



# Off the starting block

**SDC assessment of government  
Sustainable Development Action Plans**



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# Executive Summary

## Background

1. The UK government's sustainable development strategy, *Securing the Future*, required all central government departments and their executive agencies to produce sustainable development action plans (SDAPs), based on the Strategy, by December 2005. Departments/agencies are required to report their progress against these plans by March 2007<sup>1</sup> and "regularly thereafter".
2. In its role as the government's independent sustainable development watchdog, the Sustainable Development Commission (SDC) has prepared a critique of the SDAPs which have been produced to date. This report sets out the SDC's assessment of performance across government as well as providing individual assessments for each department/agency which have been informed by bilateral meetings with each.

## SDC's focus for the first round of SDAPs

3. The first round of SDAP assessments has focused on examining how far departments/agencies have addressed the key elements outlined in the SDC's SDAP guidance, published in August 2005. The SDC believes that ensuring that departments/agencies have established strong foundations for a sustainable development approach throughout the whole organisation, and at all levels, is essential to meeting the UK government's sustainable development goal.

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<sup>1</sup> *Securing the Future* requires departments to report on progress by December 2006. However, the Ministerial Sub-Committee on Sustainable Development in Government (SD) agreed that departments can report on progress against SDAPs in March 2007, to align with financial reporting.

4. The SDC expects to see plans continuously improving over time. As learning is built into successive departmental plans, the SDC will expect them to reflect the development of more ambition and long-term thinking.
5. **The SDC will continue to assess and monitor SDAPs. Future SDAP assessments will be used to inform our Watchdog activities, including the SDC's in-depth reviews of policy implementation and delivery of public services.**

## Overall Assessment

6. The SDAPs should be a key tool in ensuring that sustainable development is taken into account in decision-making by government departments/agencies. However, our analysis showed that SDAPs are often peripheral to the work of departments/agencies and, at this stage, most SDAPs are weak in terms of integrating sustainable development into policy making. Future plans will need to be more closely linked to the central decision-making processes within departments/agencies and across government.
7. All departments except Cabinet Office have made a start in setting out forward programmes to demonstrate how they are making an ongoing contribution to the goal, priorities and principles of *Securing the Future*.<sup>2</sup>
8. The requirement to prepare an SDAP has been an effective means of ensuring that each department/agency actively considers its contribution to the UK sustainable development strategy, *Securing the Future*. Without the SDAP process, it is clear that the UK strategy would have had a limited profile across government.

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<sup>2</sup> The Cabinet Office produced a sketch outline plan in August 2006, too late to be included in this assessment.

9. The SDC has categorised all departments/agencies according to the degree to which they displayed the key elements that the SDC would expect to see in an SDAP in its first year (see Annex A and B). This assessment is illustrated overleaf in the *SDAP journey – Year one*.
10. The **Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)** and the **Department of Work and Pensions (DWP)** have emerged as “leading the pack”. They have the most comprehensive plans which set out how they will ensure that they have the necessary processes and systems in place to deliver, monitor and report on their commitments.
11. The majority of other departments/agencies are either:
  - **gaining momentum** in terms of establishing and exploring the actions needed to reflect a sustainable development approach in their work programmes and operations or
  - **gearing up for a step change** and starting to work with new approaches to mainstreaming sustainable development into their work.

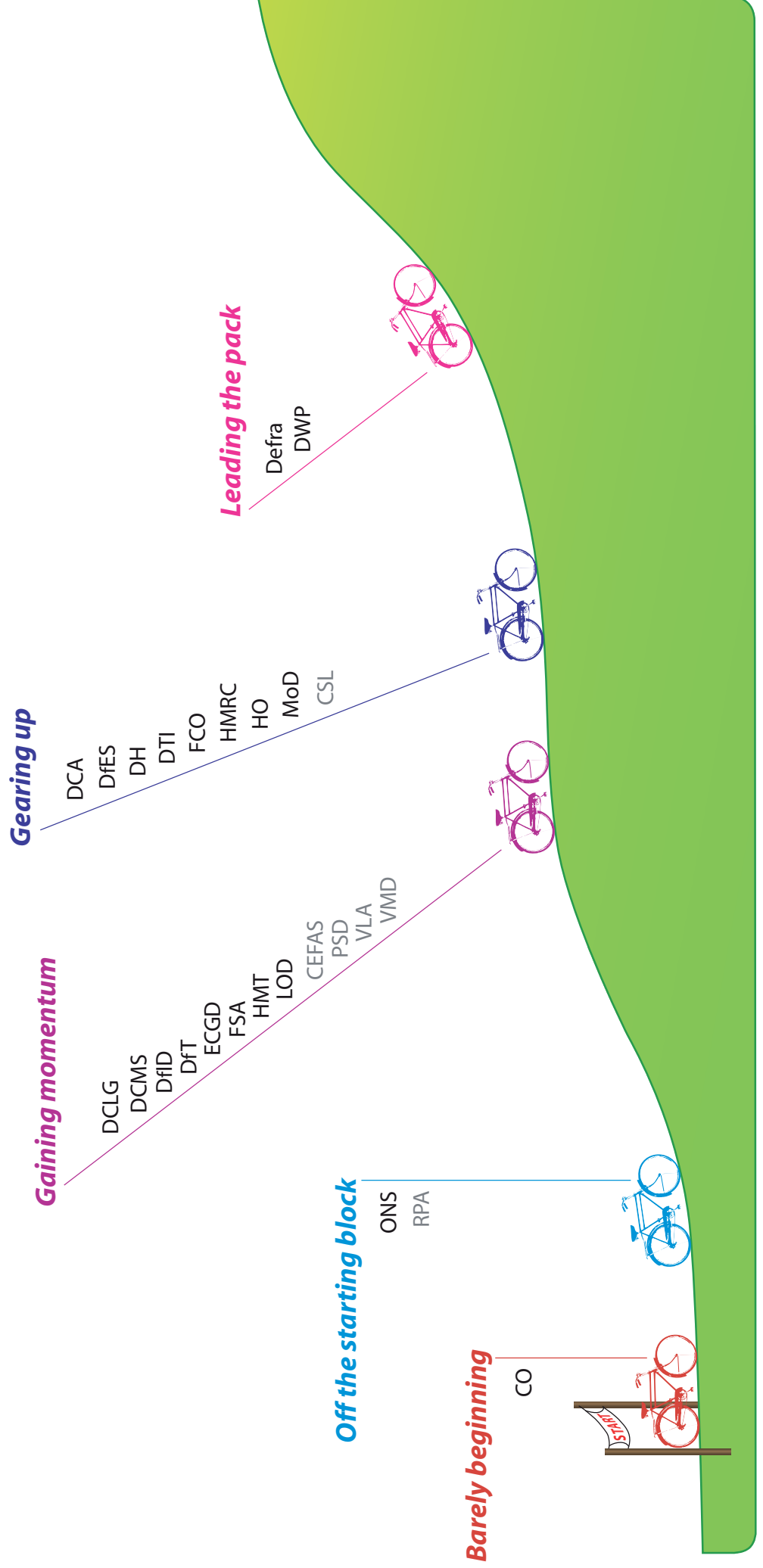
Meanwhile the Office of National Statistics (ONS), Rural Payments Agency (RPA) and Cabinet Office (CO) have made a start in setting out an action programme for sustainable development but have some work to do to catch up with the rest of government.

