

Seeing the Bigger Picture

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- Professor Tim O'Riordan, University of East Anglia and member of the Sustainable Development Commission
- Ken Webster, Assistant Director of Community Well-being, Head of the Local Sustainability Team at the Improvement and Development Agency
- Jane Morris, Strategic Policy Adviser, Environment, Audit Commission
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- Professor Bob Evans, Director of the Sustainable Cities Research Institute, Northumbria University and JRF Project Manager.

Executive summary

- There is opportunity and scope for taking sustainable development forward within local governance. There are pockets of good practice, innovation and leadership, all of which could be better tuned to that common purpose, a better quality of life for all. This will need leadership, empathy and encouragement, and co-ordination in delivery, as well as a degree of enforcement from central government.
 - There is a general lack of understanding as to what sustainable development means. While there is a set of government-affirmed principles and approaches to sustainable development, awareness and ownership of these across departments, agencies and beyond are low. As a consequence, most people inside and outside government and the public generally find it daunting and confusing.
 - Curbing unsustainable economic trends and consumption poses a huge challenge. Local authorities can play their part with their community leadership role. Fulfilling the public's expectation that they should lead by example will require greater political commitment, clarity and coherence from central government. There is a clear case for a statutory obligation on councils to demonstrate the mainstreaming and advancement of sustainable development in all that they do.
 - A lack of political will at all levels, combined with a focus on the short term, tends to inhibit government and business from taking tough decisions to secure the long-term public interest in sustainable development.
- Investing funds towards uncertain but necessary long-term change is not easily secured. This is partly driven by the fear of becoming unpopular and losing favour with the electorate. But it is also because combined commitment between partners for consistent delivery of sustainable development is lacking and there is a general distraction caused by a plethora of fresh central government initiatives.
- Bringing about institutional and personal behaviour change for sustainable development means empowering and nurturing champions at all levels, in government and in the wider community. Local government has a special democratic mandate of community leadership, to procure goods and services to meet sustainable development objectives, and to secure the well-being of its communities. This increasingly requires influencing, networking and guiding the work of strategic partnerships. However, genuine partnership working for sustainability appears to be poorly understood and practised.
 - Greater collaborative styles of working within and between organisations and participatory planning approaches with the community are crucial for making progress towards sustainable development. Ultimately, the public expects that government and the public sector generally should make efforts to get their own house in order with regard to demonstrating environmentally responsible behaviour and to lead by example.

- The Power of Well-being introduced in the Local Government Act 2000 offers radical scope for innovation to help deliver community strategy objectives, but to date it has been rarely used. A profound shift in council decision-making and delivery cultures is needed to make the most of this and new models of public service delivery – such as social enterprise and Community Interest Companies – which can be geared to deliver sustainable development.
- For sustainability to be mainstreamed, the frameworks of corporate management, the processes and use of specific tools (performance targets and indicators), audit, review and inspection procedures all need to be appropriately aligned and geared to a common sustainability set of criteria. This is not currently the case.

Ways forward could be framed by developing a concept of ‘Principled Localism’ as a new sustainability code for governance, which might include:

- reaffirming and creating *ownership of the government’s established set of principles and approaches to sustainable development* among all central government departments, agencies, local government and regional bodies throughout the public sector
 - establishing *an obligation to mainstream and promote sustainable development principles and approaches* on all the public sector
- ensuring that *Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) embraces an obligation to advance sustainable development* – but which encourages local authorities, through corporate self-assessments, to create their own vision and innovation
 - building *a suite of measures for sustainable development to enable both coherence and diversity at local or even neighbourhood level* – through the performance indicators, Best Value, strategic planning and delivery procedures
 - requiring that *all public sector procurement meets standards of sound environmental stewardship* – demonstrating a lighter ‘ecological footprint’ and increased community and social benefit
 - incentivising *innovation that applies sustainable development as a driver in the public sector* by co-ordinating existing, and fostering new learning networks of partnerships focused on community strategies and associated activities – but which embraces greater involvement from the community, voluntary and research sectors
 - setting *standards for the development and take-up of awareness raising, development and training programmes that incorporate sustainable development principles and approaches* – for all those charged with the delivery of public service and services.

1 Introduction: the purpose of the report

Internationally, it is recognised that development has to become sustainable, to reduce the risks of environmental and natural disasters, economic shocks, growing poverty, civil strife and conflict. The developed nations have acknowledged that delivering sustainable development also has to tackle consumption and production. The 'ecological footprint' (WWF, 2002a) metaphorically dramatises a sobering reality; if everyone in the world consumed as much as the average UK citizen, it would take three planets' worth of resources to support the world's population.

Sustainable development aims to connect environmental, economic and social welfare by thinking and managing for the longer term. It is a politically highly contested area. It needs strong leadership and calls for a robust set of governance arrangements (Box 1).

Box 1 What do we mean by 'governance'?

Governance is defined here to mean the process by which managing the public interest is carried out through the interaction between formal institutions of government (councils and administrations) and other agencies that operate at arm's length from government, with the private sector (business), non-governmental organisations (NGOs), voluntary and civil society by creating effective partnerships for delivery. Good governance displays adaptivity and learning.

Clear, coherent, consistent and co-ordinated policies help to make sense of it all at the local level.

Shifting technologies and lifestyles towards a low-carbon economy will need significant support through awareness raising, development of new skills, training and jobs to ensure that people have opportunities for work and to play their full part in society.

Government is taking the lead in setting the framework for sustainable development. It realises that it cannot deliver quality public services on its own. Its fast-evolving agendas on *sustainable communities*, led by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), and on *civil renewal*, led by the Home Office, could become innovative drivers of sustainability. The Cabinet Office Strategy Unit's work on *innovation and the public sector* is highly significant to this and has the potential to bind these agendas and ensure that sustainable development is embedded. The concept and management of risk are essential to bring threatened or fragile communities up to capacity where they are not only stable but also thriving local economies.

Greater clarity is needed regarding the responsibilities of different layers of government, and how they can best work together and with other sectors in society. Progress comes through learning and innovation. Often, it is difficult to get things right the first time; therefore, having the confidence, trust and collaboration of local communities is essential. Innovation and experimentation means taking risks, sharing and learning – all of which require dedicated time and space to happen.

Local government is a particularly important framework for advancing sustainability, given that so many decisions and simple actions for implementation take place within it. It is the combined effort of local authorities working in

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and guiding partnerships with other public agencies, the community and voluntary sector and business that is most likely to offer up workable solutions.

‘Policy into Practice: Tools for Local Sustainability’ was a one-year project, funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) ‘Reconciling Environmental and Social Concerns’ programme. It links with another JRF-sponsored study by the National Centre for Public Policy and the Centre for Development Studies at University of Wales Swansea, ‘Sustainable Development in Wales: Understanding Effective Governance’.

This report draws from existing research and builds on the earlier studies in JRF programmes. It has not involved primary data collection. As a result of a highly collaborative partnership between the Sustainable Cities Research Institute (SCRI) at Northumbria University (as project managers) and the UK Sustainable Development Commission, a shared work programme was developed on local governance issues. A core project team – with representatives from the Improvement and Development Agency and the Audit Commission – has guided and actively supported the work.

Discussions were held with officials across government departments, local government agencies and associations. Workshops were organised to draw on the perceptions and experience of these groupings along with academics, non-governmental organisations, consultants, researchers and practitioners, to help locate the role of sustainable development in local governance (Appendix 1). This project set out to:

- identify the obstacles and barriers to the successful delivery of sustainable development at the local level (local sustainability)
- assess the possible policy actions and new power relations between central and local government that might be adopted to overcome these restrictions.

The purpose of this report is to present some of the key messages that have come out during the course of the project. These are to:

- clarify what sustainable development means in government and why providing clarity, coherence and consistency is so vital to make sense of it within changing patterns of local governance
- identify how government policies and performance requirements within the central–local context might be better shaped for the future, and why there is a strong case for making it obligatory for local authorities to demonstrate how they are mainstreaming sustainable development principles and approaches in their work
- inspire greater government commitment to support interactive networks from a broad range of professional and voluntary interests – through central, regional and local governance – to build a new public service ethos that embraces lasting change for long-term community and environmental well-being.

Structure of the report

Chapter 2 sets out the background and context of what this project has taken to mean as sustainable development, and why and how this matters from an international down to a local context in the UK. Key issues are then analysed, presenting the challenges and suggesting how these might be addressed.

Chapter 3 reveals the importance of working to a clearly defined terminology, underpinned by a commonly adopted set of working principles. Ways of overcoming mixed and confused messages from government are offered with ideas for developing a shared understanding and common learning around sustainable development.

Chapter 4 emphasises the diverse nature of leadership and government's role in leading by example and acting as steward for the longer-

term public interest. It refers to the growing significance of local authorities' role in community leadership and local governance.

Chapter 5 maps out the rapidly evolving landscape of local government working as part of public sector reform. Some of the new mechanisms and cultures needed to make the most of the Power of Well-being are summarised.

Chapter 6 explains the dynamics of the central–local government relationship in enabling a decent, basic quality of life for all and the importance of discretion at the local level.

Chapter 7 analyses the current alignment of performance management indicators, audit and obligations, and how they add up to influence the bigger picture.

Chapter 8 summarises the messages and conclusions from the project, and presents the implications for policy.

2 Background and context

What do we mean by 'sustainable development'?

A better quality of life for all, for those living now and for future generations, and how this can be provided for given the world's finite amount of resources is the essence of sustainable development. Nature has a limited carrying capacity to supply resources and absorb waste on which human societies depend.

Even with the most sophisticated of technological advancements, we are dependent on an intricate web of natural processes, for example to maintain the fertility of the soil, fresh water, quality of air. Yet the attention given to driving the economy, linked to monetary wealth creation and measures of Gross National Product, gives the impression that society and the environment exist to serve the economy, rather than the other way round (Chambers *et al.*, 2000).

The government's UK strategy, *A Better Quality of Life* (DETR, 1999), defined sustainable development as:

... meeting four key objectives at the same time in the UK and the world as a whole:

- *Social progress which recognises the needs of everyone;*
- *Effective protection of the environment;*
- *Prudent use of natural resources; and*
- *Maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment.*

(DETR, 1999, p. 8, emphasis added)

A series of principles and guiding approaches were reaffirmed in the

government's review of progress towards sustainable development (DEFRA, 2003) to underpin the four objectives (Appendix 2). The Sustainable Development Commission advocates a similar, but more challenging, set (Appendix 3), which explicitly recommends that sustainability should be the central organising principle for government and society, and challenges the emphasis on promoting high levels of growth.

Box 2 What do we mean by 'sustainable development'?

Sustainable development (*sustainability*) can be presented from an economic, social or environmental perspective. However the argument is framed, connection must be made with the other two dimensions. All are valid interpretations. Many aspects of quality of life are a function of consumption: that is, the use of natural resources and the manufacture of goods and services. In this context, the social aspects of sustainable development mean that consumption patterns need to deliver at least a minimum quality of life for all. In this report, the concept is conceived as minimum quality of life, taken in environmental terms, and how this can be justly and equitably provided to achieve *local sustainability*, without compromising *global sustainability*.

In summary, the challenge of sustainability is to resolve the tension between ultimate ends (a good life for everyone) and ultimate means (maintaining the life-support capacity of the earth).

A local case study example that demonstrates local sustainability is set out below (Box 3) from Newark and Sherwood District Council, Nottinghamshire. Here, it is possible to see how the work of the Housing, Architects and Energy Team of the council was synergised with the efforts of Bowbridge Primary School in Newark to improve the quality of life of local people by delivering practical, tangible outcomes. This case study shows the key ingredients of sustainable development:

- sharing a sustained commitment towards a long-term vision, in for the long haul, building on stepped practical achievements
- the importance of genuine collaborative partnership working – working beyond the silo boundaries, seconding staff, pooling budgets and adopting an entrepreneurial, joined-up approach
- the importance of addressing people's basic and most pressing needs first, then building up confidence and social self-esteem
- ensuring environmental justice, improving poorer local environmental quality experienced by the less well off
- nurturing the interest of people as individuals – children, parents, families, as part of a whole-school community – leading to environmentally conscious citizenship, which improves their own quality of life but also takes account of global impacts.

Making local sustainability a reality means addressing all the ingredients throughout the stages of thinking, planning and collaborating and in the delivery, evaluation and assessment of outcomes.

The policy context

Internationally

The World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), held in Johannesburg in 2002, reaffirmed the international political and practical commitment to the Agenda 21 agreement signed at the 1992 Rio Summit (United Nations, 1993). This required countries to draw up national strategies – Agenda 21 plans – for achieving sustainable development, and for local authorities to lead the way in devising Local Agenda 21 strategies with the direct involvement of their communities.

A universal acceptance that environmental issues need to be tackled hand in hand with poverty was the marked shift at the 2002 Summit, compared with 1992 (Box 4).

The significance of the European Union (EU)

The European Union, as a key negotiating bloc internationally, has a crucial role in matters such as trade, relief of global poverty and environmental protection.

The Lisbon Strategy, agreed in 2000, is a commitment to bring about economic, social and environmental renewal in the EU. A key strategic goal is to create the conditions for full employment by 2010 so that the EU becomes 'the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion' (EU Lisbon Strategy).

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Box 3 Achieving local sustainability

Bowbridge Primary School, Newark serves one of the most deprived estates in Nottinghamshire. It regards itself as an 'extended school' working towards a 'full-service school', a one-stop-shop school where parents and children have easy access to knowledge, local support, information and news. All along, it has worked in partnership with the District Council, achieving outcomes that make a difference to local people.

Housing, Architects and Energy Team, Newark and Sherwood District Council	Bowbridge Primary School, Nottinghamshire County Council
<p>1985: 30 per cent of houses local to Bowbridge School, then largely Council owned, were found to have severe damp and mould. Local doctors reported this as seriously detrimental to health. Local teachers could smell damp and mould on the children's clothes.</p> <p>The Council worked with the Tenants' Damp Action Group to devise a 20-year Energy Strategy Investment Plan of £16.7 million to eradicate Fuel Poverty.</p> <p>By 1993, these homes in the Bowbridge school area had been improved by the Council and so were capable of delivering 'affordable energy'. However, it was clear that people were wasting energy by not undertaking good-energy housekeeping.</p> <p>Using the idea of children to educate their families, a local teacher championed a local energy project for ten year olds. A survey in 2003 found that 60 per cent of these families did not understand their central heating controls and 20 per cent of householders' grasp of energy housekeeping was so bad that it resulted in high fuel bills or cold homes.</p> <p>The Council secured a series of three European-funded projects to support projects at the school while undertaking this work.</p>	<p>In 1995, the attainment of children was reported by the Head Teacher as well below the national expectations. Reasons identified were that children were going hungry and were in poor health, with no adult role models for learning. In response, 1996–2000, a 'breakfast+fruit club' and drinking water were provided in all classrooms and a 'five-a-day' healthy eating routine was promoted. The school built on this and arranged for welfare, health, optician and speech therapy services to be delivered from the school premises.</p> <p>A Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) Barriers to Adult Learning Study for the locality highlighted a lack of childcare and transport to college, and low personal confidence as barriers to adult learning. But the parents from Bowbridge did show an interest in courses for ICT, childcare, caring for the elderly and art. The school seized this opportunity.</p> <p>In response, the local college set up adult classes in the school as well as a childcare scheme. The TEC funded a computer suite for adult and pupil learning within the school in 1997. This then made the 'Anytime Anywhere Learning' initiative viable in 1999. By 2003, this involved 80 laptops for families funded by the school through founding its own charity, the 'E-Learning Foundation'.</p>

European Social Fund support for 2002–05 was awarded for adult learning, which is being managed by a seconded District Council officer to ensure that sustainability is brought into the dialogue with the community. In 2004, Family Eco-Teams adult learning outcomes were combined with school E-Teams (energy monitoring teams). The focus is on the household, food, water, waste and energy use. This is good housekeeping that saves money and cuts CO₂ emissions.

