

Securing the future – delivering the UK sustainable development strategy

Monday 7 March 2005

Introduction

Published on 7 March 2005, *Securing the future* sets out the government's strategy to integrate the principles of sustainable development into all aspects of business and life to ensure that the quality of life of future generations is not compromised. The strategy builds on the previous 1999 strategy and contains four agreed priorities;

- Sustainable consumption and production
- Climate change
- Natural resource protection
- Sustainable communities

The strategy includes a range of measures that will have implications for local authorities;

- During 2005 the Government, Local Government Association and IDeA will develop a joint central-local government commitment to the delivery of sustainable development.
- The government will work with partners to develop toolkits and other materials to support Local Strategic Partnerships in developing and delivering Sustainable Community Strategies
- The next rounds of Beacon Council themes (7&8) will include themes around aspects of sustainable development at the local level
- The Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) process from 2005 will seek to recognise and reward good performance on sustainable development and community engagement
- Under the cleaner safer greener programme, Government will launch a How To programme to transform the local environment
- The government will hold cross-departmental workshops to explore ways of improving the Government's communication of consistent messages on sustainable development to local authorities
- The Audit Commission is to draft a revised set of quality of life indicator

LGA key messages

- The emphasis on local delivery throughout the strategy is welcomed. The government recognises that local action is crucial in tackling the major issues of sustainability.
- The LGA will work with the government to develop a joint central / local government commitment to the delivery of sustainable development. This is something that we have lobbied for and we will ensure that this commitment is not prescriptive but gives local authorities the freedoms and flexibilities to develop local approaches
- The LGA is pleased that the government has recognised that different departments have in the past sent conflicting messages regarding the importance of sustainable development. The LGA has long argued that the lack of consistent messages have been a barrier to successful local delivery on sustainable development, and so welcomes the commitment to tackle this

briefing

- The LGA understands that the government wants to ensure that all local authorities take a consistently committed approach to sustainable development. However we are disappointed that it feels the CPA process is the way to do this. CPA should only be part of the performance management approach which also needs to include self assessment and peer review

Further information

This briefing sets out an initial response from the LGA on the Government's Sustainable Development strategy. We will provide further briefing and analysis in the near future.

For further information please contact Tim Woodhouse 020 7664 3381 or email tim.woodhouse@lga.gov.uk

Chapter one – A new Strategy

This chapter introduces the strategy, looks at the background to the strategy and identifies 4 key action areas which are;

- Sustainable Consumption and Production
- Climate Change and Energy
- Natural Resource Protection and Environmental Enhancement
- Sustainable Communities

Chapter one also introduces the government's new set of high level indicators; the UK Framework Indicators and says that research has been commissioned to establish whether an "ecological footprint" indicator could be constructed for the UK.

LGA View

We welcome the emphasis placed on local action with the inclusion of sustainable communities as one of the key action areas. We also recognise that local government can have an impact on the three other areas.

Chapter 2 – Helping people make better choices

This chapter explains that the government wants to ensure that the strategy enables, encourages and engages people and communities to move towards sustainability while recognising that the government should lead by example.

Key points for local authorities

- Surrey County Council is leading a ChangeLAB – changing Lifestyles Attitudes and Behaviour – project which will increase the knowledge base about effective local interventions to influence behaviour in sustainable directions. Experience gained from this project will be helpful to all local authorities
- The government sustainable development website www.sustainable-development.gov.uk is being relaunched
- The government will launch Community Action 2020 – Together We Can. This programme will "reinvigorate community action on sustainable development by promoting new and existing opportunities to get involved".
- Schools play a important role in teaching the next generation the importance of sustainability

LGA view

We are pleased that innovation in local authorities, in this case Surrey County Council is recognised and valued.

We welcome proposals for support and will continue to work with Government when designing Community Action 2020 to ensure that the programme is as effective as possible.

Chapter 3 – “One Planet Economy”; Sustainable Consumption and Production

This chapter focuses how much the UK has become a consumer driven society and argues that “we need a major shift to deliver new products and services with lower environmental impacts across their life cycle, while at the same time boosting competitiveness”.

Key points for local authorities

- Government wants to continue to encourage waste minimisation and recycling through the landfill tax and aggregates levy
- the Business Resource Efficiency and Waste Programme will be funded through landfill tax receipts to, amongst other things, encourage the reuse and recycling of materials
- WRAP and Defra will work with local authorities to pilot new ways to encourage householders to recycle their waste at supermarkets
- Government will present the conclusions of the first review of the “Waste Strategy 2000” by the end of 2005
- Government will encourage sustainable public procurement including
 - wider use of whole-life costing
 - ensuring that public sector procurers receive appropriate professional training

LGA view

The LGA supports proposals to work together on better resource and waste management including through procurement. The LGA will continue to lobby the Government to ensure that councils have adequate funding to do this. Links must also be made to the ongoing efficiency reviews and the Centres of Procurement Excellence.