12. As might be expected in year one, most of the plans are compilations of existing work programmes. However, a good number of departments/agencies have risen to the challenge and started to think about how they may need to re-orientate existing work programmes (where resources have already been allocated) or instigate new initiatives in order to contribute to *Securing the Future*. Most departments/agencies are

only just starting to establish the necessary processes and infrastructure at all levels of their organisation to support an integrated and embedded approach to sustainable development.

**The integration of sustainable development into government is a long journey/process, and therefore even the more progressive departments/agencies have plenty of scope to advance further.**

# SDAP Journey: Year one



## Supporting the “champions”

13. Throughout the course of this assessment exercise, the SDC has been struck by the range of committed individuals across government who are working hard to ensure that their organisation is taking sustainable development on board. However, this significant challenge is often not being shared beyond the allocated sustainable development team and is not integrated into core business nor mainstreamed into everyday departmental processes and activities. The sustainable development teams across government face a range of generic organisational barriers, such as:
- inadequate governance infrastructure and reporting mechanisms for sustainable development;
  - lack of senior-level buy-in; and/or
  - insufficient resources (people and funding).
14. All of these barriers must be tackled over time for any significant progress to be achieved. The efforts of officials and politicians in leadership roles who challenge ‘business as usual’ is needed to demonstrate, through their own and others' success, that sustainable development does deliver sound policy and operational outcomes.

## Resources

15. The resourcing of the dedicated sustainable development teams is a matter of departmental priority and there is no straightforward measure to assess the appropriate level of resources. However, it would appear that across government, sustainable development teams are not given adequate resources to respond effectively to the challenges set out in *Securing the Future*, and are often inadequately equipped to tackle some of the barriers mentioned above.

## Making the Links to Securing the Future’s principles, priorities and commitments

16. *Securing the Future*, commits the government to using its five sustainable development **principles**, which have been agreed across the UK, to underpin all its policy making. However, many departments are as yet unfamiliar with them and for the most part cannot demonstrate how they are using them. (See page 28, the Five Guiding Principles.)
17. Overall, departments demonstrate a better understanding of how the current work of their department links to *Securing the Future’s* four **priorities for immediate action**.
18. In this first year, the SDC has not been able to assess the quality or viability of each department/agency’s actions across *Securing the Future’s* four priority areas. However, cross-government action is evident on all fronts. There is no one particular priority area that is unduly neglected in the SDAPs. Departments/agencies are required to regularly report against their plans and these reports will assist the SDC in assessing whether progress in the priority areas is sufficient. (See page 29, the Four Priorities for Immediate action.)
19. *Securing the Future* sets out the high-level contributions each key government department can make to its delivery. Most departments have acknowledged at least some of their **commitments** from *Securing the Future* but have tended to take a rather ‘pick and mix’ approach without explaining why and indicating relative priorities. (See page 35, departmental commitments.)



20. **The SDC expects each SDAP to acknowledge the full range of relevant *Securing the Future* commitments and indicate their relative priority. This does not require departments to list all of its *Securing the Future* commitments in its SDAP. However, there should be a transparent audit trail between the commitments and any future work programme re-orientation.**
21. *Securing the Future* also sets out a list of **cross-government commitments** which apply across departments. In the main, it is the cross-government commitments which have been omitted from plans. Most plans include some actions in the relevant areas, but do not acknowledge that these contribute to the cross-government commitments. For example, whilst most plans include actions on sustainable procurement, most do not set out how they intend to contribute to ensuring that the UK government is an EU leader on sustainable procurement by 2009. (See page 35, cross-government commitments.)
22. **The SDC recommends that the government's Sustainable Development Programme Board, which monitors *Securing the Future*, considers how to best promote the cross-cutting commitments outlined in the Strategy.**

### Common SDAP strengths

23. Most departments have made an attempt to explain **what sustainable development means to their organisation** and have tried to identify the links between sustainable development and their core business, e.g. their strategic plans and Public Service Agreements (PSAs). For example, the Department of Constitutional Affairs' (DCA) plan acknowledges the relevance of its Public Service Agreement (PSA) on social exclusion and its shared PSA on
- reassuring the public and reducing the fear of crime.
24. Most plans clearly explain how the department intends to **report on progress** against its plan. Whilst the majority of departments do not indicate in their plans if they intend to report on a defined regular basis, discussion revealed that most departments intend to report on progress annually. For example, the Home Office has committed in bilateral discussions to report on progress annually in their sustainable development report.
25. **The SDC expects future plans to set out how progress will be monitored against all the actions in the plan, outlining the monitoring and review mechanisms in place.**
26. The recent Environmental Audit Committee (EAC) report, *Sustainable Development Reporting by Government Departments*,<sup>3</sup> recommended that departments update SDAPs and monitor progress against them on an annual basis so that the momentum will not be lost. **The SDC supports the EAC recommendation requiring departments to update and report on SDAPs annually.**
27. Almost all departments/agencies have identified a need to **improve their capacity** to take a sustainable development approach, whether that be through improved skills, processes, training or culture. However, departments/agencies have not done so well in specifying what SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-related) actions they might need to strengthen capacity within their organisation. For example, the Department of Trade and Industry's (DTI) plan includes some helpful activities aimed at increasing capacity within the department and commits to sending

<sup>3</sup> House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee, *Sustainable Development Reporting by Government Departments*, seventh report of session 2005-06

senior civil servants to the Cambridge Programme for Industry's Business in the Environment Programme events in 2006/07. The plan however, does not specify SMART targets relating to this commitment.

