

Council for Sustainable Business terms of reference

Introduction

1. The Council for Sustainable Business (CSB) has been established to advise on how businesses can help achieve the aims of the 25 Year Environment Plan (25 YEP). It will focus on building positive momentum inside the business community and acting as a bridge between government and industry.
2. The 25 Year Environment Plan sets out the government's ambition to leave our natural environment in a better state than we found it. [Section 2, 'Putting the Plan into practice'](#) commits the government to establish a new green business Council. The CSB fulfils that commitment.

Aims and objectives

3. The Council will act as sounding board, challenger, innovator and advisor to the Secretary of State, Ministers and Defra policy teams. Focus will be on business perspective and outreach, and achievable action, which has maximum effect with minimum delay.
4. The Council will encourage and influence business communities, as well as work with business leaders to:
 - identify environmental innovation and entrepreneurialism that will advance 25 YEP ambitions and goals
 - advise on the development of the right regulatory frameworks, policies and support structures to achieve these ambitions
 - strengthen the financial case for sustainable business and help businesses understand, join and collaborate on actions to improve the environment and restore nature
5. The remit of the Council may from time to time be modified by the Council's chair or the Ministers, following consultation with the Council.

Rules and responsibilities

6. The Council has a chair and a core membership of 15 to 20 leaders from key sectors of the economy. Membership aims to ensure a broad spread of sectors and a balance between big business and subject matter experts.

Becoming a member

7. Existing members may agree and nominate a new member. This nominee needs to be approved by the Secretary of State.
8. To demonstrate environmental leadership, members are asked to evidence that they meet the following leadership principles:
 - members will demonstrate strong environmental leadership in the way they run their businesses. They will specifically be able to publicly demonstrate how they are actively contributing to the goals of the 25 Year Environment Plan, restoring nature and working towards Net Zero ahead of the curve

- members will conduct their business in a transparent and responsible manner
 - in any areas where their company's environmental or sustainability performance is likely to be perceived as not yet strong enough, members will have robust improvement plans in place
9. All members will be expected to have high credentials for Human Rights guiding principles and EDI strategies.
 10. Due diligence checks will be carried out on new members.

Conduct

11. Members should promote an inclusive and diverse culture in the group and their actions should help create an environment where different perspectives and backgrounds are encouraged and valued.
12. All members should act in good faith and in the best interests of the Council.
13. Each member must at all times act in good faith and observe the highest standards of impartiality, integrity and objectivity in relation to the conduct of the Council's business
14. Members are not to misuse information gained in the course of their membership for personal gain or for political or business profit, nor seek to use the opportunity of public service to promote their private interests or those of connected persons or organisations.
15. All members must inform the Council's Chair and Secretariat of any actual or perceived conflict of interest, bankruptcy, any official investigation, unspent criminal conviction or disqualification as a company director in advance of appointment or should any such instances occur during their appointment. They must also inform the Chair of any change in their circumstances which results in an actual or perceived conflict of interest, becoming bankrupt, subject to a police investigation, convicted of a criminal offence or disqualified from being a company director.
16. All Members are required to notify the Council's Chair and Secretariat of any potential reputational risks to the Council arising on their behalf.
17. All members are to ensure they are familiar with any applicable guidance on their role on the Council, including how to handle conflicts of interest.
18. Where any personal social media accounts used by you make reference or link to your connection to Defra, you should take care to ensure that it is clear in what capacity you are acting.
19. All members will be expected to actively contribute to the work of the Council and regularly attend scheduled meetings. If it is felt by other members, the chair, or the department that this commitment is not being met or that the member no longer meets the ethos of the Council, they can be asked to leave.

Confidentiality

20. In accepting appointment to the Council, members are required to accept that they will not disclose any information or documents presented to the Council without the approval of the secretariat. This includes policy under development and the content of any discussions relating to such information. Members undertake not to make copies of any such documents, and to follow the advice provided by the Secretariat about the handling of such documents.

The Chair

21. The chair will be agreed by Secretary of State and members. It will be reviewed as and when deemed necessary by the Secretary of State or by the Council itself.
22. The chair has the additional responsibility in ensuring that any known 'conflicts of interests', reputational risks to the department due to the conduct of Council's members is clearly communicated to the department.

Remit

23. The Council has no decision-making power.
24. The Council will not routinely produce reports; the focus will be on identifying specific and achievable actions and presenting findings and results to the department. Meeting conversations will be flexible and respond to priorities as they emerge - "we will learn and adapt".
25. Membership of the Council will not create preferential treatment of the individual member or business they represent. All meetings with government officials will be focused on work of the Council and not for private discussions.
26. Departmental approval must be sought before the publication of material in the name of the Council.

Meetings

27. The Council shall meet at least once a month and otherwise as required:
28. The Council will hold regular internal meetings, to update members on progress of individual workstreams and gather advice and opinion.
29. The Council will hold meetings with Defra ministers and Secretary of State. These meetings will:
 - be to update those present on current workstreams, and seek steers on that work
 - be 'co-chaired' by a minister or Secretary of State, who will bring a subject for discussion
 - be an open and honest forum for an exchange of feedback and for the business perspective to be presented
 - be an opportunity for the department to request that the Council investigate a specific issue
 - only focus on the work of the department, and not personal business matter
 - where possible have papers issued in advance to allow for preparation
30. Policy officials may also be invited.
31. In the interests of public accountability, the Council will carry out its work as openly as possible, subject to any conditions set by Ministers or agreed by the Council. Council meetings will not be open to members of the public, but minutes of the meetings *may* be published on an ad hoc basis, under Chatham House rules, subject to any redactions considered to be necessary.
32. The Council may, with the approval of the Chair, as and when necessary form working groups for the efficient and effective conduct of its business. Such working groups may be standing or ad-hoc. Each will be bound by the Council's terms of reference and will report to the Council. The membership of working groups shall not be limited to members of the Council.

Secretariat responsibilities

33. The secretariat will provide administrative and strategic support to the Council, organise the Council's meetings, required minutes and necessary correspondence.
34. The secretariat will offer advice and support with policy connections within Defra and across government.
35. The secretariat will provide regular update on the progress of the Council to officials within Defra to champion the work and ensure the purpose of the Council is being fulfilled, as well as elicit feedback on direction.
36. Any follow up meetings with Ministers on individual workstreams, should be arranged by the workstream leader directly with Private Office and not by the secretariat.

Review

37. This terms of reference, remit and membership will be subject to a review as deemed necessary.