



Overview & Scrutiny Commission

22 April 2024

Report Title	St Helens and the UN Sustainable Development Goals
Cabinet Portfolio	Corporate Services
Cabinet Member	Councillor Martin Bond
Exempt Report	No
Reason for Exemption	N/A
Key Decision	No
Public Notice issued	N/A
Wards Affected	All
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Borough Priorities	Ensure children and young people have a positive start in life	X
	Promote good health, independence, and care across our communities	X
	Create safe and strong communities and neighbourhoods for all	X
	Support a strong, thriving, inclusive and well-connected local economy	X
	Create green and vibrant places that reflect our heritage and culture	X
	Be a responsible Council	X

1. Summary

- 1.1 The Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) framework was adopted by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in 2015 and will be in force until 2030. The SDGs aim to address the key global challenges of economic, environmental, and social sustainability through a framework comprising of 17 global goals that collectively provide 'a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet'. The SDGs apply at both domestic level and overseas and UN member states are responsible for their implementation both at home and contributing to progress internationally.
- 1.2 St Helens is committed to delivering the SDGs locally, and each of the 17 SDG Goals have been mapped against the 6 priorities of St Helens 'Our Borough Strategy 2021-30' (see Appendix 1). The following report provides a brief assessment against the Sustainable Development Goal framework globally and attempts a further assessment of St Helens' position in relation to key aspects the SDG framework locally by drawing on a number of linked metrics and data sources.

2. Recommendations for Decision

Overview and Scrutiny Commission are recommended to:

(1) Note the report and St Helens latest position against the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

3. Purpose of this Report

- 3.1. The purpose of the report is two-fold. Firstly, to provide the Commission with an overview of the background to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Framework and a brief update on the latest position from the United Nations in relation to global progress. Secondly, the report attempts to present a further examination of St Helens position in relation to the SDGs, following on from the initial report to Overview and Scrutiny Commission in February 2023. In doing so, relevant metrics, many of which feature within St Helens Borough Strategy Performance Management Framework, have been mapped where possible against the 17 SDGs. St Helens latest available data for these metrics has subsequently been gathered and compared to the position both across the country as a whole and in relation to the North West. St Helens position has subsequently been RAG (Red, Amber, Green) rated to provide an overview of how the Borough compares to the England and North West position.

4. Background /Reasons for the recommendations

- 4.1. Background to the UN Sustainable Development Goals – In 2015 the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted by all United Nations Member States, both developed and developing in a global partnership (see Appendix 1). The SDGs Framework recognises that ending poverty and deprivation must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and drive economic growth, whilst tackling climate change and working to preserve the sustainability of the planet.
- 4.2. Within the framework of the 17 SDG headline goals, there are 169 targets, each with associated indicators that were established to allow the tracking of progress against each goal to demonstrate the progress made towards their achievement.
- 4.3. In July 2023, the United Nations published its latest [Sustainable Development Goals Report](#) which provided an overview of progress towards the 17 goals within the SDG framework using the latest available data. According to the report, which makes for harsh reading, 'we have

entered an age of polycrisis with conflict, climate change, lingering effects of Covid-19 pandemic and other global challenges playing their part to derail the hard-earned progress towards the SDGs'. In summary the report concludes:

- The world is still reeling from the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic with recovery being slow, uneven, and incomplete. This has led to significant reversals in global health outcomes and has contributed to the number of people living in extreme poverty increasing for the first time in a generation.
- Global conflict and human rights violations had displaced 110 million people, of which 35 million were refugees.
- The climate crisis is worsening as greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise, oceans are facing severe plastic pollution, and species extinction continues to grow.
- Developing countries are grappling with an unprecedented rise in external debt as a result of high inflation, rising interest rates, trade tensions and constrained fiscal capacity.
- The SDGs remain the roadmap out of these crises and for our own survival. However, the severity and magnitude of the challenges demand sweeping changes and accelerated action on a scale not yet seen in human history.

4.4. Following this, in September 2023, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a [political declaration to accelerate action towards achieving the SDGs](#). It was announced that despite commitments around SDGs, progress has been slow with only 15% of the targets being on track, with many other targets going in reverse. The declaration included a commitment to financing for developing countries and supports the proposal for an SDG Stimulus of at least \$500 billion annually. It also calls for reforming the international finance architecture to address outdated and unfair practices. In terms of challenges and urgent areas the following were confirmed:

- Hunger remains a critical issue, affecting millions of people globally.
- Transition to renewable energy needs acceleration.
- The benefits of digitisation must be more widely accessible.
- Collective action from all stakeholders is essential to meet the SDGs by the 2030 deadline.

