



SECTION 4

Towards sustainable services

Guide for services and paths
to improvement for:

SOCIAL SERVICES

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 social services 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: Social Services

After education, social services and housing are the highest spending departments in councils.

The sector has seen substantial growth in recent years, much in private and voluntary organisations, and social enterprises working alongside local authorities. The work of social service departments with children and families, with the elderly, and in community care, makes an **important contribution to the goals of social inclusion and the re-generation of communities**. These services, together with the critical linkage to community health (q.v.), underpin the fabric of society. In particular, a major societal change being faced by Scotland is an increasing elderly population with increasing expectations for public services and formal support due to the potential reduction in informal care (by unpaid carers). Implications include how to maintain service quality (maintaining people at home, fast and local access to services), the economic costs of provision, and the **environmental implications of increased mobility** as institutional care reduces and more services are provided in the home.

Yet how to set out a social services 'contribution to sustainable development' has been seen as difficult because the social policy aspects of sustainable development have often been taken forward separately from the economic and environmental ones. Social inclusion is rarely treated as integral to sustainable development. The suggestions for action below are therefore more tentative than in other policy areas, such as transport, where the agenda is well established. **The emphasis is on joined-up service provision**, consistent with the agreement between NHS Boards, Councils and the Scottish Government to support outcomes driven joint performance management approach to health and social care provision. In a number of areas, **Community Health and Social Care Partnerships** have been established to underpin the governance and management arrangements required to deliver this shared agenda.

Paths to improvement include:	Policy	Being Implemented	Outcomes
Do those engaged in social services have access to, and are they supported by, other parts of the council (and its community plan partners) in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● tackling fuel poverty and home security; ● getting people back to work and training; and ● establishing and supporting social economy organisations? 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are social services engaged in regeneration projects , drawing on their understanding and knowledge of communities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are improvements to diet , local sourcing of fresh or organic food, better handling of waste and more energy efficient transportation of meals encouraged (drawing on parallel work in education departments and the health service)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are 'travel to care' miles optimised , including sharing with NHS transport: reducing the length of journeys made by both care workers and their clients to access facilities, whether day care and/or care in their homes?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are there facilities to recycle and re-use specialist equipment ?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is there support for care homes and other care facilities which encourages their energy and resource efficiency (just as authorities will be doing for their own buildings)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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