28. **The SDC is beginning work with the National School for Government to develop civil service expertise in sustainable development, to help embed it across government policy making and delivery, as well as organisational and operational activities.**

29. The majority of departmental plans have been **signed off** by the relevant Sustainable Development Minister and those from Agencies by the Chief Executive. Most departments have allocated senior level responsibility for the delivery of the plan. For example, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) has allocated a sustainable development champion to support the Sustainable Development Minister, the Secretary of State and the Permanent Secretary, who hold overall accountability for delivery of the action plan.

30. Most departments have made an attempt to contribute to the cross-cutting *Securing the Future* commitment to become a leader in **sustainable procurement** across EU member states by 2009. However, most do not set their actions in the context of this commitment. For example, DWP commit to "review sustainable procurement policy to incorporate SPTF [Sustainable Procurement Task Force] outcomes" but do not set this action out in the context of the commitment set out in *Securing the Future*.

### Common SDAP challenges

31. Departments are finding it difficult to develop **a strong 'business case' or rationale for sustainable development in the public sector.**

It would seem that the 'business case' for sustainable development is working more powerfully amongst leading firms in the private sector where it is increasingly accepted that sustainable development contributes to making businesses more competitive, more resilient, more unified in purpose and therefore more likely to attract and hold customers and employees.

32. Not all departments are clear on the **benefits of taking a sustainable development approach**, or the risks of not integrating sustainable development into departmental business. The majority of departments have been able to articulate only generic sustainable development benefits, such as reducing the running costs of their operations. The Departments for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), International Development (DFID), HM Treasury (HMT) and the Law Officers' Departments (LOD) do not set out any benefits of taking a sustainable development approach.

33. **It is evident that departments/agencies will follow a 'business as usual' route unless they are able to articulate clearly what sustainable development means for their core business and understand the potential benefits of taking a sustainable development approach through policy making and delivery, based on the goals, priorities and principles of *Securing the Future*.**

34. Most SDAPs do not clearly set out what the departmental **priority areas** are for the timeframe of the plan and many plans include long lists of un-prioritised actions. For example, DTI's SDAP includes long lists of actions/commitments with no indication of priority areas for the timeframe of the plan.

35. Departments/agencies seem to have found it particularly difficult to write **transparent and auditable** plans explaining the decisions they have

taken, priorities they have chosen etc. However, we would highlight DCMS as having made the best attempt at explaining their approach.

36. Most struggled to specify **SMART targets** in their plans. Many of the actions across departments/agencies are not outcome focused and it is not always clear what the specified action will achieve or what the desired outcome is. For example, the Ministry of Defence's (MoD) key policy commitment is to "develop a coherent policy framework for environmental management based on air, land and water as a key enabler of defence". However, the SDAP does not identify the outputs that MoD expects from this approach in order to assess progress.

37. **The lack of SMART targets in this first round of SDAPs is extremely surprising. SDC expects to see more robust and specific targets in future plans to facilitate effective monitoring, reporting and review. Future plans should have a work programme with SMART targets and milestones, as well as allocated responsibility for delivery.**

38. Whilst most departments acknowledged the need to ensure that sustainable development is embedded within the existing policy making process, many of the plans do not describe how far existing processes are adequate. **The SDC expects future plans to set out clearly how departments/agencies will ensure that policies are appraised against the Cabinet Office revised Impact Assessments guidance, identifying whether the policy option will underpin the sustainable development principles, as set out in the current proposed revision of this.**

### Organisational coverage of plans

39. Departments/agencies have not been clear about the **coverage** of their plans. Whilst the majority of plans indicate that their agencies are incorporated into departmental plans, most do not specify

which agencies are covered. Bilaterals also revealed that in many cases, departments did not meaningfully engage with their agencies in the production of the plans.

40. **The SDC encourages departments to actively engage with their agencies in the preparation and delivery of their action plans to ensure a coordinated approach in line with departmental priorities.**

### Future coverage of plans

41. **SDC would expect Executive Agencies to report separately as required by the *Securing the Future* commitment unless the lead department can set out a clear business case for not doing so e.g. an existing precedent in regard to managing its agencies. However, SDC recommends that lead departments oversee the process and produce a 'compendium' of lead and Agency plans, as well as updates on progress.**

42. Ultimately the SDC would like to see all public bodies, including NDPBs, required to prepare an SDAP. However, in these early stages it would seem sensible to have a phased approach and ensure that all departments, executive agencies and non-ministerial departments establish their plans first. It must be clear which organisations are required to prepare plans.

43. **The SDC recommends that the Energy and Environment Sustainable Development Cabinet Sub Committee (EE-SD) agrees a phased approach to extending organisational coverage of the SDAP commitment and clarifies the current extent to which the commitment applies across government.**

## 1. Overview

The UK government's sustainable development strategy, *Securing the Future*, required all central government departments and their executive agencies to produce sustainable development action plans (SDAPs), based on the strategy, by December 2005. Departments/Agencies are required to report their progress against these plans by March 2007<sup>4</sup> and "regularly thereafter".

In its role as the government's independent sustainable development watchdog, the Sustainable Development Commission (SDC) has prepared a critique of the SDAPs which have been produced to date. This report sets out the SDC's assessment of performance across government as well as providing individual assessments for each department/agency which have been informed by bilateral meetings with each.

The focus of this first round of SDAP assessments has been to examine whether departments have addressed the key elements outlined in the SDC's SDAP guidance, published in August 2005. Many of these are simply the core elements of a good action plan whatever its purpose. The SDC believes that ensuring that departments/agencies have established strong foundations for a sustainable development approach is essential to meeting the UK government's sustainable development goal in the long-term. For example, the SDC has considered how far each department has the appropriate cross-cutting decision-making processes and infrastructure in place, linked to core business systems, to ensure that the actions set out in the plan can be delivered in an integrated programme.

However, after this introductory year, the SDC expects plans to improve over time and

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<sup>4</sup> *Securing the Future* requires departments to report on progress by December 2006. However, the Ministerial Sub-Committee on Sustainable Development in Government agreed departments can report on progress against SDAPs in March 2007, to align with financial reporting.

that successive iterations will be more ambitious, long term, and will build on learning from earlier versions. Future assessments by the SDC of departmental action plans will increasingly focus on providing a deeper analysis of operational and policy commitments and, where relevant, policy gaps. The future SDAP assessments will be used by the SDC to inform our Watchdog reports, including the SDC's in-depth reviews of policy implementation and delivery of public services.

