

# ***Taking it on***

developing UK sustainable development strategy *together*

A Consultation Paper

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[www.sustainable-development.gov.uk](http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk)

Published by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Printed in the UK, April 2004, on material containing 80% post-consumer waste and 20% Totally Chlorine Free virgin pulp.

Product code PB9555

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# Foreword

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We live in a time when we've seen enormous improvements in many aspects of quality of life. World-wide, people are living on average 20 years longer than they did 50 years ago, and in the UK we've been reducing child poverty and our economic growth continues to be strong.

But we also see many areas where we still need to do much more. Globally we see instability, severe inequalities in health and prosperity, and challenges from climate change and loss of biodiversity. Even now the world is not using its natural resources well. Estimates may vary, but it has been argued that we would need three planets' worth of resources to maintain our current level of consumption in the UK across the world.

So not only are we failing to meet the needs of the world's current population, but we are also acting in ways which will affect the ability of future generations to meet their needs. Changing that is what sustainable development is about – *the* big challenge. It is the challenge of how we achieve a decent quality of life for us all in the UK – food, health, education, housing, community, environment, work and play – that does not have a negative effect on others. It is also about how we work to use our influence in Europe and internationally to help achieve this for others as well as ourselves.

We are already doing a great deal, but we need to do more to rise to the challenge of delivering sustainable development. We all have our parts to play – in government, in businesses and voluntary organisations, and as individuals.

Achieving sustainable development involves everyone. We have produced this consultation document because we need your views and ideas to shape and help take this agenda forward.

Together, the UK Government, Scottish Executive, Welsh Assembly Government and Northern Ireland Administration want to work to create a new UK strategic framework for sustainable development. This will provide the background for separate more detailed strategies prepared by our different administrations, as well as for action by others. The opportunity is here for us all to take action for change.

**The Rt Hon Margaret Beckett MP, Secretary of State for Environment,  
Food and Rural Affairs**

**Ross Finnie MSP, Minister for Environment and Rural Development,  
Scottish Executive**

**Carwyn Jones AM, Minister for Environment, Planning and Countryside,  
Welsh Assembly Government**

**Angela Smith MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Northern Ireland Office**



# Introduction

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This joint consultation paper by the United Kingdom Government, Scottish Executive, Welsh Assembly Government and the Northern Ireland Administration seeks your views on what should be in a new strategy for sustainable development for the UK, and what we and others need to do to make it happen.

Sustainable development is about making economic, social and environmental progress in such a way that we achieve ‘development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’<sup>1</sup>. The decisions we all make every day and the actions we all take at home, at work, and at play, can have effects across the world and can help to make a better or worse future for ourselves and our children. We know that we all still face a huge challenge in achieving sustainable development and that action is needed at all levels, from the individual to internationally.

At the moment we don’t have a shared sustainable development strategy document or approach. The UK Government’s current strategy for the UK, *A better quality of life*, was published in 1999, just as devolution began to come into force. Since then, the Scottish Executive and National Assembly for Wales have developed their own approaches and the Northern Ireland Administration has begun to develop theirs. Every English region also has its own strategy and so do local authorities.

For the first time we want to build a UK strategic framework for sustainable development, to 2020. This will provide the background for our own separate strategies and plans in each of our administrations to take forward action, and for action by others. This is an opportunity to kick-start the debate on the challenges we face in achieving sustainable development, and on what more we need to do to meet them – as government in the UK, and more widely across society.

To help us take this work forward, we would like your views and ideas on as many or as few of the questions throughout this document as you want, and need your **responses by 31 July**. You can find more information on how you can send us your views and get further involved on page 40.

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<sup>1</sup> The so-called ‘Brundtland definition’ of sustainable development. From *Our Common Future* (The Brundtland Report) – Report of the 1987 World Commission on Environment and Development. Oxford University Press 1987. ISBN 0 19 282080 X.

# 1. Setting the scene

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## A changing landscape – why we need a new strategy

- 1.1 In the last five years much has changed and is still changing, both within the UK in terms of responsibilities for delivering sustainable development, and in terms of progress from the international level down.
- 1.2 In 1999, the UK Government published *A better quality of life*<sup>2</sup> (with 15 headline indicators of progress) and *Quality of life counts*<sup>3</sup> (a comprehensive set of 147 indicators). The same year, the process of devolution of many powers away from the UK Government to the devolved administrations of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland began. The Scottish Executive and the National Assembly for Wales now have their own strategies in *Meeting the Needs...*<sup>4</sup> and *Starting to Live Differently*<sup>5</sup>, and their own indicators, and Northern Ireland is developing theirs.
- 1.3 Within England more decisions are now taken at regional and local level, with resulting relevant frameworks and strategies. All regions have brought together their stakeholders to draw up regional sustainable development frameworks, and local authorities have been acting on their legal requirement to produce Community Strategies for their areas, often through Local Strategic Partnerships.
- 1.4 A number of business sectors (notably motor vehicles, retail, offshore oil and gas operators, cement, and most recently engineering) have developed or are developing sustainable development strategies to identify how they can improve their contribution towards sustainability and provide frameworks for concerted action. This is encouraging given the large numbers of businesses covered<sup>5</sup> by these sectors but there are still many more who could usefully follow their example.
- 1.5 The agenda has also moved on, within the UK as well as in Europe and internationally. For example:
- in the UK we have our own ambitions and targets, such as putting the UK on a path to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 60% by 2050;
  - the European Union now has its own sustainable development strategy and is reviewing it this year; and

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<sup>2</sup> *A better quality of life – A strategy for sustainable development for the UK*. 1999, Cm 4345, The Stationery Office, London, ISBN 0 10 143452 9. This and other UK Government sustainable development publications are available at [www.sustainable-development.gov.uk](http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk)

<sup>3</sup> *Quality of life counts – Indicators for a strategy for sustainable development for the United Kingdom: a baseline assessment*. 1999, DETR, ISBN 1 851123 43 1.

<sup>4</sup> *Meeting the Needs... Priorities, Actions and Targets for Sustainable Development in Scotland*. Scottish Executive, April 2002. Together with Scottish Executive progress reports against its sustainable development indicators, and action being taken to achieve change, this is available at [www.sustainable.scotland.gov.uk](http://www.sustainable.scotland.gov.uk)

<sup>5</sup> *Starting to Live Differently*, the sustainable development scheme of the National Assembly for Wales, March 2004; this succeeds *Learning to Live Differently*, November 2000. Together with Welsh Assembly Government annual reports on progress in implementation, and a recent report on its effectiveness over the last four years, these are available at [www.wales.gov.uk/themessustainabledev/](http://www.wales.gov.uk/themessustainabledev/)

- the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg and other international agreements, such as those on climate change, world trade and the UN Millennium Development Goals, have set a new agenda for action at all levels.
- 1.6 So it makes sense to take a fresh look at our approach, drawing on experience and progress so far, to have a new strategy and indicators for 2005 onwards. This will help us work together to achieve our common goal of being further along the road to achieving sustainable development at the same time as taking account of the different approaches and responsibilities within government in the UK.

## How have we been doing so far?

- 1.7 You can find details of UK progress and action to achieve sustainable development in the *Achieving a better quality of life* annual reports produced by the UK Government, in co-operation with the devolved administrations. The last one, published in March this year, reviews progress from 1999 to the end of 2003. The Scottish Executive and Welsh Assembly Government also report separately on progress in Scotland and Wales, and the Sustainable Development Commission (SDC), as advisor to all four administrations, has recently prepared their independent view of how we have been doing and posed some challenges<sup>6</sup>.
- 1.8 The picture that emerges is a mixed one. In many areas we have been making progress, and many initiatives and actions are in place to achieve advances. However, we still face great challenges on all three pillars of sustainable development: economic, social and environmental.

### *The broad economic picture*

- 1.9 Even in a challenging international environment the UK's economic policies have allowed us to cope well, and our growth measured in gross domestic product continues to be over the EU average. Unemployment is also low across the UK, and is the lowest of the G7 economies<sup>7</sup>.
- 1.10 But prosperity needs to be shared more widely and fairly. The last 20 years have seen the gap widening between average earnings and the earnings of the lowest paid. There are also differences between regions, and between rural and urban areas, for example, in England productivity in the poorest performing rural areas is 18% below average productivity. We need to reduce the widening gap in growth rates between some regions and make sure that the barriers in the job market that some people face (for example older workers, those with disabilities, ethnic minorities and lone parents) are broken down. There are still other economic challenges, including making sure that pension funding arrangements take account of the effects of a population that is living longer, so that future pensioners achieve a decent quality of life and help is targeted at the poorest pensioners.

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<sup>6</sup> *Shows promise. But must try harder*, Sustainable Development Commission, 2004. Available at [www.sd-commission.gov.uk](http://www.sd-commission.gov.uk)

<sup>7</sup> The G7 countries are Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the UK and the United States.

