

House of Lords

Science and Technology Select Committee
Call for Evidence

Behaviour Change Submission
by the Sustainable Development Commission

Background and summary

The Sustainable Development Commission (SDC) is the Government's independent adviser on sustainable development, reporting to the Prime Minister, the First Ministers of Scotland and Wales and the First Minister and Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland. Through advocacy, advice and appraisal, we help put sustainable development at the heart of Government policy.

The SDC has a strong track record of developing evidence-based advice to Government on behaviour change. This is in the context of enabling people to live more sustainable lives as part of a society that is just, healthy and fair, and that lives within environmental limits. Our lead Commissioner in this field is Tim Jackson, Professor of Sustainable Development at Surrey University and Director of the Research group on Lifestyles, Values and Environment.

Enabling people to live more sustainable lives is a priority for government to address. Our evidence finds that government has been too timid in respect of enabling sustainable behaviours, and that current solutions do not address the scale of the challenge.

In November 2010 we shall publish key findings and recommendations on this subject to Ministers. Our evidence includes qualitative research with government officials and experts outside government that we undertook in summer 2010, in order to understand the barriers and needs of government and others. We refer to this research in our submission and intend to make this available to the Committee.

SDC's previous work in this area includes *I Will if You Will* (2006), the report of the UK Sustainable Consumption Roundtable which SDC co-hosted. This identified people's homes, travel and food as the priority areas for reducing environmental impacts (including climate change), while also improving social outcomes such as health and wellbeing. It also made clear that the scale of transformation needed to address the major challenges of climate change, obesity and global sustainability cannot be achieved by 'green' consumers alone. Government policies and business practices need to ensure that sustainable choices are the easy choices for everyone. Our subsequent work has advised on sustainable diets (*Setting the Table*, 2009); sustainable travel (*Smarter Moves*, 2009) and homes and communities (*Stock Take*, 2006; *The Future is Local*, 2010). We have also showcased ideas that could have a transformative effect on the sustainability of the economy, places and people's lives (*Breakthroughs for the 21st Century*, 2009) and advised DECC on a public facing narrative on climate change (*Creating visible support for climate change*, July 2009). In addition, SDC Scotland was commissioned by Scottish Government to encourage networking between community projects funded through the Climate Challenge Fund, and to provide access to advice and support.

This submission draws on all of this experience, and focuses on behaviour change in the context of enabling sustainable lifestyles rather than behaviour change more broadly. We include some information in relation to community interventions given the Committee's potential interest in this area, and would welcome opportunity to provide more specific input based on our experience of Scotland's Climate Change Fund, if requested. We also include a short response on obesity.

Key points

- 1 All policy interventions impact on behaviour in some way. Behaviour change needs to be seen as an outcome, and not an intervention in itself.
- 2 Enabling sustainable behaviours is particularly challenging due to the disconnect people face between the current benefits of their behaviours and lifestyles and the longer term negative impacts on the environment and society. While a growing number of consumers are prepared to make the more difficult, expensive or outside the norm 'green' choice, the majority cannot or will not. It is therefore essential for policy makers to consider how all people can be 'enabled' to live more sustainable lives.
- 3 The evidence that 'changing contexts' – the environment in which we make decisions – is more effective than 'changing minds' is well documented. Despite this evidence, we continue to see 'personal responsibility' advocated by many politicians and

commentators as a favoured approach to behaviour change. SDC strongly considers that policy needs to be driven by the findings of relevant evidence and experience, rather than driven by ideological approaches to behaviour change.

- 4 There is a need for better evaluation of what works, and a sharing of this information across government and with others.
- 5 Government needs to have the right skills and structures in place to support the effective application of behavioural science to policy.
- 6 The whole spectrum of interventions can be used to effect a change in behaviour as illustrated by the 4E's model of behaviour change: of engaging, exemplifying, enabling and encouraging. These range

from roles for government including regulation, the provision of incentives, economic levers, standard setting etc., as well as interventions by businesses, communities and public facing campaigns. Interventions – or packages of intervention - need to be 'fit for purpose' and designed according to the audience and intended outcome.