## 2. The Verdict

Diagram 1 summarises the SDC's assessment of the SDAPs. Organisations were scored against a competency framework based on the SDC's checklist (see Annex A) of key elements that the commission would expect to see in an SDAP in this first year. These elements were articulated in the SDC's SDAP guidance issued in August 2005 and include elements generic to good action planning as well as specific to *Securing the Future*.

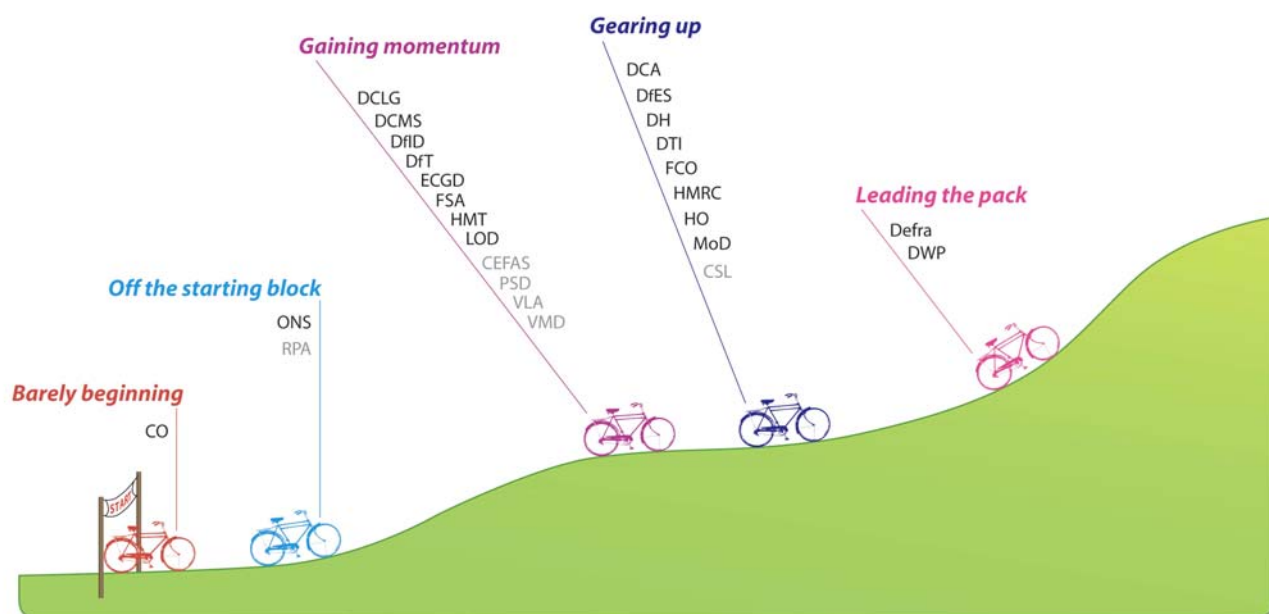
**The Commission has not scored departments on the quality of the programmes described.** The competency framework accounts for the degree to which these elements have been displayed whilst the checklist only indicates whether an element is present or not. Our methods and approach are set out in Annex B with a sample checklist and the competency framework. Each department/agency's checklist is provided with its individual SDC assessment. The checklist results across government are summarised in Annex C.

The score that each department/agency achieved against the competency framework was used to classify it into one of five groups:

- Leading the pack;
- Gearing up;
- Gaining momentum;
- Off the starting block;
- Barely beginning.

These classifications are explained below, and the allocation of departments/agencies in each group is summarised in Diagram 1

## SDAP Journey: Year One



FCO's assessment is based on its 2005 sustainable development strategy which was assessed in a separate process.

## ***Leading the pack***

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) have emerged as “leading the pack” and having the most comprehensive plans. These plans set out how the departments will ensure they have the necessary processes and systems in place to deliver, monitor and report on their commitments. DWP for example included actions which will ensure sustainable development is considered in strategic decision making and has undertaken “to take an audit of sustainable development within business planning.”

**The integration of sustainable development into government is a long journey/process, and therefore, even the more progressive departments/agencies have plenty of scope to advance further.**

## ***Gearing up***

Plans in this category tend to be ones where departments have actively reviewed existing work programmes and their contribution to sustainable development, as well as gaps that need to be tackled in the future. For example the Ministry of Defence (MoD), despite having a good record of understanding, and articulating the sustainable development impacts of both its policy and operations, has recognised that it needs to simplify internal sustainable development governance arrangements and is intending to review its infrastructure. The MoD has also recognised that it does not have appropriate monitoring systems to track progress on some of the actions it has specified and has instigated processes to tackle this.

Most of the plans in this category also demonstrate an understanding of sustainable development and make specific links to their organisations. The Department for Education and Skills (DfES), for example, explains that education is “recognised by

governments the world over as a key part of sustainable development.” The plan describes how schools can be places where sustainable living and working is demonstrated to young people and the local community.

## ***Gaining momentum***

Plans that fall into this category tend to be ones which approached the preparation of the plan as a more passive and relatively straightforward exercise in the co-ordination and articulation of existing activities/commitments in a sustainable development context. There is little evidence that departments/agencies in this category have actively sought to assess whether existing programmes and approaches are sufficient to meet the commitments in *Securing the Future*. Some have taken this co-ordination approach because they feel their work programmes are already well-aligned with *Securing the Future* – e.g. Department for International Development (DFID), Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCLG) and Department for Transport (DfT). Others have clearly not had either the resource, impetus or infrastructure to seek input from across the organisation and thus to take a more active approach to the preparation of their plan.<sup>5</sup>

Whilst some of the plans in this category set out a full programme of action, it is not always supported by a clear explanation of where the department feels its work links to the principles and priorities of *Securing the Future* nor is there a description of the processes that will underpin the delivery and monitoring of its plan.

## ***Off the starting block***

Plans in this category have made a start in setting out an action programme for sustainable development, but have some

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<sup>5</sup> Although the Food Standards Agency (FSA) approached the preparation of its plan actively, its SDAP has been categorised as ‘gaining momentum’ as the plan’s links to *Securing the Future* are limited.



work to do to catch up with the rest of government.

