

Environmental progress report

Period: 1 May 2019 – 30 April 2020

Author: Ana Musat, Policy Manager

SUMMARY

The Aldersgate Group monitors the climate and environmental impacts arising from carrying out its business. These impacts are relatively low, with the main ones relating to the amount and mode of business and commuting travel and office tenancy. Unfortunately, it is not always possible to obtain data on these impacts from our suppliers (e.g. for office premises), and the challenges have been even greater this year, with key team members from supplier companies being placed on furlough following the outbreak of the COVID crisis, thereby limiting the ability to obtain granular data. Where we cannot obtain granular data, we continue to engage with those suppliers to improve their measurement and management of environmental impacts and share the data with us.

Key findings

- The impact of the pandemic on some suppliers, especially the owners and managers of the AG office space (The Office Group – TOG), meant that we were unable to get data as granular as last year. For instance, we were unable to obtain data on water consumption or waste.
- The Group estimates its **annual electricity use to have been 1,677.04 kWh**, based on annual readings from TOG. This figure is a rough estimate and included only as a benchmark for future reporting.
- **Scope 3 emissions decreased by 35.6%** this year, excluding emissions from waste and water usage where measurements were unavailable this year.
- The Group has seen a **30% drop in commuting emissions** given increased levels of working remotely even before the pandemic, and nearly 3 weeks of working solely at home given lockdown restrictions.
- Land-based business travel decreased by 22.37% this year, and train travel decreased by 32.73%.
- The data shows a **drop of 50.35% in emissions related to overnight stays** compared to the previous financial year.
- Data storage emissions increased this year by 8.96%.
- Estimated emissions associated with **use of paper decreased by 78.7%**.

BACKGROUND

The Aldersgate Group is an alliance of leaders from business, academia, politics and civil society that drives action for a sustainable economy. Formed in 2006, the Group now has 57 organisation members and a permanent Secretariat. The environmental progress report refers to impacts of the Secretariat's activities and does not include environmental impact of the membership or Board of Directors, except where travel was undertaken by Directors on Aldersgate Group business.

The Aldersgate Group has prepared annual reports showing its greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions since its 2011-2012 fiscal year. However, changes in scope of data have affected the consistency of accounting over recent years, primarily arising from changes to suppliers and challenges in obtaining robust and comparable data from key suppliers. The Group determined that the ongoing effort to publish full GHG emission reports was not justified due to lack of comparability of data year on year but acknowledged the value of monitoring key activities to help identify and manage its impacts.

In line with the Board of Directors' recommendations, the Aldersgate Group Secretariat has not published a GHG report for the last three years, but has continued to review and record its environmental impacts and engage with suppliers.

ASSESSMENT

Staff numbers changed quite a bit over the course of the past 12 months as the Secretariat went through a period of renewal. Only for 3 months (February to April) did the Secretariat have the full number of 6 members, and for a period of 6 months there were only 4 members of the Secretariat and 5 members of the Secretariat for the remaining 3 months. Hence, as an average assumption for this report, it is assumed that the average size of the Group's Secretariat was five FTE members of staff over the reporting period.

Scope 1 & 2 emissions

The Aldersgate Group is based in a co-working space, which is owned and managed by The Office Group (TOG). A lack of data has limited consistency and accuracy in this reporting year. With the TOG Sustainability Coordinator being placed on furlough and the building manager having joined quite recently, we were unable to get data that was as granular as in previous years. For instance, the annual electricity consumption was only given to us as a rough yearly estimate instead of monthly readings, as was the case previously.

Based on annual metered building electricity consumption provided by TOG, the Aldersgate Group **estimates its annual electricity use to have been 1,677.04 kWh. However, as this figure is a rough estimate, we include it only as a benchmark for future reporting.**

TOG has a waste portal and is introducing an energy portal to monitor electricity use (the building does not use gas), which would have helped to secure granular data. However, the energy data has not been delivered to schedule, and staffing pressures following the COVID-19 pandemic within The Office Group mean that the Aldersgate Group have been unable to secure data on Scope 2 emissions this year in spite of early engagement. It is our belief that once staff members return to work following the end of the furlough scheme and the energy portal is running at TOG, the data collection process will be more straightforward in the future. The Aldersgate Group will ensure that it engages proactively with TOG on this issue.

