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| To | Waikato District Council |
| From | Bessie Clarke, Policy Planner |
| Subject | Waikato District Council and the SDGs |
| Date | 27 February 2024 |

**Introduction**

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015 as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The SDGs are comprised of 17 unique global goals and are an urgent global call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030.

The 17 SDGs take an integrated approach, recognising the connections between ending of poverty and other depravations and improving access to health, education, reducing inequalities and enhancing economic growth- whilst simultaneously addressing climate change and preservation of oceans and forests. This is also recognised by the re-instating of the four wellbeing’s into the Local Government Act. This acknowledges the valuable role local leadership have in the promotion of the social, economic, environmental, and cultural well-being of citizens and communities and the links that exist between all four. Section 10, which outlines the purpose for local government, refers directly back to the four well-beings.

The universal nature and scale of the SDGs necessitates cooperation and collaboration across all levels of governance. Whilst implementation largely occurs at the national level, overall achievement is strongly dependant on progress made at the local level. New Zealand is a member state and therefore a signatory to Agenda 2030, however Council has not yet formally adopted the SDGs. Therefore, Waikato District Council (WDC) has a requirement to follow through on the national level directives and objectives to achieve the SDGs.

As a territorial authority, Waikato District Council (WDC) is in an advantageous position at a local level to implement the change necessary for the realisation of the SDGs. This memo will examine whether formally adopting the SDGs will provide further benefit to both achieving the SDGs as well as Council’s current climate and sustainability objectives.

**Relevant SDGs to WDC**

The interdependent nature of the SDGs is a deliberate approach to recognise the multiple, intersecting, and complex challenges individuals and communities face. The agenda is designed to be implemented as positive change simultaneously across various sectors of society, e.g., poverty, health, education, infrastructure, ocean health. Eight years on from the adoption of the SDGs, significant challenges remain to realise their completion. Rapidly changing climate, persistent conflicts, inequality, persistent pockets of poverty and hunger, rapid urbanisation, and environmental degradation all inhibit their success. Successfully addressing these issues requires an integrated approach that recognises that these challenges, and their solutions, are interrelated.

As a signatory to Agenda 2030, New Zealand is expected to deliver on these goals. As a territorial authority, the breadth of work WDC undertakes covers multiple areas of interests and tackles a range of issues for the community. It can therefore be argued that all 17 SDGs are in some way relevant, as all aspects of our work influence outcomes across all 17 areas.

Council’s Climate Response and Resilience Strategy, which was adopted by Council on 1 November 2023, identifies the following SDGs:

* 3 Good Health and Wellbeing
* 5 Gender Equality
* 6 Clean Water and Sanitation
* 7 Affordable and Clean Energy
* 9 Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure
* 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities
* 12 Responsible Consumption and Production
* 13 Climate Action
* 14 Life Below Water
* 15 Life on Land
* 17 Partnerships for the Goals

Policy Statement 9.4 of Council’s Climate Response and Resilience Policy states *“Set emission reduction targets in line with Central Government and partner Council’s commitments e.g., the Paris Agreement, UNSDGs, Glasgow Agreements, Waikato Regional Council.”*

Council’s Taiao (Nature) in the Waikato Strategy references the SDGs, highlighting SDG 15 (“Life on Land”) and the importance the earth, plant life, and forests and the dependence of both humans and millions of other species for their survival.

**Localising the SDGs**

Whilst majority of the implementation of the SDGs occurs primarily at the national level, achievement of the SDGs depends strongly on action and progress at a local government level.

SDG localisation is the process of translating the 2030 Agenda within the local context and challenges, defining, implementing, and monitoring local actions and strategies to contribute to the overall global achievement of the SDGs. The agenda emphasises the need for an inclusive and localised approach to the SDGs at all levels of governance and partnership with stakeholders in developing and implementing strategies, using transformative implementation and comprehensive methods for monitoring and reporting.

A report by United Cities and Local Government (2018) suggested that local authorities have important responsibilities in promoting the use of public transport (SDG 11), in developing waste management strategies that emphasise reuse and recycling (SDG 13) and in helping to mitigate the effects of climate change through emissions reduction[[1]](#footnote-1) (SDG 13).

Local stakeholders are critical to the process of the promotion of key values of culture (i.e., heritage, diversity, inclusion) and the transmission of knowledge as drivers and enablers of sustainable and inclusive development. In this context, distinct local cultures, including indigenous communities, minorities, and migrants, are incredibly valuable in developing local policies, ensuring the process is participative, legitimate, and truly representative of the local communities. More importantly, localisation will ensure that a key component, i.e., diversity, is being embraced.

