

# Local decision-making: and sustainable development

LSPs, Sustainable Community  
Strategies and LAAs



Sustainable  
Development Commission



# 1 Introduction

**“A thorough understanding of how to apply sustainable development principles will need to be a key part of policy skills for the future as will the ability to engage the wider public in the development and implementation of new ideas.”**

*Securing the Future – delivering UK sustainable development strategy, March 2005.*

Local authorities and their partners, through local strategic partnerships (LSPs), are pivotal to achieving sustainable development. By taking a sustainable development approach, individually and in partnership, they can play a leading role in exemplifying and delivering integrated environmental, social and economic improvements at the local level.

The increasing importance of achieving sustainable development at the local level is being matched by increased expectations on local authorities and their partners through the new performance framework, the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA), which comes into place from April 2009.

The Government’s vision, for example, is that “to a greater extent than previously, sustainability should be at the heart of” the LSP’s Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) – the overarching plan for a local area.<sup>1</sup> In turn, the Local Area Agreement (LAA) should be the “shorter-term delivery mechanism for the Sustainable Community Strategy.”<sup>2</sup> The Local Development Framework (LDF) – the spatial planning strategy for an area – should also be in harmony with SCS priorities.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, the proposals for the CAA say that it will be “inherently about sustainability.”<sup>4</sup>

To look at ways in which this vision can be achieved, the Sustainable Development Commission’s (SDC) Capability for Local Sustainability project brought together key government departments and national, regional and local stakeholders to explore ways to improve the capability of local government and its partners, to deliver sustainable development.

The project focused in particular on the role of LSPs, SCSs and LAAs.

This paper highlights some of the key findings from this project. It sets out the key responsibilities of local authorities and their LSP partners in relation to sustainable development, and some of the opportunities and challenges that they face in meeting these. It also highlights some of the ‘key ingredients’ for delivering sustainable development at the local level. These are based on the learning from existing good practice. Finally, the paper signposts what support is already out there, what more is being developed and what else is required from national and regional bodies.

Alongside this paper, we have also published two other resources as part of the *Capability for Local Sustainability* project:

- A report from CAG consultants, *Capability for Local Sustainability*, which sets out the findings of research commissioned by the SDC to identify current good practice in delivering sustainable development through LSPs, SCSs and LAAs and how this good practice could be replicated more widely, and
- A set of good practice case studies, co-published with the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA), which were produced as part of CAG’s research.

Both of these resources can be found on the SDC’s website.

## 2 The potential of local authorities and their LSP partners

The combined resources and activities of local authorities and their LSP partner bodies are enormous. At the same time, the public sector alone is responsible for significant environmental, social and economic impacts. For example:

- The local government and education sectors 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<sup>5</sup>
- The public sector has significant purchasing power. The local government, health and education sectors in the UK together bought over £88 billion worth of goods and services in 2005/06<sup>6</sup>
- Local authorities alone delivery over 700 different services covering areas including education, transport, planning, social services, public health, procurement, energy consumption and provision, recreation and leisure, housing, regeneration and environmental stewardship

- It is estimated that the schools estate alone is responsible for 10.4 million tonnes of carbon dioxide, which is just under 2% of UK carbon emissions and almost 15% of carbon emissions attributable to the public sector<sup>7</sup>
- Local government in England owns more than one in ten houses and collects over 29 million tonnes of household waste per year<sup>8</sup>
- Around 800,000 meals are served in hospitals every day creating impacts from food production, processing and transportation.<sup>9</sup>

By using their combined resources to achieve sustainable development, local authorities and their LSP partners can simultaneously support local economies, strengthen local communities and benefit the environment both locally and globally. They can do this through the internal management of their organisations, the services that they commission and provide, and by providing leadership for their communities.

## 3 Understanding sustainable development, sustainable communities and climate change

CAG's report, *Capability for Local Sustainability*, found that there is confusion amongst local authorities and LSPs about what is meant by sustainable development, particularly in terms of its relationship with the concept of 'sustainable communities'.

In the UK, a shared set of principles helps guide public sector decision-makers to define what sustainable development means. Government's Sustainable Development Strategy *Securing the Future* (2005) describes the goal as:

**"We want to achieve a strong, healthy and just society living within environmental limits."**

This is the goal of sustainable development. There are also three defined elements which will contribute to achieving this goal, and these are a sustainable economy, good governance and using sound science responsibly. It is clear from these

principles that sustainable development should not be confused with economic development. Where environmental limits and social progress are not integrated as the primary goal, then economic development cannot be described as sustainable development (see Annex A).

Sustainable development is emphatically not about "trading off" one principle against another, and where major trade offs occur, the primary goal or objective is unlikely to have been sustainable development. Actions which breach global environmental limits cannot be sustainable, but neither can initiatives which respect those limits but are socially divisive or economically unviable over the long term. However it is worth noting that there can be a short term cost penalty, but with sustainable development the longer term gain will be positive and lasting. If climate change is the most graphic and pressing example of what happens when we

breach environmental limits, sustainable development is the only response which can provide lasting solutions. Meeting all five principles at once is a tough challenge, but it is not impossible, and happily there are examples which can motivate us all.

The UK strategy for sustainable development, *Securing the Future*, sets out the relationship between these five sustainable development principles and sustainable communities:

“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 also to make their communities sustainable.”<sup>10</sup>

For consistency, it is important that all bodies, be they national, regional or local, use this *Securing the Future* definition as their starting point for thinking about sustainable development and sustainable communities at the local level.

