

Local Sustainable Development Lens: Final Proposal Overview Paper

*"CAA is inherently about sustainability... our assessments will embed sustainability by making explicit assessments of outcomes to determine whether the performance trends in an **area** are in fact sustainable."* Comprehensive Area Assessment: Joint Inspectorate Proposals for Consultation – Summer 2008

1. Introduction

This paper provides an overview of the Sustainable Development Commission's (SDC) final proposal for a Local Sustainable Development Lens (LSDL): a voluntary basket of local indicators that can be used to guide and track area-wide progress towards sustainable development at the local level.

The proposals has been developed iteratively through engagement with a range of stakeholders including: CLG, Defra, and other Government Departments, Government Offices in the Regions, the Audit Commission, the Local Government Association (LGA), the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA), the Environment Agency, a number of local authorities, and CAG Consultants.

2. Background

The framework within which local authorities and Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) partners now operate includes a strengthened range of responsibilities and powers in relation to the achievement of sustainable development.

The Local Government White Paper says that a local area's Sustainable Community Strategy should be "at the heart of creating sustainable development at the local level", with the Local Area Agreement (LAA) as its delivery mechanism. The subsequent statutory guidance restates the importance of sustainable development, saying that to a greater extent than previously, sustainability should be at the heart of decisions taken on the content of the LSP's Sustainable Community Strategy and that local priorities and policies should be based on the principles of sustainable development if they are to be sustainable.¹

The SDC's paper, *Local Decision-Making and Sustainable Development: LSPs, Sustainable Community Strategies and LAAs*, sets out these responsibilities in relation to sustainable development in more detail.²

3. Purpose

In the light of these ambitions, and based on our engagement to date, the SDC proposes that the LSDL should act in three main ways:

- (a) First and foremost as an interactive tool for **local authorities and their partners** for tracking area-wide progress on sustainable development at the LAA area level. We recommend that development of any tool is undertaken by the local government sector itself, using our proposals as a starting point. Indeed, the IDeA have now agreed to work with a range of partners to do this³
- (b) As a tool for the **Audit Commission and the other Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) inspectorates** to frame and inform their understanding of progress towards

¹ HM Government, *Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities: Statutory Guidance*, July 2008.

² Sustainable Development Commission, *Local Decision-Making and Sustainable Development: LSPs, Sustainable Community Strategies and LAAs*, November 2008, www.sd-commission.org.uk.

³ Contact dan.mccartney@idea.gov.uk for more details on the IDeA's work on this.

sustainable development at the local level. The Audit Commission are currently exploring how to use the LSDL in the CAA when it goes live from April 2009;

- (c) As a means of providing the **UK Government** with a better understanding of local progress on its 'litmus test' priorities for sustainable development. It could also be used by the Government Offices in future rounds of LAA development to prompt to thinking about how LAA proposals contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. The Government has already agreed to adopt the Lens to track local progress against Defra's Departmental Strategic Objective on sustainable development.

4. LSDL: key characteristics

The LSDL will provide a foundation for tracking local area progress towards sustainable development. SDC proposes that the LSDL should consist of up to three layers, depending on its use:

1. **A 'core' set** of 19 indicators from the Government's National Indicator Set (NIS). These are the only indicators in the LSDL against which local authorities' performance, alone or in partnership, can be reported to, or performance managed by, Central Government. Taken together, these can be used to measure progress at the local level against Defra's DSO on sustainable development.
2. **Three 'additionally recommended'** voluntary indicators that the SDC believes should also form part of a *holistic baseline assessment of sustainable development* at the local area level. Taken together with the 'core' set, these form a small number of key environmental, social and economic indicators, based on the Government's definition of a sustainable community which could be used to provide a more rounded picture of local progress on sustainable development. Unlike the 'core' set, these are voluntary indicators and, as such, can only be determined and performance-managed locally, for example through the Sustainable Community Strategy or as additional local LAA indicators.

We are recommending that these are used as part of any tool for local authorities and their partners, and by the CAA inspectorates to provide contextual information on local progress towards sustainable development.

3. **A 'supplementary database' of indicators**, which could provide users with *the flexibility to build on the foundation* of the core and additionally recommended sets. These could be used to form a more locally-relevant, flexible and innovative LSDL. This is yet to be developed and so we recommend that this idea is explored as the LSDL is developed further by the different user groups, particularly by the IDeA and the CAA inspectorates.

Diagram 1, below, describes the different layers of the proposed LSDL in more detail.

