

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000

PUBLICATION SCHEME OF THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

Effective from: 5 January 2004

Updated: 23 November 2010

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Introduction

Background to the requirement to have a scheme in place

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 received Royal Assent on 30 November 2000. It gives a general right of access to all types of recorded information held by public authorities, sets out exemptions from that right and places a number of obligations on public authorities. A 'public authority' is defined in the Act, and includes but is not restricted to central and local government, non-departmental public bodies, the police, the health service and schools, colleges and universities. Any person who makes a request to a public authority for information must be informed whether the public authority holds that information and, subject to exemptions, supplied with that information.

Individuals already have the right of access to information about themselves under the Data Protection Act 1998. As far as public authorities are concerned, the Freedom of Information Act will extend this right to allow public access to all types of information held.

Every public authority will be required to adopt and maintain a publication scheme setting out the classes of information it holds, the manner in which it intends to publish the information, and whether a charge will be made for the information. The purpose of a scheme is to ensure a significant amount of information is available, without the need for a specific request. Schemes are intended to encourage organisations to publish more information pro-actively and to develop a greater culture of openness.

The following scheme seeks to demonstrate the Sustainable Development Commission's commitment to both word and spirit of this legislation.

1a Title of the organisation: Sustainable Development Commission

The Sustainable Development Commission and its function

The Sustainable Development Commission is the Government's independent adviser on sustainable development, reporting to the Prime Minister, the First Ministers of Scotland and Wales and the First Minister and Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland. Through advocacy, advice and appraisal, we help put sustainable development at the heart of Government policy.

On 1 February 2009, the Sustainable Development Commission (SDC) became an executive non-departmental body (Executive NDPB). The SDC is registered with Companies House as a Company Limited by Guarantee, and registered with the Cabinet Office as an Executive NDPB. It is wholly owned by Government.

As a separate legal entity the SDC will:

- reinforce its remit as the UK Government's sustainable development watchdog and advisor;
- have more freedom to make decisions over staffing and finances;
- continue to have a close working relationship with the UK Government and the Devolved Administrations.

Previously the SDC was an advisory NDPB and its secretariat functioned as part of core Defra.

The SDC's expert Commissioners will continue to be recruited as public appointments and appointed by the Prime Minister with the agreement of the Devolved Administrations.

The Devolved Administrations (Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales) will all be part-owners of the new Sustainable Development Commission Ltd (Company No: 6798740).

A framework document has been drawn up by Defra and the Devolved Administrations in consultation with the Sustainable Development Commission (SDC), and sets out the broad framework within which the SDC will operate: <http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/publications.php?id=1035>

How the SDC is organised

The SDC currently has 11 Commissioners appointed by the Prime Minister and the First Ministers of the Devolved Administrations. It is chaired by Will Day. The Commissioners meet four times a year in plenary session and twice a year, a smaller group meets in one of the devolved administrations. Biographies of all the Commissioners can be found here: <http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/pages/commissioners.html>

Commissioner appointments are made through Defra in compliance with the Nolan recommendations on public sector appointments and vacancies are notified on the SDC website.

There are currently 60 members of the Secretariat headed by Chief Executive, Andrew Lee. The Secretariat recruits from both the public and private sector to ensure a range of expertise is available to the Commission.

The Commission Secretariat has four offices throughout the UK. The contact details for each office can be found here <http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/pages/788-contact-us.html> Each office has its own webpage; they can be accessed here:

<http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/scotland.php>

<http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/wales.php>

http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/northern_ireland.php

There is no fixed base for Commissioners who, as members of a UK body, meet at different locations throughout the UK.

The remit of the Sustainable Development Commission

In 2005, the UK Government's Sustainable Development Strategy, *Securing the Future*, strengthened the SDC's role to act as an independent watchdog, scrutinising the UK Government's progress on implementing the strategy, and monitoring targets on the sustainable management of the Government estate and sustainable procurement. The SDC performs a similar scrutiny and advisory role for the Scottish Government, and the Welsh Assembly Government works closely with the SDC in Wales which provides it with policy advice on sustainable development. Proposals for the SDC's role in Northern Ireland are currently being considered by NI Ministers.

- Undertake watchdog appraisals of Government's progress
- Produce evidence-based public reports on contentious environmental, social and economic issues
- Draw on expert opinion to advise key Ministers, policy-makers and stakeholders across Government
- Respond openly to Government policy initiatives
- Invite debates on controversial subjects

1b Job title of the person with overall responsibility for the scheme:

SDC Chief Executive: Andrew Lee

1c Person responsible for maintaining the scheme:

Web Manager: Mariam Saleemi

1e The SDC's purpose and aims of the published scheme:

To demonstrate compliance with the legislation detailed in the foregoing sections and provide details of the information held by SDC and available to the public.

The SDC intends this publication scheme to be a living document, which will be modified and developed in light of the SDC's work, public comment and feedback.

2. Classes of information published and their format

2a The following are available now in hard copy (obtainable from SDC, or by telephone to 0300 068 6305 or by email request to enquiries@sd-commission.org.uk) and on the website www.sd-commission.org.uk :

Operational information

Management Framework Document

Role, Function and Structure

Commissioners and Register of Interests
 Secretariat
 Remit and Objectives
 Welsh Language Scheme

Principles of SD and SDC policy areas

Board meeting papers

SD Principles
 Current work programme

Background and Research Papers

Initial policy papers
 Consultants Reports
 Reports by the SDC

Annual Reports

News Releases

All news releases issued by the SDC: <http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/presslist.php>

2b Classes to be published at a later date

None proposed at this time.

