

Localisation of the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals in Sheffield

**SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT
GOALS**



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1. Introduction of the City and the Co-production Process

This is the final report of a project that explored local engagement with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Sheffield, a city and metropolitan borough in South Yorkshire, UK with an estimated population of 585,506. Sheffield is one of the eight largest regional cities that make up the English Core Cities group. The Sheffield SDG localisation case study was led by researchers from the Realising Just Cities programme at the University of Sheffield's Urban Institute, working in partnership with Sheffield City Council.

In Sheffield, the Mistra Urban Futures project instigated local engagement with the SDGs that was not happening prior to the research taking place. This initially took the form of conversations between project lead Nick Taylor Buck and Sheffield City Council officials to scope local awareness of and interest in working with the SDGs. Following the appointment of Kristina Diprose as the SDG Research Associate in August 2018, the Urban Institute and Sheffield City Council agreed a partnership to explore local engagement with the SDGs through coproduced research activities.

The local aims of this research were to understand the relevance and usefulness of the SDGs for Sheffield City Council and its partners, to learn from other cities' experiences of implementing the SDGs, and, contingent on the findings of this work, to coproduce a forward plan for Sheffield's engagement with the SDGs. Sheffield SDG research and engagement activities included a researcher-led review of local policy alignment with the SDGs, stakeholder interviews, and dialogues with various city officials, groups and city partnerships.

2. Localisation of the SDGs in the City - Main actors and Activities

The only SDG localisation activity that has taken place in Sheffield is activity that has happened as a direct result of this research project, and has been researcher rather than city led. The main point of contact at Sheffield City Council has been the Interim Head of Sustainability, through which we have connected with other city officials working in energy, flooding, health, housing, infrastructure, partnerships, planning, policy, sustainability and transport (7 of which we interviewed). Additionally, we interviewed representatives from both city universities (University of Sheffield and Sheffield Hallam), neighbouring local authorities Barnsley and Doncaster (6), Sheffield City Region combined authority (2), and members of the Green City Partnership Board (6), which includes external cross-sector representation from across the city. The timeline below details the local research and engagement activities that have taken place, primarily over a 13-month period from September 2018 to September 2019, up to the preparation of this city report.

When	What
Late 2017	Initial stakeholder interviews to scope the project.
Sep 2018	Research team presents draft project to Sheffield City Council's

	Sustainability Programme Group.
Oct 2018	First meeting of the research team and Council officers to agree and plan research activities. Research team completes a pilot desk-based analysis of local policy alignment with the SDGs.
Nov 2018	Research team participates in SDG cross-city knowledge exchange sessions at the Mistra Urban Futures' conference and writes a briefing note for the Council on partner cities' work with the SDGs.
Dec 2019	Research team and Council officers meet to exchange feedback on the local policy alignment pilot report and learning from the conference.
Jan 2019	Research team completes an analysis of Sheffield Transport Strategy's alignment with the SDGs and meets Council officers to discuss this work.
Feb and Mar 2019	Stakeholder interviews with Sheffield City Council officials, neighbouring Councils and City Region.
Apr 2019	Research team presents interim findings at Sheffield City Council Partnership Managers Meeting; further meetings with Council officials.
Jun 2019	Sheffield hosts a national workshop on Localising the Sustainable Development Goals, with UKSSD.
Jul and Aug 2019	Stakeholder interviews with the Green City Partnership Board. Research team updates policy alignment work and drafts final city report.

3. The New Urban Agenda in the case study cities

Locally, we are not aware of any discussion of or work around the New Urban Agenda. The NUA has very limited national visibility in the UK. We are not aware of any national policies or guidance documents that relate to the NUA, nor of any UK local authorities or city regions that are working with it. Given that, in this project, we were already introducing the City Council to an international framework (the SDGs) that is not high on the national or local radar, the Sheffield research team took the decision to exclude the NUA as an additional focus of the research.

4. City Administration with other actors in relation to the SDGs

As part of our research and engagement activities, Sheffield City Council's Interim Head of Sustainability suggested that we interview Green City Partnership Board members to ascertain their awareness of and views on the SDGs, and to find out whether other organisations in the city are using the framework. We interviewed representatives from the private sector (Arup and Veolia), the voluntary sector (Community Energy England and Sheffield Climate Alliance), academia (Sheffield Hallam University) and the city's Director of Public Health. Additionally, we interviewed the academic and student leads for sustainability at the University of Sheffield. Findings from these conversations and others with local government officials will inform a final

report to Sheffield City Council. The Council will then decide whether it wants to take forward any direct stakeholder engagement around the SDGs.