1.11 Past economic growth has had significant environmental impacts. And while there is now some evidence of a 'decoupling', or separation, between economic growth on the one hand and environmental degradation and the overall use of materials on the other, the picture is mixed. In some areas, such as river water quality and air quality (emissions of nitrogen oxide and sulphur dioxide) in towns and cities, the link has been decisively broken. However, there are other areas which still need to be tackled. For example, as household consumption has increased during the past 12 years, so has water use, energy consumption and the amount of waste which is not recycled. A great deal of work remains to be done in this area to improve our use of resources, and to make sure that economic development is sustainable.

### *Socially*

1.12 We have made significant progress in improving the quality of social-sector housing, and are working to make sure that housing is of the right type (in terms of size, type and affordability) in the right place at the right time. There are also fewer children living in poverty, and in Great Britain we are on track to meet or better the UK Government's target to reduce the number of children in low-income households by a quarter by 2004/2005.

1.13 More people are staying in full-time education and more people are being educated to degree level. Educational achievement amongst most minority ethnic groups continues to rise, although there are still important gaps to tackle. People are also living longer. But whilst overall life expectancy has increased, an increasing proportion of those extra years are spent in poorer health.

1.14 In all these areas we still have plenty to do. We also continue to work to reduce crime, drug use and antisocial behaviour. In England and Wales as a whole crime has fallen by over a quarter in the last six years, and the chance of being a victim of crime is at its lowest point for more than 20 years. Through capacity-building activities we are seeking to strengthen the ability of people and organisations to help themselves, and contribute to the regeneration and cohesion of their neighbourhoods and communities.

### *The state of the environment*

1.15 In tackling climate change the UK is on track to meet its target under the Kyoto Protocol to reduce its emissions of greenhouse gases by 12.5% below 1990 levels by 2008-12. We are also making progress on our more challenging domestic goal of moving towards a 20% reduction in carbon dioxide emissions below 1990 levels by 2010. Provisional data show that in 2002 greenhouse gas emissions were 14.9% below 1990 levels and carbon dioxide emissions 8.7% below. In the longer term we want to be on a path to reduce UK carbon dioxide emissions by 60% by 2050, with real progress by 2020.

1.16 We are travelling more, and although improved access and ease of mobility can make a positive contribution to social and economic progress, transport can also have negative effects on the environment. For example, road traffic is still a significant source of greenhouse gas emissions, and air traffic is becoming one. Car use continues to grow, not least as ownership increases, though the link between traffic growth and economic growth

has weakened since the early 1990's. The challenge for the future is to find a way to reduce the negative impact of travel and adopt a balanced approach in line with the principles of sustainable development.

- 1.17 We also face other challenges, in particular tackling waste. UK household waste continues to rise by between 2 and 3% each year, whilst we have a rate for recycling well below the EU average.
- 1.18 The UK has experienced environmental improvements in recent years. Specifically, the quality of our air, rivers, drinking and bathing water has shown marked improvement. However, we still need to do more to tackle diffuse pollution of air, water and land, from agriculture and other sources. These can affect the health of our wildlife and countryside and biodiversity, for which wild bird populations are a useful indicator of our success as they live in a wide range of habitats and are usually near the top of the food chain. Both woodland and farmland bird populations have fallen considerably since the 1970s – farmland birds had almost halved in population by the 1990s. Although there are signs that populations are stabilising they are still areas of concern.

### *Playing our role internationally*

- 1.19 Our actions have international effects as well as local consequences, from climate change and pollution to social impacts. The UK has significant political and economic influence, with an important role to play in the international community. We must rise to the challenge of making sure we are a force for good. Across the world far too many people live in deep poverty, often side by side with great wealth, and too many live in fear of armed conflict. Habitats and water resources are under severe strain, and species are disappearing at an unacceptable rate. Sustainable development internationally is essential for our long-term peace and security. And we need to ensure that increasing standards in the UK do not simply result in our problems being exported.
- 1.20 The UK has worked hard to promote action around the world. Much has changed internationally over the last five years – we now have a clearer set of international commitments and long-term targets. These have been developed through a number of groups and include the UN Millennium Development Goals, WSSD commitments, and the UN Economic Commission for Europe Aarhus Convention. Overall, progress is steady, but we need a continued emphasis on real action (backed up with resources) and monitoring to keep our progress on track.

### *Individual and joint responsibility*

- 1.21 Surveys<sup>8</sup> show that awareness of broad environmental issues and concern about them has been increasing in recent years and awareness of 'sustainable development' has remained about the same, with about a third of people in England and Wales saying they have heard of it. However, a survey in Scotland indicates that the idea (if not the phrase) is more widely understood; over three-quarters of people thought there was a need for most people to change their way of life so that future generations could continue to enjoy a good quality of life and environment. But even so, less than half of those questioned thought that they themselves needed to change their behaviour<sup>9</sup>.
- 1.22 Within government, as in many organisations, we recognise that we still need to do much more to make sustainable development central to all our work, from our daily actions to our strategic decisions.
- 1.23 Others have a role to play as well. Recognition is growing that partnerships between business, government and civil society are essential for putting our sustainable development commitments into practice. The UK is seen as a pioneer of corporate social responsibility (CSR), with many of our companies acting as trendsetters in developing and putting CSR policies into practice. Many of the leading academics, non-governmental organisations and business experts are based here. We all need to use our influence positively to help achieve sustainable development at home and across the world.

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<sup>8</sup> *Survey of public attitudes to quality of life and to the environment – 2001*, Defra, 2002 (available at [www.defra.gov.uk/environment/statistics/pubatt/index.htm](http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/statistics/pubatt/index.htm)), and *Consumption in Wales: encouraging the sustainable lifestyle*, Welsh Consumer Council, March 2003

<sup>9</sup> *Key Scottish Environment Statistics 2003*, Scottish Executive, 2003. Available at [www.scotland.gov.uk/library5/environment/kses03-00.asp](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library5/environment/kses03-00.asp)

## 2. The approach to a new strategy

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- 2.1 By 2005 we aim to have in place a new strategy that will provide a strong basis for renewed action to deliver sustainable development.
- 2.2 We will produce a **UK strategic framework** for sustainable development to 2020, agreed by the UK Government and the administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, to provide a consistent approach and focus across the UK.
- 2.3 We expect it to include:
- a shared understanding of sustainable development, a vision of what we are trying to achieve and the guiding principles we all need to follow to get there;
  - our sustainable development priorities for UK action;
  - our work internationally to help achieve sustainable development; and
  - indicators to monitor and measure performance.
- 2.4 There will also be **separate strategies** by each administration – building on existing work and also translating the framework into action, based on their different responsibilities, needs and views. These strategies may include further priorities, and be supported by further measures and indicators.
- 2.5 As illustrated, together these will form the new UK strategy. Consultation on a draft Welsh Assembly Government Action Plan is currently in progress<sup>10</sup>.



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<sup>10</sup> The prime purpose of this is to put the National Assembly for Wales' Sustainable Development Scheme into effect, but it is also designed to complement the anticipated UK strategic framework. Consultation closes on 21 May 2004, the paper is available at [www.wales.gov.uk/themessustainabledev/content/review/action-plan-e.htm](http://www.wales.gov.uk/themessustainabledev/content/review/action-plan-e.htm) or on request from 029 2082 3388.

<sup>11</sup> The UK Government strategy will be for England and relevant non-devolved issues.

**2.6** We want the review process and the new strategy to do the following:

**1 Improve the delivery of sustainable development outcomes, and focus on delivery in the longer term**

There has been more criticism of the extent to which the 1999 strategy has been put into practice than of the strategy itself. So we need to look at what is needed to help implement a new strategy and deliver the outcomes we want.

It is difficult to measure how far sustainable development is being achieved, but it is still important to try and do so. Indicators were an essential part of the 1999 strategy and their use is well regarded. There are also indicators developed or being developed for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and for use at the regional and local levels. However, we need to consider how much we should expect from indicators. For example, to what extent they can and should be an essential part of policy-making, and how they might better measure sustainable development as opposed to progress in separate policy areas. We also need to consider the room for including goals and targets.

**2 Increase awareness of, and engagement with, sustainable development**

Sustainable development makes people think about their behaviour and often how to do things differently. There is a need to engage ‘hearts and minds’, and to create a better understanding of the links between our everyday decisions and their outcomes, from the local to the international level.

Sustainable development education and raising awareness in a wide audience is important to make sure that we all understand both why and how we should take steps to live and act more sustainably.

**3 Build a sense of common purpose across the UK, but support devolved, regional and local diversity**

In developing a revised strategy we need to respect and welcome the variety of different approaches that are already being taken across the UK. The extent of devolution of responsibilities and powers for achieving progress is complicated and wide-ranging, from national to regional and local government. We need to work together to achieve change to meet both our international commitments and our own aspirations in the UK.

#### **4 Embed sustainable development more effectively within government action and policy-making**

We should provide leadership to others, not least by all parts of government leading by example in our own actions: within policy-making and putting policy into practice, in the way government works with others, and in the way we manage our buildings, land and operations. We're already doing a lot but need to build on this work. For example in putting new European legislation<sup>12</sup> into practice, from making public bodies take account of the environmental effects of their plans and programmes and so promote sustainable development, to consulting the public.

