



environmental
guide for
public sector

There is increasing public expectation, statutory duty and political pressure for the Public Sector to lead the drive towards sustainability. The challenges Local Authorities face are more daunting than those in commercial organisations due to their unique socio-economic nature – it remains a fact that the influence of Local Authorities allows them to act, as they always have done, as a beacon for society as a whole.

Reading this guide will give public sector managers and officers an overview understanding of those challenges – and of the socio-economic effects of meeting them.

It also outlines in brief terms the current situation and the areas where change and education can be most effective.

We hope you find it both interesting and a useful starting point to one of the greatest challenges currently facing societies globally.

environmental guide for public sector

this guide outlines relevant legislation, codes, guidelines and the key sustainability issues for the sector.

The public sector covers a wide range of services. Local authorities alone deliver over 700 different services covering education, transport, planning, social services, public health, procurement, recreation, leisure, housing and regeneration.

Local government, the education sector and the National Health Service (NHS) employ just over 15% of the UK workforce, with the figure growing to 20% for the wider public sector.

Moreover the public sector as a whole has significant purchasing power: an estimated £150 billion per year¹.

With such an influence over the UK economy, the public sector also has a significant impact on the environment.

Local authorities can play an important role in reducing this impact; by taking the lead on addressing issues such as waste, greenhouse gas emissions, biodiversity and water use.

1. Defra website: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/climatechange/uk/publicsector/index.htm>.

2. The term sustainable development was originally used by the Brundtland Commission in 1983 to describe the "ability to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." It is widely stated that there are three pillars of Sustainable Development; these are economic, environmental and social.

relevant legislation and codes / guidelines

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Central Government is responsible for developing strategies, objectives and frameworks that promote sustainable development on a national scale. But it is the responsibility of local government to translate those national objectives into local strategy, in a way that will reflect the priorities and needs of the local community. Meeting these needs relies on a healthy balance between environmental and

- Reducing risks: Adaption and mitigation will reduce the risks associated with climate change
- Preventing interruptions in supply: Promoting good practice within the supply chain can help avoid interruptions in supply

While local authorities can take the lead through working to reduce their own sustainability impacts, these only represent a small proportion of any community's overall impact. The local authority should work within the community, instigating Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs), ensuring the development of shared long-term objectives and targets and the continued assessment of progress against these targets. The Sustainable Development Commission (SDC) has highlighted key ingredients essential for delivering sustainable development in the local authority, these include: Leadership, Attitudes, Culture, Know How, Governance, Tools and Resources³.

Local authorities can take a lead in promoting sustainability in a number of key areas, including planning and construction; energy and climate change; waste management; water resource management; procurement and transport.

Ensuring the sustainability of resources and the protection of the environment is now also a requirement of European and UK legislation in many of these areas. Two key areas, waste and climate change, have been selected here to illustrate the important role that local government has to play in promoting sustainable development and how recent legislation may affect the way that local strategy is developed and implemented.

socio-economic objectives. It is essential that local authorities recognise the interdependency of the three pillars of sustainable development: environmental, social and economic², and show leadership in shaping more sustainable communities. For example, improvements to the housing stock can result in economic and health benefits as well as carbon emissions savings.

There are many incentives for local government to focus on sustainable development, including:

- Setting an example: Enhancing trust and reputation
- Supporting the local economy: for example, by procuring locally sourced food products
- Financial savings: More efficient use of energy and other resources can lead to direct financial savings, especially over the long-term. Environmental efficiency measures, such as insulation, recycling bins and low flush toilets, can all reduce running costs



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key issues

WASTE

Each year we generate about 100 million tonnes of waste from households, commerce and industry combined⁴. The majority of this waste (over 50%) is sent to landfill. This is the least preferred waste management option because it requires more energy to extract and process new raw materials, than to recycle or reuse waste materials. Moreover the biodegradable waste generates methane, a greenhouse gas 25 times more potent than carbon dioxide, and a significant contributor to climate change⁵. More information on waste can be found on this website [Link to Waste Article].

- The Landfill Directive
- End-of-life vehicles (ELVs)
- Batteries Directive

More information on these can be found on the Europa website:
<http://europa.eu/scadplus/leg/en/s15002.htm>

The UK Government published a “Waste Strategy for England” in 2007. This strategy supports the principles embedded in the EU Waste Directive and emphasises the concept of the waste hierarchy, which prioritises waste management strategies in the order of reduction, re-use, recycling and disposal. In addition, Government is consulting on potential legislation that would allow local authorities to introduce household financial incentives for waste reduction and recycling. Local authorities would be free to introduce schemes where householders who recycle their waste receive payments funded by householders who do not. All schemes would have to be revenue neutral.