There appears to be **greater awareness of the SDGs in other sectors**. Stakeholders from both Sheffield Universities and from Sheffield's Green City Partnership Board highlighted how the SDGs can be used to frame corporate social responsibility agendas, organisational strategies and project plans.

Envisaged **benefits of engaging with the SDGs** at a local level include: using them as a communications tool with colleagues and citizens; drawing on the international status and provenance of the SDGs to highlight ambitions for transforming cities; cross-referencing strategies in development and identifying gaps; combating silo thinking; encouraging partnerships; using them as a basis for developing local targets; and demonstrating progress towards sustainability.

The **challenges of localising the SDGs** include: uncertainty about their status and lack of incentive for local government to align its work with them; a crowded marketplace of indicator frameworks and the limited availability of data at a local level; the impact of austerity on local sustainable development planning; national policies that undermine local efforts, e.g. to end poverty or promote renewable energy; and lack of knowledge about how to practically implement a framework that sits across so many different policy areas.

The SDGs can be useful for highlighting **tensions and trade-offs** between different policy goals and finding solutions. Green City Partnership Board members suggested, for example, that the SDGs could be used to focus on a 'just transition' in the context of the climate emergency and Sheffield's zero carbon ambitions.

5. SDGs Role in Urban Sustainability

Stakeholder interviews highlighted **low awareness of the SDGs among local government officials**; officials had either not encountered the SDGs before, or described themselves as "vaguely" or "superficially" aware of them. There is **limited understanding that the SDGs are relevant to local policymaking**. Rather, most stakeholders expect that – if the SDGs are important – the Government will translate them into national policy frameworks that filter down into city planning. Local government officials are **unsure of the national status of the SDGs** and have not encountered them in the policy frameworks and funding criteria that they work with day-to-day.

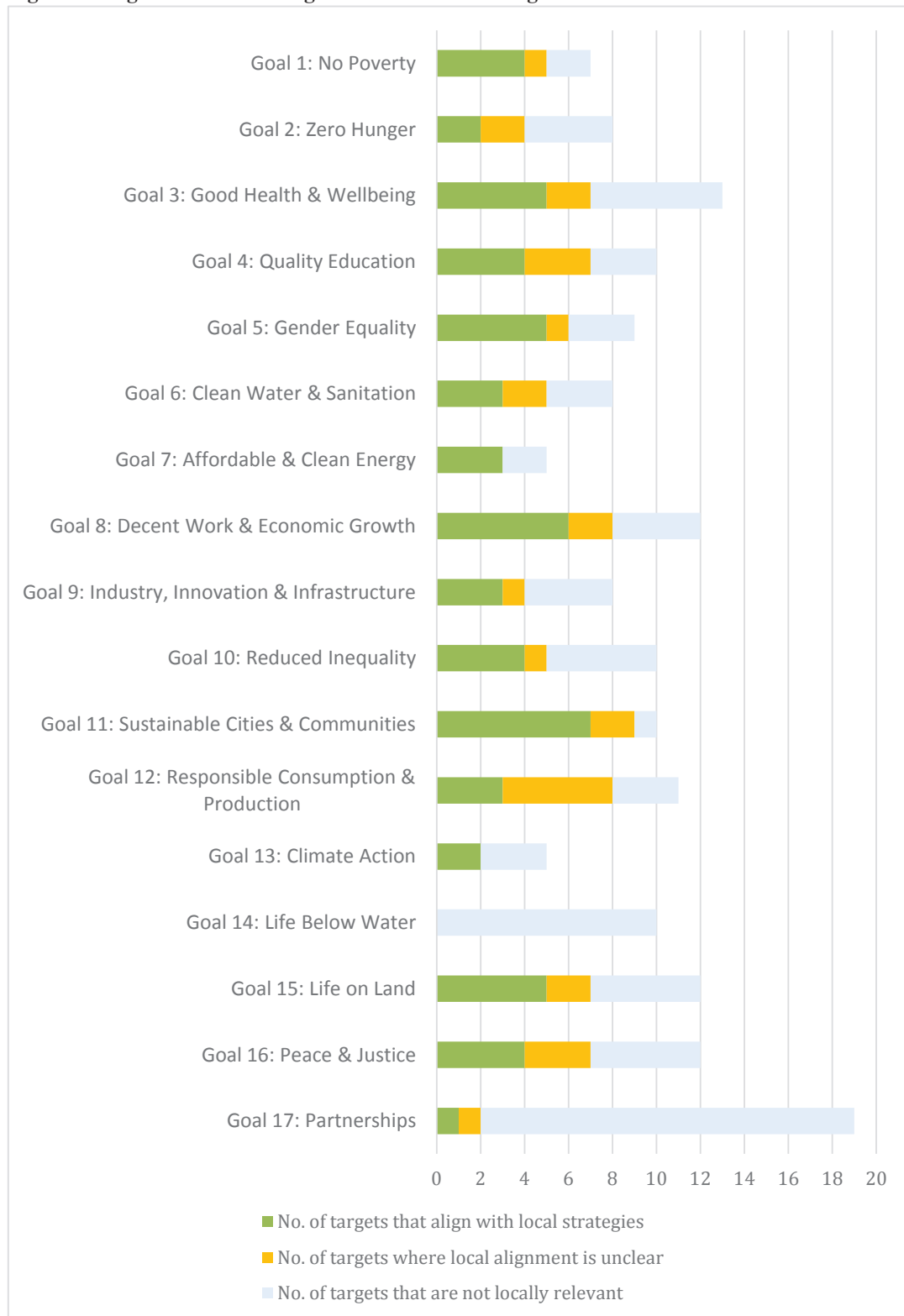
6. Synergies and Conflicts between the City's Main Local Strategies and the Achievement of the SDGs