4.5. Initial Assessment of St Helens' Position Against the Sustainable Development Goals Framework – St Helens like many other local authorities has committed to the delivery of the SDG Framework at a local level. Following the approval of the Our Borough Strategy 2021-30, and its outcome-based performance framework, the 17 SDGs were aligned against the Strategy's 6 high level priorities (see Appendix 1).

4.6. Following the alignment of the SDGs against the priorities of the Borough Strategy, a further exercise was undertaken to select and map a series of local metrics against the targets of the SDG Framework, where data for St Helens is readily available. It should be noted that some of the metrics selected are a like for like match against the indicators defined by the UN within the SDG framework. However, it should also be acknowledged that a number of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and associated global targets do not readily lend themselves to monitoring at a local authority level or are not applicable to an area such as St Helens. These include indicators in Sustainable Development Goals relating to Clean Water and Sanitation, Life Below Water and Life on Land.

- 4.7. The local metrics / indicators selected to provide an initial assessment of St Helens' position against the SDG framework are set out against the relevant Goals at Appendix 2. A good number of these metrics, 35 in total, are existing indicators that already feature within St Helens Performance Management Framework. Where there was not a like for like match to indicators within the UN SDG framework, a proxy metric available from St Helens statistics closest to the corresponding global SDG indicator has been selected. However, there are a number of SDG Goals where relevant local metrics do not readily exist and cannot currently be applied.
- 4.8. Following the selection of the relevant indicators / metrics, St Helens' latest available nationally verified data has been sourced and compared to the England and North West average. The following RAG (red, amber, green) rating has then been applied to each indicator / metric:
- 'Green' indicates St Helens' position vis a vis the latest available data is better than the England and North West average position,
 - 'Amber' indicates St Helens' position is within 95% of the England and North West average position
 - 'Red' indicates St Helens' position is worse than the England and North West average position by more than a 5% variance.
- 4.9 It should be noted that there are a small number of local indicators linked to the SDG framework at Appendix 2 that are currently reported within St Helens existing performance framework where no England or North West data is available for comparison. In the case of these indicators, the RAG status is derived from the latest assessment of performance against the local target for Quarter 3 2023/24 and labeled 'T'.
- 4.10 Prior to consideration of St Helens' position against the SDG Framework within Appendix 2, the following context should be taken into account. St Helens is a relatively highly deprived Borough with high levels of inequality in terms of health, income and employment compared to the country as a whole which have been endemic within the area for decades. The growing engagement and adoption of the SDGs at a local level within the UK has occurred during a period in which local authorities have been facing huge reductions in budgets and significantly increased demand for services. For the past decade and through the period of a global pandemic, and now an escalating cost-of-living crisis, local authorities have been asked to maintain services while having less and less resources to do so. Given the context of financial constraints and deprivation within the borough, coupled with the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living-crisis that has the potential to significantly deepen the inequality and poverty evident within St Helens, the achievement of progress against many of the SDG Goals remains a real challenge at a local level (see 4.13 below).
- 4.11 However, the challenge is also replicated at a UK level. Analysis from the second 'Measuring Up' report from the Global Compact Network UK, published in September 2022 concluded that progress in the UK towards the delivery of the 17 UN SDGs has remained fairly stagnant, with performance only classed as good on 17% of the targets relevant to the domestic delivery of the goals and regression recorded in a number of areas. The report expresses concern that poverty is deepening, with the number of people facing in-work poverty having increased even before energy and food prices began to increase. The report concludes that there is still a need for a holistic approach to policymaking and collaboration, backed by transformative action to maximise positive outcomes across the Goals, and that considering the UK Government's levelling up agenda and the cost-of-living crisis, more needs to be done to reduce inequality in this country.