- 7 Government has a key enabling role to play in the realisation of more sustainable lives. This involves providing leadership, setting out a clear strategic direction, legislating where necessary, and providing the right regulatory framework that requires, supports or allows others to take action. Sustainable behaviours need to be made the 'easy' choices for everyone. This means considering how the context and environment of people's lives can be changed so that sustainable choices become the norm.

Research and Development

1 What is known about how behaviour can be influenced?

- 1.1 There is a large and growing body of research on understanding behaviour, and how behaviour can be influenced. Much of this evidence is summarised in Thaler and Sunstein's 2008 book *Nudge*.¹ The Institute for Government's *MINDSPACE*² report, commissioned by the Cabinet Office, recently brought some of this understanding together in a UK context. In the area of sustainable behaviours, Defra's Sustainable Behaviours Unit has commissioned a wealth of research and action-based programmes in order to better understand behaviour and how it can be influenced to bring about more pro-environmental behaviours.
- 1.2 The key is understanding that human behaviour is complex, and an individual's actions are influenced by a wide range of motivations and barriers, such as social norms, self esteem, habit, incentives, access etc. Pro-environmental behaviours are particularly challenging to encourage directly due to the disconnect people face between their individual behaviours and lifestyles, and longer term impacts on the environment. Whatever people's motivations, we have found that the key factor for influencing sustainable behaviours is how easy it is.³ Currently many pro-environmental behaviours are more difficult, expensive, or outside the norm. While a growing number of 'green' consumers are prepared,

or able to make the more difficult choice, the majority cannot or will not. Hence a policy reliance on 'personal choice' in respect of behaviour change will have limited impact. It is therefore essential for policy makers to consider how all people can be 'enabled' to live more sustainable lives. This means considering how the context and environment of people's lives needs to be changed so sustainable choices become the norm.

- 1.3 There are many successful examples to illustrate this approach to altering the 'choice architecture' in respect of sustainable behaviours. For example, rates of recycling have increased dramatically since the introduction of kerb-side collection schemes by local authorities; mandatory A-G efficiency standards for white goods, and their 'choice editing' by retailers to only stock higher efficiency models have driven the production and purchase of 'greener' white goods; the phasing out of incandescent light bulbs means that inefficient lighting is no longer an option; vehicle carbon emission standards have been linked to road tax rates to encourage the purchase of 'greener' vehicles; and businesses have begun to develop products that support sustainable behaviours, such as washing powders that are just as effective at lower temperatures.

2 What are the policy implications of recent developments in research on behaviour change?

2.1 The evidence that ‘changing contexts’ – the environment in which we make decisions – is more effective than ‘changing minds’ is well documented in the Cabinet Office report, *MINDSPACE*.⁴ Despite this evidence, we continue to see ‘personal responsibility’ being used as a favoured approach to behaviour change. SDC’s *I will if you will*⁵ report made clear that the scale of transformation needed to address the major challenges of climate change, obesity and global sustainability cannot be achieved by

the personal choice of willing ‘green’ consumers. Government policies (and business practices) need to change the context of our lives to ensure that the sustainable choices are the ‘norm’ and hence the easy choices for all people. Therefore, SDC strongly considers that policy needs to be driven by the findings of relevant evidence and experience rather than driven by ideological approaches to behaviour change.

3 Is there adequate research capability within the United Kingdom to support the current pace of developments in behaviour change policy interventions?

Is there sufficient funding for the evaluation of behaviour change interventions?

3.1 Our engagement with government and academics indicates that there is a strong research base in the UK on behavioural science (psychology, behavioural economics, sociology, etc) and there is growing interest in its application to sustainable lives. There is also a growing body of evidence and ‘good practice’ relevant to enabling sustainable lives, but our research with stakeholders inside and outside government, considered this evidence is not always applied to policy development. Academics, in particular, felt there was a gap between evidence and its use by policy makers. At the same time Government officials pointed out that academic research is not always well designed or its findings communicated in ways that support policy professionals. Policy teams need the expertise to interpret academic research and apply it in a policy context, and to make better connections between the knowledge base on behavioural science and the design of behaviour change interventions.