Source: <http://www.newark-sherwooddc.gov.uk/sustainability/casestudypops/popup34.htm>

Box 4 Key messages from the World Summit on Sustainable Development

The Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (United Nations, 2002) summarised actions that still need to follow through from earlier international commitments and it set some important new targets (relating to water, sanitation, energy). It made clear that:

- all people have a right to a basic standard of living with safe clean water, food and shelter
- poverty in the developing world must also be addressed through debt relief and reform of trading agreements, including the agricultural subsidies of the EU Common Agricultural Policy
- building resilience and vitality into people's livelihoods and local economies is essential, thus the importance of understanding and managing risk
- the unsustainability of development trends, with accelerated loss of biodiversity and climate change, growing poverty and inequity, needs to be tackled
- the industrialised, wealthy countries have a role, particularly in the EU, in shouldering responsibility for tackling consumption and production
- good governance is needed at all levels, with local decision making having a vitally important role; Agenda 21 remains the key basis on which, and through which, practical activity – rather than rhetoric – should be prioritised.

The launch of many international partnership initiatives between all sectors – public, private and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) – was another new aspect embraced by the United Nations.

The EU has built on its Sustainable Development Strategy, agreed in 2001, and is subsequently developing an action plan to incorporate the targets from WSSD; for example, the following.

- The *ten-year Framework for Programmes on Consumption and Production* is one where the EU with other developed countries agreed to take a lead.
- The EU Spring Council, in 2003, recognised the role of environmental technologies as an important means of delivering change necessary to decouple economic growth from environmental degradation. This means fulfilling consumer needs through more efficient production, using fewer raw materials (including energy and water) and creating less pollution and waste in the process.
- The *Common Agricultural Policy Reform* package, agreed in June 2003, has begun to break the link between subsidies and production. This may begin to help reconnect farmers to their markets and reduce environmental damage.

However, it is vital that awareness of what EU Directives might mean at the local level is communicated locally as early as possible. This is to ensure that local government, business and

industry have sufficient time to budget for and bring about the necessary changes in custom and practice. Non-compliance with Directives can result, and has resulted, in costly financial penalties to the UK. Box 5 summarises some of the key Directives and Policy Frameworks central to environmental sustainability.

Box 5 Examples of key EU Directives and Frameworks relevant to environmental sustainability

- *The Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive* will apply to the forthcoming reforms to the English spatial planning system due to come into force in mid-2004 (ODPM, 2003a). Local authorities will be statutorily required to prepare a Local Development Framework (LDF), which will require an SEA.
- *The Sixth Environmental Action Programme* includes a number of thematic strategies. The prevention and recycling of waste strategy was launched in May 2003. The urban thematic strategy is forthcoming. Sustainable urban management, building on Local Agenda 21 criteria, is a core component. It focuses on the use of environmental management systems by local authorities to monitor progress, evaluate success and implement legislation, and includes the development of urban environment indicators.
- *The Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) Directive* was agreed in 2003 and will become part of UK law in August 2004. It encourages and sets

(continued)

criteria for the collection, treatment, recycling and recovery of waste electrical and electronic equipment. It makes producers responsible for financing most of these activities ('producer responsibility'). Private householders are to be able to return WEEE without charge.

- *The Landfill of Waste Directive*, already in force, will revolutionise the recycling and reuse of waste as the landfill taxes rise in the UK. This should lead to more materials and jobs in waste reduction and more sustainable consumption.

From a social perspective, citizen involvement is a fundamental principle of sustainability. A series of Directives are gradually being put in place relating to the pan-European Aarhus Convention on 'Access to information, public participation and access to justice in environmental matters'. The impact on local authorities will be profound. New (UK) legislation will be introduced to ensure that local authorities have the capacity to implement the obligations.

Through these examples above, it can be seen that understanding and managing risk – to minimise threats and capitalise on opportunities through innovation – is an important approach for local authorities in achieving local sustainability. Within this framework, the pattern of responses to climate change, through mitigation (steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions) and adaptation (practically dealing with consequences) is extremely important.

Sustainability in the UK

A Better Quality of Life, the 1999 UK strategy, provides the framework for action. The Sustainable Development Unit (DEFRA) coordinates and promotes assessment of achievement, for example the government report that includes progress against the 15 national sustainable development headline indicators. This strategy is currently undergoing a major review, due to be completed in 2005.

There is evidence to suggest that public sector leadership in sustainable development can stimulate private sector initiatives and investment in environmental technologies in, for example, renewable energy. This is demonstrated only to a limited degree in the UK. Woking Borough Council is one notable example, leading with the use of photovoltaics and hydrogen fuel cell technology (Challis, 2003, p. 17). The UK – compared to Germany or Denmark – has a different cultural perspective, which has yet to harness the business case for sustainability and use it as a driver for innovation. There is massive potential for joint commercial, social and civic enterprise in these areas. The thrust of the government's Innovation Strategy, in 2004, may positively alter this.

In the following section, the context for (English) local authorities is set out to describe some of the current tools and potential drivers for local sustainability.

The contribution of Local Agenda 21 (LA21)

LA21 was never made a statutory requirement in the UK, with no dedicated national-level funding. However, the Prime Minister's statement in 1997, that all local authorities should have a Local Agenda 21 Strategy in place

by December 2000, galvanised efforts, resulting in 93 per cent achieving this target.

Many self-professed LA21 projects were environmentally focused and were community or voluntary sector led. Over time, as the understanding and practice of LA21 evolved, strategies took on a more rounded socio-economic approach (LGMB 1997; Morris, 2001). Local authorities were pioneers in piloting the quality of life indicators with communities and NGOs.

The enormous contribution of informally led community and voluntary activity and participative neighbourhood activity, not labelled as sustainability, has become apparent only in recent years. LA21 has usually remained on the margins and has not altered the main thrust of economic development, which has tended to carry on business as usual.

LA21 activities often had to compete for resources with the plethora of central government activities that were rapidly introduced in the mid- to late 1990s (Table 1). The setting up of new zones, pilots and initiatives led to an overload of 'initiativitis' for local government. It takes time for new partners to adjust, build trust and develop the kind of collaboration to deliver positive changes – much longer than the quick-win time frame expected by government.

The Local Government Modernisation Agenda (LGMA)

The purpose behind the Local Government Modernisation Agenda is to enable stronger, more effective local leadership and to deliver improved quality public services. Key elements were introduced with the Local Government Act

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Table 1 A sample of the many central government–local, multi-agency partnerships often working in parallel or competing with local LA21 branded initiatives

Start	Partnership name	Purpose	Number
1994	Single Regeneration Budget	Regeneration in deprived communities	900
1998	Crime and disorder	Tackle community safety and fear of crime	376
1998	Education Action Zones	Raising educational standards in groups of schools	73 (plus 100 smaller)
1998	New Deal for Communities	Tackle deprivation in the most deprived neighbourhoods	88
1998	Health Action Zones	Targeting health care and treatment	26
1998	Early Years Development and Childcare	Develop nursery provision and childcare	150
1999	Health Act Partnerships	Joined-up working between health and social services	64
1999	Healthy Living Centres	Promoting health	–
1999	Sure Start	Promote development of children from deprived families	500 by 2004
1999	Excellence in Cities	Raise education standards in major cities	58
1999	Social inclusion	Tackle social exclusion	48
1999	Sports Action Zones	Promote sport in deprived communities	30
2000	Employment Zones	Help long-term unemployed	15
2001	Neighbourhood Renewal Fund	Improve services in the most deprived areas	88

Source: adapted from Sullivan and Skelcher (2002, pp. 228–37).

1999 and, particularly, the Local Government Act 2000.

These have resulted in an overhaul of local government with:

- a new corporate performance management framework for all councils under a new duty to achieve Best Value through a rigorous, externally inspected regime of reviewing the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of council services, and implementing continuous improvement programmes (introduced in 1999)
- new political management structures – with new cabinet executive models giving clearer accountability for strategy and policy functions, and with a defined separate scrutiny and overview function
- a duty for local authorities to prepare a Community Strategy for promoting or improving the well-being of their areas and so contribute to the achievement of sustainable development in the UK

- a legal power for promoting or improving economic, social or environmental well-being.

Strong Local Leadership – Quality Public Services, a summary of the Government White Paper published in January 2002 (DTLR, 2002), set out the challenge and milestones. It explained the important linkages and next steps in this radical reform agenda with reference to:

- *the Central–Local Partnership (CLP)*, established in 1997 as a means of improving the working relationship between government and local authorities, with representation through the Local Government Association
- *Local Public Service Agreements (LPSAs)* as a new scheme for setting targets negotiated individually between government and the local authority, with reward funding for achieving enhanced outcomes
- *Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs)*, the government-defined mechanism designed to bring together public service deliverers, the community and the voluntary and business sectors to tackle local priorities
- *Community Strategies (CS)* and local councils' leadership and statutory role in being accountable for the work of the LSP
- *Best Value* and the evolution of an overarching corporate methodology for *Comprehensive Performance Assessment* to grade authorities

- *freedoms and flexibilities* detailing reforms in local government finance, with rewards for high-performing councils through greater discretion on spending and lighter-touch inspections.

A National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (NSNR), launched in January 2001, made the case for integrated regeneration focusing on the 88 most deprived areas, with long-term goals to lower unemployment and crime, and to improve health, skills, housing and the physical environment. This is highly significant in that all the designated areas in the Strategy were each formally required to establish a Local Strategic Partnership. The formal guidance and workings of these LSPs have provided a useful model to more widely inform the development and adoption of LSPs.

The rate and pressure of change on local authorities, particularly in England, was immense in accommodating these changes. The government's commitment to reducing and rationalising plan requirements, expressed in the Local Government White Paper (DETR, 2001a), was followed with a proposal that the Community Strategy would remain a key service plan into which various existing plans would be subsumed, including LA21, Local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategies, Local Cultural Strategies and Biodiversity Action Plans (OPDM, 2003b).

The intention of all this was to make local authorities' work more strategic.

However, sustainable development has failed to emerge as a high-profile issue in practice, even within the new overarching statutory context of the community strategy.

Reform of the planning system and regionalism

The increasing importance of the citizen focus is reflected also in the government's ambitious reform of the planning system. The Planning Green Paper (DTLR, 2001b) sets out the aim of creating a quicker and more accessible system that meets the needs of business and the wider community. The current structure, local and unitary development plans will be replaced by a folder of planning documents known as the Local Development Framework (LDF). This will be a means of delivering the long-term (15–20 years) Regional Spatial Strategy for their region, and also of helping to deliver the aims of their (local) Community Strategy. LDFs will require the preparation of a Statement of Community Involvement. All of these embody an aim to contribute to sustainable development (ODPM, 2003c).

The relationship between regional bodies and the emergence of elected regional assemblies will increasingly provide strategic capacity for sustainability at local level. All English regional sustainable development frameworks (RSDFs), which are non-statutory high-level documents, are drawn up in partnership by key players: Regional Assemblies (RAs), the Government Offices, Regional Development Agencies (RDAs), business, local authorities and voluntary and community groups. They are the primary mechanism for the delivery of sustainability at regional level.

However, the degree of alignment between RSDFs and Regional Economic Strategies, which are the responsibility of RDAs, has been questioned (CAG Consultants and Oxford

Brookes University, 2003). RDAs have a statutory purpose to contribute to sustainable development in promoting economic development and social and physical regeneration.

Local sustainability – the challenges in England

Taking into account this context, five key themes emerged during the course of the project workshops.

The project workshops (Appendix 1), in April and July 2003, were organised to find out if the tools of the LGMA, particularly the Power of Well-being, are providing an answer to reinvigorating sustainable development at the local level.

This focus on the Well-being Power was adopted as a direct result of government ministers' statements, following the 2002 Johannesburg Summit, which emphasised this as a key area for local government and local sustainability. To date, very little use has been made of the Power, which is explained in Chapter 5. It represents one of the most radical opportunities for local authorities to work creatively and entrepreneurially in order to help overcome problems and provide practical solutions.

Arising from this analysis, a pattern of significant barriers and opportunities for progressing local sustainability were identified. These have been discussed under a series of themes, which are:

- knowledge and understanding
- leadership and commitment

- structures, cultures and values
- localism and diversity
- performance management – indicators, audit and obligations.

Significantly, all these aspects are encompassed within the Cabinet Office paper

on innovation in the public sector (Strategy Unit, 2003a). This work-in-progress paper is intended to provide a framework for thinking, debate and action on the conditions for successful innovation – ‘new ideas that work’ – and its diffusion in the public sector. It will be referred to again in later chapters in this report.

3 Knowledge and understanding

Learning for sustainable change

There is a general lack of understanding as to what sustainable development means. While there is a set of government-affirmed principles and approaches to sustainable development, awareness and ownership of them across departments, agencies and beyond are low.

As a consequence, most people inside and outside government and the public generally find it daunting and confusing. It is treated as a bolt-on rather than a new approach to joining up and integrating policy.

Addressing economic and social considerations within current policy and practice is failing adequately to tackle environmental concerns. Even within the UK, at neighbourhood level, communities, often the most impoverished, experience a poor quality of physical and living environment.

Limits to environmental capacity, managing for the long term and adopting a strategic approach to managing risk that takes account of the global context are vital aspects of sustainable development. These are poorly understood and practised, particularly the issue of managing risk at the local level. The degree to which they are explicitly referenced within economic (business development, regeneration) and social (education, skills and training) programmes is highly variable.

The nature of innovation in the public sector is likewise poorly understood and there are key links that can be harnessed as a positive driver for change to be made with sustainable development.

The House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee (HCEAC) has reinforced many points that were raised during the project

workshops. In taking evidence for its report *Learning the Sustainability Lesson* (HCEAC, 2003a), for example, the Committee became aware of problems encountered in using the term 'sustainable development'. The issue is that it lacks resonance to people, resulting in other more user-friendly terms, such as well-being, being used interchangeably, although such terms are not underpinned by the full meanings of sustainable development.

The HCEAC also noted the lack of a clear vision of the role of learning (informal and formal learning) within the UK Sustainable Development Strategy (para. 15). Withdrawal of HM Treasury's Landfill Tax Credit Scheme, which previously generated an important funding stream for NGOs to effect change (para. 50) through practical projects, was also noted.

In terms of joining up policy, the HCEAC noted disappointment that the Skills White Paper (DfES, 2003a):

... chose to present its future skills policy so visibly and exclusively within the narrow context of economic competitiveness rather than against the wider backdrop of sustainable development [given that] the White Paper will be a key point of reference across the employment and education sectors and the Government has missed an important opportunity to embed sustainable development as a guiding principle.
(HCEAC, 2003a, para. 175)

Raising awareness of sustainable development and environmental issues through training and other means is an important activity. All government departments are required to have strategies in place for this. The HCEAC in its *Greening Government 2003* report (HCEAC, 2003b) found little hard evidence of

committed activity, either in terms of frequency and attendance of number of staff or in terms of evaluation of the impact of any such training. Evidence from the project workshops conveyed a similar message for local government but here there is no requirement for this work to be done.

Clarity, consistency and communication

Government departments, central bodies and agencies, and local authorities fail to communicate a common message that people can easily identify as sustainable development. This became increasingly apparent throughout the project work, particularly from local government and other key players in governance generally.

Electronic presentation of, and access to, information is becoming the dominant media for communication. Yet many government websites do not even have a category search that registers sustainable development. This could be co-ordinated to explicitly portray the overarching and cross-cutting nature of sustainable development and link content themes (for example, housing, health, transport, social cohesion) with approaches (long-term planning including whole-life costing in procurement).

Overcoming the day-to-day realities of coping with electronic information overload and overall knowledge management are important issues for attention.

Endorsing core sustainability principles

Many organisations involved with governance – including government itself – fail to demonstrate ‘respecting environmental limits’ and ‘taking a long-term perspective’ within the

government’s principles and approaches to sustainable development (Appendix 2). For example, improving housing has impacts on health and may help reduce carbon dioxide emissions. The connections with climate change could be better articulated in social and regeneration work. Local government and others do not pick up a clear message.

This reinforces the earlier observations of several commentators on the local level (Fisher, 1999; Pinfield and Saunders, 2000; Wetenhall, 1999) who have remarked that Community Strategies are not statutorily obliged to consider the global impact of local activities.