#### **5 Build on what has already been done but challenge ourselves and others to do more**

The 1999 strategy and those produced by the devolved administrations so far have been well received. We should aim to build on these and on the good work that has already been done by government and others, rather than start from scratch. For example, the sustainable development objectives in the 1999 strategy have been widely used by others, but we are open to improvements. A new strategy should aim to add value, provide new focus and challenge, and improve our delivery processes – it should not be simply repackaging what we are already doing.

#### **6 Be inclusive, and involve stakeholders and those responsible for delivery at all levels**

All sectors of society have vital roles to play in delivering sustainable development – whether in local government and local communities, in business or the voluntary sector, or as individuals. Government should aim to help others to achieve sustainable development by setting the overall framework for others to work within, removing barriers and building capacity.

#### **7 Provide leadership, through a clear vision and priorities**

We should provide leadership with a clear vision of sustainable development (where we want to be and what we need to do to get there) and lead by example in achieving this. We believe that a new strategy will be more effective if it has clearer priorities. The breadth of the 1999 strategy has reinforced sustainable development's relevance to all policies, but we need to prioritise to provide a clearer focus for action.

### Questions

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**Q1** What do you think of our approach to the content and structure of a new strategy?

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<sup>12</sup> The European Community Directive (2001/42/EC) on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment (strategic environmental assessment) which must be implemented throughout the UK by 21 July 2004; Directive (2003/4/EC) on public access to environmental information; and Directive (2003/35/EC) on public participation in environmental decision-making.

## 3. What is sustainable development, and how do we do it?

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### Explaining what we want to achieve

- 3.1 The term ‘sustainable development’ has become more widely used and recognised. But there are different views on how to best describe what it means, and no clear vision of what it might look like in practice for the UK. We think that developing a common understanding of sustainable development and vision of where we would like to be in the long term will be useful to help us to make it a reality.
- 3.2 The most frequently used definition of sustainable development is ‘**development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs**’. However, there have been many different explanations of what this actually means, including within government in the UK.
- 3.3 For many people, being more sustainable still just means recycling newspapers and visiting the bottle bank – more about being ‘green’ than anything to do with economic or social issues. We know it is much more than this.

In the 1999 strategy the **UK Government** describes sustainable development as about ‘ensuring a better quality of life for everyone, now and for generations to come’; and that achieving it means meeting the following four objectives *at the same time*, in the UK and the world as a whole:

- social progress which recognises the needs of everyone;
- effective protection of the environment;
- prudent use of natural resources; and
- maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment.

No one of these objectives is more important than another. Although there can be tensions between achieving them, in the long term success in one is dependent on the others.

The **Northern Ireland Executive** and **National Assembly for Wales** have both endorsed this approach, and the National Assembly has also described sustainable development more simply, in that we should treat the Earth as though we intend to stay.

The **Scottish Executive** describes the basic aim of sustainable development as securing the future, acknowledging that achieving economic growth has to be done in such a way that it does not harm the environment or squander the natural resources we depend on, and having to distribute the wealth it creates to improve quality of life and to eradicate poverty.

- 3.4 We already have many targets and aspirations. Developing a vision does not mean setting new targets, but the difficult task of painting a picture of what things may look like if we really achieve sustainable development. The 1999 strategy's vision was of 'a better quality of life for everyone, now and for generations to come'. Can we improve on it to make it a more powerful vision and a more meaningful guide for action?

#### Some ideas for content of a vision.

All our communities are safe, healthy inclusive, and enjoy a high-quality environment where they are.

A strong economy in all parts of the UK that delivers high and stable levels of employment and decent standards of living for all our people.

We live in a fair society where nobody is held back by disadvantage, discrimination or lack of opportunity.

The UK plays a lead role in achieving sustainable development and a fairer world internationally and in Europe.

Individuals and organisations recognise the contribution they can make and act to make a positive difference.

We all use fewer resources to meet our needs, reducing the effect of our actions on others, future generations and the environment.

#### How we get there – guiding principles

- 3.5 Once we have described our vision, we need to develop an approach that will help us to achieve it.

The **Sustainable Development Commission** (SDC) has described sustainable development as 'both a **journey** (towards the end point where humankind has learned to live sustainably on this planet), and a **framework** within which a balance can be achieved between potential economic, environmental and social benefits, between the wealthy and the poor (both in this country and between rich and poor nations) and between the interests of this generation and future generations'.

3.6 We have a variety of principles to help policy and decision-making at all levels of government move towards achieving sustainable development in practice:

The **UK Government** has 10 guiding principles and approaches set out in the 1999 strategy. In summary these are:

- **Putting people at the centre** of concerns for sustainable development.
- **Taking a long-term perspective** to protect the interests of future generations.
- **Taking account of costs and benefits** in decisions, including those which cannot easily be valued in money terms.
- **Creating an open and supportive economic system** to create conditions in which trade can flourish and competitiveness can encourage growth and greater resource efficiency.
- **Combating poverty and social exclusion** as everyone should have the opportunity to achieve their potential.
- **Respecting environmental limits** to avoid serious or irreversible damage.
- **The precautionary principle** – where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, a lack of full scientific certainty must not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation.
- **Using scientific knowledge** when taking decisions.
- **Transparency, information, participation and access to justice**, including the need to involve citizens, communities and organisations more in policy-making and governance.
- **Making the polluter pay** – making those responsible pay the costs of the consequences where possible.

The **Northern Ireland Executive** endorsed all of these principles of sustainable development, and the **National Assembly for Wales** has endorsed most of them and has accepted others as objectives. A full statement of the Assembly's sustainable development principles appears in its newly-revised sustainable development scheme.

The **Scottish Executive** have three principles:

- have regard for others who do not have access to the same level of resources and wealth generated;
- minimise the impact of our actions on future generations by radically reducing our use of resources and by minimising environmental impacts; and
- live within the capacity of the planet to sustain our activities and to replenish resources which we use.

- 3.7 Sustainable development is about looking at the whole picture and linking social, environmental and economic concerns, not putting one in competition against the other, and using the principles can help guide decisions towards better outcomes.
- 3.8 However, choices often still need to be made that result in trade-offs between possible positive and negative effects on sectors of the economy, society, or on the environment. To help policy and decision-making for sustainable development before that point is reached, the SDC has suggested a hierarchy as follows:
- protect critical natural capital in all circumstances;
  - wherever possible, seek to optimise economic, social and environmental benefits over time;
  - where that is not possible, seek to minimise any potential damage to the environment, people and their communities;
  - only then can one trade off potential economic benefits against unavoidable social and environmental disbenefits.

### Questions

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- Q2 Is an explanation of what sustainable development means based on the UK Government's four objectives approach of the 1999 strategy useful?  
– if 'Yes', what changes would you make to improve it?  
– if 'No', how would you explain it instead?
- Q3 What should be our vision of sustainable development for the UK?
- Q4 What should be the guiding principles for UK decision-makers, and how can they be made widely practical and relevant both within and beyond government?
- Q5 Are there any social, economic or environmental limits that must be protected in all circumstances? If 'Yes' what do you think they are?
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## 4. Setting priorities

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- 4.1 The vision of sustainable development, and the guiding principles, should underpin all government activity. However, we believe that we will make progress faster if we focus on key areas. That means setting priorities.

### Existing priorities and commitments

- 4.2 We do not come to this with a blank slate. Across the UK we already have many different sustainable development priorities and commitments, identified in sustainable development strategies and from recent international commitments.
- 4.3 The 1999 strategy identified the four main themes for action for UK Government as: a sustainable economy; building sustainable communities; managing the environment and natural resources; and international co-operation and development. The Scottish Executive has three sustainable development priorities (resource use, energy, and travel) to help focus thoughts on ways in which people can help to progress sustainable development in a practical way. In Wales the Assembly has placed most emphasis on mainstreaming sustainable development into its decision-making and developing partnerships to promote it (though its draft Action Plan now proposes specific actions under four key headings). The Northern Ireland Executive's paper *Promoting Sustainable Living*<sup>13</sup> also proposed a mainstreaming approach.
- 4.4 International commitments that we need to make sure we fulfil include climate change; the ambitious WSSD commitments (from enhancing corporate environmental and social responsibility to securing sustainable fisheries by 2015); and the Millennium Development Goals, which include eradicating extreme poverty and reducing child mortality.

### Choosing priorities for a new strategy

- 4.5 Prioritisation is not easy. However, it does help to focus action by government and others, making the delivery of significant change more likely.

Our priorities should:

- reflect some of the biggest challenges we face as a country to achieving sustainable development – whether because of the scale of the challenge in its effects, or the need for significant further action beyond that already planned;
- go to the heart of what sustainable development is about and the links between environmental, social and economic factors (these often need an integrated approach and concerted action on many fronts to tackle them over the long-term); and
- be ones where we can all act together – whether as government, organisations or individuals – and make a significant difference.

