

Written evidence submitted by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities

As Development, Economy and Sustainability Spokesperson of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) the national and international voice of the 32 Scottish Local Authorities we are delighted to contribute to this enquiry on the Environmental Audit Committee.

We regard this inquiry as a timely exercise as the international negotiations for the Sustainable Development Goals enter a crucial phase ahead of the summit to take place in Paris end 2015.

We regard most of the Sustainable Development Goals as being eminently directly within the competence of Local Authorities, and this is why COSLA has been directly engaging with these discussions. On that basis we very much welcome that MPs scrutinise the UK Government discussion with Local Government to shape the UK negotiating position.

COSLA considers that Sustainable Development Goals are not just a matter of international development mainly concerning developing countries. By contrast the agreements at the 2015 Summit will eventually trickle down either directly via the UK or through new policy and legislation emanating from the European Union. Indeed the EU is currently formulating a new EU urban agenda that will incorporate the mandatory requirements at national and local level.

Furthermore once the agreement is reached on the Post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals, discussions will continue on how this will progress in terms of Sustainable Urban Development. This is already in discussion as part of the United Nations HABITAT III agreement expected for 2016.

Currently there has been no specific engagement with the UK Government in shaping the UK negotiating position with regards to either the Sustainable Development Goal or the HABITAT III agenda. We believe that this needs to change. Regardless of the ongoing constitutional discussions we believe that the UK Localism Act and its accompanying Policy Statement already foresee that whenever the UK Government enters into international negotiations directly concerning Local Government it should engage with Councils or their national representatives such as COSLA.

The Sustainable Development Goals and Habitat III directly concern Scottish Local Government and will affect existing policy arrangements in place in Scotland. Namely all major Scottish policy interventions on sustainable development are structured under the Single Outcome Agreements (SOAs) between the Scottish Government and the 32 Councils. Furthermore all Councils are signatories to Scotland's Climate Change Declaration. Social inclusion aspects of the Sustainable Development goals relate to our existing arrangement on Community Planning, Early Years, focus on prevention or preventative spend.

This is to simply reflect the many interactions between our existing domestic agendas and the Sustainable Development Goals and Habitat III. Hence we would be keen that UK policy moving forward is informed by and done in partnership with Local Government including Scottish Local Government.

We believe this is not only in the UK public interest but also would address the existing imbalance whereby COSLA engagement on this agenda is far more substantive by directly engaging in negotiations as part of our European umbrella organisation the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), which in turn is part of the United Cities and

Local Government (UCLG), itself a member of the United Nations Economic and Social Committee (UN ECOSOC).

Indeed CEMR/UCLG set up a Global Taskforce (www.gtf2016.org) to work on this international agenda and has been to date relatively successful in arguing for the so-called localisation of the Post-2015 negotiations, calling for a goal on sustainable cities & human settlements (Urban SDG), arguing that if urbanisation arises as one of the major challenges of the 21st century, local authorities will have a key role in delivering the SDGs. Part of that work has been a Strategic Partnership which has been signed with the European Commission to bring the SDG agenda forward. Finally preparatory work has started in HABITAT III in the Preparatory Conference held on the back of the September United Nations General Assembly.

Given all of the above, we note that whilst COSLA is actively engaged in this international agenda on its own, it is in the public interest that partnership work is established with the UK government, both to better shape the UK negotiating position and also to help instil a coordinated approach that can spread UK influence across these for a, whether that is via UK national or local governments.

Finally we would like to bring to Members attention that in parallel to the SDG and HABITAT III discussions new standards for Sustainable Urban Development are also being developed at the moment by the International Standardization Organization (ISO). Specifically ISO is developing a Standards on Sustainable Development and Resilience of Communities (to be named ISO / TC 268), covering Management Systems, Indicators of City Services and Quality of Life and smart community infrastructure. We believe that this not only cuts across with the above mentioned negotiations at the United Nations but it will also have a direct bearing in the way we do policy in the UK.

While ISO is a voluntary organisation experience shows that their standards end up being adopted as de facto binding requirements when not turned into legislation by national governments or the EU. The ISO member from the UK is the BSI Group which is incorporated under a Royal Charter and subject to the UK Government oversight by the Department of Business Innovation and Skills (BIS). Therefore we would welcome that this committee also included the ISO negotiations and the UK government actions as part of this inquiry.

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