## 4 Sustainable development: at the heart of the new performance framework?

The framework in which local authorities and LSP partners now operate includes a strengthened range of responsibilities and powers in relation to the achievement of sustainable development. Some of those we engaged with during the project have even argued that this strengthened framework amounts to a ‘duty’ on local authorities and LSPs to deliver sustainable development. In any case, it is clear that sustainable development should now be at the heart of an LSP’s business, with the SCS as the overarching, long-term plan for achieving this.

Key components of this strengthened sustainable development framework include:

- An overarching strategy for sustainable development, *Securing the Future*, in which “local authorities and their partners, through Local Strategic Partnerships, are pivotal to delivering sustainable communities”<sup>11</sup>
- A set of UK-wide sustainable development principles. Statutory guidance says that these should be respected if a local priority or policy is to be judged to be sustainable<sup>12</sup>
- A statutory duty on local authorities to prepare a SCS “that should contribute to the achievement of sustainable development in the United Kingdom.” To a greater extent than previously, sustainability should be at the heart of this Strategy<sup>13</sup>
- A “shorter-term delivery mechanism” for the SCS, the LAA, which should also therefore contribute to sustainable development<sup>14</sup>

- A duty to co-operate
- A new Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA), which “is inherently about sustainability”; “sustainability considerations will be integral to the three overarching CAA questions”<sup>15</sup>
- A duty on local planners to exercise their functions with a view to contributing to the achievement of sustainable development<sup>16</sup>
- Local authorities are also required to have regard to SCSs when preparing their LDFs.<sup>17</sup>

These responsibilities are complemented by two broad enabling powers:

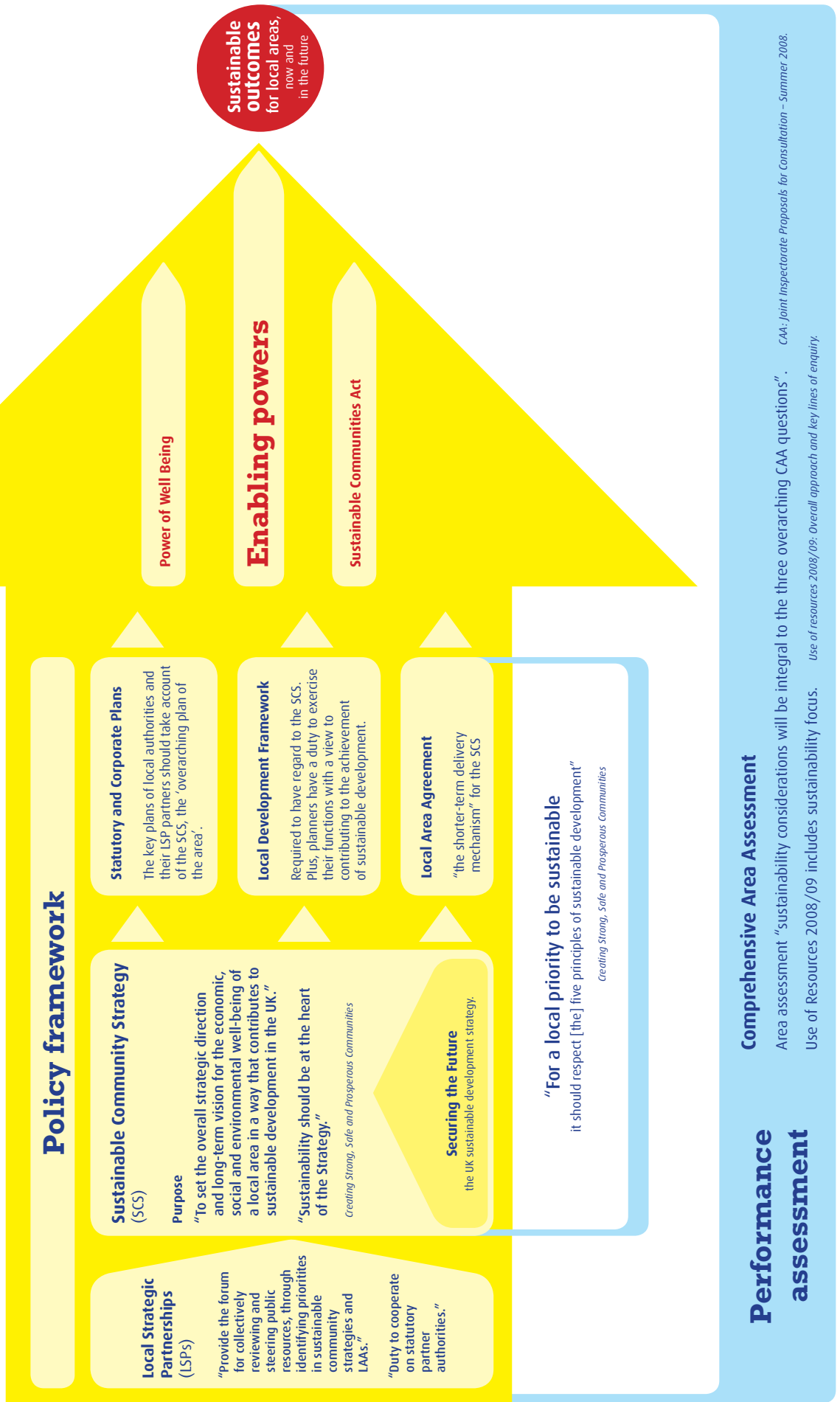
- The power of wellbeing, which allows local authorities to do anything they consider likely to promote or improve local economic, social or environmental wellbeing,<sup>18</sup> and
- The Sustainable Communities Act, which provides a means through which local people can ask central government to take action to promote the sustainability of local communities.<sup>19</sup>

These powers are further complemented by a wide range of other powers. The Local Government Association (LGA), for example, sets out the many powers that local authorities can use to deliver environmental objectives in its report *Cutting through the Green Tape*.<sup>20</sup>

The diagram overleaf sets the key elements of this strengthened framework.

