

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

How Your Department
Can Become Involved

A Guide for District Council Senior Managers

June 2007

Introduction

A Statutory Duty to ensure that public authorities act in a manner that best contributes to the objectives of sustainable development came into effect on 31 March 2007. On 9 May 2006 the Secretary of State Peter Hain launched the Northern Ireland Sustainable Development Strategy¹. This document established a framework and focus for tackling the challenges that lie ahead if Northern Ireland is going to embrace sustainable development effectively. It sends a strong message to public bodies about the need to encourage sustainable development in order to tackle the six priority areas (page 3) and to make the strategy's objectives a reality throughout Northern Ireland.

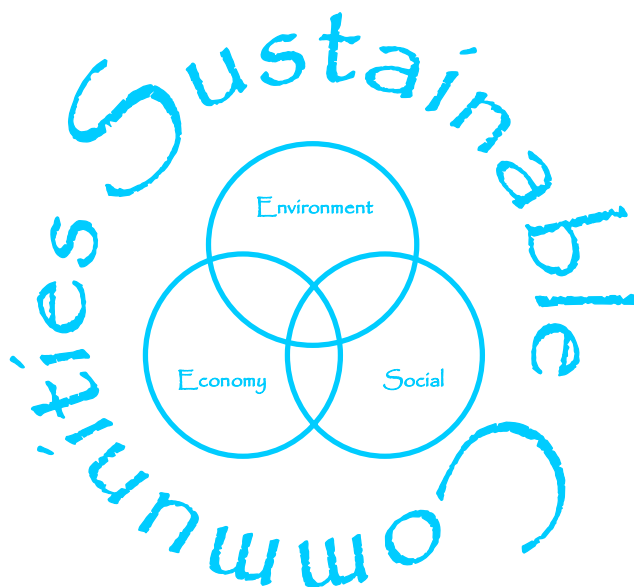
District Councils and Sustainable Communities

The primary tool to build sustainable communities is the implementation of the Sustainable Development Strategy. Sustainable development is based on balancing social, economic and environmental costs and benefits to ensure the best future. It is about looking at long term as well as short term costs and consequences, and about looking at global as well as local aspects of all decisions.

The accepted definition of Sustainable Development is:

“Development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” The Brundtland Report, 1987

District councils have a ten year history of work on sustainable development under the previous banner of Local Agenda 21 (LA21). What is expected now is a follow on to that work, but this time as a statutory 'Duty' rather than a voluntary activity. The Sustainable Development Strategy introduces monitoring and reporting on targets and a set of sustainable development indicators. District councils have a significant role to play in ensuring that synergy is realised to assist in achieving the targets and indicators and ultimately to build sustainable communities.



Compliance with the Sustainable Development Duty

Elected members and council officers have an obligation to ensure the new Duty for Sustainable Development is implemented and that it is a major consideration in all decisions made. Sustainable communities can be achieved by local and central government working in partnership to deliver the Strategy through mainstreaming social, economic and environmental matters in an integrated manner.

In this time of change for district councils, with increasing powers and responsibilities, sustainable development offers a unifying and coordinating framework which will ensure effective and efficient delivery of council services to the benefit of all citizens.

This is one of a series of three manuals designed to help councils maximise the benefits of sustainable development. The others provide a strategic overview and an implementation manual to help integrate sustainable development through all council functions, services and directorates.