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<sup>13</sup> The Northern Ireland Executive's paper is available at [www.ehsni.gov.uk/pubs/publications/Promoting\\_Sustainable\\_Living.pdf](http://www.ehsni.gov.uk/pubs/publications/Promoting_Sustainable_Living.pdf)

4.6 A short study last year<sup>14</sup> identified the top priorities for progressing sustainable development in the UK as sustainable consumption and production and resource efficiency; energy and climate change; and education, raising awareness and capacity-building. There was also strong recognition of the need for a focus on action and governance at the local level. We think further action on all of these is important. We also think that further action is needed to help communities find local solutions, and to look at what more can be done to ensure all people have a healthy environment no matter what their income or where they live.

4.7 As a result we are proposing the following four priority areas for a UK focus for action:

- Climate change and energy
- Sustainable consumption, production and use of natural resources
- Environment and social justice
- Helping communities to help themselves

4.8 We also recognise that to make progress in these areas we, and others, need to take action to:

- help change behaviour;
- take forward sustainable development **internationally and in Europe**;
- **get the structures and tools right** so that we have the institutional capacity and leadership in the UK from the national to the local level; and
- increase **the business contribution** to achieving sustainable development.

4.9 There is more information later on all these issues, and particular questions on them.

### Questions

- Q6 Are the four priority areas identified above the right ones for the UK as a whole to focus on over the next few years? If 'No', what would you change?
- Q7 What issues do you think are important, or better dealt with, only within the separate UK Government, Scottish Executive, Welsh Assembly Government or Northern Ireland strategies, or at a regional or local level?

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<sup>14</sup> From the report *Where next for the UK on Sustainable Development?* produced by UNED-UK Committee on behalf of Defra.

## 5. Climate change and energy

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- 5.1 There is now overwhelming scientific evidence that the climate is changing. Average worldwide temperatures have risen by more than 0.6°C over the last 100 years. Globally, all of the 10 warmest years on record have been since 1990, including the last five, and the 1990s was the warmest decade since records began. The general opinion of experts worldwide is that the climate is changing as a result of human activity. The Third Assessment Report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change concluded that 'most of the warming observed over the last 50 years is likely to have been due to increasing concentrations of greenhouse gases'. Carbon dioxide, released by burning fossil fuels such as coal, oil and gas, is the main greenhouse gas.
- 5.2 The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and its Kyoto Protocol are the starting point for international efforts to cut emissions of greenhouse gases. The UK is on track to meet its commitment under Kyoto to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 12.5% below 1990 levels by 2008-12, and has a national goal to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 20% below 1990 levels by 2010. The UK Climate Change Programme will be reviewed later this year, providing an opportunity (if needed) to introduce new policies and measures to make sure we achieve the national goal.
- 5.3 If we are to avoid the worst effects of climate change, ambitious action will be needed. The Energy White Paper<sup>15</sup>, published in February 2003, provides the framework for moving the UK to a low-carbon economy. It sets out four goals for energy policy: putting the UK on a path to cut its carbon dioxide emissions by 60% by 2050; maintaining the reliability of energy supplies; promoting competitive markets; and ensuring that every home is adequately and affordably heated. As far as possible, the market framework and policy instruments should reinforce each other to achieve these goals. In reducing carbon dioxide emissions, the priority is to strengthen the contribution from energy efficiency and renewables. The UK Government will be publishing its Energy Efficiency Implementation Plan shortly. The new EU emissions trading scheme will be an essential part of our policies from 2005 onwards.
- 5.4 But climate change is a global problem and a global challenge. The UK can, and will continue to, show leadership but a wider international effort is needed to bring forward technological changes, to keep down costs and to avoid harming UK competitiveness. We need to work with other countries to find a general agreement on the need for change and firm commitments to take action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions world-wide. Discussions under the UNFCCC to tackle climate change after 2008-12 will start soon.

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<sup>15</sup> The 2003 White Paper *Our energy future – creating a low-carbon economy* is available at [www.dti.gov.uk/energy/whitepaper/](http://www.dti.gov.uk/energy/whitepaper/)

- 5.5 Some degree of climate change is already irreversible, so we need to develop adaptation options too. The UK Climate Impacts Programme (UKCIP) is funded to encourage private and public sector organisations to assess how vulnerable they are to climate change and to plan their own adaptation strategies. Climate change scenarios (published by UKCIP in 2002) indicate that it is likely that we will face warmer, wetter winters, and hotter, drier summers, and an increased frequency of extreme weather such as heavy downpours. The effects of these changes are already being felt by the environment, society and the economy, and the effects of climate change will often be made worse by interactions with other pressures.
- 5.6 With UKCIP, we have set up a stakeholder-led approach in developing adaptation options to reduce climate-related risks, both in regions and in sectors. Priorities for action include assessing long-term policies and investments to make sure they are sustainable in the face of climate change, contingency planning to deal with possible threats, and further research. The UK Government is carrying out departmental audits to identify risks from climate change, and developing a new framework that will outline guiding principles for adaptation policies.
- 5.7 The whole world faces the impacts of climate change; indeed developing countries are the ones that may well have to adapt to the most serious effects. We are funding research on the global impacts of climate change and joint projects with developing countries to assess how vulnerable they are and to build in adaptation.
- 5.8 We all need to expand our vision for sustainable development into the future so that we think not only in terms of the effects of our activities on the environment, but also in terms of the pressures that our environment (through climate change) will have on us.

## Questions

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- Q8 How can we encourage more public involvement in action to reduce emissions?
- Q9 How can more people and organisations be encouraged to consider the impacts of climate change on their activities, and to respond to them? What are the opportunities for, and barriers to, progress?
- Q10 What opportunities are there for making sure that considering the impacts of climate change are an essential part of policy and decision-making as part of the drive for sustainable development?
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## 6. Sustainable consumption, production, and use of natural resources

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- 6.1 We need to deliver continuous economic and social progress that respects the limits of the Earth's ecosystems, and that meets people's needs and aspirations for a better quality of life now and for generations to come. We all want a better quality of life but not at the price of environmental or social problems here or in other parts of the world – or leaving a bill that our children will have to pay.
- 6.2 Assessing the environmental limits to our use of resources is complex and one of the trickier aspects of sustainability. Some argue that we would need the resources of three planets to maintain current levels of UK consumption across the world. This message is a vivid one, and shows the importance of the sustainable consumption and production agenda, both internationally and nationally.
- 6.3 This global challenge was recognised at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) where world leaders committed themselves to promote a 10-year framework of programmes 'to accelerate a shift towards sustainable consumption and production'. This means turning a very high-level commitment into a strategy that is sufficiently concrete to act on at home, helps drive action in the EU and wider follow-up internationally, and that can also contribute to international improvements. The UK Government's framework document *Changing Patterns*<sup>16</sup> has got this process under way, and existing work by the devolved administrations also contributes.
- 6.4 Whilst not claiming to have all the answers to problematic trends and patterns in production and consumption, the framework provides a platform for making progress at home and also importantly in our various dealings with our European partners and in different international groups such the UN's Environment Programme and Commission for Sustainable Development where sustainable consumption and production is the focus of much attention.
- 6.5 The framework (among other objectives) highlights the need to 'decouple' – or separate – economic progress from environmental degradation; to increase material and energy efficiency (doing more with less); and to promote more sustainable consumption by households and business.
- 6.6 To achieve all this we will all have to play a part, from government at all levels, to business and consumers.

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<sup>16</sup> *Changing patterns, UK Government Framework for Sustainable Consumption and Production*. 2003, Defra/DTI. Available at [www.defra.gov.uk/environment/business/scp/index.htm](http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/business/scp/index.htm)

## Questions

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- Q11** What steps do you think government, business, and others should be taking to promote a more innovative, competitive, resource-efficient, low-waste, economy whilst also improving our environmental performance?
- Q12** What steps do you think need be taken by government, business, and others over the short and long-term to help businesses make more sustainable products (ones that have reduced environmental and social impacts)?
- Q13** What steps do you think need to be taken by government, business and others over the short and long-term to help business and household consumers choose more sustainable goods and services?
- Q14** What areas of consumption do you think need to be tackled first? Why? What actions need to be taken by whom?
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## 7. Environment and social justice