### ***Barely beginning***

Cabinet Office (CO) is the only department in this category.

A considerable amount of further work will be required for the plan to meet the SDC's basic standards.

### **Key findings for each plan**

#### **Leading the pack**

##### ***Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)***

The plan is closely based on *Securing the Future*, clearly demonstrating the contribution that the department will make to the four priorities for immediate action as set out in the Strategy. The plan also recognises that leadership is key to delivery of sustainable development and allocates specific sustainable development objectives to Defra's Management Board. For example, "all Management Board members will have a performance contract requirement to promote sustainable development internally and externally." Management Board members will also be questioned on Defra's progress against the action plan in an annual open meeting.

Defra's SDAP covers other key elements such as skills and policy making. For the former, the department will be carrying out a cross-organisational skills audit to identify gaps and will be introducing a new skills database to facilitate greater use of flexible teams. For the latter, the SDAP contains a comprehensive range of actions intended to help the department ensure that its policies are consistently 'sustainable development proofed,' and contains an aim to tackle the patchy application of Regulatory Impact Assessments (RIAs). It also endeavours to ensure that RIAs will be used consistently across the department.

***Areas for improvement:*** Promoting sustainable development across government requires strong leadership, as many of the levers for embedding sustainable development often lie outside Defra's immediate sphere of influence.

This particularly requires the department to identify, communicate and promote the high-level value of sustainable development across Whitehall. Future SDAPs would benefit from providing more focus on Defra's role in promoting the value of sustainable development across government, including specific actions aimed at engaging departments in the sustainable development agenda at the working level.

##### ***Department for Work and Pensions (DWP):***

The plan has a strong focus on the integration of sustainable development into departmental core business and includes actions which will ensure that sustainable development is considered in strategic decision-making and the delivery of the department's five year strategy and delivery plan. For example, the department is currently carrying out sustainability assessments of policies through RIAs and has asked all those who engage in policy and decision making to confirm in writing their processes for integrating sustainability within their organisation. The plan also includes actions aimed at ensuring all business planning activities consider sustainable development and will review the effectiveness of current arrangements and guidelines for all departmental programmes and projects.

Sustainable development capacity and skills also feature prominently in the plan which includes a commitment to examine the viability of introducing a specific scheme to recognise appropriate sustainability qualifications and good working practice. Members of DWP's sustainable development teams will be required to be associate members of the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA) and managers in key designated posts will be studying for full membership. DWP's Sustainable Development Steering Group

will be working to identify the training needs for decision-makers across the organisation and match specific training to the needs identified.

*Areas for improvement:* Whilst the SDAP acknowledges the department's *Securing the Future* commitment "to empower Jobcentre Plus managers to tailor targeted policies for particularly disadvantaged groups or areas", the SDAP does not set out specific proposals aimed at taking this forward or indicate how this might happen and by when. The SDC views this commitment as an important area of work for sustainable communities and would expect future plans to set out specific proposals which clearly set out how the targeting will help to overcome disadvantage.

DWP's SDAP provides a helpful outline of the way in which DWP and its agencies already contribute to the main priority areas for action as set out in *Securing the Future* (DWP SDAP Annex B). However, the plan does not indicate how DWP will make its contribution to the four priorities for immediate action in the future. The SDC would like to see future plans clearly set out how DWP will do so, setting out future commitments with corresponding actions.

## Gearing up

### **Department for Constitutional Affairs (DCA)**

The SDAP does not explore the contribution the department can make to sustainable development through its objective of "strengthening democracy, rights and responsibilities by renewing the relationship between the public and state" as identified in DCA's Five Year Plan. The SDC would like to see future plans explore the possible contributions the department can make to sustainable development through embedding participation in government and delivering new forms of governance which are critical if the UK is to create the momentum and political will to achieve sustainable development.

### **Department for Education and Skills (DfES)**

The plan clearly states that its focus is schools. However, DfES' responsibilities range beyond schools and the plan does not make clear where other education related areas identified by *Securing the Future*, such as professional skills in the workplace and lifelong learning, will be addressed. The department felt that it would be helpful for schools if DfES drew all the sustainable development activity in schools together to provide a 'common language' which would enable further change. This prioritisation is sensible. However, the plan should have made this reasoning clear and acknowledged that DfES has commitments beyond schools in *Securing the Future*.

### **Department of Health (DH)**

Although the narrative in the plan acknowledges how DH's policies can make a key contribution to sustainable development, the plan and its actions/targets are completely focused on the department's operational activity, reflecting the Sustainable Development in Government (SDiG) targets, rather than its policy contribution to sustainable development. As the SDC SDAP guidance makes clear, departmental plans should cover both policy and operations. We would expect a key policy-making department such as DH to ensure that its SDAP covers core policy and not just operational activity.

### **Department of Trade and Industry (DTI)**

The plan particularly highlights areas such as energy policy and use, sustainable consumption and production, technology and innovation and materials. The related actions largely reflect existing activities and work programmes but there are a number of areas which the SDC would expect to see future DTI plans address. For example, it is striking that sustainable construction is very poorly represented in the plan, given the priority for Sustainable Buildings in achieving climate change reduction plus the impact of the construction industry on consumption of natural resources and generation of waste.



### **Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO)<sup>6</sup>**

The department's first sustainable development strategy and implementation plan has set a good standard. The SDC is keen to see the department maintain and build upon this by ensuring that the FCO sets much stronger targets which specify the outcomes which the department is seeking to achieve. It is also important that future sustainable development strategies and plans focus on the areas where FCO feels that its particular role adds the most value, as well as setting out a "mainstreaming" work programme across the department.

### **HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC)**

The SDAP does not highlight clear priorities or indicate why the department has decided to concentrate its efforts on the commitments included in the SDAP. Policy commitments include "the protection of natural habitats and endangered species through frontiers control" and "the prohibition of the importation of ozone depleting substances" but the SDAP does not make clear how the department will enforce and monitor these commitments.

