

MSP & Councillor Briefing from the LINK Local Governance Task Force

The Environment & Local Government

Summary

- Scottish Environment LINK campaigns for the achievement of sustainable development that respects environmental limits - at all levels of government.
- Since 2009, LINK has been actively engaging with Scotland's Councils and the Scottish Government to improve the implementation of environmental policy at local level.
- This engagement has met with limited success so far and this briefing outlines the major lines of our engagement and the way we intend to take them forward.

1. Single Outcome Agreements (SOAs) and Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs)

In February 2010, LINK recommended priority environmental issues for the SOAs process. The report, [Working for Sustainable Development through Single Outcome Agreements](#), aimed to offer support to Councils and CPPs in the process of developing SOAs, in relation to sustainable development, particularly the environment. It addressed ten priority topics - Biodiversity, Climate Change, Ecological Footprint, Education/Volunteering, Historic and Built Environment, Landscape, Physical Activity/Health, Recreational Access, Transport, Water and Flooding.

In February 2011, LINK published [Delivering for the Environment in our Communities: An Audit of Single Outcome Agreements](#). This audit of SOAs (by CAG Consultants) captured how sustainable development and the environment are being addressed by each CPP. It found significant gaps in addressing national priorities such as climate change adaptation, landscape, the historic environment and the sustainable management of water resources, despite evidence that we could achieve more by joining up economic, social and environmental services. Whilst the audit pointed to good practice by a few Councils, it demonstrated that many local authorities were failing to see sustainable development as a priority.

A seminar in February 2011 co-hosted by LINK, SNH, SEPA, SSN and the Sustainable Development Commission Scotland (closed March 2011), considered the process, shared experience, and identified good practice which could be developed. Over two-thirds of CPPs were represented as well as Government and the other stakeholders. Recommendations were for: leadership; guidance and more responsive mutual learning process; evidence base for area profiles; small number of strategic local outcomes; indicators and targets driving the process; improved accountability. A report of the seminar can be found at <http://www.scotlink.org/files/policy/PositionPapers/LINKSOAseminarMar11.pdf>.

2. Scotland's National Performance Framework (NPF) in relation to SOAs

The NPF is the Scottish Government's ten year framework, setting out the Government's overall purpose, desired national outcomes and indicators of progress. In September 2011 LINK supported the publication of [Revising Scotland's National Performance Framework](#), a briefing prepared by Friends of the Earth Scotland, WWF and Oxfam Scotland. It made recommendations for improvements to the NPF (the overall statement of the measurable aims of the Government), within which SOAs and other aims are set.

LINK's contributions have had only a limited impact, and many improvements remain to be made if Scotland's Councils are to fully support the goal of achieving sustainability. Pursuing this agenda, LINK asked the Scottish Government to establish comprehensive methods for monitoring and measuring environmental performance in local Councils – there being no agreed list of the environmental responsibilities of Councils, nor any



monitoring system. The Scottish Government declined our suggestion of a meeting to discuss these issues. Instead, they invited a LINK contribution to the current review of SOAs and CPPs. We are making this contribution but are not convinced that it will create a proper focus on environmental delivery.

3. Local Government Elections 2012

LINK encouraged Scotland's political parties and Councillors to ensure that sustainable development was at the heart of their manifestos in this year's local government elections. Our manifesto for the elections – *Acting Locally* – was designed to assist with policy development and to demonstrate how SOAs could be improved. Some of our members promoted our manifesto, held hustings meetings and contacted candidates. *Acting Locally* can be found at: <http://www.scotlink.org/files/publication/LINKReports/LINKActingLocally2012.pdf>. The policy ideas in the manifesto remain live and relevant.

4. Community Empowerment

LINK will engage in the debate over the Scottish Government's forthcoming Community Empowerment Bill. A briefing will set out our view that community empowerment can only be achieved if both communities of place and communities of interest are included in the process. It seeks to define the term "community".

5. Our Local Groups and Organisation

LINK is an umbrella body for Scotland's environmental community – and several of our member organisations have local branch structures. Across Scotland there are also many independent local groups dedicated to natural history, conservation, access and recreation, cultural heritage and other environmental purposes. We are investigating ways in which we can improve our cooperation with all these local groups.

6. Briefing Parliament

LINK is seeking to improve its engagement with the Scottish Parliament on these issues. In September 2011, LINK published a Parliamentary Briefing, [LINK Briefing for the Local Government and Regeneration Committee meeting of 14th September, 2011](#), submitting written evidence covering; planning; regeneration; local government; sustainability; and Scotland's environment. We gave oral evidence to the Committee – and are expanding our efforts to help to inform the work of Parliament in the area of local environmental concerns.

7. Preventative Spending

In March 2011, LINK made a [Submission to the Christie Commission](#). We argued that environmental spending was at the heart of the preventative spending agenda, underlying huge areas of health and well-being of Scotland's communities. Our suggested definition of community was adopted by the Commission.

Conclusion

Scotland's Councils are crucial to the delivery of sustainability, but at present environmental delivery by our local government is patchy. It can be significantly improved if the national framework and the local planning of Councils are enhanced. LINK intends to persist with this task of the improvement of environmental delivery at local levels. We believe that the best way to achieve this improvement is through the full and proper exercise of public scrutiny by our elected representatives in Holyrood and the Council Chambers.

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Scottish Environment LINK is a network of over 30 organisations working together for the well-being of Scotland's natural and cultural environment.