3.2 Our research identified the need for better evidence, understanding and evaluation of what works (and what does not) as a priority for government and other participants. Comments focused on a number of areas including the need to understand where people are, how to engage better, how to incentivise people to change, and how to drive the market. In particular the need to evaluate initiatives and approaches came across strongly. We therefore recommend more evaluation and understanding of what interventions work best in practice, e.g. which levers (and which combination of levers) are more effective in different situations, and who is best to deliver these. This will require closer working between government, business, civil society and academia.

Translation

4 Are there adequate structures and expertise across government and the public services more generally to support the translation of research developments in behaviour change into policy interventions?

4.1 As stated in answer to question 3, there is an apparent gap between evidence and its use by policy makers. To help address this gap, we recommend better connection between the existing knowledge base and the design of interventions; i.e. between academia and policy makers, and for the sharing of

research findings more widely across government. This will require people with skills and expertise within government and the public sector to support the transition of research developments into policy interventions.

- 4.2 Our research found that Government needs a better knowledge base and the skills to deliver effective sustainable behaviour change interventions. The following quote from our research illustrates this in practice: “Skills and capacity on behaviour change is lacking in government – the most relevant expertise is comms and marketing” (Research participant, 2010).
- 4.3 While there is some expertise, particularly in social research teams and communications and marketing functions, there has been an absence of structures to enable the sharing of this expertise across government, and with others. A further challenge is that behaviour change has often largely been seen as a communications task and not part of policy development. Social science expertise is essential and best practice sees this integrated into policy making teams.
- 4.4 HMT’s recent launch of the Behavioural Science Government Network, the creation of a new Behavioural Insights Team in the Strategy Unit of the Cabinet Office, and steps by the National School of Government to integrate behavioural science into core policy training, are all important developments, which may help to address the knowledge gap and strengthen government capability over time. The SDC urges government to adequately resource these initiatives, and for the initiatives themselves to actively engage with colleagues inside and outside government, in particular business, civil society and academia. At the current time, when ‘behaviour change’ and ‘behavioural science’ are the buzzwords across government, and new teams and initiatives are being created, it is also important to ensure there is coherence and coordination between these various initiatives.
- 4.5 In respect of sustainable behaviours, Defra is the lead department and has recently created a new ‘Centre of Expertise on Influencing Behaviours’. The ‘Centre’ will act as a single co-ordinating port of call for evidence based advice and support on influencing the behaviours of citizens, businesses, organisations and their customers across the department. We welcome this focus within Defra; however as sustainable behaviours are relevant to a number of government departments (including CLG, DECC, DfT, DH), it is unclear whether Defra has the role to convene and initiate a more co-ordinated and evidence-based approach cross-government, which is needed.
- 4.6 As local authorities and communities are increasingly being recognised as key players in enabling people to live more sustainable lives, we are concerned that a spectrum of organisations including community groups, co-operatives, development trusts, social enterprises, parish councils, local authorities and local strategic partnerships are too often hindered by a lack of support (mentoring, technical, organisational) and poor access to finance (especially for seed funding and core costs) (*The Future is Local*, SDC, 2010⁶).
- 4.7 There is similar evidence from community groups involved in Scotland’s Climate Challenge Fund (CCF), who identified a lack of access to the right people or the right information, especially in local authorities, as a barrier to progress. In learning from the CCF we recommend that community groups should be brought into closer working partnerships with local government. This would strengthen the dissemination of the learning from different initiatives and an accessible, visible constituency of support might also encourage local authorities to be bolder in tackling the transition to policies for carbon emissions reduction.