**Example:** *Waikato Wellbeing Project*

Established in 2019 between WEL Energy Trust and Waikato Regional Council, using SDGS as a foundation, the project identified a set of 2030 wellbeing targets. The vision of the project is a more environmentally sustainable, prosperous, and inclusive Waikato by 2030. The WWP leadership model includes both a Kaitiaki Advisory Board and a group of 25 Manu Taki, each assigned to a certain SDG/target area. Te Ao Maaori plays a pivotal role in the Project and the basis for decision making[[2]](#footnote-2).

Further information about the Waikato Wellbeing Project can be found here <https://www.waikatowellbeingproject.co.nz/projects/>

**Formally adopting the SDGs**

Currently, Waikato District Council have not formally adopted or recognised the SDGs. This is despite referencing the SDGs throughout multiple documents and acknowledging the importance of sustainability, climate action and sustainable development.

The 2021 Auditor General’s review of the Government’s preparedness to implement the SDGs noted a lack of political leadership for implementing the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs[[3]](#footnote-3).

Council’s current Climate Action Plan accepts that there is a clear recognition of the crisis currently facing many communities and the importance of immediate action. Section 4.1 Living, Thriving and Connected Communities Vision states the following:

*‘It is accepted that without drastic action the world will face a significant climate crisis. Council recognises that if it does not progress from discussion to action regarding climate resilience, it is likely that climate hazards will significantly disrupt our vision for liveable, thriving and connected communities within the next 30 years. We have a legal, governmental, and moral obligation to balance our communities’ current needs, economic growth and our future.’*

The intention of the SDGs is to shift development towards sustainability by addressing and combating complex challenges. The question is whether Council formally adopting and implementing the SDGs will provide any benefit.

Alignment with the SDGs provides a platform to align local priorities with a global agenda and shape sustainability fit for a local context. Research has shown that the closer involvement of local actors when addressing key issues, the greater enhancement of translation of goals into concrete strategies, enhanced task coordination, mobilisation of resources, promotion of social accountability and most importantly, greater influence over decisions that affect them[[4]](#footnote-4). Greater involvement of local communities generates local ownership of the goals, and ultimately more buy in.

Adopting the SDGs provides an opportunity for Council to vividly show its response to the ever-present global challenges that have increasingly devastating local impacts, e.g., the impacts of extreme weather events caused by climate change on communities such as Port Waikato. Mapping existing strategies to the SDGs also allows for gaps in current priorities to be identified and shift the policy focus to long-term and transformative change.

*Links with new Community Outcomes*

Council’s new Community Outcomes were adopted on 7 June 2023. Community outcomes provide an opportunity for Council and the communities they serve to define well-being in a local context and how Council will contribute to delivering this.

The SDGs emphasise holistic achievement of sustainability, with many goals and targets strongly connected and dependant on each other. The new community outcomes take a similar approach, by recognising the interaction between the social, cultural, economic, and environmental aspects of well-being and the importance of addressing all four to achieve overall well-being.

There are links with the new Community Outcomes with the SDGs, for example:

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| **Community Outcome** | **Relevant SDG/Target** |
| Cultural: We celebrate all cultures | SDG 10 Reduced Inequalities (*specifically Target 10.2 By 2030, empower, and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status*) |
| Economic: We champion sustainable growth in our local economy. We support local enterprise and encourage innovation and socio-economic prosperity for all | SDG 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth, SDG 9 Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure |
| Environmental: Waterways which are healthy and create connections. We protect and enhance our soils, water and native biodiversity. | SDG 13 Climate Action, SDG 14 Life Below Water, SDG 15 Life on Land |
| Social: Communities are connected, safe, accessible and resilient…embrace partnerships to get things done | Connections across all SDGs, however most notably SDG 11 Sustainable and Communities, SDG 13 Climate Action, SDG 17 Partnerships |

The links between the community outcomes and the SDGs are one example of the connection the SDGs have to Council’s work. As Council endeavours to embed climate action as part of the ‘golden thread’ throughout Council and its functions, adopting, linking existing strategies, and monitoring and reporting allows for gaps in current priorities to be identified and shift the focus to long-term, transformative change.

Formally adopting the SDGs is not a standalone action. It must be followed by affirmative actions and commitments to see success.

*Staff and community education*

Embedding climate change and sustainability into the organisation as part of the golden thread identifies that in order for this to happen, we must educate and assist our staff and community and encourage them to take action. Induction and continued education to staff across the organisation is an opportunity to educate staff on what the SDGs are, to easily identify how one’s role is contributing to sustainability.

