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Parliamentary Briefing

**Local Government, Sustainable Development and Scotland’s Environment**

**From: Scottish Environment Link Parliamentary Office**

Scottish Environment LINK is the forum for Scotland’s voluntary environmental sector organisations, with over thirty members collectively representing around half a milli0n people. LINK has been working with local councillors, officers and agencies to further improve the environmental performance and understanding of Scotland’s Councils. LINK supports in principle a National Planning Framework with nationally agreed outcomes and indicators and scope for local prioritisation relevant to different Council areas, so long as this is appropriately underpinned with robust guidance, direction and support from national Government.

LINK offers support to Councils and Community Planning Partnerships through the on-going process of development of Single Outcome Agreements, particularly in relation to Scotland’s sustainable development commitments and its environment. LINK’s 2010 report[[1]](#footnote-1) prioritises ten areas: Biodiversity, Climate Change, Ecological Footprint, Education/Volunteering, Historic & Built Environment, Landscape, Physical Activity/Health, Recreational Access, Transport, Water & Flooding. LINK is monitoring these areas to see how they are faring. LINK has established dialogue about the process and future expectations with Scottish Government, the Improvement Service, CoSLA, SOLACE, SNH, SEPA and other Agencies, as well as the Sustainable Development Commission Scotland (now disbanded) and the Sustainable Scotland Network. In winter 2010/11 LINK commissioned from CAG Consultants an audit of SOAs[[2]](#footnote-2) which captured how sustainable development and the environment were being addressed by each CPP and determined emerging trends. This 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 can achieve more by joining up economic, social and environmental services. The audit did point to good practice by a few Councils which recognise the benefits of strong environmental policies in terms of adding value to health, jobs, and pride in the community; however many local authorities, along with their Community Planning Partnerships, were failing to see sustainable development as a priority.

Pursuing this, a seminar in February 2011 co-hosted by LINK and many of the above bodies, considered the process, shared experience, identified good practice which could be developed. Over two-thirds of CPPs were represented as well as Government and the other stakeholders. The independent report on this seminar[[3]](#footnote-3) indicates considerable common ground about how the SOA process should be supported and directed nationally, if Scotland is to succeed in delivering national commitments at the local level through concordat between national and local government.

Key recommendations are for:

* Leadership, both political and management
* Clear guidance and establishment of a more responsive mutual learning process
* Evidence base for Area Profiles to inform priorities and outcomes
* Small number of genuinely strategic local outcomes as basis for SOAs
* Great care to be taken to ensure indicators and targets don’t drive the process
* Improved accountability

LINK will continue to monitor the process in the lead-up to the Local Government elections in 2012 with the following work streams:

* **The LINK Local Government Manifesto** – We will produce a manifesto for local action in Autumn 2011 asking the political parties at national and local levels to commit to further improving environmental performance and suggesting measures to achieve this goal.
* **Working with Government and other Agencies** – We will continue discussions with Scottish Government and Agencies, the Improvement Service, CoSLA, SOLACE and SSN.
* **Monitoring Performance** – We are seeking ways to create a unified list of the legal powers and duties of the Councils for the environment and sustainable development and will look to ensure that a proper system of monitoring performance and delivery is put in place as the National Performance Framework is reviewed and taken forward from Summer 2011.

**For more information contact:**

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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.

1. <http://www.scotlink.org/files/publication/LINKReports/SOAreportJanuary2010.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <http://www.scotlink.org/files/publication/LINKReports/LINKsoaReportAudit2011.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <http://www.scotlink.org/files/policy/PositionPapers/LINKSOAseminarMar11.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)