¹ First Steps towards Sustainability: A Sustainable Development Strategy for Northern Ireland, DOE 2006

The Priority Areas of the Sustainable Development Strategy

Priority No	Priority Area	Objectives
1	Sustainable Consumption and Production	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To become more resource efficient To make Northern Ireland public sector a UK regional leader in sustainable development To minimise the unsustainable impacts of consumption
2	Natural Resource Protection and Environmental Enhancement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To conserve our landscape and manage it in a more sustainable way To protect and enhance the freshwater and marine environments To improve our air quality To conserve, protect, enhance and sustainably re-use our historic environment To protect and enhance biodiversity
3	Sustainable Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To increase the economic well being of people in Northern Ireland To create attractive, high quality environments where people feel safe and which provide the conditions for health and social well-being To promote the development of community engagement, civic leadership and responsible citizenship
4	Climate Change and Energy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To reduce greenhouse gas emissions, principally by promoting energy efficiency and the use of renewables To establish Northern Ireland as a world class exemplar in the development and use of renewable energy To plan and prepare for climate change impacts in Northern Ireland
5	Learning and Communication for Sustainable Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To provide access for all citizens to gain sustainable development skills and knowledge To bring about the behavioural changes necessary to progress towards a sustainable society
6	Governance for Sustainable Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To mainstream sustainable development across government To strengthen the network of accountability for governance for sustainable development

District Council Services and Sustainable Development

The purpose of this document is to highlight the fit between key council services and sustainable development. Sustainable Northern Ireland's implementation manual, which underpins both this document and the strategic overview, includes more detail on the new Duty and how to ensure compliance.

Overall responsibility and accounting for the Sustainable Development Duty lies with the chief executive who, together with the senior management team, must ensure delivery of all fundamental services. To deliver sustainable development an implementation plan should be developed by the chief executive and senior management team.

Across Northern Ireland's 26 district councils there are significant differences in respect of departmental services and functions. In recognition, this document does not attempt to place functions alongside directorates but does give a high level role to senior managers with responsibility for service delivery. While it is recognised that directorate services differ from council to council, specific directorates are identified below to provide examples of their fit within sustainable development aspects.

- **Environmental Services** - All environmental health functions along with waste management, street cleansing, building control, energy management, biodiversity, and grounds maintenance
- **Leisure Services** - All leisure related issues along with community (good) relations, community safety, tourism, arts and culture, parks and recreation
- **Development** - All development issues including economic development, along with planning and regeneration
- **Corporate Services** - All internal issues along with communications, and PR

Environmental Services

Environmental Services provides a sound platform for sustainable development due to ten years of being the primary delivery directorate under LA21. This directorate is a crucial advisor on Best Practice. By its very nature many of the requirements of the directorate form a strong contribution to sustainable development. Some are statutory and contribute directly towards sustainable communities while others are advisory and build on statutory duties. Environmental Services has responsibility for the development and implementation of waste management plans to comply with current and future EU directives, targets and policies. Waste management practices impact on every resident and community and this provides opportunities to change people's attitudes and behaviours in line with the Sustainable Development Statutory Duty. Education programmes encompassing sustainable development are already in place in schools, community groups and business organisations. To attain sustainable communities these activities need to be built on and expanded.

Environmental Health activities such as air, land and water emissions, along with monitoring of these, are important functions and form a significant base for delivery of targets within the Sustainable Development Strategy. Enforcement of legislation and provision of advice and guidance to businesses in terms of good environmental management practice provides key opportunities for communicating the sustainable development message to the business community as well as to the general public. By working in partnership to improve population health and well being, integration of the strategy is a key requisite to delivering sustainable development.

Sustainable development is also dealt with by Building Control through issues such as energy efficiency and encouraging sustainable construction. Outside of the Statutory Duty, Building Control actively promotes the principles of sustainable development to the construction industry, encouraging environmentally friendly building techniques and promoting the use of recycled materials.

Energy management of council building stock forms an important role in reducing the impacts of climate change on both the local and wider community. Environmental Services has a key role in influencing energy management across local communities and to business. Renewable energy already forms a key action point in many district council energy plans, which again is a major aspect of the Sustainable Development Strategy.

District councils should have developed biodiversity plans and implement these in partnership with the community, business and local interest groups. The main purpose of these plans is to engage groups and the wider community to participate in biodiversity activities. The actions within these plans should link directly to the Sustainable Development Strategy which specifically sets clear targets for biodiversity and nature conservation.