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- 7.1 The 1999 strategy included the principle of ‘putting people at the centre’. This means thinking about people’s social, economic and environmental needs and trying to meet all three in an integrated way.
- 7.2 In both developed and developing countries it is clear that people’s health, livelihoods and their environment are strongly linked together, and there was recognition at WSSD of the need to create strong linkages between commitments to address these issues at the international level and strategies and programmes here in the UK. Often, people’s basic needs for nutritious food, clean water, safe communities, access to modern energy supplies and decent homes can depend upon a healthy environment. Many millions of the world’s poorest people do not have access to clean water, basic foods, fuel, fair trade and decent homes. Developing countries are often more vulnerable to the effects of climate change and are not always able to deal with extreme weather.
- 7.3 Recent research has shown that in England, people in the most deprived areas experience the worst air pollution (for example, they are exposed to 41% higher concentrations of the pollutant nitrogen dioxide than people living in wealthier areas), and are near to more sites producing a greater number of emissions that present a greater hazard. Research has also shown that children living in the most deprived areas are five times more likely to be killed as a pedestrian than children living in the least deprived areas; and also that people from ethnic minorities suffer more road accidents. Other research has found that some groups in the community have poor access to legal advice and support for addressing environmental issues. It is also widely recognised that inequalities like these can affect people’s health, safety, sense of community and even local job opportunities. Tackling these environmental inequalities can therefore help improve quality of life overall.
- 7.4 We have put in place strategies to create decent places, reduce poverty, exclusion and health inequalities, improve local environmental quality and close the gap between the worst off and the rest. The UK Government’s Sustainable Communities Plan set out a vision for creating thriving communities – places people want to live, not leave – and its *Opportunity for All* report outlines progress on tackling poverty and social exclusion in the UK, including the work done to address poverty issues for the young, the elderly and the disabled. *Social Justice, A Scotland Where Everyone Matters* sets out Scotland’s approach to reducing social disadvantage along with key indicators of progress. The Welsh Assembly Government’s *Communities First* programme seeks to tackle the problems of Wales’ most disadvantaged communities.
- 7.5 Whilst much has already been achieved we need to consider what more can be done to ensure people are not unduly disadvantaged and have access to the decent environments, environmental services and goods that they need.

### Questions

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- Q15 How should we bring together ‘environment’ and ‘social’ concerns at national, regional or local level?
- Q16 What more could be done to tackle environmental inequalities?
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## 8. Helping communities to help themselves

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- 8.1 Improving quality of life – now and for future generations – means building strong, vibrant communities which involve people in making the decisions that affect them.
- 8.2 The quality of people’s lives is strongly influenced by the quality of their local environment. Community transport schemes in both rural and urban areas, credit unions, neighbourhood ‘clean-up’ days, local food initiatives, neighbourhood watch schemes and liveability projects (to tackle crime, drugs and anti-social behaviour such as graffiti and abandoned cars) and community-maintained parks or gardens can all give a powerful boost to local quality of life. What is more, community action of this kind can help tackle some of the big social and environmental issues we face in the UK as a whole.
- 8.3 Communities need the right mix of knowledge, skills, tools, support structures and confidence (sometimes called ‘social capital’ or ‘community capacity’) to put in place their own solutions to local issues. Fully involving the voluntary and community sector in the planning and delivering of services is therefore key. Communities also need the chance to have a voice, to have a say in local decisions which affect them and so help shape their own future.
- 8.4 Some communities can bring together their own groups, networks and projects but others might need a bit more help. In some areas issues such as crime and disorder may reduce the capacity of communities to act and so tackling the community’s local concerns must happen alongside activity which helps communities find their own solutions. As a result, decision-makers and service providers therefore need to put in place a range of approaches that provide the right opportunities, information and support which lead to long-term community ownership, action, creativity and new ideas and allow local people to take greater control over their local environment.

### Questions

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- Q17 What are the main barriers to community action on local, social or environmental issues?
- Q18 What can be done at a national or local level to improve support for community action and participation in all areas?
- Q19 How can we empower communities to take greater control over the quality of their local environment and to tackle their other priorities?
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## 9. Changing behaviour

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- 9.1 How can we help and encourage people to adopt more sustainable behaviours?
- 9.2 A complicated range of interacting factors influence the way we behave. There is no easy answer. In practice, a package of measures is likely to be involved, including information and public involvement, education, economic incentives and standards. It is important to remember that no single element works alone. Information, however good, is only likely to be effective in combination with other policy measures. Nor is this a task that we can achieve on our own: local and regional organisations, businesses, the media, voluntary and community organisations and many others all have a role to play.

### **Information, education and public engagement**

- 9.3 A vast quantity of information is available to us (in the home, in the workplace, when we buy goods and services, as we travel, in places we visit for leisure, or at school, college or university) through an ever-increasing range of communications channels and organisations. Information providers often hope to influence the choices we make in our daily lives. Information on sustainable development has to compete in this field. It needs to be good, and it needs to be consistent and understood.
- 9.4 All sectors can play a part by integrating sustainable development information in their own communications, and by working in partnership with others to educate, raise awareness and involve people. Private, public, voluntary and community organisations can all help to get messages across and encourage positive changes in behaviour, whether through our museums and heritage attractions, arts and media, or in retail and tourism.
- 9.5 Our schools, colleges and universities can play their part in encouraging learning for sustainable development. In England the recent *Sustainable Development Action Plan for Education and Skills*<sup>17</sup> encourages involvement from all education and skills sectors to inspire and stimulate knowledge and awareness among children, young people and adults through a variety of activities. In Wales, it is proposed that sustainable development and global citizenship be a feature of required whole-school policy for all schools. And in Scotland, school performance measures include involvement in a sustainable development programme. The Eco-schools programme in particular has been very successful, with over 1000 schools registered and involved.

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<sup>17</sup> Launched September 2003, information on the Sustainable Development Action Plan for Education and Skills is available at [www.dfes.gov.uk/sd/](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/sd/)

## Other measures to help change behaviour

- 9.6 Information and education should not just stand alone. Recent research<sup>18</sup> has shown that they need to be linked to other policies, such as regulation or economic instruments, to be most effective. For example, encouraging the greater use of energy-efficient products involves a package of actions which include performance standards and labelling, regulations or voluntary agreements to remove the poorest products from the market, and economic incentives for the best ones.
- 9.7 In general markets provide the best way of distributing an economy's resources. This is as true for environmental and social resources as for others. However, many markets have imperfections. They may fail to fully reflect environmental and social costs, or discount the future too heavily. Correcting these tendencies will help to make the market work better and deliver better outcomes, and can guide it to deliver long-term sustainable development objectives.
- 9.8 The most effective form of intervention (whether regulation, economic instruments such as taxes or trading schemes, or voluntary agreements nationally or internationally) will be decided by the nature of the problem.
- 9.9 Regulation has a key role in setting the overall framework and where necessary preventing environmentally harmful activities. Economic instruments also have a central role to play. They can encourage innovation by providing incentives for behaviour that protects or improves the environment, and deterring actions that are damaging. For both consumers and businesses, instruments such as taxes and tradeable permit schemes can allow environmental goals to be achieved at the lowest cost and in the most efficient way. By including environmental costs in prices, they help to signal the structural economic changes needed to move to a more sustainable economy. Money raised can also be used to reduce the level of other taxes or even, where there is a strong case, can reinforce the effectiveness of a tax measure by strengthening incentives for positive action or reducing negative effects.

### Questions

- Q20** How is the UK likely to be most successful in achieving the behaviour changes that will be needed if we are to move toward long-term sustainability, and what would be the right balance of measures by government and others?
- Q21** How can communication and raising awareness support government and others' efforts most effectively?

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<sup>18</sup> From a study on the relative success of various Government information campaigns conducted by Demos/Green Alliance for Defra. Available at [www.green-alliance.org.uk/publications/PubCarrotsSticksSermons\\_page123.aspx](http://www.green-alliance.org.uk/publications/PubCarrotsSticksSermons_page123.aspx)

## 10. Beyond the UK – sustainable development in Europe and internationally

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- 10.1 International action to promote sustainable development is of crucial importance and sets a wider context for our own actions and policies. Our international commitments need to be integrated into our strategies, in both our domestic and international actions.
- 10.2 Economic development, particularly in the world's poorer countries but also in more developed ones, depends on healthy ecosystems, sustainable use of natural resources and social justice. Sustainable development worldwide is essential to make sure there is long-term peace and security, by dealing with the causes of conflict and instability, such as poverty and environmental degradation. Issues of poverty and health cannot be tackled separately from environmental concerns. The UK (at all levels) can and does play an active role internationally in tackling these issues and also needs to be aware of the effect its own economic activities have on other countries.
- 10.3 Since the 1999 strategy was produced, the UK has entered into a number of new international commitments on sustainable development. These include those set out in the Plan of Implementation of the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the Doha Development Agenda of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the Kyoto Protocol on climate change, and the Monterrey Financing for Development Conference.
- 10.4 These commitments cover a wide range of issues including access to water and sanitation, sustainable human settlements, sustainable consumption and production patterns, improved governance, increased finance, better chemicals management, reducing the rate of biodiversity loss, and moving towards more sustainable energy use, agriculture, fisheries, forestry and trade.<sup>19</sup>
- 10.5 The UK works closely with developing countries, delivering increased levels of development assistance to support the priorities set out in countries' own national poverty reduction strategies and development plans. This principle of ownership is important. At the same time, the UK will continue to help countries to embed environmental sustainability and wider sustainable development principles in their poverty reduction strategies.
- 10.6 Achieving existing international commitments will need action by governments, the private sector and civil society, as recognised by the launch of over 300 partnerships at WSSD. Many of these involve UK organisations. On much of this agenda, the UK works with and through the European Union (EU). Promoting sustainable development is one of the EU's main objectives. The UK will play an active role in the forthcoming review of the EU's sustainable development strategy to make sure it is focused on practical ways of delivering sustainable development at home and abroad. The UK's Presidency of the EU and the G8 group of industrialised countries in 2005 will provide opportunities to drive forward the international sustainable development agenda.