Chapter 4 – Confronting the Greatest Threat; Climate Change and Energy

- Climate change is the most severe problem we are facing today
- Between 2010 and 2020 the Government aims to update the Building Regulations every five years
- As part of the Decent Homes programme the Government is committed to ensuring that all social homes (owned by local authorities or housing associations) will have effective insulation and heating by 2010
- The Government launched the Climate Change Communications Initiative in February 2005, confirming £12 million of funding for climate change communications at the regional and local level

LGA view

The LGA welcomes the importance that Government is placing on the issue of climate change and energy use. We believe that local government has a pivotal role in responding to climate change. Local government is uniquely positioned where responsibility to promote the wellbeing of an area, delivery of key services, influence over how people live and work, practical know how and democratic legitimacy all come together. Local authorities can plan, co-ordinate, enable and deliver the changes needed for sustainable energy in a way no other organisation can.

Chapter 5 – A Future Without Regrets: Protecting our Natural Resources and Enhancing the Environment

Key points for local authorities

- The ODPM is developing a national green spaces database
- Government will undertake a new countryside survey in 2006 and 2007
- A key biodiversity priority for the Government is bringing 95% of Sites of Special Scientific Interest in England into favourable condition by 2010
- A new Integrated Agency is being established, bringing together English Nature, the environmental functions of the Rural Development Service and much of the Countryside Agency
- All access land in England will be mapped by 2006
- Special priority will be given to improve access to coastal land

LGA view

The LGA supports commitments from the Government to enhance the natural environment and will work with it to ensure that local authorities play an important role in the process and that they are supported fairly.

Local government has a unique perspective on biodiversity conservation as it represents the local communities that experience, enjoy and live with local wildlife. Therefore it is at the interface between local communities and their understanding, protection, enhancement of, and involvement with, local biodiversity that local government has the greatest role to play. Protecting and enhancing biodiversity can bring clear benefits to local people:

- An improved physical environment for people to live in and visit.
- Improved understanding and appreciation of biodiversity amongst local communities.
- Opportunities to boost the local economy and create jobs eg through tourism, and production of quality produce.
- Opportunities for local people to access, enjoy and study their local biodiversity.
- Opportunities for local people to participate in the management of local biodiversity.
- Improved political and democratic accountability for actions taken to protect the local natural environment."

Chapter 6 – From Local to Global; Creating Sustainable Communities and a Fairer World

Key points for local authorities

- The Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Bill will incentivise local authorities to take effective action to improve their local authority
- Local authorities in their leadership role can influence the resources and actions of businesses, charities, and community actions
- The ODPM and Home Office funding will be streamlined into a £660m Safer and Stronger Communities Fund
- The Government will commit £5 million over the next three years to establish a "How To" programme alongside the Cleaner Safer Greener Communities programme to improve the liveability of local environment
- Every school will introduce a travel plan by 2010
- "Sustainable Communities; Homes for All" sets out how the government is working to increase the supply of new homes in a responsible way
- through Community Action 2020 the government intends to encourage neighbourhoods to shape local public services through engagements with local authorities

- Local Development Frameworks, Sustainable Community Strategy and the Local Area Agreements are key ways in incorporating both sustainable development and community engagement into local authority action
- Government will consider revising existing guidance and toolkits to support local authorities when reviewing and preparing sustainable community strategies
- Government will work with local authorities and the Environment Agency to produce and maintain a single electronic portal to environment information in 2005
- Government will publish a new guide to delivering the shared priorities in sustainable ways
- The Audit Commission will launch a revised set of voluntary Local Quality of Life Indicators in 2005
- Local Area Agreements will give local authorities greater freedoms to explore local solutions
- Government will fund further research on the causes of environmental inequality
- Local authorities will incorporate air quality action plans and accessibility strategies into Local Transport Plans

LGA view

- The emphasis on local delivery throughout the strategy is welcomed. The government recognises that local action is crucial in tackling the major issues of sustainability.
- The LGA is pleased to see the emphasis being placed on Local Area Agreements. The pilots have shown that these can be very effective in building local partnerships that produce positive results for communities.

Chapter seven – Ensuring it Happens

- During 2005 Government, the LGA and IDeA will develop a joint central and local government commitment to the delivery of sustainable development through sustainable communities.
- The IDeA will roll out a leadership Academy on Sustainable Communities and will offer a peer review tool on Sustainable Communities
- Local authority's work on sustainable development will be monitored through Comprehensive Performance Assessment
- The Sustainable Development Commission will act as watchdog for the government on sustainable development
- Every Government department will develop a sustainable development strategy by the end of 2005 and will work towards consistent messages to local authorities

LGA view

- The LGA will work with Government to develop a joint central / local government commitment to the delivery of sustainable development. This is something that we have lobbied for and we will ensure that this commitment is not prescriptive but gives local authorities the freedoms and flexibilities to develop local approaches
- The LGA is pleased that Government has recognised that different departments have in the past sent conflicting messages regarding the importance of sustainable development. The LGA has long argued that the lack of consistent messages have been a barrier to successful local delivery on sustainable development, and so welcomes the commitment to tackle this