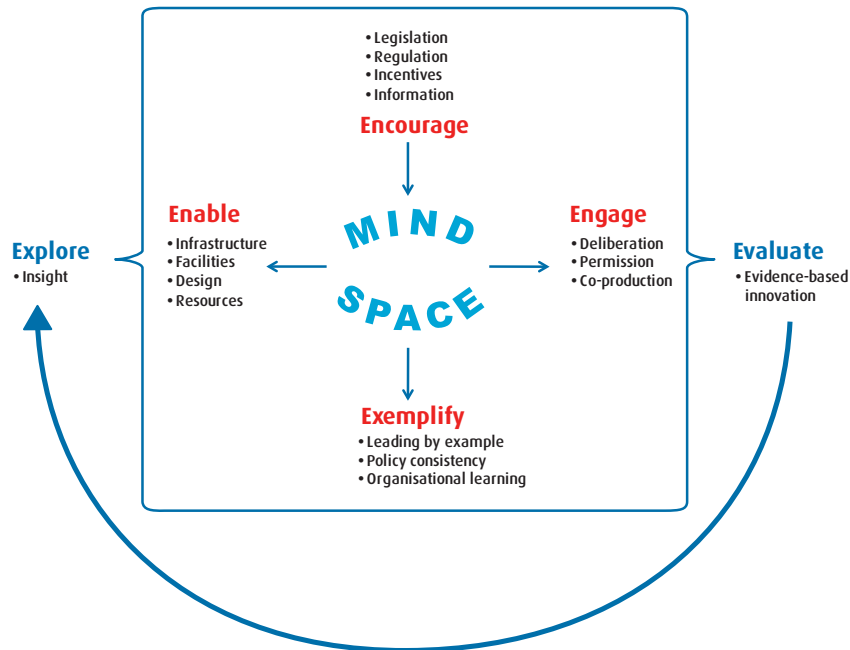
Policy design and evaluation

General

5 What should be classified as a behaviour change intervention?

- 5.1 All public policy has an impact on behaviour, whether directly or indirectly, as do interventions by business and civil society. As such, a wide range of interventions can be described as behaviour change interventions. Defra’s ‘4Es model of behaviour change’⁷ identified the need to *enable*, *encourage* and *engage* people and communities, and for government to lead by *example* as the main ways in which behaviour can be influenced. These different approaches work best when they are delivered as part of a package. The MINDSPACE⁸ report built on this model by adding ‘explore’ (i.e. gaining insight) and ‘evaluation’ (Fig.1) to the framework within which the tools of influencing behaviour can be used (**M**essenger, **I**ncentives, **N**orms, **D**efaults, **S**alience, **P**riming, **A**ffect, **C**ommitments and **E**go).

Fig.1 The 6Es framework for applying MINDSPACE



5.2 Interventions include information provision, awareness raising, providing incentives or disincentives, setting standards or legislating, voluntary agreements with business, and altering the systems or environments which lead people to certain behaviours, i.e. the choices that are

available to consumers, or the way place influences travel behaviour. Box A illustrates the range of interventions that can be classified as 'behaviour change' interventions in relation to the adoption of sustainable lifestyles.

Box A Examples of behaviour change interventions in relation to enabling sustainable lives

- Regulatory e.g. Energy Performance Certificates, Carbon Emissions Reduction Target (CERT)
- Standard setting e.g. Product standards- energy efficiency of white goods, vehicle standards
- Fiscal incentives e.g. boiler scrappage scheme, Landfill Tax, feed-in tariffs
- Voluntary agreements with business e.g. Courtauld Commitment
- Community-based initiatives e.g. DECC's Low Carbon Communities Challenge, Sustainable Travel Towns, Transition Towns, Scottish Government's Climate Challenge Fund
- City initiatives e.g. European Covenant of Mayors
- Local authority initiatives e.g. waste and recycling schemes, Smarter Choices Smarter Places travel initiatives
- Industry initiatives e.g. M&S Plan A, EDF Green Britain Challenge
- Public health campaigns e.g. Change4Life
- Mass media campaigns e.g. Act on CO₂, THINK! road safety campaign, Mr Earth and Go Greener campaigns in Scotland
- Assurance schemes e.g. Fairtrade, Marine Stewardship Council, Forestry Stewardship Council
- Labelling schemes e.g. A-G energy labels, front of pack nutrition labelling
- Product initiatives e.g. Defra's product roadmapping, industry product developments
- NGO campaigns e.g. 10:10
- Partnerships between government, business and others e.g. We Will if You Will
- Information provision e.g. DirectGov Greener Living site.

6 How should different levels of intervention (individual, organisational, community and national) and different types of intervention (legislative, fiscal, educative) interact in order to achieve policy goals more effectively?