Community education is also key. Council had success in this space with the Climate Response Programme which trained 10 community climate advisors.

*Reporting*

Performance reporting is key in any organisation to review and analyse how the organisation is performing and where changes need to be made. In terms of sustainability this is no different. Adopting the SDGs, in alignment with the Climate Change Roadmap, would need to be accompanied with a dashboard that reports on progress towards them. Reporting has already been identified as a key component of embedding Climate Change and Sustainability as part of the golden thread and in the new Climate Response and Resilience Strategy.

Measuring and reporting on sustainability data, enables greater understanding of where reductions in emissions, waste, energy use, water consumption, and other impacts can take place. The SDG targets and indicators provide a starting point for Council to craft their distinct, local targets and indicators to achieve sustainability and undertake decisive climate action.

*Incorporation into Council plans, policies, documents etc*

Several Council documents currently identify the SDGs as relevant and important. However, they simply mention the goals without further analysis or information of exactly how the policy, plan, strategy etc will contribute to that certain SDG/s. Coupled with enhanced staff awareness, SDGs referred to in any Council document should be accompanied with how they will be met and reported on.

**EXAMPLE: Utrecht City Council, Netherlands**

Utrecht City Council is a good example of how a local council adopted the SDGs and subsequently continued to report on progress.

In 2018, Utrecht City Council (city in the Netherlands) adopted the SDGs as a guiding framework to position the city’s development to be sustainable and inclusive and to increase awareness of the SDGs amongst its residents and businesses. The framework has two main objectives firstly to create and support coalitions with local stakeholders, addressing international sustainable development challenges, and secondly convening and supporting local stakeholders to raise awareness and inspire action at the local level.

Utrecht City Council developed a ‘Global Goals Dashboard’, which presents SDG data in a user-friendly manner. Internally, it clearly illustrates to employees how the SDGs relate to their work. Externally, it provides an accessible, transparent, and interactive tool, keeping them residents informed about the city’s SDG progress.

**Next steps for Council**

Following this workshop, depending on the level of support from the elected members, the next step is to take a report to the Sustainability and Wellbeing Committee for it to consider recommending formal adoption by Council.

If Council chooses to formally adopt the SDGs, the following would be a recommended course of action to ensure such a statement is accompanied by effective action:

1. Identify priority goals for Council that align most to the district and our communities.

*Council can amend goals and targets to align themselves closely to the chosen goal. The intention is to raise awareness and understanding of the SDGs within Council. Staff education and awareness of what the SDGs are, their importance, and their relevance to WDC*

1. Decide how to work with stakeholders and partners to achieve collective success

*Partnerships are essential if councils are to respond to increasing demands with limited resources. They also foster a sense of shared responsibility.*

1. Implement and monitor

*For targets to be meaningful, there must be a means of reviewing progress. Identifying indicators and gathering data is essential to whether progress is being made. Such data can be useful in the context of national progress as well.*

**Conclusion**

Action at local government level plays a crucial role in developing and implementing strategies, methods, and tools for advancing the SDGs by integrating contextual considerations and mobilising resources and the relevant local actors. A 2022 OECD report titled ‘A Territorial Approach to the Sustainable Development Goals,’ states at least 105 of the 169 targets will not be reached without proper engagement and coordination with local and regional governments.

Waikato District Council already acknowledges the SDGs in various documents/strategies and the need to address them, however this only goes so far. This recognition could be enhanced by formally adopting the SDGs and developing and integrating reporting measures to gather data that can be used at a national level to inform New Zealand’s progress towards the SDGs as well as Waikato District’s progress in achieving climate and sustainability objectives.

There is an opportunity for Waikato District Council to incorporate reporting measures that assess Council’s progress towards certain SDGs that can contribute to data reporting at a national level.

Formally adopting the SDGs clearly illustrates Council’s commitment to sustainability and sustainable development. Achieving the SDGs and addressing the complex problems faced at the local, national, and global level requires a different approach to ensure we are achieving impact on the ground – one that needs to be people-centric, locally-led and globally supported, and anchored in the spirit and practice of partnership.

**Attachments:**

Attachment 1- Visual Map: Examples of links between the SDGs and WDC

1. <https://www.uclg.org/sites/default/files/uclg_y_los_sdg-web.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.waikatowellbeingproject.co.nz/> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://oag.parliament.nz/2021/sdgs> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/978-1-80043-798-220220002/full/html#s2> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)