Government’s piloting of its ‘integrated policy appraisal tool’ could lead to broader roll-out across the public sector, with adaptations for local government. However, without more cross-cutting, collaborative working relationships – within and between organisations – and an understanding of what makes genuine partnership working tick, integration, and hence sustainable development, is unlikely to be achieved.

Public perceptions, values and citizen action

In terms of knowing how the public and citizens understand and relate to sustainable development, the evidence reinforces the need for consistent messages. The labels ‘LA21’ and ‘sustainable development’ are not widely recognised by most citizens, although they do have serious concerns, particularly about their local environment, and can see the common sense in government and agencies working in a joined-up way (Burningham and Thrush, 2001; Lucas *et al.*, 2003).

On issues such as sustainable production and consumption (purchasing, lifestyle), a 2003 National Consumer Council survey (Holdsworth, 2003) found the following.

- Consumers are happy to do their bit but the convenience in pressured daily lives takes precedence, and they want choices to be made easier with more access to, and choice of, sustainable goods.
- Those on low incomes have a much more local outlook, suffer most from local environmental degradation, feel powerless to improve their circumstances, have less access to facilities and lack the income to invest in more sustainable products.

Many informal, voluntary and NGO charitable organisations play a vital role in building awareness of the need for change, opening up debates and winning community support. They provide practical opportunities for collaboration, and for shaping and making such changes happen at neighbourhood and local level (Church and Elster, 2002).

Understanding how these networks of activity can be better supported through national funding streams and support from LSP partners is essential for creating a sense of mutuality. Improving the quality of the built and natural environment has to go hand in hand with improving social-economic conditions for people, to build stable, sustainable communities (Lucas *et al.*, 2003).

Regenerating and building sustainable communities

Tackling poverty and social exclusion is a vital element for establishing a minimum quality of life. Providing an acceptable quality of public services is essential for:

- ensuring that everyone has access to a clean, safe, warm, affordable and decent home
- maintaining a healthy livelihood through opportunities to work
- recognising the importance of education, skills and training as fundamental social aspects of sustainable development.

This highlights the strong connection and overlap with government's agendas around social cohesion, regeneration, neighbourhood renewal, liveability, community well-being, and sustainable communities and civil renewal. Also an important link to this is the way that central government is promoting the concept of 'extended schools' as a direct way to tackle social inclusion. All local authorities have a potential role in this in extending support to disadvantaged families (Migniuolo, 2003).

There is a case for these government agendas to be strategically integrated; for them to look to the longer term and to relate to the global scale. There is more work to be done in making the connections with other strategic initiatives – such as areas of low housing demand – and hence make regeneration sustainable (Sustainable Development Commission, 2002, 2003a).

Risk and climate change: a pragmatic approach

Risk as an analytical approach incorporates sustainability principles. It evolved following the Cabinet Office's report (Strategy Unit, 2002), which linked risk to innovation:

... risk is most commonly held to mean hazard and something to be avoided. But it has another face – that of opportunity. Improving public services requires innovation – seizing new opportunities and managing the risks involved. We define risk as uncertainty of outcome, whether positive opportunity or negative threat, of actions and events. It is the combination of likelihood of impact, including perceived importance.

(Strategy Unit, 2002, p. 25)

The Local Government Management Board (now the Improvement and Development Agency) provided support, training and take-up of environmental management systems (EMS) – including externally accredited systems, such as EMAS (Eco-Management and Audit Scheme) and ISO 14001 – in local government as a means of managing risk with regard to environmental impacts and an opportunity to reduce waste and lower costs. This support service and linked survey work ceased in 2000. Where local authorities have pursued full accreditation (such as Lewes District Council), this has provided knowledge and understanding, and a driver for innovation and improvement.

The EMS approach:

- naturally monitors and picks up on failures in waste-management practices generally and key issues in procurement

- helps monitor services with regard to street cleanliness and other hazards that are important for local environmental quality.

These aspects consistently feature in local residents' surveys as vitally important to their local quality of life at neighbourhood level. As mentioned earlier (Burningham and Thrush, 2001), it is those in the worst socio-economic circumstances who live in areas needing regeneration that often suffer the poorest local environmental quality.

The risk management concept, as advocated by the Cabinet Office, is challenging. However, if the basis of EMS has not been promoted and widely adopted, then this raises questions about the corporate capacity of local authorities and LSPs to grapple effectively with managing environmental and other types of risk.

Local responses to climate change in terms of adaptation – both positive and negative (UKCIP *et al.*, 2003 – involve precisely this kind of approach. Effective action by UK local authorities on this is generally poor (Box 6).

Box 6 Climate change work by local authorities

A survey undertaken by LGA, the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) and de Montfort University, published in November 2002, revealed that:

- only 7 per cent (of respondents) have a climate change strategy
- a further 23 per cent plan to produce one in 2002–03 and 47 per cent are considering it
- 68 per cent, i.e. most, of local authorities have not yet quantified or documented the effects of climate change on their areas.

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More recent survey results (Netherwood, 2003, p. 15) reported that, in 24 of the 25 Welsh local authorities / national parks, no local authority had a Climate Change Action Plan; only three authorities had considered the UK Climate Impacts Programme (UKCIP) scenarios and looked at likely climate change scenarios for the future; and only two authorities (national parks) had looked at it at a strategic level and fed climate change scenarios into their planning. From observation of past survey trends and feedback from the IDeA, the situation for English local authorities is expected to be about the same.

The Cabinet Office's *Strategic Audit 2003* (Strategy Unit, 2003b) noted that:

Climate change, if unchecked, will have dramatic impacts on the world, and is already having an impact on the UK through floods, unstable weather and a host of indirect effects. It cannot be solved unilaterally: the follow up to Kyoto will be vital and other countries – particularly the US – need to follow the UK in moving towards 60 per cent reductions in CO₂ emissions by 2050.

The critical choice for the UK is whether to move more quickly into efficient products and processes that use less carbon and other materials. Building on the Energy White Paper there may be major potential benefits for competitiveness and reducing dependence for energy on unstable parts of the world. The UK has done well in cutting CO₂ emissions: but the current position may not stimulate enough private investment to put the UK in the lead in eco-efficient technologies.

For local government, the Energy White Paper (DTI, 2003a) offers opportunities for local

government to promote energy efficiency, create health and renewal partnerships about warmth and lower carbon production. It provides the basis for a carbon audit of planning and spatial strategies, as well as development more generally. A funded local action plan for this has yet to be developed but the Councils for Climate Protection Programme, managed by the IDeA – involving 24 local authorities – has run out of funding. The Sustainable Development Commission's (SDC's) work on climate change through the 'dCarb UK' project (SDC, 2003b) could be an important model in supporting local authorities and their partners' work more widely.

Capacity-building programmes and innovation

The findings of recent research by the Office of Public Management (OPM, 2003, p. 4) on capacity-building needs for local government list the key gaps as partnership working, e-government, risk taking and community engagement. Strategic thinking and corporate working were highlighted as additional gaps among members and top teams. The findings of this project reinforce this and suggest that, additionally, environmental stewardship should be incorporated within learning and development programmes. There is no mention of these aspects within:

- the Centre for Excellence in Leadership consultation paper on *Developing the Leaders of the Future* (DfES, 2003b)
- reports of the Leadership Development Commission (Employers' Organisation and IDeA, 2003).

For local government there needs to be greater synthesis of sustainable development across the whole of the IDeA Knowledge website (www.idea.gov.uk/knowledge).

The Environmental Audit Committee remarked on disappointing progress given the pointers set out in the Toyne Report (Toyne, 1993) on implementing environmental education and its review (HCEAC, 2003a, para. 111).

The *Civil Renewal: A New Agenda* lecture by the Home Secretary (Blunkett, 2003, p. 25), in summarising an enriched approach and an emphasis on citizen involvement, sets out the need:

- for government reform and to learn from best practice, particularly in local government
- to build citizen involvement into the human resources policies and the training and development of civil servants
- to systematise research into what works best within the workings of government, and to restructure accordingly.

There are opportunities to upgrade development programmes building on the:

- experience of business working with and supporting local communities drawing on Corporate Social Responsibility good practice
- *Improving Policy Coherence and Integration for Sustainable Development – A Checklist* (OECD, 2002) and lessons of public sector management reform summarised in international case studies (OECD, 2000); and the content of the internet-based

The Councillor as Guardian of the Environment handbook series developed by the United Nations Environment Programme, International Environment Technology Centre (2000)

- WWF *Mainstreaming Sustainability* resource packs for local authorities (WWF, 2002) and the extensive skills and experience of other professionally and informally funded NGO community, voluntary and charitable sectors
- DfES *Sustainable Development Action Plan* (DfES, 2003c) using the focus on partnerships – research has shown how schools can contribute to area regeneration (Crowther *et al.*, 2003) through the whole-school approach of ‘extended’ schools
- *LGA Futures Toolkit* (LGA, 2000a) and *Delivering Well-being – A Handbook for Sustainable Decision Making* (LGA, 2001).

Furthermore, there are key opportunities to develop capacity-building programmes to foster innovation in the public sector where sustainable development principles and approaches can be used as a challenging driver for change. Here, the issues of monitoring, assessment and dissemination are vital.

Conclusions

Government fails to convey a clear, consistent and coherent message to itself and others about what sustainable development entails as an approach and, more crucially, what are expected as minimum standards across the public sector.

Working within the idea of environmental limits and the notion of stewardship for the

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long-term public interest – with consideration for people and places beyond our immediate time frame and locality – are key issues that are frequently ignored.

The government's own principles and approaches, affirmed by DEFRA, are helpful in pointing out what is expected in day-to-day policy and management, but they are not owned across government or elsewhere and are patchily and inconsistently applied. There is no minimum set of thresholds or standards on how this should be done or audited.

Tackling the most basic issues of environmental quality in the immediate sense – litter and pollution – is not being universally delivered let alone managed with the longer-term impacts in mind. More fundamentally, at local level, responses to managing the shift

towards a low-carbon economy, to reduce carbon dioxide emissions and to be prepared for the consequences of climate change are failing to be grasped.

Informal and formal education has a key role to play. There is scope for all schools to evolve the 'whole-school approach' to support local communities through 'extended' schools.

This raises key questions of capacity building and innovation across the board. It is an issue not just of technical and professional understanding of the content of sustainable development, but also of process and community engagement. There is little evidence of these aspects being integrated into organisational learning and development programmes, or of drawing on experience from overseas.

4 Leadership and commitment

A lack of sustained political will at all levels, combined with a focus on the short term, tends to inhibit government and business from taking tough decisions to secure the long-term public interest. Investing funds towards uncertain but necessary long-term change is not easily secured. Understandably, fear of becoming unpopular and losing favour with the electorate leads to a reluctance to negotiate these issues.

Bringing about institutional and personal behaviour change means empowering and nurturing champions at all levels, in government and in the wider community.

Local government has a special democratic mandate of community leadership to procure in the best long-term interests and to secure the well-being of its communities. This increasingly requires influencing, networking and guiding the work of strategic partnerships. However, genuine partnership working appears to be poorly understood and practised.

Greater collaborative styles of working between organisations and participatory planning approaches with the community are crucial for making progress towards sustainable development.

Ultimately, the public expects that government and the public sector should make efforts to get its own house in order with regard to demonstrating environmentally responsible behaviour and to lead by example.

Leadership for one common purpose

There is no doubt that reform of the public services is an overarching priority for government. The issue that is less clear is how the ultimate purpose or goal of that reform – a better quality of life for all – should be secured.

In this sense, the debate about leadership and commitment should not be for its own sake, but towards this shared common purpose, as reflected in the Prime Minister's statement below:

This government's goal is a good quality of life for all. This means we can't just focus on narrow economic factors – vitally important though these are – but must also take into account the local and environmental health of our country. People rightly want a cleaner, healthier environment, safer streets and good schools as well as economic growth and low unemployment. It is only through sustainable development that we can meet these ambitions.

(DEFRA, 2003a, p. 5)

Change, real change, takes a long time. The Cabinet Office paper on innovation in the public sector (Strategy Unit, 2003a, p. 39) notes that:

Without clear support from the top, the most promising innovations are stifled. And without clear drive from the most senior levels of organisations, it will rarely be possible to create space for new ideas to develop, or for ideas to be pushed through to testing or implementation. Leadership is also vital to counteract the very powerful tendencies toward inertia.

Three different types of innovation are defined in the paper:

- *incremental*: which is usually minor changes, abundant in organisations, and which is crucial to improvement of public services, for example the tailoring of services to individual and local needs, and to value for money

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- *radical*: which is less frequent and is about establishing fundamentally new ways of organising or delivering a service that may achieve marked improvements in performance
- *systemic or transformative*: which is much more occasional and requires fundamental changes in organisations' social and cultural arrangements and typically leads to step change in overall performance (for example, often driven by the emergence of new technologies, which transform sectors giving rise to new workforce structures and new types of organisation); but this can take decades for the full effects and for the innovation to be fully exploited.

It is arguable that the thrust of sustainable development is more akin to systemic or transformative innovation than the others, although this linkage is not made explicit in this paper. Another observation is that, generally, the more radical the innovation, the more necessary the scale and scope for effective trialling and implementation. Government departments are singled out as having a special role in:

- policy role innovation – new policy directions and initiatives
- innovations in the policy-making process
- policy to foster innovation and diffusion.

The paper also suggests that:

Government might better see itself as responsible for creating the environment or conditions in which innovation can take place in

the public sector, including encouraging the lateral diffusion of successful innovations.
(Strategy Unit, 2003a, p. 36)

Sue Goss (2001, p. 209), in drawing evidence from a civic entrepreneurial study, suggests that ten years is the time that it takes to turn an organisation around. Within this, sustained and consistent leadership, a clear and simple message, and leadership at many levels are vital. This involves making space and time for people throughout the organisation to do their bit, to innovate and to explore.

This is further endorsed by examining recent successes in sustainability at the local level where, very often, champions, through dogged determination and persistence, have overcome problems. They have been allowed, or have managed, to experiment their way to success, sometimes with senior backing. The point is that the practical successes in, for example, renewable energy, energy efficiency and fuel poverty (Newark and Sherwood District Council, Nottinghamshire, mentioned earlier in Box 3) are based on years of accumulated effort. This is as true in the voluntary, community sector as in local government.

Embedding or mainstreaming sustainability from a government perspective is perceived to be highly demanding. The key reasons are that it means affecting personal and institutional behaviour across the board. This needs a high level of committed leadership and a high degree of discretion at the local level. Box 7 summarises some of the project workshops' key points on this.

Box 7 Why is it so hard to do sustainable development?

- Making tough – potentially unpopular – decisions within a consciously planned, evolving framework, which may affect, and be affected by, electoral voting patterns.
- Evoking empathy and a sense of real concern and trust within society, which wins democratic support for policies and cultural aspirations that may only appear to work over a number of generations.
- Hence, building support from all sectors of society – citizen to corporate level – through new and sophisticated participatory planning processes that demand a high degree of skill and time for genuine engagement.
- Shaping public opinion, rather than just responding to it, to bring about changes in attitudes that question values and begin to change unsustainable consumption patterns (high levels of waste, a throw-away and ‘keep-up-with-the-Joneses’ culture).
- Addressing social exclusion and alienation from decision-making processes, and not disadvantaging poorer communities, through changes to funding and taxation that raise prices to reflect environmental damage.
- Sharing and devolving power and budgets to other layers of government, and partnerships with agencies, organisations and groups in society.

(continued)

- Using new and sometimes untested models, statutory powers, compacts, public–private partnerships, social enterprise, neighbourhood management schemes and Community Interest Companies (CICs).
- Developing and adapting governance arrangements that respond to rapidly evolving circumstances, joined-up working and integration of all key objectives at the same time.

The reality is that these changes meet with resistance from established and powerful vested interests, within almost all organisations, and from citizens generally. This is because they do not see or understand the bigger picture, and the benefits to them arising from sustainable development as it is currently offered.