# Responsibilities and duties

## A strengthened framework for sustainable development



**Figure 1** Responsibilities and duties: A strengthened framework for sustainable development

CAA: Joint Inspectorate Proposals for Consultation – Summer 2008.  
 Use of resources 2008/09; Overall approach and key lines of enquiry.

## 5 The benefits and opportunities of a sustainable development approach

Regardless of the formal responsibilities, taking a sustainable development approach also has a number of very tangible benefits for local authorities, their partners and their local areas. These include:



### Community leadership

Providing leadership on sustainable development sets an example both to the public and to partner organisations. Doing so can enhance public trust and reputation, motivate partners and the public to take action, improve levels of local engagement and participation, and help build a common sense of responsibility around sustainability. In Sutton, strong council leadership on sustainable development has led to alignment of key plans against the borough's vision of sustainability, leading to real benefits for local communities.



### Local benefits

Local communities, economies and environments can all benefit from local authority and LSP commitment to sustainable development. Procuring sustainable, local food, for example, supports the local economy, reduces food miles and associated congestion costs, cuts greenhouse gas emissions and contributes to people's health. In Birmingham, the LSP has agreed to a 'Sustainable Procurement Compact' which signs partners up to using their £6bn spending power to achieve sustainable development in the local area.



### Financial benefits

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. Bigger projects can yield greater savings; Woking BC's energy efficiency fund resulted in £4.7m of cost savings over 10 years.



### Risk management

The management of all risks, including long-term environmental, social and economic risks contributes to good organisational management. The risks of not addressing sustainability include the increasing financial costs of finite resources, such as fossil fuels, reputational risk, the risks of environmental change and increased risks to public health.



### Value for money

Basing spending decisions against sustainability criteria is the only way to ensure value for money over the long term. This means taking a 'whole-life cost' approach that takes account of environmental, social and economic considerations. Decisions based on up-front costs alone can often be a false economy.



### Joined-up delivery and enhanced outcomes

Adopting a sustainable development approach is about delivering environmental, social and economic objectives in an integrated, long-term way. In Cumbria, for example, the use of a genuine partnership approach to appraising the SCS and LAA has generated integrated outcomes.

As our case studies show, some local authorities and their partners are already using their potential to achieve good progress towards achieving integrated environmental, social and economic outcomes. The findings from CAG's research demonstrates that many others, however, are yet to maximise the enormous potential they have to contribute to sustainable development for their communities.

CAG cite a range of reasons for why this is the case. And a whole range of organisations have a role to play in improving the picture. These include government departments, government offices in the regions, public service inspectorates such as the

Audit Commission, local government improvement bodies such as the IDeA, and regional bodies including the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships (RIEPs). We look at what some of these bodies are already doing, or planning to do, to support local authorities and their partners at the end of this paper.

What is clear, however, is that there is much that local authorities and their partners can do, and are already doing, themselves. We set out below some of the factors, or 'ingredients', that CAG found has enabled good practice to happen already.

## 6 The 'key ingredients': how local partners can embed SD into LSPs, SCSs and LAAs

Our research has identified a number of 'key ingredients' that have enabled sustainable development to be integrated into SCSs and LAAs and embedded in the work LSPs. These are highlighted in Figure 2 overleaf and expanded on below.

These ingredients are not exclusive to sustainable development practitioners. They are important for all

those involved in LSP, SCS and LAA processes. This is because developing these ingredients and adopting a sustainable development approach is about better decision-making: improved partnerships working, integrating priorities and objectives, planning for the long-term and so on.

### Developing leadership for sustainable development

CAG's research found that leadership on sustainable development is a crucial ingredient for success. Leadership can happen at all levels:

- From sustainability officers within the local authority. In Cumbria County Council, for example, leadership has come from a dedicated sustainable development team
- From LSP managers and officers. In the Birmingham and Leicester case studies, this was facilitated through the appointment of dedicated sustainability officers on the LSP
- From LSP partners. In Gloucestershire, the voluntary sector has long-championed sustainable development as a cross-cutting theme. Elsewhere it has been the local business sector that has shown leadership
- From the LSP Board. Islington's work on climate change, for example, has been aided