Leisure Services

Leisure Services' aim is to improve the levels of enjoyment, health, fitness and achievement for all citizens through participation in sport and exercise. District councils need to take into account the distribution of the population within both urban and rural areas, having due regard to the problems of areas of deprivation and targeting areas of social need.

Public parks, green spaces and recreation grounds provide excellent venues for community activities and environmental projects. This provides additional opportunities for the council to interface with the community. Councils should encourage reduced use of pesticides, reduce the use of peat based composts, introduce water conservation measures and give preference to planting native species.

Sustainable Communities has a strategic objective to create an attractive, high quality environment where people feel safe and which provides the conditions for health and social well-being. Community Safety Partnerships have been established in all council areas to develop local action plans and engage residents in initiatives. Community relations work will also be a vital tool to promote the development of community engagement, civic leadership and responsible citizenship - another strategic objective.

To implement sustainable development, responsible tourism needs to be encouraged. This can include sourcing locally produced gifts with low environmental impact to sell in tourist centres. Tourist attractions may be treated separately from the main council building but all their activities should also be subject to an environmental audit. Publications should be carbon neutral, and have details on public transport availability. Catering should be ethical and focused on low food miles, and waste should be segregated and recycled.

Development

Sustainable development needs to be at the heart of the decision making process within this department. There are key links within the Sustainable Development Strategy to actions such as economic development, tourism and both urban and rural regeneration. Development Departments within councils are concerned with the long term development of the district. It is essential that sustainable development principles are fully incorporated into this department's strategic long-term planning policies.

Economic development plays a key role in fostering local enterprise and developing the local economy. Economic activities have a major impact on sustainability issues, making a crucial contribution to welfare, not only providing jobs and income but also opportunities for people and the community. Within the economic development section of the council there is the opportunity to guide businesses to make more ethical and environmentally aware decisions. Economic grants awarded by some district councils should be assessed against sustainable development criteria.

With RPA, planning is to become a new function within district councils, and with greater power comes greater responsibility. District councils already have some input into planning via area plans and environmental impact assessments for new developments. District council planning policies should integrate sustainable development into the decision making process.

Corporate Services

Within the Corporate Services directorate district councils are concerned with in-house issues and ensuring that council policy and practices are delivered in a consistent and efficient manner.

The culture of sustainability within councils is built through development and implementation of sustainable development policies, procedures and practices. In many district councils this has started but needs to be built upon to include sustainable development factors as part of all key service delivery. Training of employees through the council in respect of sustainable development and sustainable communities needs to be incorporated into and delivered as part of council training and development plans. In addition, training of elected members in sustainable development issues is of paramount importance if they are to demonstrate their role as civic leaders for sustainable development

Corporate Services need to develop a marketing and communication strategy to relay sustainable development issues to council leadership, employees and the wider council district. Communication of sustainable development is equally as important as its delivery.

Key Directorate Functions and Sustainable Development

Council chief executives and senior management teams should identify which of the following functions fall within each of their departments. Responsibility for each function should be assigned to a department, and an individual within the department, to ensure councils fully comply with the new Sustainable Development Duty. An implementation plan should be devised, integrated through all functions, and initiated. Sustainable Northern Ireland is available to help develop implementation plans and provide additional advice on suitable actions and targets to ensure full compliance with the Duty.