Local community leadership

Local government is still adapting to a new kind of governance, but with parallels to the mid-to late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries where institutions other than government, such as charities, churches and entrepreneurs, were closely involved in social provision. In the last 20 years, the shift has been from an emphasis on local authorities to local agencies and diversified models of public service delivery. This has demanded a shift from administration to leadership involving networking, negotiation and ambassadorial work (Travers *et al.*, 1997).

The community leadership role of local government is clearly defined in the 2001 White Paper (Box 8).

Box 8 Community leadership in the Local Government White Paper 2001 (DETR, 2001a)

Strengthening local government

The Government wants to see strong, vibrant, innovative, and responsive local government delivering the quality of local leadership and public services that communities need.

(DTLR, 2002, p. 1)

Leading and empowering communities

A thriving local democracy with strong and accountable political leadership underpins effective community leadership and the delivery of high quality public services. Communities and places differ and are becoming more diverse. People look to their councils to help make sure that their area is a good place to live and work.

(DTLR, 2002, p. 2)

Why local democratic leadership matters

Resources are finite, and communities' views and priorities can diverge and conflict. It also means taking strategic choices for future generations not just dealing with immediate interests and issues.

(DETR, 2001a, para 2.3, p. 13)

It also means developing social capital by supporting civic engagement and networks of neighbourhood organisations. It means enhancing environmental quality by reducing waste, energy use and air pollution and improving public space. And it means safeguarding the interests of future members of the community. Many decisions made now will have long-term implications. These need to be identified, understood and designed into local policies. These are not separate goals – sustainable development means addressing all of them at the same time.

(Para 2.8, p. 14)

Leadership roles and responsibilities

The Cabinet Office study on risk (Strategy Unit, 2002) described government's responsibility in relation to risk as covering three roles: regulatory, stewardship and management. Many risks to citizens can be prevented or contained through regulation or measures such as public health care.

Given the diversity of contractual outsourcing of public service delivery, risk is transferred but the responsibility remains with government. The reality is that, when things go wrong, people usually look to government to put them right.

Local authorities are, in effect, having to underwrite the performance of the LSPs, especially where these are tied to local public service performance agreements (LPSAs).

There are questions here about the capacity of those very small district councils or those enmeshed in their own organisational recovery planning (required for those graded as weak in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment inspection process) to deliver the management and leadership required.

Empowering local leadership also means redefining what kind of risk – financial, reputational – central government is prepared to underwrite with, and for, local government, and where it is prepared to innovate. Achieving sustainability often means trialling radical initiatives as part of a drive to improve not just public service delivery, but also better outcomes in the community.

Leading by example – public sector procurement

Local authorities' credibility with communities depends in part on their willingness to lead by example (Corbet and Roberts, 2001).

Reflecting back to the commitment to sustainable consumption and production, public sector procurement is a key target for improvement. For example, a King's Fund report *Claiming the Health Dividend – Unlocking the Benefits of NHS Spending* (Coote, 2002) reports in the summary outline of the chapter headings that:

... the National Health Service is the largest single organisation and employer in the country ... It spends £11 billion a year on buying goods and services ... It could use its huge purchasing power more effectively to tackle health inequalities and regenerate local economies. With regard to food alone it is the single largest purchaser, spending £500 million a year on feeding patients, employees and visitors ... It produces 600,000 tonnes of waste and spends £42 million disposing of it. By reducing waste it can help to reduce energy consumption, safeguard natural resources, save money and minimise health hazards associated with landfill and incineration.

The government has taken a lead through its *Framework for Sustainable Development on the Government Estate* (DEFRA, 2002) and the *Joint Note on Environmental Issues in Purchasing* (OGC and DEFRA, 2003). From November 2003, all new central government department contracts had to apply the minimum environmental standards when purchasing certain types of product, which cover aspects such as energy

efficiency, recycled content and biodegradability. This needs to be tested and audited.

Local government expenditure on goods, works and services is estimated to be around £40 billion a year. Clearly, this has significant economic, social and environmental impacts. The *National Procurement Strategy for Local Government* (ODPM, 2003d) and the IDeA strategy *Sustainability and Local Government Procurement* (IDeA, 2003) set out targets, but the test is audit against actual delivery and also whether there should be statutory obligations.

However, more could be done to include 'community benefit' requirements in procurement contracts, partnership, funding and planning agreements (Macfarlane and Cook, 2002).

Community engagement

Empowering local communities to help themselves is required for sustainability. The biggest challenge is giving those in greatest need a helping hand. The case study from Newark and Sherwood, outlined earlier, demonstrates the commitment and leadership that have resulted in delivering positive outcomes for families living in one of the most deprived estates in Nottinghamshire.

Understanding, tapping into and nurturing community activity is an important leadership aspect vital for sustainable communities. Community involvement is a diverse and complex spectrum covering many different aspects, and requiring specialised skills and approaches.

The ODPM-commissioned report *Searching for Solid Foundations – Community Involvement*

and Urban Policy (Chanan, 2003) provides a comprehensive guide to this perspective. It reveals that government has tended to focus on professionalisation of the voluntary and community sector as a means of securing alternative, supplementary deliverers of public services, with value in the cash economy. The direct (non-cash) value in maintaining and supporting the myriad of highly informal associations and networks of community and voluntary activity has not been fully appreciated. These provide mutual aid and are fundamental to social cohesion, community vitality and prosperity.

Conclusions

Leadership and commitment are essential for bringing about the long-term public interest. However strong the rhetoric for sustainable development within policy, the practice reveals a lack of political commitment at all levels to take tough decisions but also seize opportunities for innovation.

Local authorities have a special community leadership role. The governance context is less

about them having direct control and more about empowering and influencing. This requires a new outlook, skills and ways of working. A long-standing commitment to genuine partnership working based on a high degree of trust and collaboration is crucial. Procuring and brokering the best relationship with public and private partners, to deliver outcomes that are way beyond the direct control and influence of the local authority, takes a high degree of rigour and finesse.

New skills are needed to guide and inform the work of strategic partnerships, such as applied knowledge in techniques like horizon scanning, futures studies and scenario planning.

All this demands a high degree of sensitivity to public opinion and building confidence and trust with the community. Understanding, tapping into and nurturing community activity is an important leadership aspect vital for sustainable communities.

Again, this raises issues about capacity building. Programmes for development and learning need to embrace these issues so that effective leadership in all sectors, at all levels within organisations, is fostered and sustained.

5 Structures, cultures and values

A 'can-do' culture of well-being

The calibre of community leadership and entrepreneurship, central–local government relations, freedoms and flexibilities determines the capability of local authorities to deliver well-being. The advent of Best Value did bring about significant changes in organisational structures and has begun a shift in culture. However, it has not delivered the rapid step change and innovation hoped for by government.

The Power of Well-being introduced in the Local Government Act 2000 offers radical scope for innovation to help deliver Community Strategies' objectives, but, to date, it has been rarely used. A profound shift in council cultures is needed to make the most of this and new models of public service delivery – such as social enterprise and Community Interest Companies – which can be geared to deliver sustainable development.

However, local authorities, through procurement, cannot outsource their accountability to the public for services. To protect the longer-term public interest, sustainability principles and approaches need to be adopted.

Central to the public service delivery reform agenda is innovation but, as noted in Chapter 4, to fulfil transformative innovation takes many years. This also holds true for achieving local sustainability. The new structures and mechanisms for local government – new political cabinet and scrutiny functions, LSPs, Best Value, CPA, LPSAs and Community Strategies – are all geared to stimulate a step-change improvement in performance.

From the government-centred perception of local authorities, this was seen as to do with:

- an old culture which is inward looking and paternalistic
- failure to develop a community leadership role
- major problems with the local electoral system
- questions about the probity of local government
- an inefficient and opaque committee system
- neglect of service quality and uneven performance in services (Wheeler and Snape, 2001).

The new community leadership agenda, by contrast, requires a culture that is:

- highly strategic, outward-focused working that pushes the boundaries and demonstrates robust scrutiny, using lay people as well as experts
- highly citizen- and community-centred and responsive, and that is prepared proactively to shape public opinion and redefine tolerance levels and an ethos of public value
- collaborative and partnership-based, and that values and capitalises on formal and informal networks of experience and learning interest
- open and transparent, that is about managing legitimacy, and balancing accountabilities with local and national politicians, regulators and citizens

- a creative ‘can-do’ culture with thinking and working beyond traditional ‘silo’ boundaries of departments, within and between different professional organisational perspectives.

Local authority leaders (elected members) appreciate that partnership working is central to their work and have called for more appropriate support and training via a range of providers, using more inventive methods (Corbet and Roberts, 2001; Wilkinson and Craig, 2002).

The need for entrepreneurial managers and to engage with civic entrepreneurship is acknowledged. Sue Goss in *Making Local Governance Work* (Goss, 2001, p. 162) remarks on the need for local authorities not simply to bear or to take risks, but to negotiate them in an opportunistic fashion. However, the high levels of political and professional risk that very senior and junior local government officers may be exposed to, where politicians fail to take responsibility, is an issue that will need to be addressed.

Many of the remaining LA21, sustainability or environmental co-ordinators are in junior roles. They balance and manage risk in pushing the boundaries for innovation, working within a heavily driven silo and blame culture, often meeting resistance to work across departments or tackle cross-cutting issues.

Best Value did bring about significant changes in structures and has begun a shift in culture, but not the rapid step change and innovation hoped for by government. The baseline findings of the evaluation of the long-term impact of Best Value (Centre for Local and Regional Government Research, Cardiff University, 2003, p. 76) show this, even though local authorities perceive Best Value as the most important driver for change.

The Power of Well-being – a potential tool for local sustainability

The Power of Well-being has immense innovatory scope. It can be considered radical, a power of first resort. However, using the Power to its greatest potential demands and affords a new culture change, and will involve new approaches for councillors, officers and staff to realise their community leadership potential (Kitchin, 2003a).

Its introduction was symptomatic of the need for adjustment in governance arrangements to give local authorities added flexibility in working ways to spend and allocate funding to tackle cross-cutting issues such as health, regeneration and local environmental quality. Use of the Power will enable councils to:

- spend outside their areas, work across boundaries and do more for a wider range of people
- support Local Strategic Partnerships in well-being objectives and outcomes
- lend and spend money, give guarantees and provide staff, goods and accommodation to private, voluntary and community sectors
- set up contracts, companies, trusts and joint ventures
- charge for discretionary services, on a cost-recovery basis, and to trade (enhanced through additional powers brought in with the Local Government Act 2003).

It gives local authorities the opportunity to do *anything that they consider likely* to achieve any one or combination of three – economic, social or environmental – objectives to promote well-being, *unless* there is other legislation that specifically prohibits them from doing so, or limits or restricts how they do it. They must have regard to statutory guidance (introduced in March 2001 for English authorities) and to their Community Strategy, and comply with Best Value requirements.

It demands a fresh legal approach, which is the reverse of the culture imposed through *ultra vires*. Previously, local authorities were constrained by the *ultra vires* rule, which means that they have to rely on specific legislation to support or permit their actions and spending.

The LGA (2000b) suggested using a local well-being decision-making framework or template to help make explicit the economic/ social/ environmental implications of using the new Power and to integrate the three strands of well-being. This does not seem to have been adopted.

Evidence on *How the Local Government Act is Working* (House of Commons Transport, Local Government and the Regions Committee, 2002) showed that the main reason why so little use has been made of the Power was sheer ‘change overload’ resulting from setting up new structures and the dominance of Best Value.

Additional reasons revealed during this project’s April 2003 workshops are low awareness, confidence and willingness to pursue a can-do culture within councils. As a direct result of these findings, a legal scoping paper *Transforming Innovation into Action* (Welfare and Stookes, 2003) was commissioned and presented for discussion. This set out areas

where the Power might be used specifically to further sustainable development energy, transport, housing and community needs (Box 9). This also highlighted the scope for linking use of the Power with the DTI concept of social enterprise and the potential to use the proposed new type of company model, the Community Interest Company (discussed below).

The Local Government Information Unit has since profiled case studies of councils that are working creatively in six areas – food, energy, financial inclusion, safer communities, housing and education – in *Doing the Future* (Kitchin, 2003b). These examples should help to begin to change the culture, especially of legal advisers in local authorities who tend to adopt a ‘play-safe’ position matched in other departmental cultures that may still be working to narrow agendas.

Box 9 Making the most of the Power of Well-being for sustainable development: transforming innovation into action

Housing

Section 2 gives local authorities wider powers to improve living accommodation (e.g. for fuel efficiency) (paras 15–16).

Community needs

Concessionary fares schemes may be undertaken for sustainable development purposes, although strengthened guidance may be helpful (paras 21–5).

Section 2 powers could be combined with others to allow innovation in education to enable authorities to introduce schemes such as school bus services (paras 26–30).

(continued overleaf)

The use of the Power to extend education about sustainable development in schools would (were it necessary to use it) have to operate within the National Curriculum and other national education requirements (para. 32).

Waste

Waste Disposal Authorities already have powers to pursue recycling by mechanical means (paras 35–9).

The new Charging Power, based on the Well-being Power, could be used to charge for waste minimisation, were this considered desirable, although Guidance and amendments to legislation are likely to be necessary (paras 40–1).

Energy

The Well-being Power, combined with the new Trading Power, would enable local authorities to form energy companies, ESCOs and Energy and Environmental Services Companies EESCOs (para. 45). Companies formed under the new Powers could undertake small-scale electricity generation, under an exemption to the Electricity Act 1989 (para. 43). The electricity generated could be sold to residents (para. 44). The purchase of renewable energy by local authorities would need to be considered in relation to problems arising from EU procurement rules. (Welfare and Stookes, 2003)

A culture of social enterprise

Relating back to new approaches to community involvement, there is scope to see how the Well-being Power could be married with the DTI-led concept of social enterprise. The Social Enterprise Strategy (DTI, 2002) features a range of schemes that advance local sustainability – recycling, training, local transport and employment. Many generate environmental and social benefits for local communities. Renewable energy could be a new focus. The DTI's proposals for Community Interest Companies (DTI, 2003b) offer further potential. However, minimum thresholds to underpin the longer-term public interest have been suggested (Blair, 2003).

A new era of reward negotiation

The new voluntary process of Local Performance Service Agreements (DTLR, 2001a) has highlighted how local authorities, together with a range of local partners, can develop innovative and challenging new ways of working. It has been groundbreaking and is an important incentivising mechanism with financial rewards and enhanced flexibilities. This marks a shift in culture, which is closer, more collaborative and totally responsive to the context of the local authority. This is examined more fully in Chapter 7.

Advancing a new public service ethos

Whatever the partnership or organisational context, the challenge for sustainability relates to the organisational capacity that exists through using staff with the ability to help other

departments reinterpret what sustainability means for their services and activities. This has implications for staff involved in community-planning processes, community development and regeneration initiatives, to develop the skills to help other LSP partners and communities reinterpret what it means for safeguarding the long-term well-being of their locality.

A lack of joined-up working between these partners, each public agency conducting Best Value reviews and, in mixed-tier areas, councils duplicating effort has often resulted in 'over-consultation' fatigue and frustration in communities.

The situation will be further compounded by the increasing diversification of service deliverers and complexity of contractual arrangements – in the private and voluntary sector – as Public Finance Initiatives (PFIs), social enterprise and other public-private-voluntary delivery models evolve. The call for joining up from the public will be even louder.

In looking to more radical cultural and structural changes that seek to deliver coherence and quality in public service, irrespective of the provider, Aldridge and Stoker (2001) have advocated 'advancing a new public service ethos'.

Key elements of their argument for new governance can be summarised thus.

- The public and private sectors currently have different accountabilities. The cultural adjustment has to work two ways. Inasmuch as the public sector has to 'wise up' to better performance and customer-sensitive performance standards, so too there is a challenge for

the private and voluntary sector to embrace their wider contribution to community well-being if they are to be involved in the delivery of public services.