2c Exemptions

Personnel records – exempt CoPAGI
Commercial in Confidence information on registered traders and suppliers of goods;
Papers prepared for Commission Plenary Meetings and topic group meetings

2d Overview of decision process

The Commission agreed to adopt this scheme at their plenary meeting 5/6 November 2003.

The exclusion of papers for Commission Plenary meetings reflects the fact that:

- SDC meets only four times each year for its core business sessions, and discussions cover a wide range of topics including items exempted under CoPAGI.
- Pre-meeting papers are frequently written by one individual and have not been seen or agreed by the Commission as a whole. Often they are written to be provocative, or to be innovative in their approach, or raise awareness of a topic.

The Commission has excluded provision of commercial information from traders and suppliers; this is because such information supplied by a third party is exempted under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

3. How copies of the documents can be obtained

All documentation can be obtained from the Secretariat, Room 101, 55 Whitehall, London, SW1A 2HH or by accessing the web-site at: <http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/index.htm>

Documents on the SDC website can be downloaded free of charge i.e. there is no charge by us, but the user will have to meet any charges by their Internet service provider, personal printing costs, etc. For those without Internet access, a single printout as on the website can be made available by post from the SDC Office.

Requests can be made by telephone to 0300 068 6354 or by email to enquiries@sd-commission.org.uk

3a. What information will be chargeable

No charges are made for any SDC publication including hard copies

3b Copyright

Material from SDC publications, documents and research may be reproduced without permission as long as full references are given for each and every use of such material.

4. Approval Questionnaire

The following is provided for use in assessing compliance with the Freedom of Information Act s19 (3).

Answers to questions which refer to "the public interest" have been based on an interpretation that it covers "what is of genuine interest or concern to the general public".

1a Have you had regard to the public interest in allowing access to information held by you?

The SDC is committed to the policy of openness in its information. The SDC actively seeks to make its presence known and to publicise the knowledge it can impart. We seek to influence policy-makers and decision-makers throughout the public and private sector. We seek also to bring together SDC practitioners to facilitate sharing good practice and exemplification of the business case for sustainable development. We also distribute an e-digest of information on events and activities to a number of supporters and practitioners on the SDC database. We are keen to develop a high profile as experts in an increasingly sought-after area of knowledge.

1b Have you had regard to the public interest in the publication of reasons for decisions made by you?

We give advice to senior policy makers across the UK in government and business. Our advice is based on research undertaken in-house or by consultants. We publish our telephone numbers and our e and postal addresses widely and invite members of the public to comment on our publications. However, we do not have a specific remit to, nor do we have the resources to deal with specific requests for advice from the general public, to assist with queries about sustainable development, or to educate or inform the general public, except in a very generalised way.

1c Have you considered frequently asked questions and specific areas of interest when determining your classes of information?

Our work programme deals with a small number of topics that we consider to be of high interest within the sustainable development arena. We address our work specifically to policy makers and decision makers but we use the web-site and make available hard copies of our research, in order to disseminate more widely our findings and the opinions we draw from the research.

1d Have you made information available within your scheme that has not previously been made available under other information regimes?

No

1e Have you decided not to include in your scheme any information, which has been made available by you in the past?

No.

1f What steps have you taken to ensure that your scheme is accessible to people with disabilities, and to those in disadvantaged communities, and, where appropriate is produced in other languages?

Due to the small size of the Secretariat and the limited resources available, we will treat all such requests on an individual basis to ensure we meet their specific needs. We will draw on the policy knowledge of our sponsor department, DEFRA, where appropriate.

5 Classes of Information

The information available from the SDC is listed below in the following broad categories:

Organisational:

Class	Organisational
Description	Framework Management Document
Availability	http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/index.htm Hard Copy

Role, Function and Structure:

Class	Overview of the SDC
Description	General information about the SDC, its remit and objectives
Availability	http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/index.htm

Class	Membership of the Commission
Description	Details of Chairman and Commissioners and Register of Interests
Availability	http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/index.htm

Class	Secretariat
Description	Information about the Secretariat, including job titles, policy areas
Availability	http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/index.htm

Principles of SD and SDC policy areas

Class	Principles of Sustainable Development
Description	Core SD principles around which research and work programme conclusions are structured
Availability	http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/index.htm Hard copy

Class	Work programme
Description	Topics currently under investigation – regularly updated
Availability	http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/index.htm Can make hard copies available

Scrutiny and Capability Building

Class	Sustainable Development Action Plans (SDAPs)
Description	Guidance for departments
Availability	http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/index.htm Guidance available in hard copies

Class	SDAPs
Description	Individual departmental reports
Availability	http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/pages/sustainable-development-action-plans-sdaps.html Web only

Scrutiny and Capability Building

Class	Sustainable Development in Government (SDiG)
Description	Departmental reports http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/pages/sustainable-development-in-government-sdig-assessment.html
Availability	Web only

Class	Annual SDiG report
Description	http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/pages/sustainable-development-in-government.html
Availability	Hard copies available

Background and Research Papers

Class	Background papers
Description	Initial advice to the SDC from outside bodies and individuals
Availability	http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/index.htm

Class	Research Papers
Description	By external consultants
Availability	http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/index.htm Can make hard copies available

Class	Publications by SDC
Description	Based on in-house research or by external consultants
Availability	http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/publications.php Hard copy

Annual Reports

Class	Annual report 2007-2008
Description	Work programme, funding and background information on the Commission
Availability	http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/publications.php?id=1067

Class	Annual Report for 2009-2010
Description	Work programme, funding and background information
Availability	http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/pages/about-us.html

News Releases

Class	SDC News releases – October 2000 onwards
Description	News releases include topic summaries; they can include comment and/or responses to government publications
Availability	http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/index.htm Can make hard copies available