- 6.1** Our research acknowledges the complexity of influencing behaviour, and the need for a combination of interventions that are designed to take account of individual motivations and barriers. These are best delivered as part of a mutually reinforcing package, involving different levels (government, business, local authorities, communities etc) dependant on which is best placed to deliver.
- 6.2** SDC's 'triangle of change' model⁹ recognises the important roles for government, business and civil society and people to work together in synergy to enable people to live more sustainable lives. The different role that each player takes will depend on the intended outcome, the intervention and the audience. For example, government is best placed to deliver a regulatory framework and incentives while removing barriers; businesses can develop and market more sustainable products and services; and mechanisms to encourage individuals to change behaviour are often best delivered at a community or organisational level, making use of networks of trust and influence. The Department of Health's Change4Life¹⁰ campaign to encourage the uptake of healthier lifestyles was developed by government and delivered through partner organisations, including local authorities, supermarkets, energy companies, schools, community groups, hospitals, etc, with the aim of creating a societal movement. The following quote from our research also illustrates this in practice: "All have a role to play, for example, on CERT (Carbon Emissions Reductions Target) it's a government requirement, delivered by energy companies, in partnership with local authorities, and needs engagement with customers and with housing companies/landlords..." (Business interview, June 2010).
- 6.3** The demand for action can also come from different parts of the triangle of change. For example, consumer pressure has prompted business action on the reduction of plastic bags, and in Ireland has provided government with the confidence to introduce a charge.
- 6.4** EU A-G energy labels for white goods also illustrate the successful combination of different levers and players. Although the ratings were introduced in 1993, they had little impact on shifting the consumer market until 2000 when the UK government's Energy Efficiency Commitment (EEC) required energy suppliers to encourage energy efficiency in homes. This resulted in agreements between retailers and energy suppliers, moving the price of A-rated products into an average consumer price range.

7 Should behaviour change interventions be used in isolation or in combination with other policy interventions?

See response to Qs 6

Practical application

8 Have publicly funded behaviour change interventions been both evidence-based and subject to effective evaluation? How successful have such interventions been?

- 8.1** Our research identified the need for more effective evaluation as a priority and for this to influence future policy (see response to Q3 above).
- 8.2** The SDC has not undertaken its own evaluations of publicly funded behaviour change interventions. Participants in our research considered that government behaviour change programmes presented a mixed picture. While Change4Life¹¹ (a Department for Health campaign to encourage uptake of healthier lifestyles through improved diet and exercise) was generally viewed positively, due to its use of relevant messengers to deliver the campaign and supportive tools, the Act on CO₂ campaign¹² was viewed less positively. It was criticised for failing to communicate effectively with the public, for being too negative in its messages, and for not including any supporting interventions to address the barriers to adopting lower carbon behaviours. The following quote from our research

illustrates this: “What they’ve done on health and nutrition has been good, but on environmental issues they’ve tended to shock and scare people and we know this doesn’t work”. (Business participant, June 2010).

8.3 Independent evaluation is taking place for the Scottish Climate Challenge Fund, which has engaged around 260 community groups on over 300 projects to cut carbon emissions. The report will be available in summer 2011. There is also an evaluation planned on DECC’s Low Carbon Communities Challenge.

9 Within government, how are the lessons learnt from the success or lack of success of behaviour change interventions fed back into the design of future interventions? Are lessons learned from industry and voluntary sector behaviour change activities also taken into account?

9.1 To date, there has not been a systematic mechanism in place for sharing learning across government on behaviour change interventions; it has been more *ad hoc*. The new structures detailed in response to Q4 may help to address this sharing of information although it is unclear how this will influence the design of future interventions.

9.2 There is also a substantial body of experience from industry and the voluntary sector on behaviour change activities. While some of this is shared with government and others, on the whole there is potential for sectors to work better together, to develop more effective partnerships, and learn from each other.

10 What mechanisms exist, at national and local government level, to provide advice and support during the design, piloting, implementation and evaluation of behaviour change interventions in order to ensure that they achieve intended policy goals and also cultural changes within government and public services more generally?