- As part of this recognition to community well-being, this means acting in socially responsible ways beyond contractual agreements. (From the perspective of the analysis in this report, this could be defined as the longer-term public interest, or it could be a type of public corporate social responsibility that acknowledges sustainable development.)
- The development of a clear set of protocols for defining what companies and public sector bodies should do to facilitate this kind of culture among their employees to make a contribution of well-being to their communities is suggested.
- Within the contractual and protocol arrangements, equity issues must be addressed and the performance challengeable by scrutiny committees in local authorities and possibly by Parliament.
- It is through enhanced quality of service delivery with this added demonstration to contribute to community well-being that a new public service ethos would be built and be valued.
- From a governance perspective, there is scope for neighbourhood and individual procurement setting, which could bypass the allocation decisions currently made by government (at any level).

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- The creation of a single public service career to guide staff and create greater fluidity and remove barriers would help deliver this.

The Cabinet Office paper on innovation in the public sector (Strategy Unit, 2003a, p. 2) summarises the following key points:

How to seek out and foster innovation from all levels is crucial to continual development and improvement; only half of all innovations are initiated at the top of organisations. Maintaining diversity of staff, paying attention to the needs and expectations of users and frontline staff, and promoting formal creativity techniques are all valuable tools to this end.

In the public sector it is unlikely that organisations will expire if they do not develop new ideas. In the absence of the profit motive it is essential to provide other incentives for individuals and organisations, such as greater recognition of success amongst one's peers.

Furthermore, this paper suggests – inviting further comment – that:

The traditional central pyramid structure of much of the public sector may need to be displaced by creating a small number of competing intermediaries. An additional advantage of this is that it would be a set of providers with the scale or resources and expertise to rapidly take over failing and underperforming organisations.

Conclusions

The massive overhaul of local government through the Modernising Local Government Agenda has led to changes in structure and

culture. However, innovation and step change tend to be the exception rather than the rule in practice. Best Value and CPA have been key drivers in this but it is clear that there are missing ingredients and sustainable development is one of them.

Evolving a fresh and more radical approach to change management within the public sector in how it works, learns, adapts and contracts from the best in the business, community and voluntary sectors may help deliver step change and further sustainable development.

Interest in the use of the Power of Well-being and the enhanced powers in the Local Government Act 2003 is beginning to rise. There is potential for these, separately or collectively, to be combined with social enterprise and a new type of company model, Community Interest Companies, currently being developed by government, to advance sustainable development.

The overarching focus is the Community Strategy. The quality of strategic guidance and leadership that the local authority can give to its Local Strategic Partnership is crucial.

Local authorities, through procurement, cannot outsource their accountability to the public for that service. However, they can better manage risk by protecting the long-term public interest through ensuring that sustainable development criteria are embedded into all procurement frameworks and specifications for services and contracts. Therefore, the best possible understanding and sensitivity to sustainable development issues should be cultivated in all those who set these frameworks.

The culture of government, at all levels, needs to embrace genuine participatory

processes and be underpinned by a public service ethos that values the wider community and public interest. This needs nurturing and there is scope for greater cross-professional working.

6 Localism and diversity

A shift towards new localism

In terms of the job that needs to be done, there is pressure to deliver centrally determined priorities, which often compete for attention with local priorities which may be different. Local government has to work to get this balance right, with the appropriate capacity – time, funds, flexibility and adaptability – to deliver in the best public interest. Engaging with the diversity of interests and of citizens – particularly those who are from minority groups and others who are often socially excluded – is only just beginning to be better understood and delivered.

The debate between central and local government about greater devolution, decentralisation and empowerment of local authorities is highly significant for sustainable development. The international local government networks at WSSD emphasised the key role that local authorities play as a distinct sphere of government, having an important complementary role with national and regional government.

Within the UK, this has been echoed in the mounting debate on new localism. This has been defined in a Parliamentary answer by Local Government Minister Nick Raynsford, from a local government perspective as:

New localism embraces the enhanced role that we wish to see for local councils in leading their communities, engaging more fully in innovation, taking more responsibility for their own decisions and using greater freedom to shape services to meet local needs.

(<http://www.parliament.the-stationery-office.co.uk/pa/cm200203/cmhansrd/cm030402/text/30402w04.htm>)

Meeting local needs means pursuing solutions with appropriate levels of financial resources and spending (from the tax base) in ways that are highly responsive to local circumstances. The balance of how much discretion local authorities have to raise and spend from their own local base is the bone of contention with central government. There is also an anxiety about ensuring consistent minimum standards, hence avoiding the postcode lottery.

It could well be that new localism, if unfettered from centrally determined standards, may deliver the aspirations of that particular locality according to their self-defined tolerance levels and expectations of society. However, if the context within which this happens is not underpinned by some compact of ethical and moral principles that also include the notion of environmental justice, the realities could be damaging.

Areas vary enormously in their socio-demographic profile, range of ethnic groupings, economic and social vitality, and community cohesion and local geographical distinctiveness. What works for one area, at any point in time, may be totally inappropriate for another.

The Central–Local Partnership has recognised that there are some priorities that are common to both central and local government and provide a shared agenda for improvement. These are encapsulated in the agreed shared priorities (Box 10).

Box 10 The 2003–04 central–local shared priorities for public service improvement

- Raising standards across our schools.
- Improving the quality of life of older people and of children, young people and families at risk.
- Promoting healthier communities and narrowing health inequalities.
- Creating safer and stronger communities.
- Transforming our local environment.
- Meeting local transport needs more effectively.
- Promoting the economic vitality of localities.

The LGA set out in a document entitled *Special Delivery* (LGA, 2003a) issues calling for bolder confidence on the part of government in relation to the key aspects of the LGMA, local partnerships (LSPs), Local Public Service Agreements (LPSAs), deregulation, devolution and civic disengagement from local political processes. (Boxes 11 and 12 provide examples of how local authorities have been using LPSAs.)

There is a general understanding that one size does not fit all. However, from the local perspective, the freedoms and flexibilities from central control promised to the 22 councils graded as excellent in their Comprehensive Performance Assessment are discouraging:

As the London borough of Camden showed in its presentation to the innovation forum [made up of the 'excellent' councils and government ministers], centrally imposed bureaucracy and multiple funding streams are inhibiting ambition and delivery at a local level.

(LGA, 2003, p. 6)

Box 11 How local authorities have been using Local Public Service Agreements: transport

Suffolk County Council

Concern had been raised that the Rural White Paper target of a 33 per cent increase in number of rural households within ten minutes' walk of an at-least-hourly bus service by 2010 would not be met, while pockets of transport-derived social exclusion in urban areas would increase.

In the 'Suffolk Speaks' survey, the LPSA target was ranked as fourth in importance by local people.

The council has been working together with local bus operators to maintain and develop strong core networks of commercially sound bus services within and between Suffolk's main centres of population. It has involved the voluntary sector to maintain and develop community transport services for people whose mobility is impaired by infirmity or location. Also it is working in partnership with the rail industry to improve the frequency of train services and accessibility.

Pilots, one rural and the other focusing on Ipswich, are looking at improving poor public transport links. If successful, the scheme will be rolled out across the county. The projects involve private hire vehicle (PHV) operators or community transport (CT) operators to tender for local bus services. The main focus will be on demand-responsive travel rather than traditional services (LGA, 2003c).

Box 12 How local authorities have been using Local Public Service Agreements: improving the quality of the local environment

East Riding of Yorkshire Council

East Riding of Yorkshire Council has an innovative target of improving the streets and open spaces. The LPSA target has a great focus on the satisfaction of local residents. It aims to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of existing street-scene-related front-line service resources through the better co-ordination of services.

The Council has established the parish and area liaison team, which is developing links with the local community to enable more influence over local neighbourhood management. The team also monitors the performance of service units against the LPSA targets and promotes improvements to ensure that the Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets are achieved.

By working in partnership with local ward members and town and parish councils and others – resident groups, neighbourhood watch, tenants' forums – the parish and area liaison team can effectively establish what matters to the community and develop local solutions. It encourages local community representatives to put forward their ideas and aspirations for improving the quality of life of their local public space (LGA, 2003c).

Balancing central and local priorities

This issue of tension and balance that local authorities face in working to deliver on targets that are centrally determined was a recurrent theme that emerged from all the workshops.

The tension lies in the amount of resources that working to national priorities diverts or absorbs from what are perceived by the local authority as more pressing issues. This is compounded through:

- the local authorities' own performance management framework by having to focus on statutory Best Value Performance Indicators
- the potential mismatch in LSPs of other public sector partner agency representatives being tied to work on their central, nationally determined priority targets – for example, very specific ones on health – that bear little relevance to locally identified pressing health needs for the local area.

Delivery of national departmental targets can restrict progress on local-level Community Strategy priorities. Where these differ, this can limit the financial pooling of resources within the LSP.

Issues of common concern and of universal relevance are summarised in a checklist for sustainable communities, devised by the Sustainable Development Commission (Power, 2003) in response to the Sustainable Communities Plan (ODPM, 2003e). These questions can help focus the activities of central agencies with LSP partners at the local level in a highly practical manner (Box 13), but in a way that allows for local discretion.

Box 13 Sustainable development checklist for sustainable communities (Power, 2003)

Does the *community* (residents, service providers and other local stakeholders) have a *key role* in analysing the challenges and deciding priorities within the available and potential resources?

Do homes have the highest *Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP) rating*, including refurbished homes and reuse of existing buildings? Is the cost of achieving this for *existing homes* built into the plan, with a payback time of a typical loan of ten to 30 years?

Are the materials and components used in *construction* as locally sourced as possible, health friendly (e.g. low toxins), low in embodied energy, and easily and locally maintainable? Are new communities going to have the lowest energy use overall, the *lowest environmental impact* overall and overall beneficial social effects?

Is there sufficient *usable green space* within *walking* distance (15 minutes with a pushchair from any home) with trees (to absorb carbon and provide shade and shelter) and supervision and maintenance? Does the green space provide wildlife habitats and contribute to urban drainage?

Are the streets *pedestrian and cycle friendly* to encourage local contact, informal surveillance and local shopping? Do street fronts include shops and small businesses near bus stops and intersections?

(continued)

Does the settlement have *frequent, reliable, cheap public transport* – requiring a density of at least 50 homes per hectare to support bus routes, local shops and schools? Is car parking and car access organised to:

- allow and encourage essential economic and social activity?
- deter unnecessary journeys?
- generate income for local services (particularly public transport)?
- rebalance urban communities in favour of families, young children, the elderly – social contact and street life generally?

Parking fees/permits, the limiting of road space, enforcement of speed limits and the establishment of Home Zones are some techniques.

Is the *design and layout* of communities creating a *viable mix of people and uses*; integrating old with new; providing community facilities, parks and play areas, benches and planting; encouraging involvement, commitment, ownership and investment – attracting people of different ethnic and social backgrounds?

Do communities have *meeting points* – benches, pocket parks, play areas, cafes?

Are there community facilities – centres for meetings, for hire, for parties and weddings; churches with social activities and provision attached?

Are there ways for residents to make an input into their communities?

(continued overleaf)

Do all sections of the community have a chance to influence and make decisions that affect their future? What about local schools, training facilities, lifelong learning?

Are there *front-line jobs* – with training and recognition – to care for, protect and repair the neighbourhood? This strategy helps people needing work, creates informal supervision and maintains conditions. The park-keeper, caretaker, warden and school assistant are examples.

Is there proper *security, street supervision, repair and maintenance and environmental care*? For instance, is there a neighbourhood management team responsible for organising this basic environmental and social service, and co-ordinating public inputs to maximise community quality of life?

The LGA (2003b) has articulated this and listed a series of five key tests that it wishes every minister and national politician to apply when developing a new policy for local people (Box 14).

Box 14 Five key tests of democratic localism (LGA 2003b)

1 Does this policy let local people make decisions about their services and priorities through their locally elected representatives?

Councils are democratically elected and are at the heart of and directly accountable to their communities. Better engagement

(continued)

between local councils and the people they serve will ensure the effectiveness of local solutions and reinvigorate local politics.

2 Does this policy direct money to meet locally agreed needs or help councils raise resources locally?

Local priorities should determine how councils spend and raise money. Councils need the discretion to decide how they direct resources, rather than trying to meet local needs with centrally set spending levels.

3 Does this policy support local councils in their role and help them identify local priorities?

Local councils are not agents of central government. They are autonomous and accountable to the communities they serve. Their role is to lead their local communities – identifying priorities, developing local solutions and ensuring that all local public services are scrutinised and accountable.

4 Does this policy enhance the freedoms and flexibilities available to local councils?

Local freedoms and flexibilities are the key to local government improvement and delivering high-quality local public services. They help councils deliver sustainable solutions to local challenges. Where local public service delivery is concerned, one size does not fit all.

(continued)

5 Has this policy been subject to full consultation with local government via the Local Government Association (LGA)?

The LGA is the single voice for local government, representing local councils in England and Wales. Its national role means the LGA can work with decision makers and those developing new policies to ensure that they are in the best interests of the local communities that councils serve.

However, within this discourse on localism, reference to the government principles and approaches to sustainable development is lacking. More broadly, there is no publicly available report that comments on how sustainability is mainstreamed, monitored and reviewed within the corporate workings of the LGA.

The emergence of regional governance

The impact of evolving regional governance is significant for localism and diversity. In many cases, it is proving to be the optimum scale for strategic delivery of sustainability issues, and to provide a regional identity of branding large enough to be competitive within the EU. A survey by the Regional Futures Network (Brouder, 2003) maps out the complexity and confusion between the myriad of regional governance organisations. The alignment of their priorities with LSPs and Sub-regional Strategic Partnerships adds even greater complexity to the central–local relationship. This study – and other evidence gathered through the practitioners who are members of the Regional Futures Network – calls for more joined-up working, and coherence and clarity of responsibilities.

Social outreach and understanding communities

The reality of social disengagement with local politics, as evidenced by low election turnout rates, is accepted, but government responses as to how to reinvigorate this are limited. As discussed earlier, key reforms in the spatial planning system, together with future implications of the Aarhus Convention, offer opportunities to rekindle local interest.

Specifically, the whole discipline of participatory planning, rather than the outmoded notion of public participation, needs to be not just fostered within the spatial planning system, but also embedded into all public strategy development processes. The implications of the issues are noted in *Participatory Planning for Sustainable Communities* (School of the Built Environment, Heriot-Watt University *et al.*, 2003). This study reinforces the message that a one-size-fits-all response to community engagement does not work. Engaging with the diversity of citizens, particularly those who form minority groups and others who are often socially excluded, is only just beginning to be better understood and delivered.

The need for capacity building in devolved approaches to local governance in neighbourhood management has also been identified (Burgess *et al.*, 2001).

Conclusions

The relationship between central and local government is adjusting. Government is giving increased flexibility and freedom to local authorities to pursue their own creative solutions in response to local priorities, but

Seeing the bigger picture

there are limits, which cause tension. However, the pressure to meet centrally determined targets still dominates.

The 'shared priorities' agreed between central and local government are a useful focus, but how relevant they are to specific locality needs and the degree to which sustainable development approaches underpin them is not yet transparent or challengeable.

Discretion in raising and spending from the local tax base will be increasingly important to resource local solutions that are socially and environmentally just and sustainable. There are pockets of innovation and pioneering good practice that could be better shared and adapted to meet specific localities' needs.

Furthermore, the emergence of regional governance – armed with a sustainability

obligation – is proving vital to provide extra strategic capacity to co-ordinate and steer the disjointed actions of agencies and partners at regional and local level, so that the overall impact advances, rather than undermines, progress towards sustainable development.

Meeting community needs has to deal with the reality of social disengagement as evidenced by low election turnouts. Restoring confidence and trust means responding to the community with better understanding of local diversity of interests and people, especially those who are socially excluded.

There is much to be done in building capacity in local government and others in governance to adopt genuine participatory approaches to planning of all types.

7 Performance management: indicators, audit and obligations

Adopting a whole-systems approach

For sustainability to be mainstreamed, the frameworks of corporate management, the processes and use of specific tools (targets and indicators), audit, review and inspection procedures all need to be appropriately aligned and geared to a common sustainability set of criteria. This is not currently the case.

In the absence of some universally applied minimum stewardship standards and approaches, a local authority could be delivering exactly what its community wishes, with total democratic legitimacy, but which might contravene any sense of environmental and social justice.