A desk-based review of 30 local strategies published by Sheffield City Council, Sheffield City Region, Sheffield City Partnership and others suggests that, of 89 SDG targets that are locally relevant, 61 are well-aligned with existing local ambitions.

Figure 1 gives an overview of the total number of locally relevant SDG targets for each Goal, how many of these targets align with local strategies, and where alignment between local strategies and the SDGs is unclear. This is **not an assessment of Sheffield's performance in relation to the SDGs**; we have simply reviewed synergies between local policy priorities and the SDG targets.

Alignment between Sheffield strategies and the SDGs is not a result of local efforts to demonstrate commitment to them. None of the local strategies reviewed explicitly reference the SDGs; indeed, many of these documents were published prior to their adoption in 2015. Rather, this analysis demonstrates that the SDGs are, to a large extent, focused on common challenges that city-level actors have, independently, identified as a local priority.

Figure 1: Alignment of SDG targets and Sheffield strategies



7. Localisation of SDG Targets and Indicators

Sheffield City Council is not currently using the SDG targets and indicators. In stakeholder interviews, we sought feedback on the local relevance and usefulness of the SDG 11 targets and indicators (see below). This feedback highlights the importance of **local translation and adaptation** to ensure that the SDGs are locally meaningful and useful.

At a national level, The Office for National Statistics (ONS) is responsible for measuring the UK's progress towards the SDGs and is currently reporting on 75% of the SDG indicators on a UK National Reporting Platform¹. The UK is among the world leaders in publishing open data on the SDGs, and some of this data is available at sub-national level. However, discussions with local stakeholders and at the Localising the SDGs workshop highlighted that this data is not available at the level of granularity that local authorities need to inform local planning and decision-making. There are “a wealth of indicators and indices” spanning different policy areas at the national level, some more obviously aligned with national policy frameworks, plus others promoted by foundations such as Joseph Rowntree and Social Progress Index. Moreover, because the SDG indicator framework is, by virtue of its international status, very high-level, adapting it for UK cities and identifying datasets at an appropriate level of granularity is a difficult and resource-intensive task. Local stakeholders observed that city-level data is not that useful, rather they are more interested in inequalities of outcome between different neighbourhoods within their jurisdiction.

8. SDG 11 Indicators

The table below is based on local stakeholder feedback from local government officials working across various policy areas within Sheffield City Council and neighbouring local authorities, Sheffield City Region and from Green City Partnership Board members.