10.1 To our knowledge, there are no general mechanisms in place to provide support and advice at national or local government level on behaviour change interventions relating to enabling sustainable lives. Defra’s new ‘Centre of Expertise on Influencing Behaviours’ is intended to provide expertise across the department though it is unclear how this will work with other government departments or the public sector more broadly.

10.2 Some advice and support has been provided to organisations involved with specific funding initiatives, such as Nesta’s Big Green Challenge, Defra’s Greener Living Fund and Scotland’s Climate Change Fund. The National Social Marketing Centre has built social marketing capabilities focussing on public health.

Cross-government coordination

11 What mechanisms exist within government to coordinate and implement cross-departmental behaviour change policy interventions?

See response to Q4

12 What mechanisms exist within government to cascade learning and best practice on behaviour change policy interventions?

See response to Q4

Ethical considerations

13 When is it appropriate for the state to intervene to influence the behaviour of members of the public and how does this differ from when it is appropriate for the commercial or voluntary sector to intervene? In particular, when should this be done by outright prohibition and when by measures to encourage behaviour change? Are some methods of producing behaviour change unacceptable? Which and why?

- 13.1** As stated in response to question 5, it is important to recognise that government is already in the business of 'behaviour change' as existing systems and policy influences behaviour either directly or indirectly.
- 13.2** There are a number of cases where it is appropriate, or indeed necessary, for the state to intervene to influence behaviour. As David Cameron has recognised: "My belief in social responsibility is not a laissez- faire manifesto. I believe that government has a vital role to play in changing social behaviour". These cases include:
- Where there is a need to manage and respond to long term challenges to safeguard current and future generations. This role is significant given that human behaviour (and consequently business behaviour) naturally seeks more immediate gains. Climate change is one example where there is a need for government to intervene to secure long term benefit, where the costs and benefits of an individual's actions are not as immediately visible.
 - Where the risks of not taking action are too great to leave to markets or personal choice; for example the prohibition of hazardous substances in products that would otherwise present a health risk, or the banning of CFCs in aerosols to prevent ozone depletion.
 - Where it is identified that action at that level will be more effective, taking account of the triangle of change, behavioural science, and the 4Es model in the design of interventions.
 - Where there is a need for clear signals from government to enable others to act. For example, providing a regulatory framework so there is certainty for business to allow strategic planning and investment.
 - Where interventions at other levels have not delivered the necessary outcomes; for example the failure of voluntary agreements, or market failures, as was the case in the pricing of carbon.
 - Where there is a strategic case to initiate or kick-start a change, for example investment in new technologies.
- 13.3** Government clearly has an important role to play in enabling people to live more sustainable lives. Participants in our survey saw this as including the provision of clear messages and the right framework for others to deliver within, leading and exemplifying, providing the right incentives and regulation where appropriate, and working in partnership with business and other trusted partners.
- 13.4** Regulation is one of the main levers available to government. Although the current political philosophy is for fewer bureaucratic interventions, our research stressed the importance, particularly for the business community, of having a regulatory framework in place that supports and enables change, that lets the market deliver, and that creates a level playing field. An example that illustrates the value of regulation is the case of vehicle emission standards. The EU introduced mandatory emission reduction targets after a voluntary approach had failed to drive sufficient change. Within this framework the car industry is able to innovate and bring new products to the market. As one business participant in our research put it: "Government's role is getting things done behind the scenes to enable front of house changes to happen. It has to look down on the market place and see what it needs to do to let others get on with it, and step back." (Business participant, June 2010).
- 13.5** Although participants in our research thought that government needed to set out clear messages on sustainable lives - in particular around the importance of taking action - they agreed that government is not necessarily the best messenger. Government was seen to be less good at communicating with the general public than other players, including local authorities, NGOs, businesses and community organisations, and it was felt that more of an impact could be made by working through these trusted partners. The 2020 Climate Change group in Scotland is an example of how the Scottish Government are looking to business, civil society and academia to provide inspiration for the desired behaviour and act as role models.
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The Department for Health's *Change4Life* campaign is another example (see above). The importance of choosing the right messenger is evidenced in behavioural sciences literature, and was brought out in the Institute for Government's MINDSPACE report.¹³

