PublicBodiesClimateChangeDuties_October2011.pdf

⁵ <https://foe.scot/press-release/partial-and-inconsistent-reporting-by-public-sector-hinders-climate-change-effort/>

have 5 year climate change impacts resilience strategy and action plans with an annual monitoring and climate change impacts report as part of the duties.

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

Yes. This helps the bodies themselves and the public see what spending is making a difference and contributing to the response to the climate emergency. It aids decision making and transparency and accountability.

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. It is important that the guidance is comprehensive and that the public does not lose out on information it has thus far been entitled to. We approve of making the reports more user friendly as it is so important for people to be able to easily see and understand what each body is doing and is planning.

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

Please specify which aspect of the proposal you disagree with and why.

There is an issue about removing Integration Joint Boards (IJBs). This is OK if it is merely removing duplication because everything will definitely be reported by the relevant local authority or health board. And this is about reporting, not about complying with the public bodies' duties. But there must be safeguards to ensure that they can be publicly seen to be fulfilling their duties (or not) under climate legislation, when procuring large contracts. Such contracts could have a huge impact on emissions and adaptation. Such procurement activity must be made clear in any reporting by the relevant health boards and local authorities.

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

Please specify which aspect of the proposal you disagree with.

Agree except for:

Removing 1g Context, as this provides useful information, particularly for members of the public.

Part 2, Governance, Management & Strategy. Ditto.

3 e – k We disagree with removing all of these unless some of the proposed changes will capture estimates of estimated emissions and cost savings for the year(s) ahead. We also think it is worth including examples of best practice. And on 3g: This should be retained. We find it very helpful to be able to see, for example, whether a change to service provision or staffing levels, might be impacting on emissions reduction/increases.

Part 5. Procurement. If the problem is no meaningful information being gathered, we still would want to see procurement retained as part of the reporting, with a change to improve what is covered. The change should not see procurement removed from these reports. If it

involves duplicating/copying some information from relevant annual procurement reports and/or improving those, that is the way ahead. It would be wrong to remove procurement entirely. It has a crucial role in climate action and this must be transparent and easily accessible for democratic accountability.

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

We are concerned that the reporting should cover the duty on public bodies to act in the way they consider most sustainable.

We would be open to consideration of how reports can be linked, covering climate change and biodiversity and procurement - and food, which may become a duty via the Good Food Nation Bill.

Q9. Do you agree that Public Sector Bodies should each make their own report on emissions reductions publicly available?

Definitely. Reports should also cover climate adaptation and sustainability.

Other comments.

UNISON is very concerned that the austerity funding cuts which have hit public bodies so hard over the last decade have impacted work to date on tackling climate change and ensuring it receives the priority necessary. Local government has taken the brunt of the cuts, but NHS services are clearly also under severe strain. Given the scale and urgency of the climate emergency, the funding of public services is an absolutely crucial aspect of the role of public bodies in securing a just transition to a net zero Scotland. If the resources are not there for the public sector to take action, all the training and targets and policies in the world will not help us save the planet. Public bodies have a range of legal duties and the public bodies climate duties are an essential part of ensuring public services play their part in leading by example on reducing emissions and in adaptation. **We need government at all levels to ensure sufficient funding for the magnitude of the climate emergency.** If the money is not spent early in a preventative way, the costs increase as extreme weather and other impacts of climate change take effect. We need climate ready infrastructure and sufficiently funded emergency planning.

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