Target	Relevant? <i>(yes, no, yes with some modification)</i>	Comments on relevance <i>(Including why/why not relevant?)</i>
11.1.1 Proportion of urban population living in slums, informal settlements or inadequate housing	Modify	Slums and informal settlements are not a local issue, but affordable and decent housing is. Rather than one catch-all indicator for this target, relevant local metrics include: building and minimum space standards for new builds; the number of affordable new listings; retrofitting of existing housing stock; regulation of private sector housing; the proportion of households in fuel poverty; and the proportion of the urban population who are homeless or rough sleeping, in temporary accommodation, or on a priority waiting list.
11.2.1 Proportion of population that has convenient access to public transport, by sex, age and persons with disabilities	Yes, but it doesn't capture active travel	Local stakeholders agreed that safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable public transport is a priority, and that it is important to monitor access to and usage of public transport. They queried whether it is possible to disaggregate passenger data "by sex, age and persons with disabilities" as the UN indicator suggests, though noted schemes to improve affordability and access for some groups e.g. pensioners, young people, and those with disabilities. They additionally highlighted active travel as a local priority, with associated metrics around the proportion of people walking and cycling, and the provision of active travel infrastructure. This important local issue is not reflected in the UN target or indicator.
11.3.1 Ratio of land consumption rate to population growth rate	Unsure	Local stakeholders were unsure as to whether this indicator is locally relevant. The phrasing of target 11.3 and its associated indicators is very technical and caused some confusion.
11.3.2 Proportion of cities with a direct participation structure of civil society in urban planning and management that operate regularly and democratically	Modify	As above, required clarification of what is being measured and why. Local stakeholders variously interpreted this to mean "involving communities in the planning and management of where people live", as being focussed on consultation and democratic processes, and as being delivered by Local Plans, settlement planning and service provision.

11.4.1 Total expenditure (public and private) per capita spent on the preservation, protection and conservation of all cultural and natural heritage, by type of heritage (cultural, natural, mixed and World Heritage Centre designation), level of government (national, regional and local/municipal), type of expenditure (operating expenditure/investment) and type of private funding (donations in kind, private non-profit sector and sponsorship)	Modify	Local stakeholders commented that the reference to ‘the world’s cultural and natural heritage’ in this target “could be off-putting” and is not necessarily what matters at the city scale. They felt that heritage is not just about “world-renowned” resources, but rather understanding what creativity, arts and culture looks and feels like locally and its role in affirming a sense of community. Some stakeholders observed that culture seems, at first glance, missing from the SDGs, and argued that it should be more prominent. While there was general agreement that “planning has quite a strong role in protecting what cultural and natural assets a place does have”, and that natural and cultural heritage is an important local agenda, there was little clarity from stakeholders on how this should be metricated, nor whether the UN’s proposed focus on public and private expenditure indicator 11.4.1 is a useful approach.
11.5.1 Number of deaths, missing persons and persons affected by disaster per 100,000 people	Modify	This indicator’s focus on deaths and missing persons caused by disasters initially suggests limited relevance to Sheffield. However, local stakeholders noted the impact of the 2007 floods, which resulted in two deaths, displaced hundreds of residents and caused major damage to homes and businesses. Flood vulnerability is thus a local priority for resilience and emergency planning, and metrics around the number of people affected by disasters are certainly locally relevant.
11.5.2 Direct disaster economic loss in relation to global GDP, including disaster damage to critical infrastructure and disruption of basic services	Yes	Measures of economic loss, critical infrastructure damage and disruption of basic services were perceived as relevant to Sheffield.
11.6.1 Proportion of urban solid waste regularly collected and with adequate final discharge out of total urban solid waste generated, by cities	Unsure	Local stakeholders agreed that waste management is “a huge part of local authority thinking, budget, time”, but had no comment on whether the proportion of urban solid waste regularly collected is a useful local indicator. They highlighted recycling rates in households and businesses and the proportion of waste reused (e.g. in Sheffield’s energy recovery facility) as additionally important local indicators.
11.6.2 Annual mean levels of fine particulate matter (e.g. PM2.5 and PM10) in cities (population weighted)	Modify	Local Air Quality Action Plans and a proposed Clean Air Zone highlight the local priority of air quality concerns. Local stakeholders queried the UN’s proposed indicator for monitoring air quality (11.6.2), noting that it does not specify a target level and is weak compared to current obligations – at the time of writing – under EU legislation. A Senior Transport Planner at Sheffield City Council, observed: “It’s one thing saying ‘substantially reduced’, reduce adverse impacts, but what we’ve got at the moment is a very specific target which we are legally compelled to meet.”