### **Home Office (HO)**

The plan commits to taking action on reducing crime and the fear of crime, volunteering, civil renewal and community cohesion. However, it does not make clear why the department has decided to concentrate its efforts on these areas. Surprisingly, the plan does not explore the potential contribution the department can make to Sustainable Communities through HO policies aimed at empowering local communities through the *Together We Can* initiative.<sup>7</sup>

### **Ministry of Defence (MoD)**

MoD's SDAP supports sustainable development leadership at senior level and

demonstrates a commitment to increase the knowledge and skills of staff to deliver a step change in MoD's performance on sustainable development. However, the SDAP does not cover the full range of MoD's impact on sustainable development such as developing the skills of young people and its welfare role in the Ministry's support for ex-service personnel. Nor does it assess the impact the Ministry has on sustainable communities as a landowner and manager of housing stock. The SDAP's key policy commitment is aimed at "embedding sustainable development into defence" but the SDAP doesn't provide much explanation of why the protection of natural resources is a "key enabler of defence" or identify the outputs that MoD expects from this approach in order to measure progress.

### **Central Science Laboratory (CSL)**

The Commission found that CSL has set a high standard for other agencies to follow by actively engaging with staff across the organisation in the preparation of the plan to identify key areas of work to include in the SDAP. The plan however, does not acknowledge or refer to the five guiding principles as set out in *Securing the Future*. The SDC would expect future plans to address the internal mechanisms for policy advice appraisals, ensuring the effective integration of the sustainable development principles into the policy advice the agency provides.

## **Gaining momentum**

### **Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG)**

DCLG's SDAP clearly reflects *Securing the Future's* emphasis on sustainable communities and climate change. The plan however, does not address how sustainable development is taken into account in policy-making nor how the department will ensure that the five principles of sustainable development will be integrated into the policy making process. In addition, the SDAP does not

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<sup>6</sup> FCO's assessment is based on its 2005 sustainable development strategy.

<sup>7</sup> Since the action plan was written, the Home Office has begun a process of reform. The *Together We Can* Initiative now rests with DCLG. The SDC would expect next year's SDAP to explain how sustainable development fits in within the department's new purpose and priority areas.

explore the impacts the department has on *Natural Resource Use and Environmental Enhancement* (one of the shared priorities of *Securing the Future*) through its responsibility for the planning system, or the impact it can have on *Sustainable Consumption and Production*.

The department has responsibility for local government which is currently responsible for £39.8bn of public procurement and over 26% of public sector procurement spending.

#### **Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS)**

The SDAP recognises that the 65 bodies sponsored by the department are “in an excellent position to promote the benefits of sustainable development in an accessible and positive way either because of their strategic role in the sporting and cultural sector or because their facilities are enjoyed and used by the public.” However, the SDAP makes no commitment to making this a core part of their work. The SDC would like to see the department using its Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs) more actively to contribute to *Securing the Future’s* cross-cutting theme of behaviour change.

#### **Department for International Development (DFID)**

This plan is orientated around *Securing the Future’s* international priorities but does not acknowledge the five guiding principles of *Securing the Future* which should now underpin all UK policy making. The SDC would expect to see future plans indicating how the department is accounting for and using the five guiding principles. Whilst the commission appreciates DFID’s active sifting of programmes to include in its SDAP, this thinking is not explicit in the plan. The plan should set out the department’s key priorities for action against clear timescales.

#### **Department for Transport (DfT)**

DfT’s SDAP clearly reflects the need to understand the impact of DfT’s policies in relation to sustainable development and recognises the need to ensure staff are aware of the need to integrate the sustainable development principles in decision-making. However, the plan does not set out clear SDAP priorities or explain

why the department has decided to concentrate its efforts on the particular commitments included in the SDAP. The plan has no SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-related) targets and does not include any specific actions relating to policy appraisals.

#### **Export Credits Guarantee Department (ECGD)**

Due to major restructuring of the department throughout summer and autumn 2005, ECGD’s plan is primarily a scene-setting document. This approach has been endorsed by ECGD’s Management Board. ECGD’s SDAP acknowledges the international priorities of *Securing the Future* and lists those that are of particular relevance to them. These include ensuring as far as possible that debt financing is sustainable, using sustainability impact assessments and strengthening international environmental governance. The policy priorities identified in the plan are aimed at addressing these. Whilst the SDC accepts that the focus of ECGD’s plan will be based on the international priorities as set out in *Securing the Future*, future iterations of the plan also need to acknowledge the four priorities for immediate action in the UK and include actions contributing to these where appropriate.

#### **Food Standards Agency (FSA)**

FSA’s SDAP clearly reflects *Securing the Future’s* emphasis on the need to integrate sustainable development into departmental decision-making and aims to ensure staff carry out sustainability appraisals effectively. It also sets out clear objectives and timescales for delivery. However, the SDAP fails to acknowledge the four priorities for immediate action as set out in *Securing the Future*. In particular, the plan does not explore the impact the agency’s nutritional advice has on *Natural Resource Use and Environmental Enhancement* - one of the shared priorities for immediate action, nor does it explore the environmental implications of its nutritional advice. For example, the consumption of fish and fish oil can play an important part in a healthy diet, but also has implications for declining fish stocks. In addition, the SDAP does not

consider the role FSA could play in providing greater clarity to consumers about the current state of knowledge/debate on the direct benefit of sustainable food production (e.g. organic farming) for individual health, within the FSA's existing remit and stated objectives.

### **HM Treasury (HMT)**

HMT's SDAP effectively reflects the important function the department has in the delivery of all four of the priorities for immediate action identified in the *Securing the Future*. It also recognises the high-level commitments set out in the Strategy for which it has a lead, such as making use of fiscal measures to tackle environmental externalities by developing environmental taxes. However, the SDAP does not outline the benefits of taking a sustainable development approach to the organisation and does not refer to the risks of HMT not integrating sustainable development into its work. The SDAP doesn't acknowledge, or refer to, the five guiding principles which should now underpin all policy making in the UK or actively articulate how the principles have been taken into account or how relevant trade-offs are made.

### **Law Officers' Department (LOD)**

The SDAP is focused on the department's operational activity and does not include any policy-related actions. The SDC would expect future plans to explore the possible contributions that LOD can make to sustainable development, particularly to sustainable communities - one of the shared priorities for UK action identified in *Securing the Future* - through its service priority to "engage with the communities we serve" as set out in its 2005 Annual Report.

### **Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (CEFAS)**

The SDAP clearly reflects *Securing the Future's* commitment to 'Lead by example' on the way Government runs its estate. The SDAP aims to ensure the effective use of resources across the organisation. However, the plan does not identify or include commitments on government policy, despite the agency's role in helping to put sustainable development into practice

through the implementation of a sustainable fisheries policy.