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<sup>19</sup> Further details on these commitments is available at [www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/eac-wssd/progress.htm](http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/eac-wssd/progress.htm)

## Questions

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- Q22** What are the top international and EU priorities for sustainable development that should be dealt with in the new sustainable development strategy?
  - Q23** How can we in the UK, at all levels, do more to help other countries achieve sustainable development and to promote and deliver sustainable development internationally or in the EU?
  - Q24** What distinctive contributions can government, business, charities and non-governmental organisations, and the public make and how might the strategy help kick-start those contributions?
  - Q25** What lessons can we learn from other countries to shape our sustainable development strategies and how we put them into practice?
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# 11. Getting the structures right for leadership

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11.1 Different organisations and sectors of society have different roles to play and different responsibilities. But we believe that government at all levels in the UK needs to lead by example and have the right structures and processes in place to help achieve sustainable development.

## At the national level

11.2 We in Government have a particularly important role, providing the framework within which all others operate. Laws, regulations, policies and practices can and do influence the behaviour of others, whether local authorities, other public sector bodies, businesses, voluntary organisations, or individuals.

11.3 Over the last few years we have taken steps to underline the strategic importance of sustainable development in policy terms. For example in the UK Government, Scottish Executive and in the Welsh Assembly Government:

- Cabinet sub-Committees have been set up to consider sustainable development;
- sustainable development is an important part of the Spending Reviews; and
- central guidance has been introduced to help policymakers consider and cost the economic, social and environmental effects of proposals.

11.4 UK Government departments and devolved administrations have also developed their own strategies and high-level policy statements to confirm their commitment to sustainable development and to map the way forward.

11.5 We have also taken steps to manage our own operations more sustainably. The UK Government's 'Framework for Sustainable Development on the Government Estate' sets common targets and commitments on environmental management systems, public reporting, travel, energy, water services and biodiversity for 20 departments and their executive agencies. New targets will be announced in 2004 on waste, procurement, estates management and social impacts. Likewise, the Scottish Executive has a 'Greening Government' policy aimed at improving its environmental performance and reducing the environmental effects of its own activities and operations. The National Assembly for Wales's 'Greening Operations' policy statement set out its strategy for improving environmental performance, from saving energy to green procurement, and its draft sustainable development action plan proposes to go further. And in Northern Ireland a review endorsed applying social and environmental considerations in public procurement decisions, and there are energy efficiency targets for the government estate.

11.6 Much government business is carried out or advised by other public bodies (such as JobCentre Plus or the Environment Agencies) and these too have a role in helping to achieve sustainable development through their actions. We established one such body, the Sustainable Development Commission, to advocate sustainable development across all sectors in the UK and to provide us with advice.

- 11.7 UK Government departments, the devolved administrations and other public bodies are also developing forums which will extend broader partnerships right across the wider reaches of government. Scotland and Wales both have Sustainable Development Forums, and Wales also has a Youth Sustainable Development Forum, and an Advisory Panel on Education for Sustainable Development.
- 11.8 The challenge for us now is to build on the progress made so far and incorporate sustainable development more effectively into all our activities.

### Questions

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- Q26 What more do we in Government need to do to improve our own leadership in sustainable development? How would you like to see reporting improved?
- Q27 What do you see holding back effective action by Government?
- Q28 In what areas is a clearer lead from us needed to promote sustainable development? What form might this take?
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### In the English regions

- 11.9 The UK Government recognises that decisions made at the regional level can take better account of the unique opportunities and challenges faced by an individual region; more decisions are now taken at this level. This can lead to improvements both for the region in question and for the country as a whole. Strategic city-wide government has been restored to London made up of a directly-elected Mayor and an elected assembly. Also referendums will take place in the North East, North West, and Yorkshire and the Humber regions (probably in autumn 2004) on whether to set up elected regional assemblies.
- 11.10 Sustainable development is at the heart of measures to strengthen the English regions. All regions have drawn up regional sustainable development frameworks setting high-level visions for sustainable development in their region. Regions also prepare a range of strategies which are influenced by the frameworks.
- 11.11 For example, Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) have been set up to co-ordinate regional economic development and regeneration and to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. Each RDA co-ordinates the development of a Regional Economic Strategy which is a primary mechanism for the delivery of sustainable economic development. Similarly, the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill currently before Parliament makes contributing to sustainable development in England and Wales a statutory objective for regional and local plans. It requires Regional Chambers, as the regional planning bodies, and local planning authorities to appraise the sustainability of their regional spatial strategies, the successors to regional planning guidance, and local development documents respectively.

## Questions

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- Q29** What are the main challenges for delivering sustainable development in your region?
- Q30** How can Regional Chambers, Regional Development Agencies and other regional organisations better deliver sustainable development? What contributions from a national and local level would help the regions to improve delivery of sustainable development?
- Q31** How can regional sustainable development frameworks better contribute to the delivery of sustainable development?
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### At the local level

- 11.12** Public service providers, private sector businesses and the voluntary and community sector all have a crucial role in improving local quality of life and protecting it for future generations. We have recently put in place a variety of 'tools' which can be used by local government, other service providers and community interests to deliver sustainable development at the local level.
- 11.13** Local Agenda 21 has been a real focus for local and community engagement in many areas and now local authorities in England and Wales prepare Community Strategies for promoting the economic, social and environmental well-being of their areas and to contribute to achieving sustainable development in the UK. Local authorities have also been given new wide-ranging powers to promote the social, economic and environmental well-being of their areas as well as freedoms and flexibilities which could all be used to help put the principles of sustainable development into practice. Local authorities in Wales are also invited to make policy agreements with the Welsh Assembly Government that include action to promote sustainable development. A review of performance management arrangements in local government is in progress. There is a statutory partnership agreement between the Assembly and Local Government in Wales, and an SD Compact (due to be renewed) between the Welsh Assembly Government and the Welsh Local Government Association.
- 11.14** The Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 introduced a statutory Best Value regime which includes an explicit reference to sustainable development. The Act also introduces statutory Community Planning arrangements and a power for local authorities to advance the well-being of their area or persons in it. Northern Ireland has developed a unique approach to implementing sustainable development at local level by establishing Local Strategy Partnerships, and their associated integrated development strategies, under the EU Peace II Programme. A key objective of Peace II is to ensure the sustainability of an agreed, inclusive partnership approach to local planning and decision-making.

**11.15** Following the 'Rio Summit' in 1992, and the 1999 strategy, local authorities and their communities clearly demonstrated commitment, creativity and activity in delivering sustainable development at the local level. The challenge is now to re-energise this delivery and to ensure the tools described above are being used effectively to integrate social, economic and environmental goals, and that they consider wider regional or even international impacts of local action and the longer-term consequences of meeting more immediate local needs.

### Questions

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- Q32** What are the main challenges for delivering sustainable development in your local area?
  - Q33** How can we re-energise local delivery and strengthen local leadership for sustainable development?
  - Q34** How could local stakeholders make the most of existing partnership arrangements, strategy requirements, freedoms and flexibilities to improve delivery of sustainable development?
  - Q35** What can be done to build the capacity of local professionals and local communities to deliver sustainable development?
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# 12. The business contribution to sustainable development

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- 12.1 The involvement and performance of business is critical to delivering environmental, social and economic goals. Business investment, enterprise and trading are essential in creating the wealth to tackle poverty and other social challenges at home and abroad. Government has an important role to play through active economic, social and environmental policies that support or stimulate action. But ultimately it is the action taken by businesses themselves that will deliver a supply of products and services that are clean, resource-efficient, and fair to employees and communities. Examples include:
- more systematic management of the impacts of their products and processes, of their transport and distribution operations, and of their supply chains;
  - building stakeholder confidence by being more open and transparent through reporting against meaningful key performance indicators and targets;
  - actively keeping customers informed through product declarations or labelling; and
  - by communicating sustainability aims to the workforce and local community.
- 12.2 Within the UK, businesses of all types face growing economic competition to develop new ideas, raise their productivity, and create new products and high-value services. And the intangible asset of corporate reputation is now a vital part of building and keeping market value, and is increasingly vulnerable to perceived failures in social and environmental responsibility.
- 12.3 In an increasingly global, knowledge-based economy, there will be greater opportunities for whole systems of production and consumption to be radically transformed rather than changed gradually – with step-changes in terms of resource use and consumer choice. Innovation is also essential to tackling the major environmental pressures the world faces.
- 12.4 However, to achieve step-change benefits will need organisational, social and political innovation just as much as new science, technology and know-how. In the past, profitable growth, environmental protection and social responsibility have often been seen as conflicting goals. And while there are many good examples of UK businesses at the forefront of sustainable development innovation, much more needs to be done to spread best practice deeper and wider across all sectors and companies of all sizes.