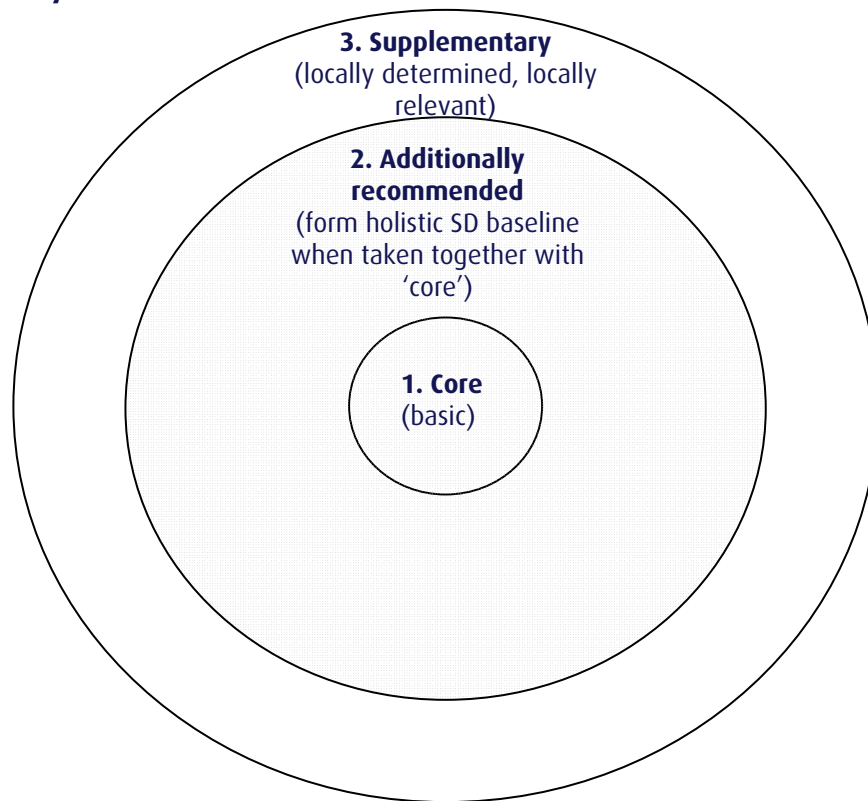
Criteria for selecting the LSDL indicators

Based on consultation with key national stakeholders, we have based the content of the proposed 'core' and 'additionally recommended' indicators on a number of criteria. They should:

- Incorporate a small number of key environmental, social and economic indicators which can be used to track the 'litmus test' priorities which will have the most impact on sustainable development
- Be based around existing sustainable development policy within the UK. As such, we have framed the LSDL around the Government's definition of a sustainable community, as set out in the UK SD Strategy (see Annex B)
- Use indicators that are outcome-based and area-based as far as is possible (rather than process-based or organisation-based)
- Use only existing indicators and data sets (so that there is no extra reporting burden for local areas)

- Not result in additional performance-management from central Government. As such, only indicators selected from the NIS should be subject to national performance management in the new performance framework.

Diagram 1. The three layers of the LSDL



LSDL indicators: limitations and caveats

We do not claim that our proposals will provide a definitive measure for tracking progress on sustainable development at the local level and there are a number of limitations:

- The LSDL, by its very nature, can only provide an ‘indication’ or starting point for assessing progress on sustainable development. This is why we have called it a lens: it helps to frame key SD outcomes and to shed light on whether they are being achieved
- Our proposals are based on existing indicators only. The result is that some of the proposed indicators are ‘best-fit’ indicators, rather indicators that are completely ‘fit-for-purpose’, in SD terms
- Consultation on our proposals has been limited to date. Further consultation (informal and formal) would help improve the robustness of the LSDL. Equally, the LSDL has yet to be ‘road-tested’
- We recognise that ‘one size does not fit all’ and that each local area will have different SD priorities. As such we have tried to limit the amount of indicators in the core set to those which can be regarded as ‘litmus test’ priorities. The supplementary database is designed to enable local authorities and their partners to make the LSDL locally-relevant and applicable.