from a high level of commitment from its LSP Board

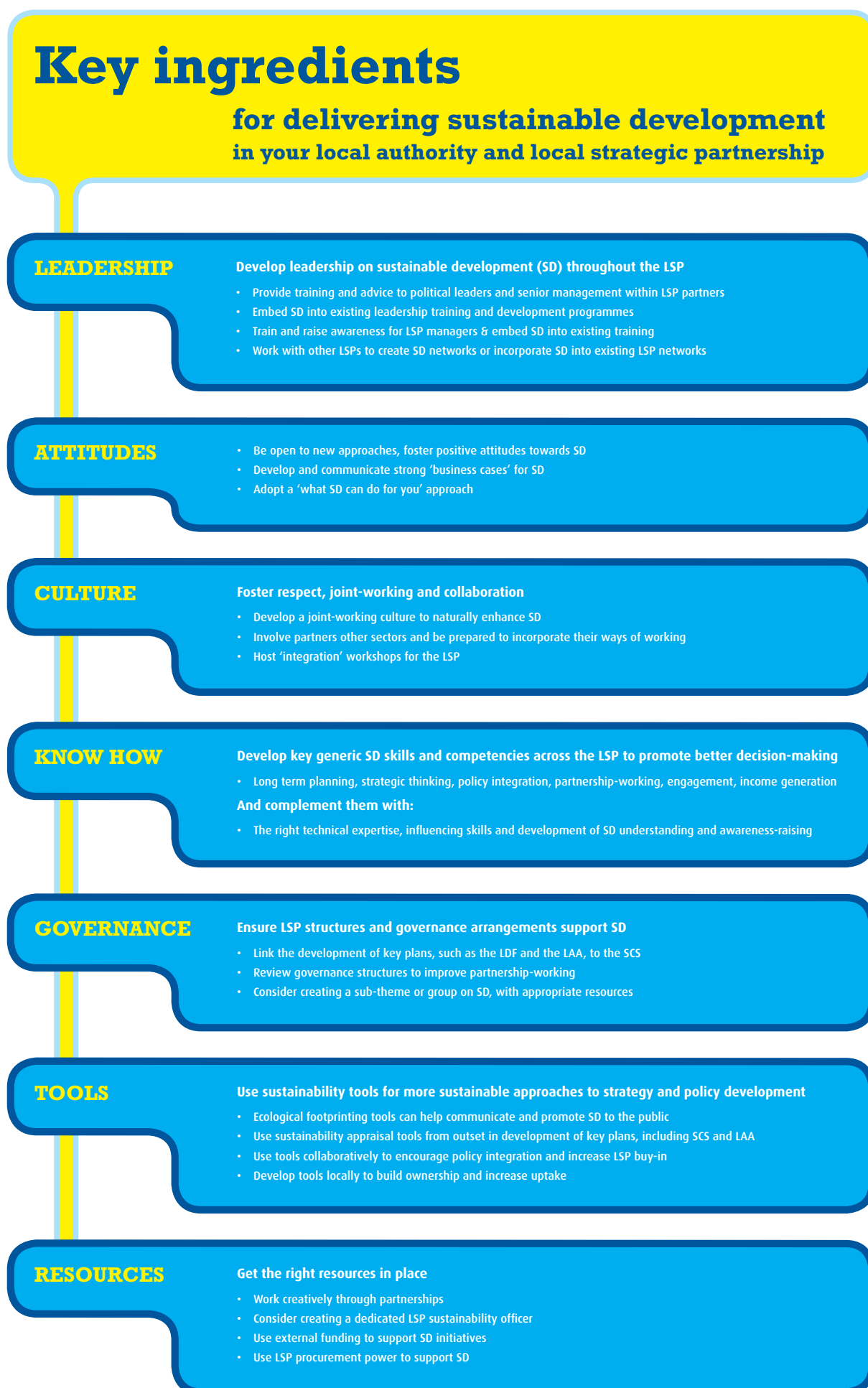
- From senior council figures, such as the Leader, the Cabinet portfolio holder and Chief Executive. Achieving this level of leadership is challenging but, where it happens, it significantly enhances good practice.

So what can help to improve leadership for sustainable development? National and regional bodies have an important role to play, but the research demonstrates a few areas where local authorities and LSPs could help themselves. These include:

- Training and advice in leadership for sustainable development, particularly aimed at political leaders and senior management within local authorities and LSP partners, including seeking opportunities to integrate sustainable development into existing leadership training and development



**Figure 2** The key ingredients for delivering sustainable development



- Training and awareness-raising on sustainable development for LSP managers; this is best achieved by including it into existing training and development programmes
- Working with other LSPs in the region to create sustainable development networks for LSPs, and incorporating sustainable development into existing LSP networks.

## Attitudes: being open to new approaches

The research found that risk aversion, particularly amongst senior managers who have yet to appreciate the value which sustainable development could add to their service delivery, seems to be a significant block to the acceptance of sustainable development as a cross-cutting issue.

Creating positive attitudes and openness towards sustainable development is therefore important, although this can take time. In Cumbria, for example, the use of sustainability appraisal has led to an increasing appreciation by the LSP of the benefits to be gained from adopting a sustainable development approach. Previously, it was often

viewed as a ‘hoop to jump through’ or a barrier to economic growth.

One way to foster positive and open attitudes towards sustainable development is to develop and communicate strong ‘business cases’<sup>21</sup>, emphasizing the benefits that taking a sustainable development approach can achieve, particularly where financial or win-win-win outcomes can be created. Adopting a ‘what sustainable development can do for you’ approach, as opposed to a ‘what you can do for sustainable development’ approach, can pay real dividends in engaging with those who tend to be unfamiliar with, or closed to, the concept.

## Culture: fostering respect, joint-working and collaboration

The delivery of local sustainable development is naturally enhanced by a culture of joint-working, both between LSP partners as well as within and across local authorities and other partner organizations. Bringing together partners with different but overlapping economic, social and environmental interests enables the development of integrated, collaborative and more holistic solutions.

Successful joint-working takes time however. LSPs are relatively new structures and so it is natural that not all of them are collaborating as effectively as they might. And again, risk-aversion

was highlighted in the research as a barrier to better collaboration.

There are ways, however, to improve and stimulate more effective partnership working around sustainable development. Involving partners from business and other sectors can often lead to new ways of working and can overcome risk-aversion. In North Somerset, a series of ‘integration workshops’ and a large-scale stakeholder event enabled LSP partners and other stakeholders to review all the outcomes from the community consultation and to think beyond their own areas of responsibility.