Innovative piloting work to create 'quality of life area profiles' is under way by a consortium led by the Audit Commission. This will track, and visually translate into scalable graphical form, the outcomes of assessments of all public service providers, including those provided by the private, community and voluntary sectors. How this might be set against some minimum environmental stewardship criteria will be critical.

If government's goal is to deliver a better quality of life for all, then this will require practical demonstration backed by a statutory obligation that underpins the actions of all those involved in delivering public service to show how they are mainstreaming and improving sustainable development outcomes. It depends on a relationship between central, regional and local government and citizens that is open and highly connected. It depends on being mutually supportive and seeing the bigger picture.

Best Value and Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA)

When Best Value was introduced, local authorities were required to have regard to sustainable development. Detailed, practical formal guidance for use by auditors and inspectors and local authorities was not issued.

Sustainability checklists were evolved (SOLACE, 2000) and local authorities devised their own methods for impact assessments for undertaking cross-cutting reviews of performance across the council's operations, services or functions. Evidence (CAG Consultants, 2003a) from the use of sustainable development checklists in local authorities suggests that they are likely to be effective only when sustainable development specialists or champions are available to support and reassure policy makers in their identification of key sustainability impacts for their policy area.

The outcome of Best Value reviews was not based on the assessments for sustainability performance. The dominance of Best Value often resulted in the sidelining or curtailing of sustainability training and awareness, and environmental management and improvement programmes.

CPA is an attempt to look in a systematic and integrated way at the performance of a council. It combines a consideration of the Best Value inspections on specific services with a wider appraisal of corporate performance. From 2002, all county and unitary local authorities were subject to CPA. From 2003 to 2004, all districts will be subject to a similar, but different, variant of the process, but with the same basic stages.

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In the first round of CPA inspections of county and unitary authorities, the majority (two-thirds) did not mention sustainable development in either their self-assessments or corporate assessments (CAG Consultants, 2002). Factors that contributed to this outcome are the Audit Commission's own guidance to local authorities, the methodology applied by the Audit Commission and how well inspectors understand the importance of sustainable development and can therefore advise and encourage sustainability. New *Mainstreaming Sustainability* guidance developed by WWF for the IDeA could helpfully inform inspectors and auditors (WWF, 2002b).

The current main thrust of audit and inspection places more of an emphasis on checking that the local authorities' strategic aims and objectives are delivered in accordance with priorities identified by the community, through the Community Strategy.

Communities may be resistant, and reluctant, to agree or prioritise measures that promote the longer-term interest. Examples are taxation on work car-parking spaces, road-toll charging, tourist taxes and 'nimbyism' in response to the siting of waste disposal options such as recycling or incineration stations. Their tolerance levels for non-sustainability may be high; therefore, there is a need for some universally applied minimum stewardship standards and approaches.

Based on the findings of the first reviews, the Audit Commission, following consultation, has carried out a refresh of the process. Also a revised methodology and guidelines are being developed for 2005–06.

Following a joint Audit Commission and IDeA workshop, held in Newcastle in

September 2003 for central, regional and local authority practitioners from the area, a series of questions were generated for the Audit Commission to consider using to help evaluate the effectiveness of local authorities in sustainable development performance. These relate to three themes:

- balancing national, regional and local priorities for sustainable development
- strategic vision and corporate community leadership
- stakeholder engagement and participation.

The suggested questions on community leadership are set out in Table 2 (CAG Consultants, 2003c).

Indicators and the measurement of outcomes

From a theoretical perspective, measuring what is valued, rather than valuing just what can be easily measured, is a key challenge in determining progress. Models and methods using different types of indicator have been rapidly developing since the 1990s. Some of these – such as the (voluntary) quality of life indicators – have been adopted and are being evolved by government in partnership with other agencies and organisations to inform policy and to track progress (Audit Commission, 2002). The way that growth, development and prosperity are defined raises some key questions. Commentators challenge some of the government's criteria for sustainable development, particularly with regard to the economic growth (SDC, 2003c).

Table 2 Strategic vision and community leadership: possible future questions to assist evaluation of sustainable development performance in local authorities

Suggested questions	What Audit Commission inspectors could consider
Do the Community Strategy and other strategies translate into clearly defined sustainability actions, which local people could appreciate?	Could be undertaken as part of a more general evaluation of the extent to which the vision of the Community Strategy is translated into tangible actions.
Is there a strong political and management lead on sustainable development?	Again, this could be part of a general evaluation of the vision of the local authority.
Is a corporate commitment supported by the use of mechanisms to encourage more sustainable working among strategic and operational staff?	Clear corporate systems for implementing sustainable development should be in place. Inspectors could also examine whether the authority uses management tools such as ISO 14000, EMAS, Sustainability Appraisal and SIGMA (Sustainability – Integrated Guidelines for Management), and also the promotion of sustainability with the council workforce and stakeholders.
To what extent are sustainable development priorities reflected in all the local authority's strategies?	This would require an evaluation by the Audit Commission inspectors based on a firm understanding of the range of sustainability issues.
Is the Community Strategy really a Sustainable Development Action Plan as it should be? To what extent does it take on board all aspects of sustainable development in an integrated fashion?	This would require an evaluation by the Audit Commission inspectors based on a firm understanding of the range of sustainability issues.
Have LSP members been trained on sustainable development and on the national guidance and toolkits available around SD?	Inspectors could examine whether training has been undertaken and whether this has translated into increased awareness among LSP members.
Is the authority dealing with current issues in a way that also integrates longer-term and more global concerns?	As with the local/regional national balance of priorities, it is important that an authority be seen to consider intergenerational and global sustainability concerns.

Source: CAG Consultants, 2003c, p. 9.

Seeing the bigger picture

In terms of fulfilling a basic standard of delivery that supports local environmental and broader local sustainability outcomes, there are helpful measures, such as the government's headline sustainability indicators (DEFRA, 2003a) and a range of statutory Best Value performance indicators. However, there is no coherence to link the collective impact of these and for this to be included as a significant measure as part of the local authority's performance judgement when externally inspected or audited.

Several pioneering local authorities – Oxfordshire, Liverpool, York, Isle of Wight, Cardiff and Gwynedd – are now using the approach of 'ecological footprinting', which is a much more sophisticated type of indicator to measure natural resource use. It is a valuable communication tool that can help influence changes towards a more sustainable lifestyle. The Welsh Assembly Government is the first to use the 'footprint' as a headline (sustainability) indicator (Bond and Netherwood, 2003).

The results of the quality of life area profiles work led by the Audit Commission will provide a new context within which to test out sustainability criteria. It may be that these are evolved in the UK Sustainable Strategy Review process due to be completed by 2005.

Policy integration

Policy integration tools have been developed (largely pioneered by the Forum for the Future, a sustainability charity). These tools help to identify the connections and potential impacts of diverse policies and programmes, highlighting whether they positively reinforce or undermine one another. The best positive

alignment between economic, social and environmental impacts is needed to maximise the sustainability potential. These tools have been successfully adopted by a few local authorities and, most significantly, by the Welsh Assembly (CAG Consultants, 2003a).

A framework for more sustainable decision making – for establishing sustainable development at the heart of local authority and partner organisation aims, organisation, management and culture – was published by the Local Government Association in 2001 (LGA, 2001). The key management themes, processes, tools and service delivery areas that need to be considered as a composite package are summarised in Box 15.

Box 15 A framework for more sustainable decision making

Delivering Well-being – A Handbook for Sustainable Decision Making (LGA, 2001) sets out advice in three sections covering: managing for sustainable organisations and areas, cross-cutting issues for sustainable development and service delivery.

The advice and approaches summarised are presented as an adapted list below. It can be seen as a framework for establishing sustainable development at the heart of local authority and partner organisation aims, organisation, management and culture.

Managing for sustainable organisations and areas

- Awareness raising and training.
- Best Value and performance management.

(continued)

- Community planning and local strategic partnerships.
- Leadership, probity and democratic renewal.
- Managing impacts and financial appraisals.
- Monitoring, review and scrutiny.
- New powers to promote local well-being.
- Regional government.
- Vision and long-term planning.

Cross-cutting issues for sustainability

- Biodiversity and green space.
- Climate change.
- Equal opportunities and social inclusion.
- International responsibility.
- Local economy and work (paid and unpaid).
- Pollution of air, land and water.
- Procurement and contract specification.
- Regeneration and neighbourhood renewal.
- Resource management (energy, water, waste, etc.).
- Working in partnership.

Service delivery

- Construction and infrastructure management.
- Education and lifelong learning.
- Health and safety.
- Land-use planning and the rural environment.
- Leisure and culture.
- Training and employment.
- Waste management and cleansing.

Auditing sustainability in corporate performance

A qualitative assessment of LA21 strategies was never undertaken by government. However, various surveys and research by the Local Government Management Board (LGMB, 1997) and others (Morris, 2001) tracked a number of observations through year-on-year surveys. These ceased in 2000, so there is no current baseline data to demonstrate how sustainability is being mainstreamed in local authorities measured against a robust set of sustainability principles. IDEa has set out to undertake a survey within its 2003–04 programme, but the scope of this has yet to be determined.

However, recent evidence relating to the sustainability activity of local authorities in Wales suggests confusion and fragmentation, and a lack of corporate approaches to considering environmental performance (Netherwood, 2003). This survey notes that indicator initiatives are piecemeal and not joined up, and suggests the need for clear government guidance.

The survey reported that 20 (out of the 25) authorities have no corporate system of environmental stewardship and undertake a range of measures to manage environmental performance within services.

Environmental management systems (EMS)

Currently, Best Value and the CPA framework do not oblige local authorities to reduce their environmental impacts through an environmental management systems approach. 'Whole-life costing' (purchase, maintenance, end-of-life and disposal costs) within procurement could be a basic requirement for all those involved in public service delivery.

Seeing the bigger picture

Building on the basic EMS approach, the evolution of health impact assessments, 'rural proofing' and other new kinds of social proofing techniques offer more of a sustainability management system. None of these is an obligatory requirement or is standard practice for local government.

Whatever the type of formal or informal system, the key is that it is integrated. Sustainability issues need to be evidenced throughout the whole overarching corporate working delivered within, for example, Investors in People programmes, Business Excellence Model and other quality assurance schemes. However, there are some promising examples (Box 16).

Box 16 Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council

Sandwell developed a process for simultaneously addressing the 'core issues' of sustainable development, equalities, community safety, risk management and e-government in Best Value.

An 'impact assessment template' for all of the core issues is considered by review teams in workshops, with further specialist support available. The impact template allows the teams to identify what is most important to their service.

A core issues group has been set up, with champions from each of the five core areas. With the Chief Executive's support, their role is to push the mainstreaming agenda through all service activities, including

(continued)

Best Value and business planning. It has been helpful for sustainable development to be treated as a core issue alongside the other areas – it helps streamlining.

For instance, a single message goes to heads of service, rather than five or six separate messages. There is less risk of competition between the core areas and it has the benefits of 'hunting in a pack' – the sustainable development specialist need not be a lone voice any more (WWF, 2002b).

Local Public Service Agreements

Local Public Service Agreements (LPSAs) will become increasingly important as a driver and conduit for funding through LSPs. Targets (normally 12) are adopted by the local authority, negotiated directly between the local authority and government, and linked to priorities in the Community Strategy or the council's Performance Improvement Plan. It shows trust with a relaxation in central government control and prescription of how a particular service should be delivered in return for the tangible achievements of improved services for the community (LGA, 2003c).

Since the initiative began in 2000, the majority of unitary and county councils in England have agreements. District councils, local agencies, statutory bodies and the independent sector can be involved as partners.

The first round of 'Round 1 Local PSA' selected between seven national and five local targets, with the later addition that the four main departments (DfES, Department of Health, Home Office and Department for Transport) would propose targets to authorities in these areas.

This first round:

- has a total potential reward grant for each authority of 2.5 per cent of the local authority's total annual budget. In the average authority, each target has a potential reward of around £0.75 million
- has allocated a pump-priming or invest-to-save grant of £750,000 plus £1 per head of population for each council
- means that there is a potential increase of additional extra funding coming into local government of £1.5 billion.

From the sustainability perspective, there are a number of key observations to be made.

- What progress has or could be made through carbon dioxide reduction targets and others pertinent to long-term, quality-of-life issues, especially since the second generation of LPSAs will give local authorities greater autonomy to choose targets that are local?
- An unambitious choice of targets may be selected to secure the quick-win financial rewards that are tangible within the first few years. For many sustainability-related targets, changes instituted now will demonstrate benefits only over a much longer time span.
- The internal central government calculation determines the 'stretch' of target and the different target-setting styles among government departments that result in some targets being more challenging than others, which raises a coherence issue.

Obligation as a driver

The context is slightly different for Wales in that the Government of Wales Act placed a duty on the National Assembly for Wales to promote sustainable development. Therefore, what unfolds – in terms of policy into practice based on the Welsh experience – could be of key interest to English local authorities, which do not have the potential advantage of this additional obligation.

The Assembly published its Sustainable Development Scheme *Learning to Live Differently* in 1999 (Welsh Assembly Government, 1999), and this was followed by an Action Plan to implement the Scheme. The Scheme includes a commitment to work with local government to promote sustainable development through its corporate planning and strategic policies, particularly in key areas such as Community Strategies, LA21 and Best Value. However, the Scheme's Action Plan only refers to a compact with the Welsh Local Government Association, and not *how* this commitment will be achieved through the Assembly's numerous other means of influencing local government (CAG Consultants, 2003a).

Again, as mentioned earlier, the experience and progress of sustainable development of Welsh local authorities has mirrored experience in English local authorities. This is evidenced in the responses to the Local Government Management Board, and later IDeA surveys up until 2000, and was reinforced by the practitioner workshops of the Local Sustainability Conference organised by IDeA and held in Swansea, 20 to 21 October 2003.

In the absence of up-to-date survey findings of English councils, the results from a 2003

survey of Welsh authorities (Netherwood, 2003) are worthy of note. They confirm the findings of this project – that there is a lack of political support for sustainability, which does not appear to be mainstreaming the custom and practice of local authorities. Innovation and good practice are happening but this is not universal. Eighty flagship projects and skills needs of each Welsh local authority on the sustainable development agenda are listed in the report.

Co-ordinating research programmes

In terms of seeing the bigger picture, government's role in tracking how key policies, strategies and performance tools are working is essential. The importance of baseline data and scoping of research and survey work needs to be recognised to provide clear threads of continuity for assessing progress in sustainable development.

As has been mentioned in earlier chapters, there are key opportunities for the evolving body of knowledge on innovation in the public sector to explicitly draw from, and relate to, sustainable development.

A number of long-term government-commissioned studies are under way. Within these, the degree to which distinct and subtle lines of enquiry have been included with regard to some of the crunch issues on sustainability raised earlier – consideration of risk, climate change, procurement that embraces whole-life costing, decision making that respects environmental limits – varies. The terms of reference on studies on the long-term evaluation of the Local Government Modernisation Agenda, Best Value and LSPs appear to have

none of these criteria included. The study of Community Strategies does include a vital scoping stage and 'call-off', optional provision that should pick up on key gaps, especially regarding LA21 issues and approaches.

Conclusions

An overarching whole-systems approach to gauge and guide progress towards sustainable development appears to be necessary. The tools and various new types of target (LPSA) and indicators (Best Value, Quality of Life) have yet to be aligned into a context that permits a more holistic assessment.

Local Public Service Agreements need to be factored into the overall assessment of local authorities, which, in turn, needs to be factored into any more holistic measure that may evolve on performance of the LSP partners. Given that local community tolerances for unsustainability may be high, and as greater outsourcing of services and contracts progresses as a result of Best Value reviews, it is increasingly important for sustainability principles to be embedded in councils' strategic procurement frameworks.

The Audit Commission-led work on 'quality of life' area profiling is an important next evolution. Within this, the adoption of an 'ecological-footprinting' indicator would demonstrate the resource limits issue. Drawing on the evidence from Wales, it would seem that, even with a sustainable development obligation (on Welsh Assembly Government) and a compact with the Welsh Local Government Association, this in itself will not guarantee the mainstreaming of sustainable development at the local level. However, this does not in itself devalue the need for such an obligation.

