

scottish community alliance

local people leading

The new normal: Strengthening the contribution of communities in fighting climate change

A Scottish Community Alliance submission to the Scottish Government's new Climate Change Plan

About the Scottish Community Alliance

Scottish Community Alliance's 20 member networks engage with over 2,000 community based organisations and enterprises located the length and breadth of Scotland, which:

- Have well over 100,000 individual members,
- Employ 5,500 staff,
- Engage 20,000 volunteers,
- Own or manage 250,000 hectares of land,
- Own or manage hundreds of buildings of all shapes and sizes
- Have a combined annual income of £600 million.

Our overarching aim is to help the community sector in Scotland to develop its own distinct identity and voice so that it can campaign effectively on a wide range of issues. We see our work as having two main functions – to promote the work of local people in their communities and to influence national policy development.

About this paper

In November 2016, Scottish Communities Climate Action Network (SCCAN), convened a meeting on behalf of Scottish Community Alliance to discuss the unique contribution of the community sector in tackling climate change; the barriers which hold the sector back; and the opportunities available for our sector to contribute to the Scottish Government's Climate Change Plan.

This paper is the output from that meeting and is intended to inform and support the Scottish Government in the development of the Climate Change Plan.

Executive summary

Climate change is radically altering the world around us and putting at risk the lives of millions of people. And yet the action that is required to avoid this global catastrophe provides a unique opportunity for transformation – to create a ‘new normal’. If this ‘new normal’ could be achieved the potential outcome is a way of life that is more sustainable, healthier and happier for everyone.

Communities are the places where the attitudinal and lifestyle changes needed to deliver our ambitious emission reductions targets can be normalised. In order to achieve the necessary buy-in to the process of decarbonising our country, the potential of our communities to instigate and integrate the ‘new normal’ needs to be fully harnessed.

To date, active engagement with communities on this agenda has been limited. We see this as a missed opportunity to capture the energy, enthusiasm and ingenuity that is inherent in all of the places we live.

Scottish Community Alliance Proposals

We call on the Scottish Government to:

1. Make an explicit statement within the Climate Change Plan committing local and national government to work with the community sector on the co-production and implementation of the Plan.
2. Make a commitment to on-going dialogue on climate action with the community sector, beginning with a cross-departmental roundtable discussion as a starting point towards developing a more effective and systematic approach to maximising the contribution of communities in the implementation of Scotland’s Climate Change Plan.
3. Recognise the contribution that locally led place plans (ref. review of Scotland’s planning system) can play in the identification of key challenges and opportunities that exist within communities to tackle climate change and in shaping what action local people will take in their transition to a low carbon future.
4. Streamline Scottish Government investment in communities and build in a requirement that all such investments must include consideration of its impact on climate change, in the same way that an equalities impact assessment is currently required.
5. We call on the Scottish Parliament to convene a Cross Party Group on climate action.

Scotland’s community sector has an extensive reach across the length and breadth of the country. Our unique ability to engage, connect with and empower individuals and whole communities is what makes our contribution so crucial. We operate mostly in the “social” sphere of the ISM model of behaviour change, working at a grassroots level, to stimulate behaviour change in ways that are beyond the reach of government and the private sector.

To enable our members to unleash change in the “social” sphere, we need government to transform the “material” context by removing barriers and perverse incentives and to create supportive physical and policy infrastructure and regulation.

We would welcome the opportunity to work together with officials to discuss and plan how to achieve this 'new normal' and embed the contribution and work of the community sector into the policies and proposals contained in the Climate Change Plan.

Introduction

“Scotland knows that moving to a low carbon future is not only a moral imperative, it is also a massive economic opportunity – and we are determined to lead by example.”

Nicola Sturgeon MSP, Speech for Climate Week NYC, 2015¹

Climate change is radically altering the world around us, increasing the number and severity of natural disasters, destroying wildlife and natural habitats and putting at risk the lives of millions of people around the world. Action to tackle human-caused climate change is already having a positive impact, with carbon emissions flat for the third year in a row². However, urgent action is needed to keep global temperature rise as close to 1.5°C as possible if we are to avoid catastrophic climate change.