Directorate Function	Links to Priority Area of SD Strategy						Example of Action Needed
	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Waste disposal	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Reducing and recycling waste. Provide facilities and promote their use. Support community and voluntary organisations in developing reuse and recycling schemes.
Street cleansing			✓		✓		Monitor cleanliness levels across council district to ensure citizens have access to a clean environment. Initiate actions to reduce elements of anti-social behaviour such as graffiti, flyposting and vandalism.
Air quality			✓	✓	✓		Continue to monitor air quality in line with Air Quality Strategy and statutory duty. Implement initiatives to improve quality. Liaise with other departments to encourage new businesses to install clean air technology.
IPPC		✓	✓	✓	✓		Monitor IPPC discharges to minimize pollution incidents.
Building regulations	✓			✓	✓		Promote the concept of sustainable building and construction to developers and architects. Go beyond minimal building regulations to promote high building standards.
Biodiversity		✓	✓		✓	✓	Local Biodiversity Actions Plans should be adhered to and closely monitored.
Building maintenance and energy management	✓	✓		✓		✓	Cleaning supplies should be audited for their environmental specifications. Initiatives to reduce the amount of energy used should be investigated. Renewable sources of energy for council buildings should be installed.
Advice to businesses	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Provide advice to businesses on environmental management systems, environmentally friendly technology and relevant legislation.
Community safety			✓		✓		Community Development Action plans should be implemented along with 'Cleaner, Safer, Greener' agenda
Community relations	✓	✓	✓		✓		Community relations should be used as a tool to engage the community and involved them in the community planning process and the development of sustainable communities.
Tourism	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Tourism should focus on eco-tourism. All publications, events, tourism centres, and catering should be subject to sustainable development principles.
Parks and Recreation	✓	✓		✓		✓	Sustainable development principles need to be incorporated into planting schemes and the use of pesticides and fertilisers minimised. Priority should be given to native species and those likely to increase biodiversity.

Directorate Function	Links to Priority Area of SD Strategy						Example of Action Needed
	1	2	3	4	5	6	
District planning		✓	✓	✓		✓	Sustainable criteria needs to be incorporated into all planning decisions.
Economic development	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Advice on setting up sustainable businesses and environmentally friendly technologies should be given. Part of the criteria for economic grants should be based on an environmental impact assessment. Sustainable development needs to be integrated into the department's Economic Development Strategy and be at the heart of the decision making process.
Community planning	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Refer to the Sustainable Development Strategy to ensure service provisions such as local transport, tourism, urban and rural development are undertaken appropriately and with full community involvement.
Regeneration		✓	✓	✓	✓		All funding provided to local regeneration initiatives and advice given should be subject to abiding by sustainable development principles. Regeneration initiatives should not have a negative environmental impact.
Neighbourhood renewal			✓				Neighbourhood Renewal Partnerships should focus on improving public services by adopting a joined up approach between government departments, district councils, statutory bodies and other service providers. These partnerships should use the community planning approach and incorporate sustainable development principles.
Purchasing	✓			✓		✓	Introduce a 'Green' Purchasing Policy to include decision making based on environmental, ethical and local criteria. Embed whole life costing into all procurement decisions.
Tenders	✓			✓		✓	Sustainable development criteria should be built into the tender process
Policy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Sustainable Development should be incorporated into all council policies and procedures. Review, implement and communicate the council's sustainable development policies and practices.
Marketing and communication	✓			✓	✓	✓	Printed material should be done by a company with an EMS and made carbon neutral by offsetting carbon emissions. Communicate sustainable development initiatives both in-house and to rest of council district.
Human resources	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Sustainable development policies should be a part of both the induction and the appraisal process. Lack of adherence to the council's environmental policy should be a disciplinary matter.
Finance	✓			✓		✓	Embed whole life costing into procurement decisions and monitor cost reductions from reduced energy usage and other SD priorities.
Administration	✓			✓		✓	Move to reduce the amount of paper and other waste generated and energy consumed. Efforts to move to a more paperless office should be utilised where possible.

There is further support on how to implement each of the examples of action needed in '[Sustainable Development – How Your District Council Can Play Its Part – An Implementation Manual](#)'. This is available for download from www.sustainableni.org. This implementation manual contains more detail on each priority area along with additional examples of recommended action.

Remember: Sustainable Northern Ireland is always here to help.

Sustainable Development

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Produced by



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Sustainable Northern Ireland
89 Loopland Drive
Belfast
BT6 9DW

T. 028 9050 7850
F. 028 9094 2151
e. info@sustainableni.org
w. www.sustainableni.org



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