## Developing sustainable development ‘know-how’

The case studies and research highlighted the importance of a number of key generic skills and competences in making effective decisions on sustainable development. These include:

- **Long term planning.** Sustainable development is about preserving and enhancing quality of life for future generations. As such, developing skills and techniques which foster long-term

thinking are critical, especially as local policy and funding cycles are often short-term

- **Strategic thinking.** CAG identified this as a “key necessary skill for delivering local sustainable development.” Thinking ‘long-term’ is an aspect of this, but just as important is the ability to see the bigger picture and think beyond ‘easy-win’ issues

- **Integration.** Skills, knowledge and techniques in integrating economic, social and environmental objectives in strategy and policy-making. In Gloucestershire, for example, the County Council's Leadership Training includes a focus on how to take an integrated approach to delivering council business
- **Partnership-working.** The case studies highlighted that developing competencies around networking, collaboration and negotiation is important to enable effective and sustainable decisions to be taken by partnerships on strategy and policy
- **Engagement.** LSPs cannot deliver sustainable development in a vacuum – all sectors of the local community need to be genuinely involved. CAG's research demonstrates that more training and peer support for officers involved with LSPs is required
- **Income generation.** In a time when local authorities and LSPs are facing increasing financial pressures, having the ability to attract internal and external funding is very important, particularly for sustainable development teams. In Sutton, three quarters of the sustainability team are externally funded.

Developing these skills and competencies should be the responsibility of all LSP partners.

For sustainable development to be truly embedded, it is important that these are not just seen as the domain of local authority sustainable development officers or their equivalents (although these skills are important for them too).

As well as these generic skills, also important are:

- **Technical expertise.** Technical expertise on a range of specific areas is also critically important. On climate change, for instance, skills and knowledge on issues such as micro-generation, energy efficiency, adaptation, sustainable transport systems, and environmental education amongst others, are required across local authorities and their LSP partners
- **Influencing.** For sustainable development officers and their equivalents, being able to put forward a convincing business case and influence key figures is often critical to embedding sustainable development across LSP partners
- **Developing basic understanding and awareness.** The research found that understanding of sustainable development is still relatively limited, particularly amongst key decision-makers.

For all these things, it is important that appropriate support is available externally from the various improvement and support bodies, as we discuss in section 7.

## Governance for sustainable development

Effective partnership working is critical to delivering local sustainable development. For LSPs, this involves putting in place the right structures and governance arrangements. These have developed significantly in recent years and the case studies from this research demonstrate that significant progress has been made in some areas in recent years.

Linking the development of key strategies to the SCS will increase the chances of them delivering sustainable development. In Cornwall, for example, the SCS and LAA (the strategy's delivery agreement) were developed in parallel. A number of other case studies highlighted the importance of aligning the development of the LDF with the SCS to ensure that the strategy is genuinely sustainable.

Independently reviewing partnership structures can also pay dividends. In Gloucestershire, a review by the Tavistock Institute has increased the clarity of roles and responsibilities between the various partnerships and strategies in the two tiers of local governance.

Some areas have also found it beneficial to create a sub-theme or group on sustainable development, as opposed to it being dealt with by an environment sub-group or not at all. This can be very effective in keeping sustainable development on the LSP agenda, provided that the group has high-level support and the influence and resources necessary to work at a strategic level across the LSP and its other sub-groups.

## Using the right tools

The research found that sustainability tools can be very useful in promoting and developing more sustainable approaches to strategy and policy development. Hounslow's sustainability standard toolkit, for example, resulted in sustainability being a cross-cutting theme within its LAA, as well as creating integrated action on air quality, health and economic development in particular. Ecological footprinting tools can also be useful. In Sutton, for instance, this approach has helped to communicate and promote understanding of sustainable development issues in a very powerful way.

Significantly, the way in which sustainability tools, particularly appraisal-type tools, are developed and applied is also important. In particular:

- Local authorities are already required to use sustainability appraisal in relation to spatial planning and the LDF. However, the case studies show that sustainability appraisal can also add value to other key local plans. For instance, using it in an iterative way throughout each step of SCS or LAA development, from early stages to final drafts, ensures maximum effectiveness
- Using tools collaboratively helps to identify integrated policy solutions and increases buy-in
- Developing new tools locally with the involvement of partners builds local ownership and leads to greater enthusiasm and uptake of their use.

## Resources

In order to take forward sustainable development effectively, LSPs need to have sufficient resources in place. Of course, this is not easy always at a time when many LSP partners face increasing resource constraints. This is particularly a challenge in smaller LSPs, such as those at the district level.

Nevertheless, our case studies show that having the right resources in place is a significant factor in good practice. The LSPs in Birmingham and Leicester, for instance, both have dedicated sustainability officers. In Sutton, the local authority sustainability team has often worked creatively in partnership with the LSPs to draw in funding from a wide range of sources.

Even where there is no dedicated staff or project

resources for sustainable development on LSPs, there is still much LSP partners can do. Procurement, for example, is a particularly powerful means of promoting sustainable development and one which all LSPs have in common. In Birmingham, the LSP has signed a Sustainable Procurement Compact in which the LSP partners have agreed to work together to use their estimated £6bn spend on goods and service to support sustainable development in the local area.

The SDC's guide to financing sustainable development at the local level, *Financing Local Futures*, contains a wealth of ideas on how local authorities and their partners can develop finance for sustainable development.<sup>22</sup>

## 7 External leadership, support and incentives: an improving picture?

Local authorities and LSPs cannot deliver sustainable development on their own. They also need the right frameworks, leadership, support and incentives from a range of bodies, including Government, the inspectorates, regional bodies and local government leadership and improvement bodies.