## Questions

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- Q36** What more needs to be done to improve the business contribution to delivering sustainable development?
- Q37** What actions should we take to support, enable or require a higher level of business contribution?
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## 13. Measuring our progress

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- 13.1** Indicators of sustainable development have a variety of different uses including raising awareness, improving communication, simplifying complicated information, setting targets and measuring our progress.
- 13.2** We have long recognised the power of indicators, and in 1996 the UK became one of the first countries in the world to produce a set of sustainable development indicators. Our work on indicators continues to be highly regarded and influences other indicator sets, and work on the selection and use of indicators continues to evolve in the UK Government and devolved administrations.

### UK indicators

- 13.3** The UK Government has 15 headline sustainable development indicators that have been the main way of communicating progress against the current strategy – in UK Government annual reports, on the sustainable development website<sup>20</sup>, and in *Quality of life barometer* summary leaflets.
- 13.4** The UK Government made a commitment that ‘where a trend in the headline indicators is unacceptable, the Government will adjust policies accordingly, and will look to others to join it in taking action’.
- 13.5** A wider set of indicators in *Quality of life counts* provided a baseline assessment in 1999 for the 15 headline indicators and 132 core indicators. The criteria that were used for choosing the indicators are in Annex A. An update was published in March 2004 to provide a review of progress after five years. Many of the indicators are based on ones already used across Government for monitoring different policies so they have also been reported separately elsewhere. Many of the indicators have also been adopted as part of other more recent indicator sets developed for other purposes.

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<sup>20</sup> The latest information on each of the UK Government’s headline indicators is available at [www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/indicators/index.htm](http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/indicators/index.htm)

## UK Government 15 headline indicators

1	Economic output	GDP per head (UK)
2	Investment	Total and social investment relative to GDP (UK)
3	Employment	People of working age in work (UK)
4	Poverty and social exclusion	Working-age people in workless households (GB) Working-age people without qualifications (GB) Children living in relative low income households (GB) Single elderly households experiencing fuel poverty (Eng)
5	Education	Level 2 qualifications at age 19 (UK)
6	Health	Expectancy of good or fairly good health (GB)
7	Housing conditions	Households in non-decent housing (Eng)
8	Crime	Recorded theft of and from a vehicle (E&W) Recorded burglary in a dwelling (E&W) Recorded robbery (E&W)
9	Climate change	Emissions of greenhouse gases (UK)
10	Air quality	Days when pollution is moderate or higher (UK)
11	Road traffic	Road traffic volume (GB) Traffic intensity (per GDP) (GB)
12	River water quality	River lengths of good or fair chemical quality (UK) River lengths of good or fair biological quality (UK)
13	Wildlife	Populations of farmland birds (UK) Populations of woodland birds (UK)
14	Land use	Homes built on previously developed land (Eng)
15	Waste	Household waste (E&W) All arisings and management (E&W)

**13.6** The devolved administrations have also used indicators to reflect their own priorities and circumstances. The indicator sets of the Scottish Executive<sup>21</sup> and National Assembly for Wales<sup>22</sup> are presently made up of 24 and 12 indicators respectively, but the Assembly's revised sustainable development scheme envisages the addition of a small suite of summary indicators. A set of indicators for Northern Ireland is being developed.

**13.7** There is considerable overlap between the indicator sets with, in most cases, indicators being identical or similar to indicators in the UK headline or core set. However, due to a lack of comparable information, some indicators in the UK set only cover Great Britain, England and Wales, or just England, whilst some indicators used in Scotland or Wales are not reflected in the UK Government's set.

<sup>21</sup> Further information on Scottish Executive indicators is available at [www.sustainable.scotland.gov.uk](http://www.sustainable.scotland.gov.uk)

<sup>22</sup> Further information on National Assembly for Wales indicators is available at [www.wales.gov.uk/themessustainabledev/index.htm](http://www.wales.gov.uk/themessustainabledev/index.htm)

## Scottish Executive 24 indicators

1	Sustainable prosperity*	Ratio of carbon dioxide emissions per GDP
2	Work – people as a resource*	Unemployed working-age people
3	Population structure	Population which is working age
4	Waste production†	Municipal waste arisings
5	Waste recycling†	Household waste recycled
6	Waste landfilled	Biodegradable municipal wastes land filled
7	Climate change†	Greenhouse gas emissions
8	Air quality	Air quality management areas
9	Water quality†	Rivers identified as 'poor' or 'seriously polluted'
10	Biodiversity*	Biodiversity action plan species and habitats stable or increasing
11	Sea fisheries*	Fish stocks within safe biological limits
12	Energy – consumed*	Electricity consumed
13	Energy – renewable*	Electricity generated from renewable sources
14	Travel – distance†	Total vehicle kilometres
15	Travel – industry*	Freight industry (tonne kilometres and GDP)
16	Travel – mode*	Journeys to work not using car
17	Travel – accessibility*	Households within 6 minutes walk of a bus service
18	Home life	Children living in workless households
19	Preparing for life	16-19 year olds not in education, training or employment
20	Fuel poverty	Households living in fuel poverty
21	Social concern	Homeless people entitled to permanent accommodation
22	Crime†	Recorded crimes
23	Volunteering*	People taking part in voluntary activities
24	Health†	Life expectancy at birth

† equivalent to UK Government Headline indicator

\* equivalent to UK Government *Quality of life counts* indicator

**13.8** More widely, within central and local government, different sectors, European and other international organisations, and non-governmental organisations there are now a considerable number of indicators.

## National Assembly for Wales 12 indicators

1	Employment†	People of working age in work
2	Education†	Level 2 qualifications at age 19
3	Crime†	Recorded theft of and from a vehicle Recorded burglary in a dwelling Recorded robbery
4	Housing†	Unfit dwellings
5	Climate change†	Emissions of greenhouse gases
6	Air quality†	Days when pollution is moderate or higher
7	River water quality†	River lengths of good or fair chemical quality River lengths of good or fair biological quality
8	Wildlife†	Widespread breeding bird species increased significantly
9	Waste†	Total household waste Household waste recycled or composted
10	Welsh language	People who are Welsh speakers (all aged 3 or over) Children who are Welsh speakers (aged 3 to 14)
11	Electricity – renewable sources*	Electricity generated from renewable sources
12	Ecological footprint	Wales' global ecological footprint

The Welsh indicator set is likely to be extended in coming months. In particular, the Welsh Assembly Government will seek to identify summary indicators of:

- The global impact of consumption in Wales
- Biodiversity within Wales
- The overall level of deprivation in Wales
- The level of economic activity
- Genuine economic progress, taking account of environmental factors, resources and well-being

† equivalent to UK Government Headline indicator

\* equivalent to UK Government *Quality of life counts* indicator

## Indicators and the English regions

13.9 *Regional quality of life counts*<sup>23</sup>, provides consistent English regional versions of the 15 UK Government headline indicators, and is published each year. These are intended to raise public awareness about sustainable development and provide a useful input to regional monitoring. In drawing up their regional sustainable development frameworks, English regions have also developed their own indicators to measure progress against their own objectives. The choice of indicators varies between regions to reflect different circumstances and priorities.

## Indicators at the local level

13.10 Drawing on the experience of both the UK Government and English and Welsh local authorities, a menu of indicators *Local quality of life counts*<sup>24</sup> was developed to help raise awareness and monitor progress at the local level. The menu provided guidance on how to develop indicators, which where possible was consistent with indicators at the national level. The Audit Commission<sup>25</sup> has built on this work and has produced and tested a set of local quality of life performance indicators. Local authorities have drawn on these and other indicators to create their own sets of indicators to measure progress against the objectives in their Community Strategy. The choice of indicators varies between authorities to reflect different circumstances and priorities.

### Questions

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- Q38** What are the strengths and weaknesses of the current sustainable development indicators, and how they are used?
- In general
  - More specifically indicators used:
    - in the UK Government’s headline set;
    - in the wider UK core set in *Quality of life counts*;
    - in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland;
    - in the English regions;
    - in local authorities; and
    - elsewhere (for example, sectoral indicators).
- Q39** What needs to be monitored and measured UK-wide?
- Q40** Who are the audiences for indicators and how could we better meet their needs?
- Q41** Should any set of indicators supporting the new strategy
- concentrate on just the main priorities in the strategic framework; or
  - be wider and more comprehensive?
- Q42** Should important high-level sustainable development indicators focus on monitoring
- general progress towards final outcomes;
  - specific delivery actions and targets; or
  - both?
- 

<sup>23</sup> 'Regional quality of life counts – 2002: Regional versions of the national headline indicators of sustainable development, 3rd edition'. 2003, Defra, PB 8346. Available at [www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/indicators/regional/index.htm](http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/indicators/regional/index.htm)

<sup>24</sup> 'Local quality of life counts: A handbook for a menu of local indicators of sustainable development'. 2000, DETR, 00-EP-0602. Available at [www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/indicators/local/index.htm](http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/indicators/local/index.htm)

<sup>25</sup> The Audit Commission's website is [www.audit-commission.gov.uk](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk)

# 14. Getting your views: the consultation process

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- 14.1 The consultation process began on 21 April, and will last just over three months to 31 July 2004.
- 14.2 We are running different types of consultation to make sure we receive a broad set of responses from as many organisations and individuals as possible. These are:
- A structured web-based consultation open to everybody.
  - A virtual panel process.
  - A series of events throughout the UK.