11.7.1 Average share of the built-up area of cities that is open space for public use for all, by sex, age and persons with disabilities	Yes	A local planning officer from Sheffield City Council noted that this is driven by national planning policy, which “requires you to have an open space assessment done of your whole areas provision of open space, how accessible it is, what kind of quality it is, sort of as your baseline and then the study will set standards for how much open space people should have access to and how far they should have to travel to get to it. That is actually a really important piece of evidence that we are using.” Stakeholders were unsure as to whether it would be possible to monitor open space usage by sex, age, and persons with disabilities, as indicator 11.7.1 suggests, but said it is possible to look at the accessibility of open spaces and the provision of play facilities for children and young people.
11.7.2 Proportion of persons who are victim of physical or sexual harassment, by sex, age, disability status and place of occurrence, in the previous 12 months	Yes	Perceived as locally relevant by the stakeholders that we interviewed, though none had a public safety remit so could not comment specifically on the feasibility of disaggregating the data as the UN suggests. Local stakeholders commented on the diverse make-up of Sheffield and the wider city region, which includes urban, peri-urban and rural areas and “a legacy of formerly self-sustaining industrial communities” in the neighbouring coalfields. This highlights the importance of connectivity across the region and thus the local relevance of this target. The UN’s proposed indicator, however, seems more aimed at a national level. One city official commented: “it’s difficult to know what to make of that one... the relevant bit for Sheffield, I guess, would be the city having local urban regional development.” This might include, for example, the new planning powers conferred through the Sheffield City Region devolution deal. Another local planner observed the adverse impact of a previous national Coalition Government policy that abolished regional-level spatial planning in 2010, as an issue that could impede progress towards this target.
11.a.1 Proportion of population living in cities that implement urban and regional development plans integrating population projections and resource needs, by size of city	Modify	This is one of the few SDG targets and indicators that prescribes a specific role for local government. None of the local stakeholders we interviewed within or outside of local government had heard of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, illustrating that the UN is perhaps overestimating the extent to which its international frameworks cascade to influence local policies and planning. Stakeholders said that the general topic/focus of this target seems locally relevant, but could not comment further without knowing more about the Framework that it references.
11.b.1 Proportion of local governments that adopt and implement local disaster risk reduction strategies in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030*	Modify	
11.b.2 Number of countries with national and local disaster risk reduction strategies*	Modify	The target focuses on the ‘number of countries’ and so seems more aimed at a national level, though again the topic of disaster risk reduction is of some relevance locally.

11.c.1 Proportion of financial support to the least developed countries that is allocated to the construction and retrofitting of sustainable, resilient and resource-efficient buildings utilizing local materials	No	The research team assessed this target and indicator as not relevant at local authority or city level in the UK.
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9. The Role of Comparative Co-production in Localising Global Sustainability Agendas

Mistra Urban Futures' aim of coproducing research about local engagement with the SDGs has faced challenges in Sheffield. The low profile of the SDGs within UK national and local government and amongst the general public means that there is very little incentive for this work to be a priority for local government officials. Moreover, in Sheffield as elsewhere – as highlighted by many local stakeholders that we interviewed – austerity has had an adverse impact on local sustainability budgets and personnel. This was reflected in the difficulty we faced in convening, as originally envisaged, a core group of Sheffield City Council officials to meet and input regularly to design local stakeholder workshops. Instead, the project relied heavily on the Interim Head of Sustainability and ad-hoc meetings convened with different officials, groups and partnership boards.

Whilst there was flexibility in how local research teams and cities implemented Mistra Urban Futures' research plan, the overall focus and aims of the project were not coproduced with local partners in Sheffield. Working on an externally-initiated project driven by an international agenda, and without an existing foundation of local SDG engagement to draw upon, the Sheffield team have found ourselves in the dual position of both researching and advocating for the SDGs. By exploring local engagement with the SDGs, we are de facto initiating that engagement regardless of the extent to which the SDGs are a local priority. As a result, the project has been more researcher-led than would ideally be the case in a coproduced initiative. Partly due to the different timescales of the project in each city, and partly due to the local level of priority of the SDGs, Sheffield City Council has been less engaged in cross-city coproduction activities than other partners. Sheffield was the only local team without a city partner at the Cape Town conference (Our city partner was invited, but felt that they could not justify the in-kind contribution of council officers' time). As a result, it was difficult to get Sheffield City Council to engage with the peer-review process, as they were not party to the discussions where this was suggested as a way of maintaining connectivity and cross-city knowledge exchange. Following the Cape Town conference, we produced a note for Sheffield City Council on our international partners' work with the SDGs. The Council offered a verbal update on what they would be interested in learning from other cities, and some officers offered feedback on draft responses to information requests from Malmo and Shimla, but otherwise the peer review process has, like other Sheffield SDG activities, been researcher led. It is hoped that the Sheffield hosting the final RJC conference and cross-city exchange will provide an opportunity for Sheffield City Council to engage with international partners, but this comes very late in the research process.

ⁱ ONS (2019) Open SDG Platform: Reporting Status. Accessed 9 September 2019.
<https://sustainabledevelopment-uk.github.io/reporting-status/>