CAG have previously identified the need for the “the coordination and coherence of the ‘patchwork quilt’ of different agencies and initiatives involved... in the sustainable development offer to local government”.<sup>23</sup>

We are pleased to have observed therefore that the *Capability for Local Sustainability* project has helped to stimulate and strengthen relationships between different partners on the project, and that it has led to increased understanding of what is required to improve sustainable development at the local level. We hope that this will lead to more collaboration in the future on support and improvement for the delivery of local sustainable development.

To this end, the *Capability for Local Sustainability* report makes a range of proposals for improving support for local authorities and LSPs on sustainable development. Broadly speaking, these fall into five inter-related themes:

- Ensuring **clearer and more consistent Government messages** to local authorities and LSPs
- Ensuring that sustainable development is embedded into the **new performance framework**
- Ensuring **local political and senior management buy-in** to sustainable development
- Developing a package of **measures to support LSPs** on sustainable development
- Developing a package of **measures to support sustainable development practitioners**.

Below, we briefly discuss each theme, identifying where recent progress has been made and where further improvement might be made in the future.

### Clearer and more consistent Government messages

There have been a number of positive developments on this front, including:

- New statutory guidance, *Creating Strong Safe and Prosperous Communities*, which says that sustainability should be at the heart of Sustainable Community Strategies “to a greater extent than previously”, with LAAs as their “shorter-term delivery mechanism”
- The creation of an all-region Government Office group on sustainable development. We hope this might provide a springboard for building capacity on sustainable development across the Government Offices.

In the future:

- As champions for the delivery of sustainable development in local areas, Defra have agreed to promote across central Government Departments the range of responsibilities and powers that local authorities and their partners have in relation to the achievement of sustainable development

- The Regional Directors of Government Offices are already committed to embedding sustainable development within their organisations and the Government has committed to ensuring that sustainable development principles are embedded in Government Office business planning, workforce development and performance management systems.<sup>24</sup> The evidence from this project suggests that further progress is needed. The SDC therefore encourages:
  - Defra to reiterate the importance of embedding sustainable development as a top priority for Government Offices, especially within the context of the new departmental make-up of government following the creation of the Department for Energy and Climate Change
  - The Government Offices to explore how existing senior-level networks can be utilised to help build capacity on sustainable development. Senior-level networks could share and build

- on good practice, raise the profile of the Government Office commitment to sustainable development and agree on the inclusion of a sustainable development objective in senior-level personal development plans
- Regional Directors to consider agreeing to take part in a sustainable development masterclass from the SDC to build on their own understanding of how sustainable development principles can be applied within their organisations

- Government will need to ensure that the impacts of the Sub-National Review, at the regional and sub regional levels, do not undermine recent progress in embedding sustainable development into the local governance framework. To help achieve this, Defra will be considering the outputs of the projects undertaken through the Sustainable Development Transition and Transformation Fund – the aim of which is to assist regions in embedding sustainable development within any new regional arrangements as a result of the SNR process.

## The new performance framework

The performance framework is a critical factor in determining the degree to which sustainable development is delivered at the local level. The development of the CAA is a real opportunity for the Audit Commission and the other inspectorates to strengthen the focus on sustainable development within the performance framework. Positive developments here include:

- The proposal that sustainability will be integral to the three main overarching questions in the ‘area assessment’, part of the new Comprehensive Area Assessment
- The incorporation of sustainable development into the Audit Commission’s Use of Resources 2008/09 judgement. In the future, this judgement will be part of the new CAA’s ‘organisational assessment’
- Agreement from the IDeA to develop the SDC’s proposals for a Local Sustainable Development Lens (LSDL) into a tool for local authorities and their LSP partners. The Government Office for the West Midlands, the Audit Commission and the Academy for Sustainable Communities (ASC) have also agreed to help develop and support these proposals.<sup>25</sup>

In the future:

- The SDC looks forward to continuing work with the Audit Commission and other inspectorates to embed sustainable development into the new CAA and to build up their own capacity and understanding of sustainable development. The ASC will also

work to support the Audit Commission on sustainable development

- The ASC will promote the use of the LSDL amongst LSPs and through the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) delivery teams
- The ASC, in collaboration with partners including the Audit Commission and the SDC, will be developing a benchmarking toolkit that uses sustainable development principles to support local authorities and LSPs in their approach to improvement. The benchmark will include a range of case studies to exemplify how good practice can be delivered, which will build on the good practice identified through the *Capability for Local Sustainability* project.
- The IDeA and LGA have agreed with the Nottingham Declaration Partnership to consider forming a link between the LSP self-evaluation tool and the Nottingham Declaration website to help LSPs wanting to see how climate change can be reflected within the self-evaluation tool.

In addition:

- The SDC encourages the IDeA and LGA to explore the opportunities to ensure that the CAA’s focus on sustainable development is reflected in their LSP self-evaluation tool. Some of the generic skills for sustainable development, such as long-term planning and integrating policy objectives are particularly relevant.