- 13.6** As highlighted by the triangle of change model (see response to question 6), government does not act in isolation, and there are cases where it is more appropriate, or where it will be more effective, for the commercial or voluntary sector or others to intervene. Determining who in the triangle of change is best placed to act will depend on the desired behaviour change, the audience, and the intervention. Given the current administration's focus on localism, smaller government and 'Big Society', there will be a greater role for business and others. However, actions at other levels should be synergistic with government action, not a replacement.
- 13.7** The government is making increasing use of 'responsibility deals' with businesses to some success. For example the Courtauld Commitment on reducing packaging and waste has successfully

engaged major retailers and manufacturers. Targets have been extended to allow for continuing progress and importantly, WRAP provides expertise and support. Responsibility deals can be successful where businesses and government can agree shared goals and businesses can see benefits. Where there is less agreement or clear benefits, or there is an urgent need for action, responsibility deals are less likely to be successful and regulatory approaches may be appropriate. For example the Landfill Tax has been an important driver to support the increase in recycling.

- 13.8** The SDC report *The Future is Local*¹⁴ highlights that long-term shifts in behaviour are most likely to be achieved where communities have a strong role. The example of Todmorden in Yorkshire is one example used in the report to illustrate how communities come together, initially around a single issue (in this case local food growing), to build a stronger more cohesive society and enable people to make more sustainable choices in their day-to-day living. The Transition Town movement, DECC's low carbon communities, and Scotland's Climate Challenge Fund projects are also examples from which to learn.

14 Should the public be involved in the design and implementation of behaviour change policy interventions and, if so, how? Should proposed measures for securing behaviour change be subject to public engagement exercises or consultation? Should they be piloted? Do considerations differ in the case of interventions aimed at changing addictive behaviour?

- 14.1** Any intervention aimed at changing behaviour therefore needs to start from an understanding of where people are (not where policy makers think they are), and take account of motivations and barriers, while also recognising that people's acceptance of change is often dependent on how involved they feel they have been in the decision. Therefore this insight should be informed by meaningful engagement with the target audience, and can be gained thorough a range of techniques including pilots, field trials, consultation, and co-design of schemes.
- 14.2** The above point is supported at the community level, where it has been found that behaviour change is best enabled when projects engage with participants to identify all their latent motivations in order to address barriers and drivers. Information emerging from the review of Scotland's CCF, which will be available in summer 2011, illustrates this. One particular project, Zero Carbon Dunbar 2025, is recognised for having tapped into latent motivations – in this case the localism agenda (getting a local

community owned bakery up and running, getting local produce into the greengrocer, mapping local resources to boost knowledge and community pride/sense of place/ownership etc) – to involve the whole community in reducing carbon emissions. As a founding member of the project team puts it, the project is about engaging "the collective genius of our community in creating a positive vision of a sustainable and resilient, zero carbon future".

- 14.3** Policy-makers will increasingly be presented with complex issues of strategic importance, which need to be dealt with as whole systems rather than single issues, taking into account conflicting departmental objectives. A full 'public engagement' programme can enable significant shifts in policy and action. Engagement also generates shared ownership and responsibility across society for addressing difficult issues, and will raise the likelihood of successful outcomes. Omitting proper engagement can leave government in a defensive position searching for 'quick-fix' measures which are more likely to fail and to be a waste of resources.

International comparisons

15 What lessons can be learnt from previous successful or unsuccessful behaviour change interventions in other countries? Which countries provide the most helpful examples of best practice? Are behavioural change interventions generally transferable between different societies?

15.1 Valuable lessons can always be learned from others' experience, including from other countries, but to be most effective, behaviour change interventions need to be designed with the target audience in mind. So while there are many benefits of sharing experience, the interventions would need to be tailored to the specific circumstances i.e. culture, society, environment. Examples include the development of the London Barclays Cycle Hire Scheme, which learned from the successful schemes in Paris and Lyon; or the experience of creating a

cycle friendly city in Odense¹⁵ (Denmark) which is now being replicated elsewhere in Europe. We therefore recommend that UK government is fully engaged with other countries to learn from best practice on enabling sustainable lives, and that it encourages and provides support for others e.g. local authorities and communities, to engage and learn from experience elsewhere. The European Covenant of Mayors and European Energy Cities Network are examples of networks providing opportunities for learning and sharing of experience.

