

This case study was developed by CAG Consultants for the SDC and has been co-published with the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA). It is one of a set of case studies that has been produced for the SDC's Capability for Local Sustainability project. For more information on the other case studies and the project as a whole, visit [www.sd-commission.org.uk](http://www.sd-commission.org.uk).



# Hounslow's Sustainability Standard Toolkit

## Abstract

Hounslow Council has developed a sustainability toolkit with 13 sustainability principles, against which all council and LAA targets, policies and projects can be assessed.

The Sustainability Standard Toolkit has helped:

- promote sustainability within the council and across the borough
- identify connections between different areas of work and encourage joint working
- inspire new sustainability projects, such as the development of a borough-wide sustainability brand and the new climate change strategy

## The issue

Of all 33 London boroughs, Hounslow ranks 7th highest for its CO2 emissions. The borough has a strong manufacturing and dockland industry-based economy and is home to Heathrow. This, along with the close proximity of the M4, contributes to poor air quality. Hounslow residents have an ecological footprint four times larger than the recommended amount per person.

In April 2007, a sustainability healthcheck of the Community Plan identified a number of challenges for the borough. These included:

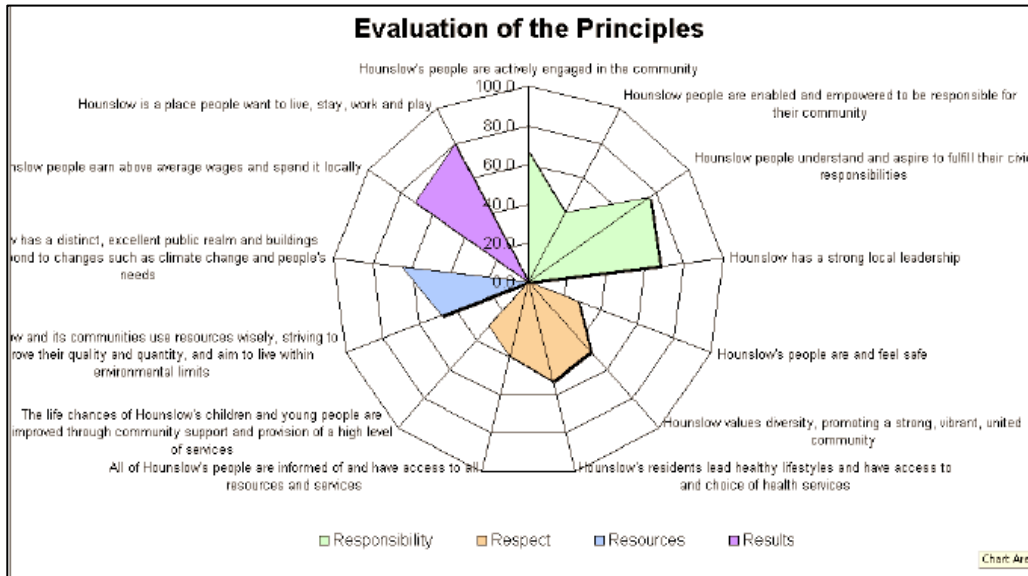
- community cohesion
- promoting a low carbon economy
- sustainable transport
- improving health through economic activity
- equality of access to open spaces
- maximising the benefits for the borough of the 2012 Olympics and Paralympics
- engaging children and young people

In response, Hounslow developed a tool to assess the sustainability of LAA targets and other policies and projects. The project centred on making sustainability information accessible to those involved in developing performance measures and the strategic vision of the LAA.

## What Hounslow did

The council contracted London Sustainability Exchange (LSx) to develop a sustainability matrix tool, comprising 13 sustainability principles. This was used to create the Hounslow Sustainability Standard Toolkit, which takes the form of a scored testing mechanism for Hounslow to rate different initiatives including their current LAA targets, policies and projects (see diagram below)

## Example assessment of policy against 13 principles



The tool was promoted through workshops and presentations with:

- Hounslow's LAA Task Group
- Hounslow's LSP
- regional partnerships and coordinator groups

as well as through discussions with council officers.

