ET (21-22) 5.8 - Climate Action Plan

SAAS Executive Team	
Date of Meeting	28 September 2021
Agenda Item/Subject	SAAS Climate Action Plan
Prepared By	▮▮▮▮▮
Purpose	Decide

1. Background

1.1. The purpose of this paper is to set out some practical proposals on how SAAS can reduce its carbon footprint, contribute to meeting Scotland's targets on carbon emissions and help to slow climate change.

1.2. This paper and the recommendations in it will be familiar to members of ET as an earlier draft was brought to an informal meeting of ET in June 2021 for discussion. Following that discussion, I updated the paper in line with points made.

1.3. That revised draft is now being brought to a formal meeting of ET for sign-off.

2. Key Points

2.1. In 2019 the Scottish Government declared that we faced a climate emergency. SAAS has a part to play in responding to that emergency. At the heart of that response is reducing SAAS's own direct and indirect carbon emissions.

2.2. Central to addressing the climate emergency and limiting the negative impacts of climate change is the reduction of carbon equivalent emissions (C02e). Only huge and urgent changes in carbon emissions will prevent the crossing of two key climate change tipping points – an increase of 2 degrees C in average global temperatures since 1880 and an increase in levels of CO_2 in the atmosphere beyond 450 parts per million.

2.3. In 2019 the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament committed to Scotland having net zero carbon emissions by 2045. SAAS needs to plays its part by becoming carbon neutral as an organisation. We are well placed to do that and to do it significantly sooner than 2045.

2.4. SAAS is responsible for very limited direct emissions but significant indirect ("Scope 3") emissions, in particular through travel (primarily commuting and to a lesser extent business travel).

2.5. Other sources of emissions include the heating and powering of Saughton House, our use of servers (which consume large amounts of electricity) and the goods and services we purchase.

2.6. SAAS has both a responsibility and a capability to reduce these emissions.

3. Recommendations

3.1. We could begin by identifying and agreeing where the main opportunities to reduce our carbon footprint are and prioritise them. The biggest opportunities appear to be in the areas of staff commuting and business travel (including but not exclusively funding awareness visits). This is not about stopping these activities altogether but about exploring and implementing changes to reduce emissions related to these activities. For commuting, increased working from home is one of the changes that can reduce emissions. For our Funding Awareness Outreach team, a move to a post-pandemic hybrid model of face-to-face and virtual events could make a difference. We could also make greater use of electric vehicles where private transport is needed for business purposes. A bid was submitted for funding for SAAS's own electric vehicle and the options that came out of this exercise could be revisited.

3.2. In addition, there will also be opportunities for SG to reduce the carbon footprint of Saughton House and there may be opportunities for us to reduce the amount of electricity used by our servers. Other areas for exploration could include our supply chain and procurement. Creating our own baselines and studying advice and good practice from other organisations will help to confirm or revise our priorities.

Establishing a baseline for some of the areas above will help to establish which of these areas offer the biggest opportunities for change and allow us to measure change over time. In particular, it is proposed that we move quickly to establish baselines for staff commuting and for business travel. We could use 2019/20 (pre-Covid) as our baseline year. The UK Government publishes guidance and formulas to help organisations establish their own baselines:

Greenhouse gas reporting: conversion factors 2020 - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

RECOMMENDATION 1: THAT WE CREATE BASELINES FOR THE CO2e EMISSIONS FROM OUR COMMUTING AND BUSINESS TRAVEL.

RECOMMENDATION 2: THAT WE ALSO EXPLORE WHETHER THIS IS POSSIBLE FOR OUR ENERGY USE IN SAUGHTON HOUSE, FOR THE ENERGY USED BY OUR SERVERS AND FOR THE ENERGY USED AS A RESULT OF INCREASED WORKING FROM HOME.

RECOMMENDATION 3: THAT WE REVISIT THE OPPORTUNITIES AND OPTIONS FOR SAAS TO USE ELECTRIC VEHICLES FOR BUSINESS TRAVEL WHERE A PRIVATE VEHICLE IS NEEDED (E.G. USE OF SG ELECTRIC POOL VEHICLES; HIRING OF ELECTRIC VEHICLES; CAR CLUB(S); PURCHASE OR LEASING OF OWN VEHICLE).

3.3. It has been agreed that going forward we include environmental measures in SAAS's long-term performance framework. These measures could focus on SAAS's carbon footprint including commuting and business travel and could involve reporting against the baselines in Recommendation 1 above. They could also include other priority areas if these are agreed.

RECOMMENDATION 4: THAT THE PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT PROJECT TEAM WORK WITH THE SAAS ENVIRONMENTAL GROUP TO DEVELOP RELEVANT MEASURES.