### **Pesticides Safety Directorate (PSD)**

The SDAP effectively reflects *Securing the Future's* commitment to integrate the five principles of sustainable development into its policy making and commits to assessing all business cases for new project work against the principles. However, the plan contains high-level commitments with no specific targets, timescales or milestones nor does it specify the internal benefits that taking a sustainable development approach will bring to the organisation. It is important that SDAPs make clear how a sustainable development approach supports core business.

### **Veterinary Laboratories Agency (VLA)**

The SDAP explains that VLA's approach is consistent with the five guiding principles as set out in *Securing the Future* but does not elaborate on the links between the principles and the agency's work. The SDC would expect to see future plans indicating how the agency is accounting for and using the five guiding principles in its work.

### **Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD)**

The SDAP clearly articulates VMD's role in contributing to sustainable development. However, the SDAP does not refer to the four priorities for immediate action despite the agency's role of protecting public health, animal health and the environment. In future plans the SDC would expect VMD to set clearly how it is contributing to the four priority areas of *Securing the Future* with corresponding, prioritised, actions.

## **Off the starting block**

### **Office for National Statistics (ONS)**

The SDAP notes that ONS is not a policy-making department and the SDAP therefore does not address sustainable development beyond operational activity. However, the data sets that the ONS create support decision-making by other government departments who are attempting to evaluate sustainable development outcomes of current arrangements as well as to predict what the future may look like.

As such, the SDC would expect future plans to consider systematically the extent to which the data sets gathered by ONS support sustainable development evaluation and decision making.

### **Rural Payments Agency (RPA)**

The agency is currently undergoing a fundamental review of its work due to difficulties in meeting the deadline for making payments to farmers under the Single Payment Scheme (SPS). The RPA's action plan has been greatly affected by the agency's current circumstances. The sustainable development team put the plan together with little input from the rest of the agency due to different priorities and pressures for the delivery teams. Moreover, the plan has not yet been signed-off and currently has no senior management buy-in. Once the agency's review is finalised and permanent staff are in place, the SDC would like the sustainable development team to consult with project managers on RPA's policy contributions for future plans, as well as working to raise awareness and sustainable development capacity across the organisation.

### **Barely beginning**

#### **Cabinet Office (CO)**

A sketch outline was produced just before publication of this report. The SDC's initial brief assessment shows that it will be in need of a considerable amount of further work to meet the SDC's basic standards.

## **2.1 Plans don't tell the whole story**

In many cases, the SDC's bilateral meetings with individual department/agencies revealed that there was far more activity and thinking behind a plan than the document itself indicated. For example:

- The **Department of Health's (DH)** plan is surprisingly centred around its estates management rather than its policy (although the links are explained in the narrative). However, the department explained that a programme of work is

underway to ensure a more formal integration of sustainable development into departmental policy development; the department feels that much of existing policy by default aligns well with the sustainable development agenda but it recognises that it needs to take a more active approach to 'sustainable development proofing' its policies. This work is being overseen by the newly developed sustainable development forum which includes senior representation from across the department, including the Policy Hub.

- The **Department for Education and Skills' (DfES)** plan is not clearly based on the set of commitments that it signed up to in *Securing the Future* and offers little explanation why. However, it was explained in the bilateral that since the publication of *Securing the Future* the department had rethought its sustainable development approach and re-orientated its work with a more strategic approach. The department feels that it has moved beyond the initial *Securing the Future* commitments.
- The **Central Science Laboratory (CSL)**, one of Defra's executive agencies, has set a high standard for other agencies to follow, although this is not necessarily evident from the plan. The CSL has actively engaged with staff across the organisation in the preparation of the plan – focusing on the contributions which each of their science groups can make to *Securing the Future*, and incorporating those that could be achieved within the timeframe of the plan. CSL has developed a project tool kit and checklist for scientific project proposals which includes sustainable development and are currently investigating the possibility of incorporating sustainability into their staff competency framework.

## 2.2 Supporting the “champions”

Throughout the course of this assessment exercise, the SDC has been struck by the range of committed individuals across government who are working hard to ensure that their organisation is taking sustainable development on board. However, this significant challenge is often not being shared beyond the allocated sustainable development team and is not integrated into core business nor mainstreamed into everyday departmental processes and activities. The sustainable development teams across government face a range of generic organisational barriers, such as:

- inadequate governance infrastructure and reporting mechanisms for sustainable development,
- lack of senior-level buy-in and/or
- insufficient resources (people and funding).

All of these barriers must be tackled over time for any significant progress to be achieved. The efforts of officials and politicians in leadership roles who challenge ‘business as usual’ is needed to demonstrate, through their own and others’ success, that sustainable development does deliver sound policy and operational outcomes.

### Resources

The resourcing of the dedicated sustainable development teams is a matter of departmental priority and there is no straightforward measure to assess the appropriate level of resources. However, it would appear that across government, sustainable development teams are not given adequate resources to respond effectively to the challenges set out in *Securing the Future*, and are often inadequately equipped to tackle some of the barriers mentioned above.

## 2.3 Common strengths

- Most departments have made an attempt to explain **what sustainable development means to their organisation** and have tried to identify the links between sustainable development and their core business, e.g. through their strategic plans and Public Service Agreements (PSAs). For example, DCA acknowledges the relevance of their PSAs to the sustainable development agenda, such as their PSA on social exclusion and their shared PSA on reassuring the public and reducing the fear of crime.
- Most plans clearly explain how the department intends to report on progress against their plan. Whilst the majority of departments do not indicate in their plans if they intend to report on a defined regular basis, discussion revealed that most departments intend to report on progress annually. For example, the Home Office has committed in bilateral discussions to report on progress annually in their sustainable development report.
- Almost all departments/agencies have identified a need to **improve their capacity** to take a sustainable development approach, whether that be through improved skills, processes, training or culture. However, departments/agencies have not done so well in specifying what SMART actions they might need to strengthen capacity within their organisation. For example, DTI plan includes some helpful activities aimed at increasing capacity within the department and commits to sending senior civil servants to the Cambridge Programme for Industry’s Business in the Environment Programme events in 2006/07 The plan however, does not specify SMART targets relating to this commitment.
- The majority of departmental plans have been signed off by the relevant **Sustainable Development Minister and those from Agencies by the Chief**



**Executive.** Most departments have allocated **senior level responsibility** for the delivery of the plan. For example, DfES have allocated a sustainable development champion to support the Sustainable Development Minister, the Secretary of State and the Permanent Secretary, who hold overall accountability for delivery of the action plan.