In Scotland, significant progress has already been made in reducing harmful emissions, and the target to reduce emissions by 42% below 1990 levels has already been reached. In order to meet future targets and avoid the worst effects of climate change, even stronger action is now required.

The urgent and strong action required provides a unique opportunity for transformation – to create a 'new normal'. The potential for this 'new normal' is a way of life which is more sustainable, healthier and happier for everyone in Scotland.

There is now substantial evidence to show that taking action on climate change and moving towards a low carbon future can create jobs and economic opportunities, protect our air and water, restore our soil, improve health and wellbeing, and create warmer homes, better public transport and clean, sustainable energy.

The community sector has a crucial role to play in bringing about this 'new normal'. From the ground up, communities are transforming Scotland for the better, whether by creating social cohesion, strengthening the local economy or empowering people to come together for a common purpose. The contribution that the community sector makes is one which can change people's everyday lives for the better.

The Scottish Government's new Climate Change Plan, provides a chance to realise the opportunities of a new status quo, to strengthen communities and to address the challenges that climate change poses.

This paper from the Scottish Community Alliance sets out the unique contribution of communities in tackling climate change and creating a fairer, more prosperous Scotland,

¹ Nicola Sturgeon speech: <https://www.theclimategroup.org/what-we-do/news-and-blogs/scotland-determined-to-lead-by-example-on-climate-change-first-minister-nicola-sturgeon>

² “Global carbon growth stalls as US coal continues to slump” BBC News, 14th November 2016: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-37949878>

and calls on the Scottish Government to recognise and commit to strengthening that contribution in the new Climate Change Plan. Specifically, we call on the Government to make a commitment to ongoing dialogue on climate action with the community sector, beginning with a cross departmental roundtable discussion as a starting point to develop a more effective and systematic approach to maximising the contribution of communities in delivery of Scotland's climate change action plans. We believe that a co-productive, community based and integrated approach to tackling climate change can produce long lasting behaviour change and a wealth of co-benefits.

Community action in Scotland

About Scotland's community sector

The term "community sector" refers to the broad range of organisations and groups which operate at a local, community level. These can range from development trusts to community woodland groups, reuse and recycling initiatives to local energy companies and community gardens to credit unions. Typically, these organisations are small and local in scale, often informal, voluntary and typically with low levels of funding.

Despite this, the twenty Scottish Community Alliance (SCA) member networks actively engage with over 2,000 local groups, well over 100,000 individuals, employ 5,500 staff, own or manage a quarter of a million acres of land and have a combined income of £600 million. The scale and diversity of all this local activity creates the 'social glue' that binds a community together and generates the civic pride that people feel for the places in which they live.

Climate change will affect the whole of Scotland, but we will feel its effects most acutely, in our places, in our communities. Communities of place are therefore the crucible in which climate policy, political will and action will be forged.

In this way, climate action affords a space where many other shared ambitions and strengths may come together. Through co-production, communities and government can combine their strengths in creating the individual, social and material changes needed for a transition to a sustainable and thriving low carbon future.

We believe that the cornerstone for developing a more sustainable, inclusive and democratic society is for communities to have more control and responsibility for issues that matter most locally. All across the country there are examples of communities that have acted to empower themselves. The vision we share is of a vigorous community sector, able to engage in a new relationship between the state, community organisations and citizens. This includes recognising the contribution that locally led place plans (ref Planning Review) can play in the identification of key challenges and opportunities that exist locally to fight climate change and shaping what action local people will take in their transition to a low carbon future.

Our contribution

The community sector has an extensive reach, operating in every part of Scotland. Our unique ability to engage, connect with and empower individuals and whole communities is what makes this sector so crucial. We operate mostly in the "social" sphere of the ISM

model of behaviour change, working at a grassroots level, to stimulate behaviour change in ways that are beyond the reach of government and the private sector.

What is more, the community sector produces multiple benefits for local people, often with minimal input from the formal structures of the state. For example, it is the community sector which can gain the trust of vulnerable or hard to reach people and our activities often produce co-benefits such as improved health, warmer homes, lower bills or reduced social isolation.

