# **Participating in a Peer to Peer Review** – A Guide for Public Bodies

This short guide has been developed by the Sustainable Scotland Network (SSN) to support public bodies in carrying out peer to peer review of Climate Change Reports. It is intended to support the flexible nature of peer review and public sector organisations should use it to the extent that they deem appropriate.

## **What is Peer to Peer review?**

Peer to peer review is a review of a public body’s climate change report by another public body (or bodies) also reporting under the climate change duties. It can be considered:

* a ‘critical friend’ assessment of whether the body is taking all reasonable steps to produce an accurate and complete climate change report;
* an opportunity for public bodies to discuss their approach to climate change reporting with other bodies, to encourage knowledge sharing and continuous improvement across the public sector;
* a process of self-regulation by the public sector to maintain standards, improve performance and provide credibility to reported information.

Peer to peer review:

* is not a formal audit or assessment;
* does not deliver a scored assessment;
* is not driven by external requirements or standards;
* is not reported to government.

## **Planning a review**

A review may take many forms, from an individual evaluation of another body’s report to a workshop with many participating organisations. Participating organisations can determine the most appropriate approach given their circumstances, or speak with SSN if unsure.

In planning a review, consider the following:

* The scope of the review – for example, is the intention to include the full report content or are there particular topics you feel would benefit most from a peer to peer discussion? How detailed should the review be?
* The type of organisation(s) to engage with – for example, you may partner with organisations based on the nature of your functions, emissions profile, size or geographical considerations.
* The review method – such as one-on-one or workshop based, face to face or virtual/desk-based reviews. How will you capture the outcomes of the review?
* Who should be involved – which staff from each organisation should be involved in review conversations (typically those responsible for the report as well as significant contributors).
* Timing – consider the 30 November deadline and the reporting timelines for the participant organisations. Allow plenty of time to address review findings before completion and sign off of reports.

# **Review Questions**

Below are some questions bodies may consider when critically reviewing another organisation’s report. In general, you are looking to determine whether the reported information makes sense, is well explained and appears appropriate given the nature and scale of the organisation.

Consider whether the organisation has clearly explained their reported information. For example, have they used the comments fields to provide context, explain methodologies, state any assumptions or gaps, comment on effectiveness of projects and activities etc.

**Section 1: Profile of reporting body**

Has the body reported sufficient information for the reader to understand the environment within which they are operating?

*Has the body highlighted relevant information on unique functions or services, or unique considerations in relation to climate change?*

Is the context and scale of the organisation apparent?

**Section 2: Governance, Management and Strategy**

Has the body demonstrated a robust system of governance?

*i.e. do governance arrangements appear appropriate given the nature and scale of the organisation?*

Does the report clearly indicate where responsibility & accountability lies? Have responsibilities been clearly defined and do they appear to be well understood by the body?

Has the body demonstrated how governance arrangements have proven to be effective in dealing with climate change responsibilities?

*Examples could include decisions related to climate change taken during the year by governance bodies or management teams.*

**Section 3: Emissions, Targets and Projects**

Considering the functions of the organisation, does the boundary they have defined appear appropriate?

*i.e. have they included all emission sources you would expect to see (electricity, gas, other heating, waste, water, transport?*

In particular, have all reasonable scope 3 emission sources been included?

*Waste, water supply, water treatment and business travel are typically expected, further sources are encouraged where it is possible to measure or accurately estimate them.*

Have exclusions been clearly explained and do the exclusions appear reasonable?

Is the body using consistent methodologies so that emissions can be meaningfully compared over time?

*Changes in methodology, data sources, boundary etc should be clearly stated.*

Are scopes correctly applied? Have comments been used to identify that the correct scope is applied *(Best practice is to use comments to state ‘fleet transport’ or ‘business travel’ for transport sources so it is clear whether the source is scope 1 or scope 3 emissions).*

Have assumptions, estimates, data sources & methodologies been clearly explained?

Has the body defined targets which appear attainable based on the information provided? Are they transparently reporting progress against targets?

Are projects well explained and is good data available to track progress

**Section 4: Adaptation**

Has the body clearly defined the status of their adaptation activities?

*For example, if the body has not yet carried out a climate risk assessment is this explained in the report? Has this been planned into future activities?*

If the body has identified climate risks, have appropriate measures been put in place to manage these risks? Are the measures clearly explained in the report?

*i.e. strategic plans, policies, action plans addressing climate risks.*

Does the body’s level of progress with adaptation appear reasonable considering their operating context and level of maturity with climate change more generally?

Has the body used Adaptation Scotland guidance/tools?

Has the body reported progress made in delivering policies and proposals in the Scottish Climate Change Adaptation Programme?

Have priorities for adaptation been defined and do they appear relevant given the type and scale of the organisation?

**Section 5: Procurement**

Does the body have a procurement policy in place? If so, are the objectives well defined as they relate to climate change duties?

*i.e. does the policy specifically reference efforts to influence emissions reduction, adaptation and acting sustainably?*

Have specific procurement activities been reported? Is it clear how sustainable procurement considerations were applied in carrying out those procurement activities?

Is the body making efforts to quantify the climate change (emissions / adaptation) impact of procurement decisions? If not is there an opportunity for them to do so?

**Section 6: Validation**

Do the body’s internal review procedures appear robust and reasonable given their scale?

Are data management and document management processes explained, where relevant?

Does the body appear to have taken reasonable steps to ensure their report is a true and accurate reflection of their organisation’s activities as they relate to climate change?

Do the body’s validation activities appear to be proportionate to the scale and nature of their operations?

*For example, a large and/or complex carbon footprint may warrant a greater degree of validation, for example external.*

Has the report been signed off by a person with senior responsibility within the organisation?

**Section 7: Wider Influence**

Has the body completed any questions in the wider-influence section?

Does the information reported appear to be a good representation of the body’s wider influence? Are there further initiatives or activities they could include that seem to be missing?

If the body is not reporting on wider influence, is there an opportunity for the organisation to start doing so? *i.e. do they have a policy or strategy to influence beyond their corporate boundary in relation to climate change or do they have a future intention to do so?*

## **Recording outcomes**

## If your organisation has participated in a peer review process, you should document the following in section 6 of your Public Bodies Climate Change Duties Report:

* The organisation(s) involved;
* The scope of the review;
* Which staff participated in the review process (and their roles);
* The format of the review (e.g. workshop, face to face meeting between two bodies);
* The key findings and actions arising as a result of the review;
* Any other information you think is relevant.

This helps SSN and other report users understand the level of scrutiny your report has been subjected to. We can also use this to identify any themes emerging across the public sector in relation to knowledge sharing and continuous improvement.

It is also suggested that you capture more detailed findings from the review for your own records. For example, if you use the review questions in this guide you may decide to document responses against each question, or alternatively you could summarise the key findings for each section of the report.

## **Further support**

SSN are available to support peer to peer reviews by providing additional guidance to help you plan and prepare for a review. We may also be able to attend review meetings or workshops.

For a discussion on how SSN may be able to support your peer to peer review activities, contact ssn@keepscotlandbeautiful.org.