## Open web-based consultation

- 14.3 You can give us your views on any or all of the questions raised in this consultation document by taking part online through the UK Government's sustainable development website at [www.sustainable-development.gov.uk](http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk)
- 14.4 You can also send us your views on the questions (A Word document listing them is also online) by post or e-mail. We can also provide this document in an alternative format, such as large print, Braille or audio. Our contact details are below.

Paul Rainey  
Sustainable Development Unit  
Defra  
9 Millbank  
c/o 17 Smith Square  
London  
SW1P 3JR

e-mail: [Sdsconsultation@defra.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Sdsconsultation@defra.gsi.gov.uk)  
tel: 020 7238 5811

- 14.5 A Welsh language version of the document is on the Welsh Assembly Government's website at [www.wales.gov.uk/themessustainabledev/index.htm](http://www.wales.gov.uk/themessustainabledev/index.htm), and you can get a bilingual Welsh/English hard copy from:

Strategic Policy Unit  
National Assembly for Wales  
Cathays Park  
Cardiff  
CF10 3NQ  
tel: 029 2082 5111

- 14.6 In line with our policies of openness, we will make copies of the responses we receive available to the public. If you do not agree with this, you must clearly ask us to treat your response confidentially. We will not treat any confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system in e-mail responses as a request of this type.

## A virtual panel process

- 14.7 A virtual panel of invited individuals, representing a cross-section of UK organisations and groups, will take part in a separate web-based consultation. This will be in two stages, each lasting about five weeks. After the first stage, a report of the key points generated will be put on the website so as to encourage additional comments from the public as well as the virtual panel.

## Consultation events

- 14.8 We will hold various events during the consultation period to get views from people in all parts of society, and to look at some important themes for sustainable development in the UK. You can see more details of the events on the website as dates and venues are set.

## When the consultation has ended

- 14.9 At the end of the consultation you can get copies of the responses by calling at or writing to the following addresses, or by phoning the numbers given below. If you are calling at one of the libraries, you should give them at least 24 hours' notice of what you need. You will have to pay an administrative charge to cover photocopying and postage costs.

<p><b>In England</b></p> <p>Defra Information Resource Centre, Lower Ground Floor, Ergon House, 17 Smith Square, London SW1P 3JR</p> <p>tel: 020 7238 6575 e-mail: <a href="mailto:defra.library@defra.gsi.gov.uk">defra.library@defra.gsi.gov.uk</a></p>	<p><b>In Scotland</b></p> <p>Scottish Executive Library, Saughton House, Broomhouse Drive, Edinburgh, EH11 3XD</p> <p>tel: 0131 244 4552</p>
<p><b>In Wales</b></p> <p>Strategic Policy Unit National Assembly for Wales Cathays Park Cardiff CF10 3NQ</p> <p>tel: 029 2082 3388</p>	<p><b>In Northern Ireland</b></p> <p>Angela Kane Department of Environment Environmental Policy Division 20-24 Donegall Street Belfast</p> <p>tel: 02890 (5) 44582</p>

## The six consultation criteria

14.10 We are following six criteria for public consultation. In summary, these mean that we:

- allow at least 12 weeks for a formal consultation;
- clearly set out the questions asked and the timescale for responses;
- make sure that the consultation is clear, concise and accessible;
- let people know what responses we receive and how they contribute to developing new UK sustainable development strategy;
- monitor how effective the consultation is; and
- check that the consultation follows the principles of better regulation. An initial regulatory impact assessment (RIA) has been prepared to accompany this consultation document and is on the website ([www.sustainable-development.gov.uk](http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk)). An RIA is an assessment of the impact of policy options in terms of the costs, benefits and risks of a proposal.

If you have any reason to complain about the consultation process, please contact:

Sofia Rychlik-Hadley  
Consultation Coordinator  
Defra  
9 Millbank  
c/o 17 Smith Square  
London  
SW1P 3JR

# Glossary

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**Elected Regional Assemblies** These will be new directly-elected bodies in the English regions. They will be responsible for developing a strategic vision for improving the quality of life in their regions, setting priorities, delivering regional strategies, and allocating funding. An assembly will only be established if the region votes in favour.

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**National Assembly for Wales (NAW)** This is the democratic Assembly for the people of Wales. It is responsible for making most secondary legislation for Wales, for deciding how public monies shall be allocated, and for the delivering a range of public services. Executive functions are generally delegated to the First Minister and through him to the Welsh Assembly Government. The Government of Wales Act 1998 lists the main areas in which the Assembly has responsibilities.

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**Northern Ireland Administration** A term used in this document to refer to the function of 'the Government of Northern Ireland' irrespective of whether devolution is in place or suspended as the case may be.

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**Northern Ireland Assembly** The Northern Ireland Assembly was established as part of the Belfast Agreement. The Assembly is the prime source of authority for all devolved responsibilities and has full legislative and executive authority. The Assembly was suspended from midnight on 14 October 2002. Elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly were held on 26 November 2003. The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has assumed responsibility for the direction of the Northern Ireland Departments.

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**Northern Ireland Executive Committee** The Ministers of the Northern Ireland Assembly. In effect, the devolved Government of Northern Ireland. As devolution is currently suspended there is no Northern Ireland Executive Committee at present.

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**Regional Chambers/Assemblies** Regional Chambers are voluntary, multi-party and inclusive bodies. They have been established in each of the eight English regions outside London, building on the partnership working arrangements that already existed in some regions between local authorities and regional partners. Each is recognised as being representative of the interests of the region in relation to the work of the region's Regional Development Agency. All of the Chambers have adopted the title 'Assembly'.

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Regional Development Agencies (RDAs)	These are non-departmental public bodies whose role is to promote sustainable economic development through promoting business competitiveness, social and physical regeneration, and co-ordinating the work of regional and local partners in areas such as training, investment, regeneration and business support.
Welsh Assembly Government (WAG)	This is the devolved government for Wales. It is drawn from, part of, and directly responsible to the National Assembly for Wales.
regional sustainable development frameworks (rsdfs)	High-level documents setting objectives and priorities for sustainable development in the English regions. They are drawn up in partnership by public, private and voluntary sector organisations and inform other regional strategies.
Scottish Executive	This is the devolved government for Scotland. It is responsible for virtually all matters within Scotland except those listed in The Scotland Act 1998 which are 'reserved' to Westminster and the UK Government.
Sustainable Development Commission (SDC)	This is an advisory non-departmental public body, set up in 2000 and reporting to the Prime Minister, the First Ministers in Scotland and Wales and the First and Deputy First Ministers in Northern Ireland. Its role is to promote sustainable development, review progress towards it, and build consensus on the actions needed if further progress is to be achieved.
UK Government	This is the elected government for England, and for the UK on all matters that are not devolved (for example, foreign affairs and defence).

## Annex A: Criteria for choosing the indicators in *Quality of life counts*

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The UK core set of indicators in *Quality of life counts* was intended:

- to describe, overall, whether we are achieving sustainable development;
- to highlight key national-scale policy initiatives relevant to sustainable development and to monitor whether we are meeting key targets and commitments in those areas;
- to educate the public about what sustainable development means;
- to raise public and business awareness of particular actions which they need to take in order to achieve more sustainable development;
- to report progress to international audiences; and
- to help to make transparent the trade-offs and synergies between sustainable development objectives.

An indicator was therefore included in the UK core set if it satisfied one of the following criteria:

- it is an overarching 'state of the nation' indicator, describing a key objective (broadly, these are the 'headline indicators');
- it reflects a key international or national commitment or target;
- it supports a key message for individuals or business especially in relation to key actions needed, for example, on energy efficiency, health and safety at work, ethical trading etc.; and
- it is recommended for use in international reporting (unless another indicator reflecting the same or similar issue is felt to be more appropriate in the UK).

There are certain scientific and technical criteria, which an indicator also needed to satisfy. It should:

- be representative;
- be scientifically valid;
- be simple and easy to interpret;
- show trends over time;
- give early warning about irreversible trends where possible;
- be sensitive to the changes it is meant to indicate;
- be based on readily available data or be available at reasonable cost;
- be based on data adequately documented and of known quality;
- be capable of being updated at regular intervals; and
- have a target level or guideline against which to compare it.

Overall, the indicator set also needed to be as comprehensive as possible and reflect an appropriate balance between the issues. In practice, this is difficult. Data are more readily available in some areas, and some issues are hard to quantify.





Produced by the UK Government (with Defra as lead department),  
the Scottish Executive, Welsh Assembly Government and  
Northern Ireland Administration.



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru  
Welsh Assembly Government



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**Environment**  
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