Scope 3 emissions

The Aldersgate Group has continued to closely monitor Scope 3 emissions, as this is the sole area where we have consistently held accountability in terms of the impact of our actions on emissions. However, with the TOG Sustainability Coordinator being placed on furlough this year, we have been unable to secure data on waste and water consumption from TOG, which limits the relevance of comparisons of Scope 3 emissions with previous years. All other Scope 3 emissions have been monitored as before.

When comparing Scope 3 emissions data with the previous year, emissions from waste and water usage have been excluded to permit a like for like comparison. Based on this, the Secretariat's Scope 3 emissions decreased this year by 35.6%.

The decrease can be largely attributed to a drop in business travel and hotel stays emissions, as well as a **30% drop in commuting emissions** given increased levels of working remotely even before the pandemic, and nearly 3 weeks of working solely at home given lockdown restrictions. **Land-based business travel decreased by 22.37% this year, and train travel decreased by 32.73%.** This can be partly attributed to more strategic planning of business travel, with members of the Secretariat doing more than one meeting when having to travel away from London, thereby limiting the number of total journeys as well as a greater use of online meeting tools for international meetings. The reduced number of meetings from the end of February and total lack of face to face meetings from early March, otherwise a peak time for business travel, also further explains the drop in emissions towards the end of the financial year.

Overnight hotel stays have been included in emissions calculations for the third year, and **the data shows a drop of 50.35% in emissions related to overnight stays compared to the previous financial year.** This goes hand in hand with the drop in travel emissions, with the Secretariat limiting the number of hotel stays, both in the UK and abroad, compared to previous years.

This year the Aldersgate Group was not able to include data on waste and water usage like last year, as this has been unavailable given that the TOG Sustainability Coordinator is currently on furlough. The Group will attempt to monitor and manage these emissions next year.

Data storage emissions increased this year by 8.96%. This can be explained by the need for increased online storage for both Dropbox and individual email accounts. The need to keep emails in the inboxes of previous staff members for a certain number of years (e.g. for audit reasons relating to past projects), as well as having to add new accounts, has led to an increase on previous years.

Estimated emissions associated with use of paper decreased by 78.7%. This can be explained by a conscious effort to limit office printing, as well as a more strategic approach to report printing. For example, briefings such as the pre-election manifestos, have been printed in smaller numbers given their shorter predicted lifespan. This year has also seen an increase of online distribution of our briefings and reports, with printed copies distributed less frequently and only when necessary. The uncertain situation from mid-February and the subsequent lockdown has also meant putting on hold printing for a number of reports, either where the launch date has been postponed or where the distribution has solely been done online.

FUTURE EFFORTS

The Secretariat continued to struggle with consistency of emissions measurement data from suppliers. In the year ahead, we will aim to improve:

1. **Supplier engagement:** Once disruptions caused by COVID-19 and furloughed members of staff return, we will resume engaging with The Office Group to access a full data set for Scope 1 and 2 emissions. We will also continue to monitor overall waste and recycling volumes. However, there is still some uncertainty over future work arrangements, with increased volumes of home-based working expected over the coming months. This will require some thinking over how best to measure Scope 1 and 2 emissions for the following financial year (see point 3 below).
2. **Scope 3 emissions:** The Secretariat will continue to monitor and endeavour to limit Scope 3 emissions, by continuing to use low carbon transport methods as far as possible, combining as many meetings as possible when travelling and using online platforms for meetings where these would be just as appropriate.
3. **Measuring emissions from home-based working:** There are still a number of uncertainties around future work arrangements given the uncertain evolution of the pandemic and potential lockdown measures and travel / office restrictions. Whilst the Secretariat is currently planning on a gradual return to work (i.e. one or two days a week of office-based work, with the rest done remotely), this may have to change in the event of a second peak of infections likely to occur during the colder months. Either way, the next financial year will see a big increase in the levels of home-working for all members of staff. The Secretariat will consider how best to measure Scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions in this scenario and consider what measures it might need to take to support staff in reduce home-based emissions. In the coming months, we will engage with other organisations who will be facing the same challenges to consider the most appropriate methodology.

The Aldersgate Group's long term aim is to produce zero net emissions as a result of its activities and the Group recently joined the [Pledge to Net Zero coalition](#) as part of this. Our policy to achieve that aim is firstly to reduce those emissions, and secondly to purchase and retire a good quality carbon offset for Scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions (to the extent we are able to measure them). We will continue to engage with our suppliers, such as our provider of office space, to help us better measure and reduce emissions associated with Aldersgate Group activities.