A recent European research report³ into the community sector's contribution in tackling climate change states that the transition to a low-carbon society "...will need to take place at multiple scales, driven by governments, businesses and communities."

"At least as significant as the direct carbon savings that many of these initiatives are achieving are the wider environmental impacts, the awareness raising, the social cohesion, the creation of local livelihoods and retention of wealth in local economies and the feelings of empowerment that can come through working together to bring about change."

The new normal

After a year which will be the hottest on record, where conflicts in Syria, Iraq and Yemen have taken many thousands of lives, and where voters in the UK and USA astounded pollsters and opted for Brexit and Trump, it is not beyond the realms of possibility to imagine that a dramatically different world lies ahead – a world which is less safe, less inclusive, less caring and where our climate changes beyond the point of no return. But, if we act now, together, communities and the Scottish Government can develop a radically positive new normal – a more secure, equal, healthy, prosperous and caring world.

In 2014, the Scottish Communities Climate Action Network (a member of SCA) produced a vision for Scotland⁴, bringing together the aspirations of members for the coming decade.

The vision is of a nation of empowered democratic communities where people live and work locally, participate in practical training and education and where waste is a resource. The vision calls for a vibrant local food culture, effective locally-controlled energy and improved health and wellbeing through refurbished housing and support for active travel, convivial social spaces and local livelihood opportunities.

Adding to this vision, in March 2016 SCA published its own Vision for a Stronger Community Sector⁵ which sees a future where social justice and inclusion are accepted and expected norms. We want to build a Scotland with a culture of creativity and innovation and where communities actively work together and learn from each other.

³ Community Climate Action across Europe; 62 portraits from six countries, TESS, 2016: http://www.tess-transition.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/TESS-booklet_-_Community-Climate-Action-across-Europe.pdf

⁴ Vision for Scotland, Scottish Communities Climate Action Network, 2014: <http://www.scottishcommunitiescan.org.uk/vision-for-scotland-2024/>

⁵ [A Vision for a Stronger Community Sector, Scottish Community Alliance, 2016:](http://www.scottishcommunityalliance.org.uk/upload/final%20print%20version.pdf)
<http://www.scottishcommunityalliance.org.uk/upload/final%20print%20version.pdf>

This new normal is not so different from the vision put forward by the Scottish Government. Indeed, many parts of this vision are already happening, in innovative and creative communities across the country.

Barriers to progress

As well as recognising the strengths and achievements of the community sector, the Scottish Government must also recognise the barriers we face in creating a better Scotland.

Too often, the importance of our contribution to the health and well-being of civil society is not sufficiently recognised or actively supported by government, both at a local and national level.

Despite many positive actions such as the introduction of the Community Empowerment Act, the Scottish Government's drive for "sustainable economic growth" is at odds with the need for a new economic model, indicators other than GDP and a desire for greater equality and improved wellbeing.

Too often, community organisations are seen as peripheral to economic development, rather than central to it, despite the fact that our sector creates many local jobs, stimulates local economies by retaining wealth locally and contributes significantly towards the sustainability of places which would otherwise be neglected. What is more, the drive towards procurement and short term funding limits the scope of what the community sector can achieve.

In addition to these economic issues, we often find that both the power of community action and the struggles to make it happen can be overlooked by both central and local government. Many community organisations rely on a very small number of people working extremely hard and often for little or no money. This people power is what makes change happen, but it also means that many community organisations are fragile and vulnerable to disruptions. A more strategic and streamlined approach to Government investment in communities is necessary and all such investments must include consideration of its impact on climate change, in the same way that an equalities impact assessment is required.

To support more community action, this fragility and voluntary effort must be explicitly recognised. Often, it is soft infrastructure and capacity building such as small grants, connectivity and person to person support between government and communities that can make all the difference in creating sustainable action at a local level.

Finally, the community sector faces barriers to progress from the same challenges that face many individuals – issues such as poor quality housing and cold homes, a lack of access to local food, high land prices and a democratic deficit. Where such issues prevent individuals from participating in society, whether by denying them a voice in local matters or preventing them from living in or owning an affordable, comfortable home, those individuals are also less likely to participate in or contribute towards community organisations.