Working to a set of obligatory codified sustainability principles that particularly focus on resource use and environmental stewardship could form the basis of a public service protocol that could be operationalised, challenged and scrutinised. It might apply to all those involved in the delivery of public service and public services.

Overall, there appears to be a strong case for making it obligatory for local authorities to demonstrate how they are currently mainstreaming sustainable development throughout their policies and processes.

8 Messages and conclusions

This chapter summarises the messages from each of the themes discussed in the previous chapters and indicates what is needed to progress local sustainability. The implications for policy are then presented, giving some suggestions of key areas where government and related central bodies might usefully take a lead. In the concluding comments, the need for leadership and commitment is emphasised and a proposal is floated – the concept of ‘principled localism’ – that offers a means of binding many of the aspects together by acting as a basis for a sustainability code for governance.

Summary of messages

Knowledge and understanding

- Government fails to convey a clear, consistent and coherent message to itself and others about what sustainable development entails as an approach and, more crucially, what are expected as minimum standards across the public sector. Working within the idea of environmental limits and the notion of stewardship for the long-term public interest – with consideration for people and places beyond our immediate time frame and locality – are key issues that are frequently ignored.
- The government’s own principles and approaches, affirmed by DEFRA, are helpful in pointing out what is expected in day-to-day policy and management, but they are not owned across government or elsewhere, and are patchily and inconsistently applied. There is no minimum set of thresholds or standards on how this should be done or audited.
- Tackling the most basic issues of environmental quality in the immediate sense – litter and pollution – is not being universally delivered let alone managed with the longer-term impacts in mind. More fundamentally, at local level, responses to managing the shift towards a low-carbon economy to reduce carbon dioxide emissions and being prepared for the consequences of climate change are failing to be grasped.
- This raises key questions of capacity building across the board. It is an issue not just of technical and professional understanding of the content of sustainable development, but also of process and community engagement. There is little evidence of this being integrated into organisational learning and development programmes, or of drawing on experience from overseas.
- Informal and formal education has a key role to play. There is scope for all schools to evolve the ‘whole-school approach’ to support local communities through ‘extended schools’.

Leadership and commitment

- Leadership and commitment are essential for bringing about the long-term public interest. However strong the rhetoric for sustainable development within policy, the practice reveals a lack of political commitment at all levels to take tough decisions and also seize opportunities for innovation.
- Local authorities have a special community leadership role. The governance context is less about them having direct control and more about empowering and influencing.

This requires a new outlook, skills and ways of working. A long-standing commitment to genuine partnership working based on a high degree of trust and collaboration is crucial. Procuring and brokering the best relationship with public and private partners, to deliver outcomes that are way beyond the direct control and influence of the local authority, takes a high degree of rigour and finesse.

- New skills are needed to guide and inform the work of strategic partnerships, such as applied knowledge in techniques like horizon scanning, futures studies, scenario planning. All this demands a high degree of sensitivity to public opinion and building confidence and trust with the community.
- Understanding, tapping into and nurturing community activity is an important leadership aspect vital for sustainable communities. Again, this raises issues about capacity building. Programmes for development and learning need to embrace these issues so that effective leadership in all sectors, at all levels within organisations is fostered and sustained.

Structures and cultures and values

- The massive overhaul of local government through the Modernising Local Government Agenda has led to changes in structure and culture. However, innovation and step change tend to be the exception rather than the rule in practice. Best Value and CPA have been key drivers in this, but it is clear that there are missing ingredients and sustainable development is one of them.
- Evolving a fresh and more radical approach to change management within the public sector in how it works, learns, adapts and contracts from the best in the business, community and voluntary sectors may help deliver step change and further sustainable development.
- Interest in the use of the Power of Well-being and the enhanced powers in the Local Government Act 2003 is beginning to rise. There is potential for these, separately or collectively, to be combined with social enterprise and a new type of company model, Community Interest Companies, currently being developed by government, to advance sustainable development.
- The culture of government, at all levels, needs to embrace genuine participatory processes and be underpinned by a public service ethos that values the wider community and public interest. This needs nurturing and there is scope for greater cross-professional working. The overarching focus is the Community Strategy. The quality of strategic guidance and leadership that the local authority can give to its Local Strategic Partnership is crucial.
- Local authorities, through procurement, cannot outsource their accountability to the public for that service. However, they can better manage risk by protecting the long-term public interest through ensuring that sustainable development criteria are embedded into all procurement frameworks and specifications for services and contracts, for example in Private Finance Initiatives. Therefore, the best possible understanding

and sensitivity to sustainable development issues should be cultivated in all those who set these frameworks.

Localism and diversity

- The relationship between central and local government is adjusting. Government is giving increased flexibility and freedom to local authorities to pursue their own creative solutions in response to local priorities, but there are limits and this causes tension. However, the pressure to meet centrally determined targets still dominates. The 'shared priorities' agreed between central and local government are a useful focus, but how relevant they are to specific locality needs and the degree to which sustainable development approaches underpin them is not yet transparent or challengeable.
- Discretion in raising and spending from the local tax base will be increasingly important to resource local solutions that are socially and environmentally just and sustainable. There are pockets of innovation and pioneering good practice that could be better shared and adapted to meet specific localities' needs.
- Furthermore, the emergence of regional governance – armed with a sustainability obligation – is proving vital to provide extra strategic capacity to co-ordinate and steer the disjointed actions of agencies and partners at regional and local level so that the overall impact advances, rather than undermines, progress towards sustainable development.
- Meeting community needs has to deal with the reality of social disengagement as

evidenced by low election turnouts.

Restoring confidence and trust means responding to the community with better understanding of local diversity of interests and people, especially those who are socially excluded. There is much to be done in building capacity in local government and others in governance to adopt genuine participatory approaches to planning of all types.

Performance management: indicators, audit and obligations

- An overarching whole-systems approach to gauge and guide progress towards sustainable development appears to be necessary. The tools and various new types of target (LPSA) and indicators (Best Value, Quality of Life) have yet to be aligned into a context that permits a more holistic assessment.
- Local Public Service Agreements need to be factored into the overall assessment of local authorities which, in turn, needs to be factored into any more holistic measure that may evolve on performance of the LSP partners. Given that local community tolerances for unsustainability may be high, and as greater outsourcing of services and contracts progresses as a result of Best Value reviews, it is increasingly important for sustainability principles to be embedded in councils' strategic procurement frameworks.
- The Audit Commission-led work on 'quality of life' area profiling is an important next evolution. Within this, the adoption of an 'ecological-footprinting' indicator would demonstrate the resource-limits issue.

- Drawing on the evidence from Wales, it would seem that, even with a sustainable development obligation (on the Welsh Assembly Government) and a compact with the WLGA (Welsh Local Government Association), this in itself will not guarantee the mainstreaming of sustainable development at the local level. However, this does not in itself devalue the need for such an obligation.
- Working to a set of obligatory codified sustainability principles that particularly focus on resource use and environmental stewardship could form the basis of a public service protocol that could be operationalised, challenged and scrutinised. It might apply to all those involved in the delivery of public service and public services. Overall, there appears to be a strong case for making it obligatory for local authorities to demonstrate how they are currently mainstreaming sustainable development throughout their policies and processes.

What is needed?

In respect of sustainable development, the resounding messages from this project are for central government to promote:

- clarity, coherence and consistency
- persistence and patience
- financing towards the long-term future
- education, civic engagement and empowerment.

Below are some suggestions that have implications for policy. These might be best led

from the strategic centre of government. Further details, with key departments or agencies suggested to lead these initiatives, are summarised later in this chapter in Table 3.

Clarity, coherence and consistency

- 1 To clarify and readopt the full meanings that underpin the term 'sustainable development' and to rearticulate especially those aspects that have got lost in the transition from Local Agenda 21 to Community Strategies. These are:
 - environmental *stewardship* and the notion of having to work within and having respect for finite resource limits
 - *futurity* and managing and planning for the longer term
 - *regard for global issues* and impacts such as climate change.
- 2 To apply coherence and consistency across all departments, government offices in the regions and agencies by taking ownership and transparently demonstrating use of the government's principles and approaches to sustainable development (Appendix 2). This would help overcome the confusion that arises from different terms being used in key government policies and by others involved in governance at all levels.
- 3 To demonstrate political leadership and commitment by actively championing environmental stewardship and nurturing this at all levels in governance, particularly within local authorities and community governance. Capacity building that delivers greater cross-professional and departmental working inside and outside government, collaborating with NGOs, business and

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voluntary and community sectors, is key to integrating policy agendas.

Persistence and patience

- 1 To improve continuity to help accelerate progress towards sustainable development. So much experience and learning is being lost as newly branded initiatives appear, which often do not connect with, or build on, previous effort.
- 2 To transcend electoral time frames by treating sustainable development as *the* long-term planning horizon. Short timescales distort the priorities, effort and allocation of resources. Persistence beyond the short-term, national and local party-political perspectives is needed.
- 3 To accept that creating lasting change takes a long time (ten-plus years) to alter perceptions, create new values and change personal and institutional behaviour. This needs to be reflected in all strategic performance, goal and target-setting frameworks, especially Best Value, Comprehensive Performance Assessment and LPSAs.

Financing towards the long-term future

- 1 To demonstrate that sustainable development commitments need financing beyond the short term. This should be reflected in the Spending Round 2004 as specific targets and objectives in Public Service Agreements and Service Delivery Agreements.
- 2 To oblige the central bodies to transparently demonstrate how they are applying and

mainstreaming government's principles and approaches to sustainable development.

- 3 To require that all procurement frameworks, contracts, agreements and compacts between any public agency, central body or local authority should embody these principles and approaches (risk, whole-life costing, climate change, community benefit considerations).

Education, civic engagement and empowerment

- 1 To overcome civic disenchantment and simplify bureaucracy. These are vital to build trust. Within this, education and awareness raising are essential to show how sustainable development is vital not only for improving local environmental quality but also for protecting the longer-term public interest.
- 2 To realise the civic potential of community involvement in a diversity of ways through supporting, resourcing and guiding local authorities for them and their partners to:
 - build up social capital and community cohesion in local communities
 - maximise local residents' engagement and involvement in public decision making and monitoring of services
 - facilitate different types of service provision by community and voluntary organisations
 - facilitate the contribution of communities to building up economic activity and social enterprise.
- 3 To promote and require all local authorities to adopt 'ecological footprinting' and for this to

be embedded within their formally assessed performance frameworks (CPA). Eco-footprinting is a powerful tool for assessing a local community's impact on the environment, and is a key means for engaging and raising public awareness of sustainability issues and the need for lifestyle changes.

- 4 To require all capacity-building programmes for learning and leadership development for government officials, local authority elected members and officers to have regard to sustainability principles and approaches.
- 5 To nurture champions for sustainability within the civil service colleges, and through public sector induction and training and development programmes.
- 6 To actively promote and align sustainability principles across all policy and practice, which could be demonstrated through web-based links.
- 7 To promote sustainability through case study examples. Hundreds of case studies exist on scores of websites – but it is how the vital ingredients of sustainable development can be highlighted within these that needs to be made explicit. These could be clustered and linked.

Implications for policy

The *Egan Review* (ODPM, 2003f) was commissioned by the Deputy Prime Minister to review the skills required to deliver sustainable communities. This acknowledges the importance of local authorities in creating and

maintaining sustainable communities. Many of the implications for policy summarised here are highly relevant to that review. The Central–Local Partnership could be instrumental in prioritising and developing central–local action in response to this project's findings.

Similarly, the government's Sustainable Development Strategy Review, due for completion in 2005, offers an opportunity for these issues to be comprehensively debated and framed within a new energising context.

Table 3 is designed to show how the various institutions of local governance (government, LGA) and the related central bodies (IDeA, the Employers' Organisation, Local Authorities' Co-ordinators of Regulatory Services [LACORS] and the 4Ps [Public Private Partnerships Programme]) – and the Audit Commission might usefully take a lead. The table is indicative only.

The table places them in a number of different ways. This is deliberate suggesting that there are a variety of options for exploring and delivering this report's proposals.

The main point is to:

- *enhance the co-ordinating mechanisms of central–local government relations*
- *centre sustainable development principles into the thinking and practices of the main local governance organisations*
- *incorporate effective liaison with the Community-based Organisations whose reach extends to neighbourhood level and to the disadvantaged.*

Concluding comments

There is a critical lack of capacity within local governance to deliver sustainable development. This is due, in part, to no clear direction from central government, no coherent link in the institutions connecting central to local government and factionalism in political policy making and delivery.

There are limited arrangements for establishing partnerships across the public, private and civic sectors, and inadequate policy frameworks for devising and funding for persistent investment. There appears to be a general inability to seize all the potential joining-up opportunities that occur. The civic sector is poised to contribute very effectively but is not given the tools or the recognition to do so.

However, there is opportunity and scope for taking sustainable development forward within local governance. There are pockets of good practice, innovation and leadership, all of which could be better tuned to that common purpose, a better quality of life for all. This will need leadership, encouragement, empathy and co-ordination in delivery, as well as a degree of enforcement from central government.

'Principled localism' – a new sustainability code for governance?

This project proposes that there should be a mechanism for binding a new kind of 'principled localism' in governance, designed for central–regional–local buy-in to advance sustainable development

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principles and approaches. This might be in the form of a statutory code or compact that would:

- encompass criteria that are workable at all scales and have universal relevance
- underpin all policy and practice, and be directional rather than prescriptive, respecting discretion at the local level in terms of means and methods
- reflect the diversity of arrangements within the English regions and the various stages of progress towards elected regional government (links within the forthcoming Regional Assemblies Bill and associated guidance would be an obvious consideration)
- be used to help define the minimum standards of performance in the public sector, and guide the audit and inspection, and improvement-planning processes.

Demonstrating adherence to this code to show how mainstreaming sustainable development is being advanced could form the basis of an obligation on local authorities and others involved in delivery of public service and public services.

A government-funded and co-ordinated nationwide conference would enable debate and progress the outcomes of this project and other similar studies. This could lead to improved and more detailed guidelines, and offer a means of championing this new notion of

(continued)

'principled localism' in governance, at all levels of policy and practice.

Ways forward could be framed by developing this concept of '*principled localism*' as a new sustainability code for governance, which might include:

- reaffirming and *creating ownership of the government's established set of principles and approaches to sustainable development* among all central government departments, agencies, local government and regional bodies throughout the public sector
- establishing *an obligation to mainstream and promote sustainable development principles and approaches* on all the public sector
- ensuring that *Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) embraces an obligation to advance sustainable development* – but which encourages local authorities, through corporate self-assessments, to create their own vision and innovation

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- building *a suite of measures for sustainable development to enable both coherence and diversity at local or even neighbourhood level* – through the performance indicators, Best Value, strategic planning and delivery procedures
- requiring that *all public sector procurement meets standards of sound environmental stewardship* – demonstrating a lighter 'ecological footprint' and increased community and social benefit
- incentivising *innovation that applies sustainable development as a driver in the public sector* by co-ordinating existing, and fostering new, learning networks of partnerships focused on Community Strategies and associated activities – but which embraces greater involvement from the community, voluntary and research sectors
- setting standards for the development and take-up of awareness-raising, development and training programmes that incorporate sustainable development principles and approaches – for all those charged with the delivery of public service and services.

