



SECTION 4

Towards sustainable services

Guide for services and paths
to improvement for:

ENVIRONMENT

Sustainable Development at the service level

The Local Government in Scotland Act (2003) established Sustainable Development as a statutory duty within the Best Value regime. The Best Value regime requires all local authorities to continuously improve their performance and secure services of the highest quality at a cost that is acceptable to their local communities. **Sustainable development is an integral part of local authorities' efforts to deliver Best Value.**

'A local authority which secures Best Value will be able to demonstrate a contribution to sustainable development — consideration of the social, economic and environmental impacts of activities and decisions both in the shorter and longer term.'

As well as being a corporate aim, sustainable development should be part of every service's plans and operations. This chapter aims to answer the question **"what would a sustainable development approach to environment look like?"**

As Chapter 7 of the Best Value guidance states, "2. Contributing to the achievement of sustainable development (should be) reflected in the authority's objectives and highlighted in all strategies and plans at corporate and service level"

This chapter provides a **self-assessment questionnaire** outlining **Paths to Improvement**. This is designed to enable you to **assess your current position**. It also sets a framework within which you may, step by step, progressively engage more fully with sustainable development.

On the right hand side of each 'Paths to Improvement' table are three columns headed **'Policy'**, **'Being Implemented'**, and **'Outcomes'**. These stages enable the authority to assess whether they have reached the stage of policy; or progressed to implementation; or have moved on to reach outcomes.

The stages are defined below:

Policy	The Council has considered the topic, then adopted a policy to address it. There is a commitment and decision to seek change and improvement ; and outcomes are being set.
Being Implemented	The Council is implementing policy ; this is reflected in financial allocations ; revenue and/or capital allocations; plans and strategies for the topic; agreement with relevant partner agencies; staff responsibilities and job descriptions. Resources and procedures are in place to secure change and improvement.
Outcomes	The outcomes of the policy are being measured, and there are measurable deliverables. Change and improvement is being achieved, and is being monitored and reported.

It must be stressed that the process of continuous improvement is not prescriptive:

- **If this chapter does not pose the right questions for you please adapt the questionnaire accordingly.** Many local authorities have done this, to great effect.
- **It is also not intended that the questionnaire should be used solely as a checklist with 'yes' or 'no' answers.** Please add detail, such as – what evidence do you have to show that policy is being implemented? Who is responsible for this?



Towards sustainable services: Environment

Placing the environment at the heart of all policy making is one of the cornerstones of sustainable development, and of Government policy.

That centrality is reinforced through the requirements of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). However, sustainable development also requires that the protection and enhancement of the environment, including biodiversity, is achieved alongside economic well-being and social inclusion.

Therefore, a more joined-up approach is needed which:

- **Tackles environmental injustice**, addressing the inequitable distribution of environmental quality;
- Encourages the development of **'green' goods and services**, in line with Scotland's *Going for Green Growth: a Green Jobs Strategy for Scotland*; and also
- Provides **environmental stewardship**, and protects and enhances biodiversity in line with the Biodiversity Duty on all public bodies.

The key principles that govern policy on environmental stewardship include:

- Identifying, protecting and where possible **enhancing environmental assets**;
- Protecting and enhancing **biodiversity**.
- The **'polluter pays' principle**: i.e. ensuring that true costs are borne by those that impose them; and
- The **precautionary principle**, which enables decisions to be taken and appropriate safeguards instigated in situations where there is scientific uncertainty and potential for harm.

Assessment of environmental assets, and of risks to these and to human health, is now undertaken by reference to the baseline information gathered in the preparation of Environmental Statements. Publishing and exchanging this information in an integrated and open way should avoid data being duplicated or fragmented, mean that relevant policy decisions can be more clearly evidence based, and support **constructive public participation** as required by the Aarhus Convention.

Paths to improvement include:	Policy	Being Implemented	Outcomes
Is environmental justice being secured by taking steps to reduce the relatively higher exposure to environmental hazards and nuisances of those living in deprived communities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are steps being taken to ensure full public participation , alerting communities to developments, providing information, reacting to responses, and explaining and informing about decisions?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is local air quality management being achieved including the objectives set down in the Air Quality (Scotland) Regulations and, where required, implementing Air Quality Management Areas?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are the management and quality of water systems being improved in accordance with the Water Framework Directive and the requirement for River Basin Management Plans?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is the Council working with community plan partners and neighbouring authorities as appropriate towards an integrated approach to management of the coastal zone ?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is contaminated and derelict land being identified, treated and restored, including finding and implementing beneficial end uses?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is local biodiversity being considered by all services , and safeguarded and enhanced in accordance with the duty under the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 and the priorities set out in Local Biodiversity Action Plans?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Paths to improvement include:	Policy	Being Implemented	Outcomes
Are the environmental agencies being supported in identifying then reducing both specific and diffuse pollution ?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is the authority undertaking a co-ordinated and integrated approach for systematically assessing and monitoring the significant environmental effects of all strategies, plans and programmes to meet SEA (Strategic Environmental Assessment) requirements?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
See also ensuring environmental improvements also contribute economic and social benefits (under economic development)			
See also protection and enhancement of the natural and built environment, and support for green networks/ corridors and greenspace (under land use planning)			
See also encouraging potential for low impact development (under land use planning)			

This chapter is part of the **Sustainable Scotland Network's Best Value & Sustainable Development Toolkit**. To view the complete toolkit, go to www.sustainable-scotland.net/bestvalue