Similarly, inequality means that those who are better off in our society can often afford to opt out of helping those less fortunate than themselves. That means that communities miss out on those people's capacity, resources and abilities. Therefore, if the Scottish

Government is to support successful community level action on climate change, tackling inequality must also be part of the equation.

Opportunities for change

“At its heart, community empowerment is about communities taking their own decisions about their futures. It is a means for communities to take their own actions with access to all the resources available to them to develop their local economies, environments and cultures.

Derek Mackay MSP, former Minister for Local Government and Planning, from the consultation on the Community Empowerment Bill

Multiple opportunities exist for the community sector to fulfil its potential and play a central role in tackling climate. The Scottish Government has a responsibility to consider the community sector’s contribution and to help it overcome barriers and realise opportunities.

Momentum for change

Attitudes towards climate change are shifting. Research from Ipsos Mori⁶ and YouGov⁷ suggests that the proportion of people in the UK who agree that climate change is man-made and poses a threat is increasing and 50% of people polled by YouGov believe that there should be more action by government to tackle climate change.

In addition, community level action on climate change is increasing. For example, recycling rates continue to grow, now standing at nearly 45%, while the amount of waste going to landfill fell by nearly 17% between 2011 and 2014⁸.

The setting up of a Parliamentary Cross Party Group on climate action would be a step towards recognising the urgency of this issue and create a public forum for discussing the challenges and opportunities provided by the transformation to the ‘new normal’, low-carbon Scotland.

Building on community success

Since its introduction in 2008, 588 communities have accessed the Climate Challenge Fund to change behaviours, transform local environments and strengthen communities in the fight against climate change.

Many thousands of other communities are creating jobs, nurturing arts and culture, supporting local ecosystems and harnessing people power with small amounts of funding. Continuing and building on the Climate Challenge Fund, consolidating multiple funding streams and supporting multi-year grant funding will ensure that many more communities will be enabled to take action and transform their local area.

⁶ Ipsos MORI polling: <https://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/3667/UN-Climate-Change-Conference-Hearing-the-publics-voice.aspx>

⁷ YouGov poll for the Sunday Times, as published in the Carbon Brief: <https://www.carbonbrief.org/opposition-to-fracking-increases-again-finds-sunday-times-poll>

⁸ Zero Waste Scotland data on household waste in 2014: <http://www.zerowastescotland.org.uk/content/household-waste-data-2014>

Communities are increasingly innovative and creative. Willing to take risks and try out new ways of doing things, it is the community sector which is creating new lifestyles, new economies and new attitudes right across Scotland. By supporting such ventures, the Scottish Government can unlock innovation and help communities to connect with one another and to scale up successful projects. Investment in impact assessment will also help communities themselves to focus on trying out new ideas, instead of continually assessing activity and applying for funding.

Investment in and support for community action on climate change will have additional benefits. We know that climate justice is required here at home as well as around the world. The poorest and most deprived communities are almost always the ones with the lowest carbon footprint and therefore with the least capacity to do any more. Yet they are asked to take an equal responsibility for tackling climate change. By supporting the community sector and enabling it to grow in capacity and strength, the Scottish Government would also support people in some of our poorest communities and help them to realise the benefits of a low carbon future, from warm homes to green jobs.

Conclusion

The community sector is the social glue which holds Scotland together, building economies, developing social cohesion, improving health and wellbeing and creating a more sustainable environment.

If the Scottish Government is to be successful in tackling climate change, community action must be at the heart of any new plan. Similarly, if the Scottish Government's aims around community empowerment are to be realised, creating climate change resilient communities is essential.

The new Climate Change Plan must not be about simply protecting the status quo. Community organisations have shown through their innovation, creativity and determination, that a 'new normal' is not only possible but entirely necessary and desirable.

By removing barriers and taking opportunities to support communities, the Scottish Government can realise the potential of the community sector to ensure that climate change is not a disastrous end to our way of life but a catalyst for new, healthier, happier, more prosperous and more sustainable life for us all.

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