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Table 3 Implications for policy

Suggestion	Who should lead?		
	Central government	Central bodies and agencies	Audit Commission
Explicit affirmation and demonstration of sustainable development incorporating environmental stewardship role of government with a need to:	Cabinet Office	All departments and executive agencies including the Central-Local Partnership (CLP)	To be included in the Strategic Plan 2004-2007
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • endorse and create ownership 	Green Ministers	<i>see above</i>	<i>see above</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • build and share with local government and others in local governance 	Central-Local Partnership		
By explicit demonstration reporting on policy and practice responses	All Departments and CLP	LGA IDeA	Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) indicators
Through e-communications – overt strategy alignment and cross referencing of principles (e-based)		SDC, IDeA, LGA & community-based organisations (CBOs) & related communications teams	Build into inspection procedures
Via Spending Review Central-Local procurement with leverage through funding allocation to central bodies	HM Treasury ODPM spending assessments	Guidance from LGA and CLP	Build into Self-assessment procedures
Proposed protocol for ‘central-regional-local’ compact for ‘principled localism’:	CLP supported by OPDM, DEFRA, DTi, Home Office, DfES	Guidance from SDC, IDeA and LGA plus CBOs and the New Local Government Network (NLGN)	To be incorporated into the Strategic Plan 2004-2007
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to be universally relevant • underpin all policy and practice • to devolve discretion for local solutions 			

(continued)

Table 3 Implications for policy (continued)

Suggestion	Who should lead?		
	Central government	Central bodies and agencies	Audit Commission
Strong political support to look at the longer term	Cabinet Office and Policy Units	Leadership Development Commission (LGA, IDeA)	Corporate commitment at a high level
Risk management approach	<i>see above</i>	<i>see above</i>	<i>see above</i>
Development of participatory planning/ community involvement approaches	ODPM	LGA, CLP, IDeA, SDC, CBOs	Self-assessment
Taking a whole-systems approach, looking at the strategic community leadership role in local government	Co-ordinated government mechanisms	<i>see above</i>	<i>see above</i> plus sustainable development (SD) performance indicators
Possible key areas for initial focus			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> procurement function – energy, waste and procurement policy and ensure that each reinforces sustainable resource use 	ODPM	<i>see above</i>	<i>see above</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> options appraisal, alternative forms of public service delivery 	ODPM, HM Treasury, Cabinet Office, DEFRA, ODPM	<i>see above</i>	Self-assessment and CPA, community strategy guidelines
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> climate change used as the ‘big strategy envelope’ 	Sustainable Communities		
Linked to capacity building such as:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> development programmes and packages for local government, LSPs and tailored to working within the regional context RDA/RA 	CLP as co-ordinating mechanism	Leadership Development Commission	<i>see above</i>

(continued overleaf)

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Table 3 Implications for policy (continued)

Suggestion	Who should lead?		
	Central government	Central bodies and agencies	Audit Commission
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • creating a 'can do' culture • use of entrepreneurial models • Power of Well-being • development of 'a new public service ethos' • participatory planning <p>All to involve business, NGOs</p>	Central government co-ordinating mechanisms based on the CLP with a SD obligation	Co-ordinating relationship between SDC, LGA, IDeA and community-based organisations	To be slotted into the Self-assessment procedures and the SD guidelines for all of the audit functions
Wider freedoms to enforce (e.g. litter, carbon trading)	ODPM taking a lead on the Well-being Power	<i>see above</i>	<i>see above</i>
Freedoms and flexibilities (e.g. Landfill Tax Credits)			
Minimum criteria for SD ('eco-footprinting') obligation embedded within:		Guidance from SDC, LGA, IDeA and CBOs via workshops and case studies	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Best Value and CPA of the future (with possible league tables on sustainable development) 	Led by ODPM backed by Policy Units and the new PSAs		
Less prescription on scoring and more on judgements, 'what it's like to live here'. CPA on the whole place related to the scale of ward or street.	Emergence of the new localism agenda in Cabinet Office and ODPM	<i>see above</i>	Build into the audit functions of local government, housing health, fire and rescue and criminal justice
Integrated public service rating			

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Further information on organisations and initiatives relevant to this report

Audit Commission website: www.audit-commission.gov.uk

dCARB project website, managed by the Sustainable Development Commission: www.dCARB-uk.org

Department of Trade and Industry Social Enterprise website: www.dti.gov.uk/socialenterprise

Environmental Management Systems (EMAS): www.emas.org.uk/Iso14001/mainframe.htm

EU Lisbon Strategy: www.europa.eu.int/comm/lisbon_strategy/index_en.html

EU response to the Aarhus Convention: www.europa.eu.int/comm/environment/aarhus/

EU Spring Council 2003: www.eu2003.gr/en/cat/16/

EU (2001) Sustainable Development Strategy: europa.eu.int/comm/environment/eussd/

Forum For the Future: www.forumforthefuture.org.uk

Global to Local. A sustainable development consultancy founded in 1996. Website: www.globaltolocal.com

IDeA Local Sustainability: www.idea.gov/sustainability

International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives website: www.iclei.org/europe

Improvement and Development Agency: IDeA was established by and for local government in April 1999 (following the demise of the Local Government Management Board). IDeA's mission is to support self-sustaining improvement from within local authorities. It has a dedicated IDeA Knowledge Website: www.idea.gov.uk/knowledge

Joseph Rowntree Foundation website: www.jrf.org.uk

LACORS: the Local Authorities' Co-ordinators of Regulatory Services co-ordinates the enforcement activities of trading standards services, food enforcement, the Registration Service for Births, Deaths and Marriages, public entertainment licensing, liquor licensing and Health and Safety at Work

Local Government Association: LGA is based at Smith Square, Westminster and exists to promote better local government, working with 500 authorities to put councils at the heart of the drive to improve public services and enable local people to shape a better future for their community. Website: www.lga.gov.uk

Local Government International Bureau: LGIB acts principally as the European and international arm of the Local Government Association for England and Wales and also represents the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA). Website: www.lgib.gov.uk/intcoop/

Newark and Sherwood District Council website: www.newark-sherwooddc.gov.uk/sustainability/casestudypops/popup34.htm

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Public Private Partnerships Programme (known as the 4Ps): this is the local government project procurement agency. Its goal is to lead the provision of project support and independent advisory services to all local authorities in England and Wales to enable them to improve their procurement capability, particularly for large projects and partnerships. Website: www.4ps.co.uk

Sustainable Cities Research Institute, Northumbria University website: www.sustainable-cities.org.uk

Sustainable Development in Government website: www.sustainable-development.gov.uk

UK Climate Impacts Programme: UKCIP is based at the University of Oxford and funded by DEFRA to co-ordinate an assessment of how climate change will affect the UK. It helps organisations assess how they might be affected so that they can develop adaptation strategies. Website: www.ukcip.org.uk

Appendix 1

Background to the workshops and participating organisations

The purpose of the workshops held on 23 and 24 April 2003 – making the most of the Well-being Power to achieve sustainable development

A series of facilitated workshops were convened to find out how government can better influence local authorities – within and beyond this agenda – to make a positive, long-term difference to people’s quality of life and so contribute to sustainable development in the UK.

Key questions were raised as to how clearly SD is currently understood and defined, and what it means, both in general terms and in relation to particular subject areas, at the local level.

- What policies, programmes and practices need to be different, and in what ways, to achieve local sustainability?
- What additional mechanisms of implementation or guidance may have to be put in place to ensure that the SD objective is integrated and delivered through local governance more generally?

The sessions were kindly hosted by the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, as follows.

Wednesday 23 April

A (1030 to 1330): academic, research, blue-sky thinkers/ writers, consultants/ NGOs

B (1400 to 1700): local authorities/ relevant association/ network representatives

Thursday 24 April

C (1030 to 1330): central government/ agency representatives/ national institutions

Observations and ideas from different stakeholders were drawn together and presented with recommendations for discussion at a later meeting on 9 July.

All participants received a briefing paper before the workshops and a report of the findings and outcomes was circulated to them with the agenda.

The purpose of the workshop held on 9 July 2003 – beyond the Power of Well-being: how to re-energise the promotion of sustainable development at the local level (These sessions were kindly hosted by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister)

This was a follow-up session for senior government officials and key local government organisation and NGO representatives to present and take forward the outcomes from the April workshops. This included presentation of extracts from a paper commissioned as a result of the project, entitled ‘Transforming innovation into action: what does it really take?’.

This involved interactive, local, case study practitioner presentations covering energy, housing, waste and community with an accompanying legal commentary. The material was collated and presented by David Pickles, OBE Architect, Energy Agency Manager, Newark and Sherwood District Council. A legal commentary on this paper was also presented by Damien Welfare, Barrister, 2MCB, Planning

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and Local Government Chambers written with Paul Stookes, Chief Executive of the Environmental Law Foundation.

The crucial part of the meeting was to explore how some of the main current central-local initiatives and drivers could be used to give greater encouragement to the mainstreaming of sustainable development throughout the world of local government and other locally based agencies and groups.

Key questions covered were:

- How can we use existing policy tools, particularly Comprehensive Performance Assessment, Community Strategies and Local Strategic Partnerships, in addition to the Well-being Power, to promote sustainable development?
- How should the local dimension of the major review of the UK Sustainable Development Strategy over the next 18 months be tackled?

Effective partnership between several different agencies at central and local level was clearly identified as crucial to achieving this objective. Participants were invited to give their feedback and to consider a new collaborative means of working to ensure that a real momentum for 'mainstreaming sustainable development' is created and sustained.

Participating organisations

2MCB – Planning and Local Government
Chambers, Temple
Audit Commission
Best Value Waste Network
CAG Consultants

Carmarthenshire Council
Chartered Institute of Environmental Health
Commission for Integrated Transport
Community Development Foundation
DEFRA (SDU)
Department of Health
DfES
Diane Warburton (writer)
East Staffordshire BC
Edinburgh City Council
EG/Final Draft Consultancy
ENCAMS
English Heritage
English Nature
Environment Agency
Environmental Law Foundation
Forum for the Future
Forward Scotland
Global to Local
Government Office North West
Groundwork
Health Development Agency
Hertsmere Borough Council
HM Treasury
Home Office
House of Commons Environmental Audit
Committee
House of Commons Select Committee on the
ODPM Housing, Planning, Local Government
and the Regions
Housing Corporation
Ian Christie (writer/researcher)
IDeA – Local Sustainability
Institute of Waste Management
JMS Foresight/Bradford City Council
Joseph Rowntree Foundation
Kent County Council
Local Futures

Local Government Association	Phil Turner (Planning Consultant)
Local Government Directorate, ODPM	Planning Inspectorate
Local Government Information Unit	Quest Associates (Professional Facilitator for the workshops)
Local Government International Bureau	RSPB
London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham	SOLACE (Environment Panel)
Mark Sheldrake (International Management Consultant)	Strategy Policy Unit Welsh Assembly Government
Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, ODPM	Sunderland City Council
New Economics Foundation	Sustainable Development Commission
New Local Government Network	Sustainable Northern Ireland
Newark and Sherwood District Council	Swansea City and County Council
No. 10 Policy Unit	Levett-Therivel (consultants)
North East Regional Assembly	University of the West of England
North Hertfordshire District Council	University of Westminster
Northern Ireland Local Government Association	Welsh Local Government Association
Northumbria University	WWF
Nottinghamshire County Council	

Appendix 2

The government's guiding principles and approaches to sustainable development

- 1 *Putting people at the centre:* sustainable development must enable people to enjoy a better quality of life, now and in the future. In the words of the Rio Declaration, 'human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development. They are entitled to a healthy and productive life with nature.'
- 2 *Taking a long-term perspective:* sustainable development thinking cannot restrict itself to the life of a Parliament or the next decade. Radical improvements have to begin now to safeguard the interests of future generations. At the same time, we must meet today's needs – for example, people need warm homes, which, at present, means using predominantly fossil fuels.
- 3 *Taking account of costs and benefits:* decisions must take account of a wide range of costs and benefits, including those that cannot easily be valued in money terms. In pursuing any single objective, we should not impose disproportionate costs elsewhere. Public values should be taken into account.
- 4 *Creating an open and supportive economic system:* sustainable development requires a global economic system that supports economic growth in all countries. We need to create conditions in which trade can flourish and competitiveness can act as a stimulus for growth and greater resource efficiency.
- 5 *Combating poverty and social exclusion:* eradicating poverty is indispensable for sustainable development. We must help developing countries to tackle widespread and abject poverty. In this country, everyone should have the opportunity to fulfil their potential, through access to high-quality public services, education and employment opportunities, decent housing and good local environments.
- 6 *Respecting environmental limits:* serious or irreversible change to some aspects of the environment and resources would pose a severe threat to global society. Examples are major climate change, overuse of freshwater resources, or collapse of globally significant fish stocks. In these cases, there are likely to be limits that should not be breached. Defining such limits is difficult, so precautionary action needs to be considered.
- 7 *The precautionary principle:* the Rio Declaration defines the precautionary principle as 'where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation'. Precautionary action requires assessment of the costs and benefits of action, and transparency in decision making.
- 8 *Using scientific knowledge:* when taking decisions, it is important to anticipate early on where scientific advice or research is needed, and to identify sources of information of high calibre. Where possible, evidence should be reviewed from a wide-ranging set of viewpoints.
- 9 *Transparency, information, participation and access to justice:* opportunities for access to information, participation in decision making and access to justice should be available to all.

10 *Making the polluter pay*: much environmental pollution, resource depletion and social cost occurs because those responsible are not those who bear the consequence. If the polluter, or, ultimately, the consumer, is made to pay for those costs, that gives incentives to

reduce harm and means that costs do not fall on society at large. At the same time, it may not always be possible for everyone to bear all such costs, particularly for essential goods and services.

(DEFRA, 2003, p. 28; DETR, 1999, p. 22)

Appendix 3

The Sustainable Development Commission's key working principles for sustainable development

1 *Putting sustainable development at the centre*

- Sustainable development should be the organising principle of all democratic societies, underpinning all other goals, policies and processes.
- It provides a framework for integrating economic, social and environmental concerns over time, not through crude trade-offs, but through the pursuit of mutually reinforcing benefits.
- It promotes good governance, healthy living, innovation, lifelong learning and all forms of economic growth which secure the natural capital on which we depend.
- It reinforces social harmony and seeks to secure each individual's prospects of leading a fulfilling life.

2 *Valuing Nature*

- We are and always will be part of Nature, embedded in the natural world, and totally dependent for our own economic and social well-being on the resources and systems that sustain life on Earth. These systems have limits, which we breach at our peril.
- All economic activity must be constrained within those limits.
- We have an inescapable moral responsibility to pass on to future generations a healthy and diverse environment, and critical natural capital unimpaired by economic development.

- Even as we learn to manage our use of the natural world more efficiently, so we must affirm those individual beliefs and belief systems which revere Nature for its intrinsic value, regardless of its economic and aesthetic value to humankind.

3 *Fair shares*

- Sustainable economic development means 'fair shares for all', ensuring that people's basic needs are properly met across the world, while securing constant improvements in the quality of people's lives through efficient, inclusive economies.
- 'Efficient' simply means generating as much economic value as possible from the lowest possible throughput of raw materials and energy.
- 'Inclusive' means securing high levels of paid, high-quality employment, with internationally recognised labour rights and fair trade principles vigorously defended, while properly acknowledging the value to our well-being of unpaid family work, caring, parenting, volunteering and other informal livelihoods.
- Once basic needs are met, the goal is to achieve the highest quality of life for individuals and communities, within the Earth's carrying capacity, through transparent, properly regulated markets that promote both social equity and personal prosperity.

4 *Polluter pays*

- Sustainable development requires that we make explicit the costs of pollution and inefficient resource use, and reflect those in the prices we pay for all products and services, recycling the revenues from higher prices to drive the sustainability revolution that is now so urgently needed, and compensating those whose environments have been damaged.
- In pursuit of environmental justice, no part of society should be disproportionately impacted by environmental pollution or blight, and all people should have the same right to pure water, clean air, nutritious food and other key attributes of a healthy, life-sustaining environment.

5 *Good governance*

- There is no one blueprint for delivering sustainable development. It requires different strategies in different societies.
- But all strategies will depend on effective, participative systems of governance and institutions, engaging the interest, creativity and energy of all citizens.
- We must therefore celebrate diversity, and practise tolerance and respect. However, good governance is a two-way process.

- We should all take responsibility for promoting sustainability in our own lives and for engaging with others to secure more sustainable outcomes in society.

6 *Adopting a precautionary approach*

- Scientists, innovators and wealth creators have a crucial part to play in creating genuinely sustainable economic progress.
- But human ingenuity and technological power are now so great that we are capable of causing serious damage to the environment or to people's health through unsustainable development that pays insufficient regard to wider impacts.
- Society needs to ensure that there is full evaluation of potentially damaging activities so as to avoid or minimise risks.
- Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage to the environment or human health, the lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason to delay taking cost-effective action to prevent or minimise such damage.

(SDC website:
www.sustainable-development.gov.uk)