## Local political and senior management buy-in

*Capability for Local Sustainability* identified that clearer incentives and drivers from government and the Audit Commission were needed as a pre-requisite for greater buy-in and leadership on sustainable development from key decision-makers in local authorities and LSPs. To this end, we are pleased that the new statutory guidance and CAA proposals both include a much strengthened focus on sustainable development. We are pleased that:

- The IDeA is committed to running a two-day learning module in spring 2009 as part of their Leadership Academy programme for executive councillors to strengthen their leadership capacity in dealing with the

climate change agenda within the context of sustainable development,

In the future:

- Key local leadership and improvement bodies, including the Leadership Centre, SOLACE, CIPFA, IDeA and their equivalents across the sectors represented by LSPs, should consider how sustainable development can be incorporated into their mainstream advice and support programmes
- CLG, IDeA and LGA should consider creating a 'leadership for sustainable development' theme in future Beacon Awards.

## Measures to support sustainable development in LSPs, SCSs and LAAs

The *Capability for Local Sustainability* report identifies a wide range of measures needed to support LSPs to deliver sustainable development, particularly through SCSs and LAAs. In regard to these, we are pleased that:

- A strong sustainability and climate change agenda has come out of LAA negotiations and it is important to build on these agreed local priorities
- The IDeA and the SDC have co-published the case studies from this project as a resource for all LSPs interested in strengthening their own practice on sustainable development. The IDeA also has a range of other relevant case studies on its Places and Partnership Library
- CLG is developing an update of *Planning Together* which specifically addresses the need for improved collaboration between LSPs (SCS and LAA) and planning (LDF) in order to make places more sustainable<sup>26</sup>
- SDC and ASC are considering how they might work together for the rest of 2008/09 to improve support for LSPs on sustainable development.

In the future:

- Defra and CLG look forward to SCSs, many of which are now being revised, with a strong focus on sustainable development and the further strengthening of LSPs, supported by the local capacity building programme

- Defra will encourage the Government Offices to promote the use of sustainability appraisals for the refresh of LAA improvement targets to assess how well social, economic and environmental objectives have been integrated and identify gaps and areas that need to be developed to address sustainable development
- The IDeA will consider how sustainable development issues might be further incorporated into other strands of its capacity building. This might include greater incorporation of sustainable development into support for planners and children and young people's services, for example. The SDC encourages other improvement bodies to do the same.

In addition:

- The SDC encourages the IDeA and RIEPs to consider mainstreaming sustainable development into specific work on the Climate Change Best Practice Programme, procurement and LSP leadership, as part of the capacity building work programmes
- The SDC also encourages Defra, CLG, IDeA and the RIEPs to consider the creation of a RIEP lead on sustainable development, connected to the RIEPs, to help mainstream sustainable development into capacity-building programmes

- The Government Offices should also consider how they might support time and resource-poor LSPs and local authorities on delivering sustainable development
- CLG, IDeA and LGA should consider including a 'Beacon Awards' theme on 'genuinely

delivering sustainable development through Sustainable Community Strategies'. This would support the new Government guidance which says that sustainability should, to a greater extent than previously, be at the heart of SCSs.

## Measures to support sustainable development practitioners

Local authority sustainable development officers (or their equivalents) will continue to have an important role in embedding sustainable development across their respective authorities, LSPs, SCSs and LAAs. To this extent, we are pleased that the IDeA already provides a range of support for sustainable development officers, which includes a regular two-day conference, supported by the SDC, and other workshops, as well as online support and case studies. In general, however, we note that support for sustainable development practitioners is not well resourced, either within the IDeA or beyond.

In the future:

- The SDC encourages support and improvement bodies to allocate more dedicated resources to support sustainable practitioners in local authorities, LSPs and LSP partner organisations

- Furthermore, existing support for sustainable development practitioners should be retained in the reorganisation of the LGA group (including LGA, IDeA and the Leadership Centre)
- The Government should ensure that Regional Champion Bodies for sustainable development, and their associated networks and support, will not be lost due to the impacts of the Sub-National Review.

Finally, it is worth noting that a whole range of other national, regional and local organisations have a role to play in improving capability for delivering sustainable development at the local level, such as the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment, the Environment Agency and the new Homes and Communities Agency. We therefore encourage all relevant organisations to consider how they can strengthen their contributions to improving local sustainable development capability.



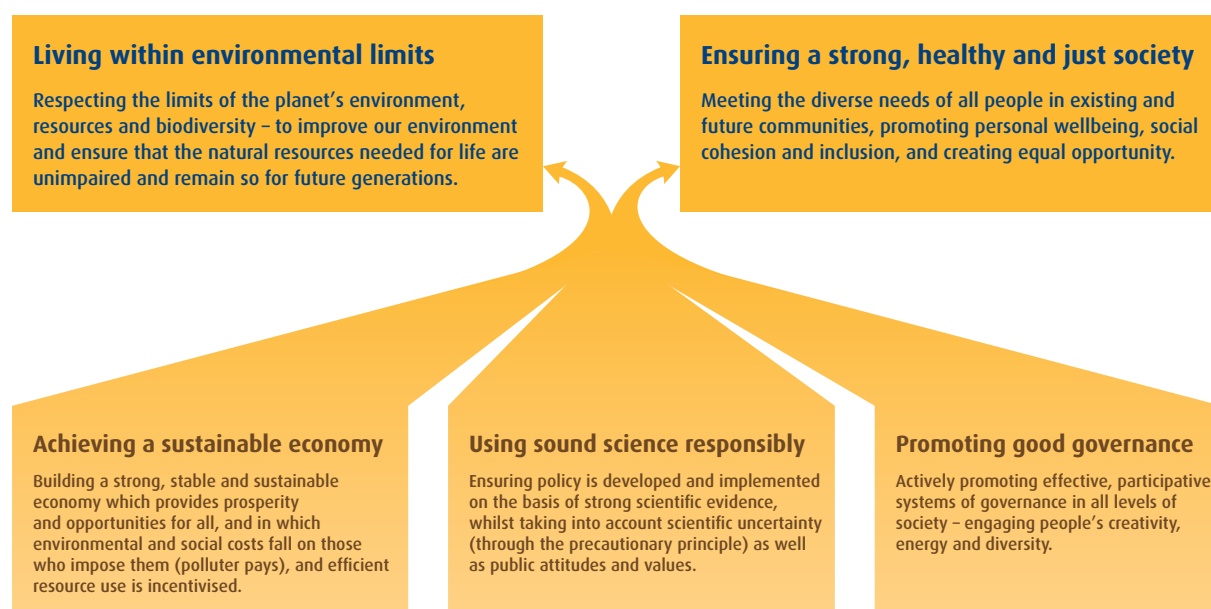
## Annex A What is sustainable development?