- 4.12 In October 2023, a [Westminster Hall Debate on the UK progress on the UN SDG's](#) took place which concluded the UK is only performing well on 21% of the relevant targets related to the domestic delivery of the SDG's. There have been improvements in 24 targets, regression in 14 targets and no change in 64 targets. Notable trends include:
- The UK has made good progress in reducing food waste since 2007, with an estimated 15% reduction.
 - Childhood obesity rates have surged, affecting one in four reception-aged children and two in five year 6 children in England.
 - Prevalence of Food and Nutritious Food is a critical concern and is likely to worsen.
 - The pandemic has significantly affected progress on the SDGs, and its full extent is yet to be revealed.
- 4.13 The latest picture presented at Appendix 2 to in relation to St Helens position against the SDG framework continues as is perhaps to be expected given the socio-economic make-up of the borough, some of the long-standing challenges it faces and the disparity between northern boroughs and the country as a whole. St Helens position is worse than the England average for the majority of indicators across the SDGs. When St Helens position is compared to the North West average the picture changes somewhat and performance in a number of areas is shown as better than the North West average.
- 4.14 Key challenges where the Borough lags the England average have not significantly changed since the 2023 report and are highlighted below against the relevant SDGs.

Sustainable Development Goal	Areas of Challenge Indicators
No Poverty	Overall deprivation, income deprivation affecting children and older people, and pension credit claimants
Zero Hunger	Adult and child obesity rates and healthy diet indicator
Good Health and Wellbeing	Life expectancy indicators and mortality rates for suicide, alcohol related conditions, CVD, cancer, and respiratory disease
Quality Education	The Early Learning Goals indicator, Attainment at Key Stage 2 and 4, school absence rates and Level 3 and Level 4 skill levels
Gender Equality	Female gross weekly pay and domestic abuse incidence
Affordable and Clean Energy	Households in fuel poverty
Decent Work and Economic Growth	GVA, male universal credit count and business density
Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure	The percentage of professional and scientific jobs
Responsible Consumption and Production	Household recycling rates

Climate Action	CO2 emissions per capita
Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions	Overall crime and violent crime rates

5 Consideration of Alternatives

5.1 None.

6 Conclusions

6.1 The report highlights the fact that significant challenges both locally, nationally, and globally remain in the delivery of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The challenges against the delivery of the SDGs locally within St Helens are well known and broadly encompass the health of the local population, the local economy, and aspects of the local environment.

6.2 There is a strong linkage between the 17 SDGs and the outcomes and the associated performance framework of the Our Borough Strategy 2021-30. The Our Borough Strategy 2021-30 and its range of sub-strategies have been adopted to promote a better borough by improving people's lives and creating distinct, attractive, healthy, safe, inclusive, and accessible places in which to live, work, visit and invest. Action to achieve this end is ongoing through the delivery of this strategic approach.

6.3 However, if St Helens is to deliver against the SDG indicators and improve its position relative to the national average position, further transformative action both locally and perhaps more importantly at a UK Government level is still urgently required.

7. Legal Implications

7.1 None

8. Financial Implications

8.1 The indicators within the SDG framework, the council's performance management framework and associated performance management processes are critical to ensuring the organisation provides value for money.

9. Equality Impact Assessment

9.1. None

10. Social Value

10.1 The SDG Framework and indicators include measures relating to the voluntary / community sector, employment, and the local economy.

11. Net Zero and Environment

11.1 The SDG Framework and indicators include measures relating to sustainability and the environment.

12. Health and Wellbeing

12.1 The SDG Framework and indicators include measures relating to health and well-being.

13. Equality and Human Rights

13.1 None

14. Customer and Resident

14.1 The SDG Framework and indicators include measures relating to the well-being of residents.

15. Asset and Property

15.1 None

16. Staffing and Human Resources

16.1 None

17. Risks

17.1 There is a risk that performance across the SDGs and indicators may decline in some areas. Progress against the Council's performance framework is reported quarterly to Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny. Progress against key strategies will be reported periodically.

18. Policy Framework Implications

18.1. The SDG framework links to the priorities of the Our Borough Strategy, related key council strategies and the council's performance framework.

19. Impact and Opportunities on Localities

19.1. There is the opportunity to link aspects of the SDG framework and the council's performance framework to the Localities agenda and report elements of performance at a locality level. Locality profiles exist within the [Local Insight](#) tool.

20. Background Documents

20.1 None

21. Appendices

21.1 Appendix 1 - Sustainable Development Goals Mapped to Our Borough Strategy Priorities.

21.2 Appendix 2 - 2024 Assessment of St Helens' Position Against the Sustainable Development Goals Framework.