Case Study: Tackling Obesity

16 The Department for Health's *Change4Life* campaign is a good example of how different partners have worked with government to address the challenge of obesity, and how behavioural science has been integrated into the design of the different interventions.

17 From the SDC's perspective, solutions to obesity need to take a whole systems approach. One government strategy that delivered on this approach was the Department for Children, Schools and Families *Play Strategy*. Rather than looking at play through a very narrow focus i.e. through the provision of play equipment, it looked more broadly, considering how play could contribute to preventing and reducing obesity in children through increased activity, allowing for 'free play', as well as structured play, and the reasons play areas may not be used, such as their accessibility and how safely they could be reached on foot. This led to local Play Teams working with Transport Planners to ensure access routes were improved, the number of play areas were increased, and the use of natural materials and spaces for play. Although this strategy has now been withdrawn, we believe the idea of what it was trying to achieve and the thinking that went into its development and delivery grasped the concept of influencing behaviour through systems change.

18 Scotland's 'Route map towards healthy weight' is also taking a wider focus on the society we live in and the kind of lives it encourages. It aims to create a 'cross-portfolio and cross-sector collaboration and investment to make deep, sustainable changes to the living environment, in order to shift it from one that promotes weight gain to one that supports healthy choices and healthy weight for all.' This is to be done by focusing on four areas:

- Energy consumption – controlling exposure to, demand for and consumption of excessive quantities of high calorific foods and drinks
- Energy expenditure – increasing opportunities for and uptake of walking, cycling and other physical activity in our daily lives and minimising sedentary behaviour
- Early years – establishing life-long habits and skills for positive health behaviour through early life interventions
- Working lives – increasing responsibility of organisations for the health and wellbeing of their employees.

19 Efforts which focus on individualisation of responsibility are often unsuccessful as they fail to address the broader systems and structures that create an obesogenic environment. For example, incorporating walking and cycling into everyday routine is acknowledged to be a simple preventative measure for obesity. However, promotional activities alone will not necessarily change behaviour – it requires the right infrastructure to be available through the

provision of safe walking and cycling routes. This is supported by evidence, which shows that lack of access to green spaces and safe walking and cycling routes contribute to high levels of obesity and mental ill health,¹⁶ and that those who live in high-walkable neighbourhoods (classified according to density and layout) take more steps per day than those who live in low-walkable neighbourhoods.¹⁷

Endnotes

- 1 Richard H Thaler and Cass R Sunstein (2008) *Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth and Happiness*
- 2 Institute for Government (2010) *MINDSPACE: Influencing behaviour through public policy*.
- 3 SDC/NCC (2006) *I Will if You Will*. Report of the UK Sustainable Consumption Roundtable.
- 4 Institute for Government (2010) op cit
- 5 SDC/NCC (2006) op cit
- 6 SDC (2010) *The Future is Local: Empowering communities to improve their neighbourhoods*
- 7 UK Government Sustainable Development Strategy, *Securing the Future* (2005)
- 8 Institute for Government (2010) *MINDSPACE: Influencing behaviour through public policy*.
- 9 SDC/NCC (2006) op cit
- 10 www.nhs.uk/change4life/Pages/change-for-life.aspx
- 11 www.nhs.uk/change4life/Pages/change-for-life.aspx
- 12 <http://actonco2.direct.gov.uk/home.html>
- 13 Institute for Government (2010) op cit
- 14 SDC(2010) *The Future is Local* op cit
- 15 Cycling Embassy of Denmark www.cycling-embassy.dk/
- 16 SDC (2010) *The Future is Local: Empowering communities to improve their neighbourhoods*
- 17 www.sustrans.org.uk/assets/files/AT/Publications/PDFs/FH14_activetravel_and_obesity.pdf

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Through advocacy, advice and appraisal, we help put sustainable development at the heart of Government policy.

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