For the public sector, the overarching framework for delivering sustainable development in the UK is set out in *One Future – Different Paths*, in which “the goal of sustainable development is to enable all people throughout the world to satisfy their basic needs and enjoy a better quality of life, without compromising the quality of life of future generations”.

Delivering sustainable development should involve planning for the long-term, fully integrating economic, social and environmental factors into decision making and considering impacts beyond the local area.

The UK’s shared sustainable development framework sets out a set of principles (below) to help guide public sector decision-makers, whereby the aim to achieve the goals of living within environmental limits and a just society by means of sustainable economy, good governance and sound science.

At the local level, terms such as sustainable communities, well-being and good corporate citizenship, and sustainable procurement all fall under the banner of sustainable development.



### Further reading

HM Government, *One future – different paths: the UK’s shared framework for sustainable development*, March 2005, [www.sustainable-development.gov.uk](http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk)

HM Government, *Securing the future: UK delivering sustainable development strategy*, March 2005, [www.sustainable-development.gov.uk](http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk)

## Endnotes

- 1 CLG, *Strong and prosperous communities: the Local Government White Paper*, October 2006, p101
- 2 CLG, *Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities: Statutory Guidance*, July 2008, p34
- 3 CLG, Planning Policy Statement 12: Local Spatial Planning, 2008 [www.communities.gov.uk/publications/planningandbuilding/pps12lsp](http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/planningandbuilding/pps12lsp)
- 4 Audit Commission, CSCI, Healthcare Commission, HMIC, HMIP, HMIP and Ofsted, *Comprehensive Area Assessment: Joint Inspectorate Proposals for Consultation – Summer 2008*, July 2008, p14
- 5 Office of National Statistics, *Labour Market Trends, 'Public Sector Employment 2006'*, December 2006, [www.statistics.gov.uk/articles/nojournal/PSE\\_2006.pdf](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/articles/nojournal/PSE_2006.pdf)
- 6 Her Majesty's Treasury, *Public Expenditure: Statistical analysis 2007*. Available at [www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/media/E/B/pesa07\\_complete.pdf](http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/media/E/B/pesa07_complete.pdf), April 2007
- 7 SDC, *Schools carbon footprinting, scoping study – final report*. Available at [www.sd-commission.org.uk/publications/downloads/SDC\\_Carbon\\_Footprint\\_report\\_to\\_DfES.pdf](http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/publications/downloads/SDC_Carbon_Footprint_report_to_DfES.pdf), April 2006
- 8 [www.lga.gov.uk](http://www.lga.gov.uk)
- 9 SDC, *Healthy Futures: food and sustainable development*. Available at [www.sd-commission.org.uk/publications.php?id=71](http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/publications.php?id=71), 2004
- 10 HM Government, *Securing the future: delivering UK sustainable development strategy*, March 2005, p184.
- 11 UK Government, *Securing the Future: delivering UK sustainable development strategy*, March 2005.
- 12 Communities and Local Government, *Creating Strong Safe and Prosperous Communities: Statutory Guidance*, July 2008, p28
- 13 *Ibid*, p28
- 14 *Ibid*, p34. The relationship between LAAs and SCSs is set out in Section 106(2)(c)(i) of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.
- 15 Audit Commission et al, *Comprehensive Area Assessment: Joint Inspectorate Proposals for Consultation – Summer 2008*, July 2008
- 16 Part 3 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004
- 17 See Section 19(2)(f) and (g) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and
- 18 Part 1 of the Local Government Act 2000
- 19 Communities and Local Government, *Sustainable Communities Act 2007: A Guide*, February 2008
- 20 LGA, *Cutting through the green tape: the powers councils have to tackle climate change*, 2008
- 21 By business cases we mean the full environmental, social and economic benefits of taking a sustainable development approach, both within the organisation itself and in the wider local and global community.
- 22 SDC, *Financing Local Futures*, [www.sd-commission.org.uk/pages/financinglocalfutures.html](http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/pages/financinglocalfutures.html) Supported by IDeA, CIPFA and LGA
- 23 CAG Consultants, *Who's who in sustainable development and local government: a national and regional stakeholder mapping project*, an internal report to the SDC and the IDeA, September 2007
- 24 DTI, ODPM and Defra, *Securing the Regions' Futures*, 2006, pp24-25
- 25 The SDC has developed proposals for a Local SD Lens – a voluntary basket of indicators, drawn primarily from the National Indicator Set, to help track progress at the local level on key 'litmus test' priorities for sustainable development. These proposals are published on the SDC website, [www.sd-commission.gov.uk](http://www.sd-commission.gov.uk)
- 26 CLG and RTPI, *Planning Together: Local Strategic Partnerships and Spatial Planning – a practical guide*, January 2007





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