5. LSDL Indicators: At a Glance

	Sustainable community component	SD Issue	Indicator
1	Active, inclusive and safe	A safer community	NI 17 Perceptions of anti-social behaviour
2			NI 198 % of children walking or cycling to school
3		Community cohesion & identity	NI 2 % of people who feel that they belong to their neighbourhood
4	Well run	Effective & inclusive participation	NI 4 % of people who feel that they can influence decisions in their locality
5		Good Governance	NI 3 Civic participation in the local area
6	Environmentally sensitive	Mitigation against, and adaptation to, the effects of climate change	NI 186 Per capita CO2 emissions in the LA area
7			NI 188 Adapting to climate change
8		Sustainable consumption / waste reduction	NI 191 Residual household waste per head
9		Protecting & improving biodiversity	NI 197 Improved local biodiversity – active management of local sites
10	Well designed and built	Good quality, sustainable buildings	NI 158 % of decent council homes
11			NI 187 Tackling fuel poverty
12		Access to good quality green space	NI 199 Children and young people’s satisfaction with parks and play areas
13		Water use	Water use: water consumption per head (Source: Area Profiles / Ofwat)
14	Well connected	Access to local services	NI 175 Access to services and facilities by public transport, walking and cycling
15		Road traffic congestion	NI 167 Congestion - average journey time per mile during the morning peak
16	Thriving	A strong local business community	NI 172 VAT registered businesses in the area showing growth
17		Good employment opportunities	NI 152 Working age people on out of work benefits

18		Economic wellbeing	NI 116 Proportion of children in poverty
19	Well served	Health & wellbeing	NI 119 Self-reported measure of people's overall health and wellbeing
20		Education and lifelong learning	NI 163 Working age population qualified to at least Level 2 or higher
21	Fair for everyone	Health inequalities	Health inequality: (a) infant mortality (by socio-economic group) (b) life expectancy (by area) for men and women (Source: ONS)
22		Local area footprint	Ecological footprint of area (Source: REAP/WWF/Stockholm Environment Institute)

Annex A. Background

The Local Government White Paper, *Strong and Prosperous Communities* sets out the UK Government's plans to introduce a new performance framework for local services in England.⁴

One of the objectives of this new framework was to "to reduce radically the number of nationally-required local targets, performance indicators and reporting". Local areas have previously had to report on between 600 and 1200 indicators. The Government has replaced these with a single set of 198 indicators on which all areas will report.⁵

Within this new national indicator set (NIS), there is no separate local performance indicator on sustainable development. Instead, Defra proposed the following:

Sustainable development

Proposal: Selecting a small number of social, economic and environmental indicators from the overall set of around 200 and flagging these to form a basket of indicators that could track delivery of sustainable development.

Context: Sustainable Development Strategy

1. The Government has a Sustainable Development (SD) Strategy which sets out its vision, principles and priorities for sustainable development, and the contribution which can be made at national, regional and local level. Defra leads on championing sustainable development across Government at all levels.
2. This basket of local indicators would be tracked each year when the data for the final set of indicators is published for every local area. We would **not** be seeking to create any kind of composite indicator. The data thus gathered would help Government, local authorities, local areas and others determine whether progress is being made on the social, economic and environmental 'litmus test' priorities which will have most impact on the achievement of sustainable development as set out in the Government's SD Strategy and the local area's Sustainable Community Strategy.
3. The information could also feed into the Comprehensive Area Assessment for each local area and help the local authority and LSP determine the way in which it achieves social, economic and environmental performance in a more balanced, integrated and strategic way. It would also help determine the way in which the local authority and local areas can champion sustainable development more effectively at the local level, and as such would inform development of their Sustainable Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement and the local authority's improvement plans.

Taken from: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/localgovindicators/issues.htm>

⁴ CLG, *Strong and Prosperous Communities: the Local Government White Paper*, October 2006

⁵ CLG / HM Government, *The new performance framework for local authorities & local authority partnerships: single set of national indicators*, October 2007, <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/nationalindicator>

Annex B

Definitions and components of sustainable communities in *Securing the Future: The UK Government Sustainable Development Strategy (2005)*; and in

Sustainable Communities: People, Places and Prosperity, ODPM's Five year plan (2005)

http://www.communities.gov.uk/pub/490/SustainableCommunitiesPeoplePlacesandProsperity_id1500490.pdf

One-line definition

Places where people want to live and work, now and in the future.

Definition

Sustainable communities are places where people want to live and work, now and in the future. They meet the diverse needs of existing and future residents, are sensitive to their environment, and contribute to a high quality of life. They are safe and inclusive, well planned, built and run, and offer equality of opportunity and good services for all.

Components: headlines

Sustainable communities are:

1. Active, inclusive and safe
2. Well run
3. Environmentally sensitive
4. Well designed and built
5. Well connected
6. Thriving
7. Well served
8. Fair for everyone

Components: in full

Sustainable communities embody the principles of sustainable development.

