

Contribution to the Public Health Consultation – Choosing Health?

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Sustainable
Development Commission

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May 2004

Introduction

1. The Sustainable Development Commission (SDC) is the Government's independent advisor on sustainable development. It is chaired by Jonathon Porritt and reports directly to the Prime Minister and the leaders of the Devolved Administrations.
2. The Sustainable Development Commission welcomes the consultation on public health, and our opportunity to contribute to it. Improving public health is a key part of delivering sustainable development, and an increased focus on public health provides the NHS with a real opportunity to increase its contribution to delivering the Government's strategy on sustainable development.
3. The Sustainable Development Commission has an active work programme promoting links between health and sustainable development, funded by the Department of Health. This project has concentrated on promoting the messages about how NHS Trusts can contribute towards sustainable development, thereby improving population health and tackling health inequalities, in the areas of food procurement and new buildings. We will also be responding to your further consultation on a Food and Health Action Plan '*Choosing Health? Choosing a Better Diet*', with more detailed examples around food, as we have concentrated on food this year.
4. In this response to the consultation on public health we have attempted to illustrate the synergies between the public health agenda and sustainable development, and show that NHS Trusts, by embracing sustainable development principles, promote public health, and that this can be built upon.
 - ✦ Making links and cross-referencing between the Public Health White Paper and the Government's Sustainable Development Strategy review will be mutually beneficial;
 - ✦ NHS Trusts contribute to sustainable development and help improve local populations health by acting as good corporate citizens;
 - ✦ NHS Trusts, by using sustainable development as their organising principle, contribute towards tackling health inequalities.
5. Sustainable Development is about achieving integrated social, economic and environmental benefits. Using sustainable development as an organising framework, can help Government Departments, organisations, partnerships and individuals take decisions that impact positively on people's health, their communities, the economy and the environment.

Sustainable Development Strategy

6. We feel it is important that the Public Health White Paper supports and is cross-referenced to the Sustainable Development Strategy Consultation currently underway. Delivering improved public health plays into the Government's Sustainable Development strategy and vice versa. In broad terms, both set out to achieve similar goals. Initiatives to promote sustainable development, for example improving housing conditions and educational levels, will, of course, contribute towards improved public



health. In the same vein, public health interventions, and particularly those that tackle health inequalities effectively, contribute to sustainable development. For example promoting safe walking and cycling to work will impact on people's health, and also on traffic levels, community cohesion and pollution.

The London Hospital Food Project aims to increase the amount of local and/or organic food served in **Ealing General, St George's, the Royal Brompton and Lambeth hospitals**. The project – run by London Food Link in partnership with the Soil Association – will promote health by providing fresher food for patients, staff and visitors and benefit local communities, through supporting food and farming in London and the South East.

Good Corporate Citizenship

7. A strong economy, cohesive communities and a robust, sustainable environment are all essential to the improvement of public health. They are the core objectives of sustainable development and good 'corporate citizenship'. The pursuit of sustainable development within public sector organisations and, particularly, the NHS will play an important role in achieving good health for the whole population. In particular, the promotion of sustainable development in, and by, NHS Trusts includes engaging with local people, supporting local communities, and working in partnership with local government and others, to encourage healthy behaviours, create healthier populations and tackle inequalities.
8. It is essential that the NHS is actively seen to be setting a good example. NHS Trusts must contribute towards increased population health and reduced inequalities. If they ensure that their corporate activities support local economies, local communities and the local environment, this will help to improve the health of their local population. By being a good corporate citizen – for example, by ensuring that the principles of sustainable development shape their food purchasing policies – Trusts can speed patient recovery, build a healthy workforce, strengthen local communities, bring jobs to poor neighbourhoods, cut road traffic and promote farming methods that safeguard the environment.
9. By acting as "good corporate citizens" (using resources to maximise social, environmental and economic benefits), NHS Trusts can directly improve the quality of life for their local communities e.g. ensuring that local suppliers have the opportunity to tender for contracts, or developing training schemes, will help strengthen local employment; by serving healthy food, and getting involved in local healthy eating projects, the NHS can promote public health through improved diet. By contributing to sustainable local transport, Trusts can contribute to better health through improved air quality and more opportunities for exercise through safe walking and cycling.

The **Pickering Community Orchard** provides fruit for local residents. The orchard was established as part of the **Yorkshire and Humber Regional Public Health Team's 5 A DAY** programme. They worked with four local Primary Care

Trusts, and with the Pickering Community to establish the orchard. The project promotes healthier eating, regenerates underused allotment land, encourages exercise and outdoor activity, promotes locally produced food (reducing the need for food transport), and brings the community together – this all impacts positively on the health of local residents.

Health Inequalities & Sustainable Development

10. Sustainable development is about much more than the environment. It is also about creating stronger, healthy communities and economies, and promoting social cohesion. There are clear links between housing conditions, educational achievement, employment levels and health (both physical and mental). Measures to make improvements in deprived neighbourhoods, including better access to services (such as GPs' surgeries, public transport and shops) not only help to create more sustainable communities and better local environments, but also help to improve the health and well-being of people in those communities.

Wythenshawe experiences some of the poorest ill-health in Manchester. The **South Manchester PCT** LIFT scheme is part of a wider regeneration scheme to improve health and social conditions. They are using LIFT to have a positive impact on the local economy and community e.g. they are employing local people wherever possible, improving the public transport links to the site, and encouraging community organisations to make use of the building.

Examples of Good Practice

Some examples of good practice in relation to health and sustainable development are included in this response. We have published many more on our website. If you would like to read more about the examples given and other case studies, please visit our website at: <http://www.sd-commission.gov.uk/healthyfutures/progress.htm>.

Easington PCT has worked with White Lea Farm (owned by the National Trust) and Durham County Council to develop a series of Health Walks. These vary in length (from 1.5 to 3 miles) and they are led by local volunteers. They are now one of the options under the PCT's Exercise Referral Programme. As well as benefiting people's health, the walks also help bring members of the community together, help below get to know the local countryside and give the volunteers who lead the walks new skills.