3.4. It is proposed that we liaise with core SG about the potential to increase the energy efficiency of Saughton House and reduce its carbon footprint. This could include identifying steps that are in SAAS's gift as well as lobbying core SG to make improvements.

RECOMMENDATION 5: THAT SAAS'S SAUGHTON HOUSE LIAISON STAFF MEET THE SG ESTATES TEAM TO DISCUSS CURRENT SG INITIATIVES FOR SAUGHTON HOUSE AND AREAS WHERE SAAS COULD MAKE ITS OWN CHANGES AND IMPROVEMENTS (E.G. COLLECTING DATA ON SAAS'S ENERGY USE WITHIN OUR SPURS SEPARATED OUT FROM WIDER DATA ON ENERGY USE IN SAUGHTON HOUSE AS A WHOLE).

SAAS could use its role and in particular the two websites, the SAAS website and SIS, to raise awareness of the COP26 Conference and carry links to SG Comms about the conference. The SIS and SAAS websites could also be used to publicise relevant initiatives to students e.g. free bike servicing; public transport subsidies.

RECOMMENDATION 6: THAT SAAS COMMS TAKE OPPORTUNITIES TO RAISE AWARENESS OF AND PUBLICISE COP26 ON THE SIS AND SAAS WEBSITES.

3.5. The last year has shown that SAAS can operate with minimal amounts of paper and printing. We could make this a SAAS policy going forward, supported by practical steps e.g. removing most of the printers from our spurs.

RECOMMENDATION 7: THAT WE CELEBRATE AND RE-ENFORCE THAT SAAS HAS BECOME A PAPER-LITE ORGANISATION AND CONSIDER COMMITTING TO MAKE SAAS A PAPERLESS ORGANISATION.

3.6. To increase awareness and generate momentum, some of the recommendations above could be announced or progressed as part of an intensive internal comms campaign – e.g. a SAAS Environmental Week or perhaps to coincide with COP26 in November 2021.

RECOMMENDATION 8: THAT SAAS COMMS LOOK AT OPPORTUNITIES TO PUBLICISE PROGRESS ON THE RECOMMENDATIONS ABOVE AND RELATED ISSUES, PERHAPS AS PART OF AN ENVIRONMENTAL WEEK OR IN CONNECTION WITH COP26.

4. Conclusion

4.1. ET are asked to review the Climate Action Plan as revised following earlier discussions and to agree the recommendations above.

Additional Information

The science:

It is now agreed that average global temperatures have increased by at least 1 degree C since 1880 and an increase of at least 1.5 degrees is inevitable. Many scientists see an increase of 2 degrees C as a tipping point at which the impacts of climate change become much worse and even harder to reverse.

The driver of these increases in average temperature has been the increase of global greenhouse gases in the atmosphere since the Industrial Revolution. Levels of carbon in the atmosphere have increased from 275 parts per million (ppm) in 1800 to about 420 ppm today with levels currently increasing by about 4ppm each year. Another tipping point has been identified at 450ppm. Without significant changes, this tipping point will be breached in the late 2020s. The only effective way to reduce the impacts and the risks of climate change is to take action now to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The sources of the information and ideas above:

The opportunities and priorities set out in the Recommendations section above have been developed in the light of training provided by the Royal Scottish Geographical Society (as part of the Climate Solutions course that they have developed with relevant academics and SG), learning and good practice developed in other organisations, most notably Zero Waste Scotland (ZWS) and Strathclyde University, and input from the SAAS Environmental Group.

ZWS have 120 staff based in two buildings in the centre of Stirling close to the train station. Baselining has shown that their main sources of emissions and their main opportunities to reduce emissions come from staff commuting and business travel. The majority of their staff will be working remotely post-pandemic, in part to reduce carbon emissions. In addition, they have also made significant reductions in their use of electricity by reducing their number of servers. They are also exploring ways to make their buildings more efficient.

Strathclyde University have focussed on making their estate more energy efficient. Business travel is another major source of emissions for them and they are looking at ways to reduce this.

Strathclyde University have suggested that the Scottish Parliament is another organisation that SAAS could share ideas with and learn from.

Baselining:

Baselining is something that SAAS could take forward itself using widely used guidance and definitions developed by BEIS and drawing on good practice elsewhere – for example, ZWS were able to baseline their staff commuting-related emissions using the BEIS definitions and formulas and a staff survey which they would be happy to make available to us.

Possible measures:

Could include things like:

➢ Annual carbon emissions from staff commuting
➢ Annual carbon emissions from business travel
➢ SAAS's annual heating and other energy costs within Saughton House.