They:

- balance and integrate the social, economic and environmental components of their community
- meet the needs of existing and future generations
- respect the needs of other communities in the wider region or internationally, to also make their communities sustainable.

Sustainable communities are diverse, reflecting their local circumstances. There is no standard template to fit them all. But they should be:

(1) ACTIVE, INCLUSIVE AND SAFE – *Fair, tolerant and cohesive with a strong local culture and other shared community activities*

Sustainable communities offer:

- a sense of community identity and belonging
- tolerance, respect and engagement with people from different cultures, background and beliefs
- friendly, co-operative and helpful behaviour in neighbourhoods
- opportunities for cultural, leisure, community, sport and other activities, including for children and young people
- low levels of crime, drugs and anti-social behaviour with visible, effective and community-friendly policing

- social inclusion and good life chances for all

(2) WELL RUN – *with effective and inclusive participation, representation and leadership*

Sustainable communities enjoy:

- representative, accountable governance systems which both facilitate strategic, visionary leadership and enable inclusive, active and effective participation by individuals and organisations
- effective engagement with the community at neighbourhood level, including capacity building to develop the community's skills, knowledge and confidence
- strong, informed and effective partnerships that lead by example (e.g. government, business, community)
- a strong, inclusive, community and voluntary sector
- a sense of civic values, responsibility and pride

(3) ENVIRONMENTALLY SENSITIVE – *providing places for people to live that are considerate of the environment*

Sustainable communities:

- actively seek to minimise climate change, including through energy efficiency and the use of renewables
- protect the environment, by minimising pollution on land, in water and in the air
- minimise waste and dispose of it in accordance with current good practice
- make efficient use of natural resources, encouraging sustainable production and consumption
- protect and improve bio-diversity (e.g. wildlife habitats)
- enable a lifestyle that minimises negative environmental impact and enhances positive impacts (e.g. by creating opportunities for walking and cycling, and reducing noise pollution and dependence on cars)
- create cleaner, safer and greener neighbourhoods (e.g. by reducing litter and graffiti, and maintaining pleasant public spaces)

(4) WELL DESIGNED AND BUILT – *featuring a quality built and natural environment*

Sustainable communities offer:

- a sense of place (e.g. a place with a positive 'feeling' for people and local distinctiveness)
- user-friendly public and green spaces with facilities for everyone including children and older people
- sufficient range, diversity, affordability and accessibility of housing within a balanced housing market
- appropriate size, scale, density, design and layout, including mixed-use development, complementing the distinctive local character of the community and using modern low cost building methods
- high quality, mixed-use, durable, flexible and adaptable buildings, using materials which minimise negative environmental impacts
- buildings and public spaces which promote health and are designed to reduce crime and make people feel safe
- accessibility of jobs, key services and facilities by public transport, walking and cycling

(5) WELL CONNECTED – *with good transport services and communication linking people to jobs, schools, health and other services*

Sustainable communities offer:

- transport facilities, including public transport, that help people travel within and between communities and reduce dependence on cars

- facilities to encourage safe local walking and cycling
- an appropriate level of local parking facilities in line with local plans to manage road traffic demand
- widely available and effective telecommunications and Internet access
- good access to regional, national and international communications networks

(6) THRIVING – *with a flourishing and diverse local economy*

Sustainable communities feature:

- a wide range of jobs and training opportunities
- sufficient suitable land and buildings to support economic prosperity and change
- dynamic job and business creation, with benefits for the local community
- a strong business community with links into the wider economy
- economically viable and attractive town centres

(7) WELL SERVED – *with public, private, community and voluntary services that are appropriate to people's needs and accessible to all*

Sustainable communities have:

- well-performing local schools, further and higher education institutions, and other opportunities for life-long learning
- high quality local health care and social services, integrated where possible with other services
- high quality services for families and children (including early years child care)
- a good range of affordable public, community, voluntary and private services (e.g. retail, fresh food, commercial, utilities, information and advice) which are accessible to the whole community
- service providers who think and act long term and beyond their own immediate geographical and interest boundaries, and who involve users and local residents in shaping their policy and practice

(8) FAIR FOR EVERYONE – *including those in other communities, now and in the future*

Sustainable communities:

- recognise individuals' rights and responsibilities
- respect the rights and aspirations of others (both neighbouring communities, and across the wider world) to be sustainable also
- have due regard for the needs of future generations in current decisions and actions.