THE ROLE OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES

According to the UK Government Waste Strategy:

“Changing how we deal with our waste is the responsibility of all parts of society and requires action by all of us: Local authorities have to provide convenient recycling services for their residents and commercial customers and provide advice and information on how to reduce waste. They will also have to work with their communities to plan and invest in new collection and reprocessing facilities.”

Effective delivery of local waste management strategies requires the following:

Communication - Communication is key to getting people to understand and support the changes to their local services and to take part in recycling. Providing good quality local information will encourage the correct use of recycling services (thus reducing contamination and resource use) and will motivate people to practice waste prevention in their homes.

THE UK AND EUROPEAN CONTEXT

The European Union (EU) has generated a substantial amount of legislation obliging member states to take a more responsible approach to managing waste. The EU Waste Directive is an overarching piece of legislation that encourages waste prevention and reduction and promotes recycling and reuse. A number of other pieces of legislation have been introduced which focus on specific waste streams including:

- The Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) Regulations
- Waste Oil Directive
- Packaging, Packaging Waste and the Packaging Waste Regulations

3. Sustainable Development Commission (SDC), Local Decision Making and Sustainable Development: LSPs, sustainable communities, strategies and LAAs.

4. Defra website: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/waste/index.htm>.

5. IPCC 4th Assessment Report.

key issues

Partnerships - Local authorities should build and strengthen partnerships with stakeholder groups along the waste management supply chain, including retailers, manufacturers, businesses, consumers, waste management operators and other local authorities. Defra has given local authorities the option of forming a Joint Waste Authority (JWA). A JWA will be a new legal entity able to sign contracts and employ its own staff. More details on how to participate in this scheme can be found on the Defra website: www.defra.gov.uk/environment/waste/localauth/partnerwork/jwa.htm.

Implementation of economic tools and legislation - The Landfill Allowance Trading Scheme (LATS) was introduced to help the UK meet the targets for biodegradable municipal waste sent to landfill as specified by the EC Landfill Directive. Each Waste Disposal Authority is responsible for implementing this scheme by trading allowances with other authorities, saving them for future years or using some of its future allowances in advance. The scheme aims to encourage the greatest amount of waste diversion to occur in areas where it is cheapest and most practical to do so. Further guidance is provided on the Defra website: www.defra.gov.uk/Environment/waste/localauth/lats/intro.htm.

Climate Change – Adaption and Mitigation - Tackling climate change is one of the most difficult challenges we currently face. We use energy for everything: heating, lighting, managing waste, transport, construction and manufacturing. Most of the energy we use in the UK is derived from fossil fuels which combust to produce carbon dioxide (CO₂), a greenhouse gas (GHG) responsible for contributing to climate change. The effects of climate change are becoming more visible. Weather patterns are changing. Winters are becoming wetter and sea level is rising, increasing the vulnerability of flooding and erosion; also summers are becoming hotter, leading to shortages of water and droughts. Every local authority will be affected by climate change. The summer floods in 2007 and the droughts in 2004-2006 have illustrated just how much impact climatic events can have on people's lives and the local economy. The floods of summer 2007 are now estimated to have cost over £3billion⁶.

THE NATIONAL CONTEXT

Many pieces of legislation have been introduced to address energy use and GHG emissions. The following two examples specially address adaption to climate change.

The Climate Change Bill was passed through the UK Parliament last year. This will provide a legally binding framework to tackle the dangers of climate change and sets a target for reducing UK CO₂ emissions by at least 26% by 2020 and at least 60% by 2050, compared to 1990 levels.



The Bill also requires the UK Government to report at least every 5 years the risks posed by climate change and publish a programme setting out how these risks will be addressed. Public bodies such as local authorities, especially those who are vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, will be obligated to take some action on adaptation and provide evidence for demonstrating progress in this area⁷. More information can be found on the Defra website: www.defra.gov.uk/ENVIRONMENT/climatechange/uk/legislation/

The Planning Bill was passed in 2007 and introduces a new system for nationally significant infrastructure planning alongside further reform to the town and country planning systems. Local authorities must incorporate climate change mitigation and adaptation into local development frameworks (LDFs). More information can be found on the Communities and Local Government website: www.communities.gov.uk/planningandbuilding/planning/planningpolicyimplementation/reformplanningsystem/planningbill/

key issues

THE ROLE OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Local authorities have enormous potential to address climate change impacts, through their functions as transport and planning authorities and through other service delivery such as development, community care providers, waste, housing, environmental health, and provision of green space. An effective approach to addressing the impacts of climate change within a local authority should cover the following key aspects:



Planning: local authorities can minimise costs by building climate change adaption into an early stage of the development process - new development as well as premises or refurbishment. In doing this, local authorities can alleviate the high cost associated with reparations after a sudden event.