These activities helped promote and encourage sustainable development within the council and across the borough.

Council officers are now supported through an online sustainability portal available on the council's intranet. The portal:

- highlights sustainability issues for each area of council work
- promotes best practice guidance and information to council officers and partner organisations

The key factors that enabled this good practice were:

### Leadership and advocacy

The Policy and Performance and the Environmental Strategy Units within Hounslow Council took a lead role in promoting sustainability across the council. They were supported in this by the Greater London Authority (GLA) and the Government Office for London (GOL).

A change of leadership to a Conservative-led administration has helped drive the LSP's vision of a 'cleaner, safer, greener' message forward, and promote 'a one planet economy in Hounslow'.

This has been supported by the Environmental Sustainability Officer Working Group (ESOWG). The group has played a key role in tackling and improving environmental sustainability in the council as well as the borough through the Community Plan.

### Resources

A £10,000 Defra Innovation Fund was instrumental in developing the toolkit, alongside the time and resources provided through Hounslow's staff and the commitment of LSP partners. Strong partnership working with the GLA, GOL, LSx and the London Sustainability Development Commission (LSDC) has led to the success of this project in Hounslow.

## **Networking and sharing information**

In addition to support from those mentioned above, Hounslow and its officers were also able to call on the help and experience of other London boroughs through London Councils' networks and the Environmental Co-ordinators Forum. Journals, events, courses and seminars also provided essential information for staff in understanding and implementing sustainability on a local and regional level.

## **The impact**

The Sustainability Toolkit was piloted during the development of the Local Area Agreement 2008 – 2009, and will be rolled out through use across other plans and strategies.

It has assisted council officers to overcome their lack of awareness on sustainability issues that were related to their field of work.

By using the toolkit, council officers have been able to identify connections with other areas of the council's work. This, in turn, has encouraged different teams to work together.

The toolkit, accompanying web-portal and briefings have been instrumental in raising awareness of environmental sustainability issues across the council. The LAA Task Group and ESOWG are helping to build a brand for their work in environmental sustainability to be promoted across the borough. This will be similar to the GLA's 'Planet DIY' brand.

Sustainability is now a cross-cutting theme within the LAA, and is being used to join up action on environmental improvement, health and economic development in particular.

## **Lessons**

The resourcing of the sustainability work is one area for improvement. Resources within the council remain stretched with only a small team working to address sustainable development within the council. Despite this, the ESOWG has increased awareness of the number of priorities which need to be addressed to improve Hounslow's environmental sustainability.

It was also thought that, in future, it might be useful to have funding streams that are specifically designed to promote sustainable development, in addition to existing EU funding streams such as LIFE and INTERREG. This would help continue to embed sustainable development initiatives and practices across the borough.

Not every priority can be addressed at once. A big gap, which is now being filled, is the development of a climate change strategy and action plan for the borough. The council is drawing on support from the Carbon Trust to identify opportunities to 'get its own house in order' before approaching big businesses and wider partners in the borough.

Political engagement is key to the success of this kind of work. Cllr Barbara Reid, Hounslow Council's lead member for environment and planning, is fully behind the Climate change strategy:

*"Climate change is the greatest environmental challenge facing the world today, but we must never forget that local actions do make a difference.*

*"That's why the council is developing a climate change strategy and exploring new ways to do business in a more environmentally sustainable way.*

*“We also aim to support and inspire other organisations and individuals who want to help our drive to reduce the borough’s carbon footprint.*

*“The Hounslow Sustainability Standard is an excellent example of this ambition in action because it will not only help the council do business in a more sustainable way; it can also help other organisations working in Hounslow to do the same.”*

## **Contact**

Rob Gibson, Head of Environmental Strategy, Hounslow Council

Ajit Matharu, Environmental Support Officer, Hounslow Council