Mitigation against weather related events: A local authority should assess the risks associated with weather related incidents and implement emergency plans and early warning systems where necessary. Where there is a high risk of flooding, for example, new infrastructure may need to be considered which can handle excess water runoff in the event of heavy rainfall. Open and green spaces can be used to offset some of the increased warmth that can be expected with climate change.

Many organisations specialise in supporting local authorities in the implementation of climate change strategy.

The UK Climate Impact Programme (UKCIP) provides a range of tools such as the local climate impacts profile (LCLIP) which can help local authorities to better understand the impacts and consequences of current extreme weather events. For more information visit the UKCIP website:

[www.ukcip.org.uk/index.php?option=com_content &task=view&id=278](http://www.ukcip.org.uk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=278).

The Environment Agency also works with local authorities to address the climate risks from increased flooding, increased water scarcity and drought, waste management and conserving freshwater biodiversity. For more information visit the Environment Agency website: www.environmentagency.gov.uk/research/library/consultations/94894.aspx

Monitoring and reviewing performance: In April 2008 a new national indicator set was introduced to monitor the performance of local government, working alone or in partnerships with other local bodies. The set includes three climate change indicators:

- CO₂ reduction from local authority operations;
- per capita reduction in CO₂ emissions in the local authority area;
- planning to adapt to climate change.

Local authorities will be responsible for monitoring two of the indicators and the newly established Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) will publish data for the third. The indicators are one component of Government's new approach to assessing local authorities' performance against national priorities⁸.

Building Partnerships: Building Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP) is essential for developing and implementing an effective climate change strategy. Partners may include stakeholders such as businesses and other local authorities. Local authorities are increasingly encouraged to form local area agreements (LAAs) and multi-area agreements (MAAs) and to also work in partnership with key delivery partners, such as the Environment Agency (EA).

7. Defra website

8. Nottingham Declaration/Energy Saving Trust website: <http://www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/nottingham/Nottingham-Declaration/Performance-Measures/What-are-the-NIs>

key issues

Commitment: The Nottingham Declaration is a voluntary agreement that commits signatory local authorities to develop plans with partners and local communities to progressively address the causes and the impacts of climate change over the next two years. Over 300 local authorities have added their names to the Nottingham Declaration and pledged to systematically tackle climate change. More information can be found at the following website: www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/nottingham

All central government departments and their executive agencies have sustainable operations targets to meet, covering areas such as energy efficiency, water consumption, waste, etc.

SUSTAINABLE PROCUREMENT - QUICK WINS

These 'Quick Wins' are specifically designed for public sector procurers. They are a set of sustainable specifications for a range of commonly-purchased products, such as IT equipment, white goods, paper (including tissue), etc. The products assessed were chosen for their environmental / financial impact, scope for environmental improvement and political or example-setting function.

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SUSTAINABLE PROCUREMENT – UK GOVERNMENT TIMBER PROCUREMENT POLICY

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conclusion

With the control and influence that a local authority has over the community comes responsibility: A local authority has a responsibility to ensure the safety, health and wellbeing of all those who live within its area of control. As illustrated, taking measures to protect the environment will yield socio-economic benefits for everyone, as well as ensuring alignment with national objectives and legislation. Only two issues: waste and climate change have been addressed here, however there are a number of other issues that also deserve a high priority on the local agenda. As legislation continues to reflect the growing concern for the environment, it is essential that local authorities keep up to date with progress in this area.



The Act provides a comprehensive code of company law for the UK, and is relevant to all sectors.

USEFUL LINKS

Carbon Trust

www.carbontrust.co.uk

Communities and Local Government

www.communities.gov.uk/corporate/

Defra, Sustainable Development

www.defra.gov.uk/sustainable/index.htm

Energy Saving Trust

www.energysavingtrust.org.uk

Energy Saving Trust, The Nottingham

Declaration on Climate Change -

www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/nottingham

Environment Agency

www.environment-agency.gov.uk/

Department of Energy and Climate Change

www.decc.gov.uk/

Greening Government

www.greeninggovernment.org/

ICLEI (International Council for
Local Environmental Initiatives)

www.iclei.org/

I&DeA (Improvement and Development
Agency for Local Government)

www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelD=1

Local Government Association

www.lga.gov.uk/lga/core/page.do?pagelD=29228

UK Climate Impact Programme

www.ukcip.org.uk/

Wrap

www.wrap.org.uk/



FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE
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