- Most departments have made an attempt to contribute to the cross-cutting *Securing the Future* commitment to become a leader in **sustainable procurement** across EU member states by 2009. However, most do not set their actions in the context of this commitment. For example, DWP commit to “review sustainable procurement policy to incorporate Sustainable Procurement Task Force (SPTF) outcomes” but does not set this action out in the context of the commitment set out in *Securing the Future*.

## 2.4 Common challenges

- Departments are finding it difficult to develop a **powerful ‘business case’ or rationale for sustainable development in the public sector**. It would seem that the business case for sustainable development is working more powerfully amongst leading firms in the private sector where it is increasingly accepted that sustainable development contributes to making businesses more competitive, more resilient, more unified in purpose and therefore more likely to attract and hold customers and employees. Firms such as Shell explain that “contributing to sustainable development ... helps us be a more competitive company and create value for our shareholders” by reducing operational and financial risk, reducing costs through eco-efficiency, influencing product and service innovation, attracting loyal customers, motivating top talent and enhancing reputation.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.shell.com>, business case for sustainable development.

Novo Nordisk - a healthcare company – explain that “sustainability-driven decisions not only have a societal impact that can be measured – throughout the value system business benefits and potential financial impact can be identified.”<sup>9</sup> BT set out 95 facts about sustainable development and the challenges and opportunities for business in their document entitled “Sustainable Development is Vital to the Success of Modern Business.”<sup>10</sup>

- Not all departments are clear on the **benefits of taking a sustainable development approach**, or the risks of not integrating sustainable development into departmental business. The majority of departments have been able to articulate only generic sustainable development benefits, such as reducing the running costs of their operations. For example, the Home Office SDAP explains that taking a sustainable development approach will contribute to increased economic efficiency. DCLG, DCMS, DFID, HMT and LOD do not set out any benefits of taking a sustainable development approach.
- Most plans do not clearly set out what their **priority areas** are for the timeframe of the plan and many plans include long lists of un-prioritised actions. For example, DTI’s SDAP includes long lists of actions/commitments with no indication of what the priority areas are for the timeframe of the plan.
- Whilst many departments have acknowledged that *Securing the Future* sets out five guiding principles, they have not done so well in identifying the **relevance of the principles** to their core business and explaining how they will be mainstreamed to inform departmental work. For example, whilst DfT’s plan acknowledges the principles,

<sup>9</sup>[http://susrep2003.novonordisk.com/sustainability/responsibility/building\\_sustainable\\_business.asp](http://susrep2003.novonordisk.com/sustainability/responsibility/building_sustainable_business.asp)

<sup>10</sup><http://www.btplc.com/Societyandenvironment/Originalthinking/Opinionpapers.htm>

it does not set out how these principles will be used in the policy making process.

- There is a clear lack of coverage of **Securing the Future's cross-government commitments**. Whilst most plans include some actions in some of the relevant areas, there is lack of a consistent approach in tackling these.
- Departments/agencies seem to have found it particularly difficult to write **transparent and auditable** plans explaining the decisions they have taken, priorities they have chosen etc. However, we would highlight DCMS as having made a better attempt at explaining its approach than others.
- Most struggled to specify **SMART targets** in their plans. Many of the actions across departments/agencies are not outcome focused and it is not always clear what the specified action will achieve or what the desired outcome is. For example, MoD's key policy commitment is aimed at "embedding sustainable development into defence" but does not really give the reader a sense of what it might actually achieve.
- Departments/agencies have not been clear about the **coverage** of their plans. Whilst the majority of plans indicate that their agencies are incorporated into departmental plans, most do not specify which agencies are covered. Bilaterals also revealed that in many cases, departments did not meaningfully engage with their agencies in the production of the plans. For example, HMT and HMRC were not clear on whether their SDAPs incorporated their agencies in the bilateral discussions.

Many of the challenges which departments/agencies seem to have grappled with in relation to their SDAPs are basic requirements of any good plan, and are not specific to sustainable development. This reinforces the importance of the SDC's bilateral meetings which allowed

departments/agencies the opportunity to explain their approach to their SDAP.

## 2.5 SDAPs – Drivers for change?

The recent House of Commons report on *Sustainable Development Reporting by Government Departments* explains that Treasury's position is that "these action plans will be a key tool in ensuring that sustainable development is taken into account in policy formulation and operational decisions in government departments. The plans will provide a basis for assessment of progress and... reporting of sustainable development."<sup>11</sup> HMT explained in its bilateral with the SDC that it would be looking for departments to ensure that their Comprehensive Spending Review bids (CSR) were informed by their SDAPs.

Whilst the SDC supports the view that SDAPs should be the basis for departmental bids in the CSR process in future years, at this stage most SDAPs are weak on integrating sustainable development into policy making. It would therefore be highly risky to regard the CSR bids in this light in the first few years of SDAPs.

The compilation approach taken by most departments/agencies to their first SDAP – whether active or passive – is unlikely to drive any key changes in priorities, work programmes or approaches this year. In cases where the SDAP has been used to identify gaps and set out actions to tackle departmental weaknesses such as consideration of sustainable development in policy making, the commission has more confidence. For example, DWP is reviewing its policy making systems and processes to ensure the integration of sustainable development into the departmental decision making and the FSA is working to ensure staff carry out sustainability appraisals effectively. Other departments such as DCA have set up a Sustainable Development

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<sup>11</sup> House of Commons, *environmental Audit Committee report on Sustainable Development Reporting by Government Departments, Seventh Report session 2005-06* (paragraph 13)

Steering Group which will be working to ensure “long term commitment to sustainable development within DCA”.

Many departments/agencies found it useful to consider their existing work and future work programmes through a sustainable development ‘lens’. The commission recognises that it is a step forward in itself that departments/agencies have at the very least presented their work from a sustainable development perspective, indicating how far existing programmes reflect sustainable development objectives. This will now be subject to stakeholder review, as the plans are public documents and departments/agencies will be reporting progress against them.

It is clear that the actual process of preparing a plan has already started to help organisations allocate sustainable development actions and responsibilities more evenly across work programmes, and to reassess their priorities and approaches. Overall, departments have acknowledged that the action plan process has been a constructive exercise which has benefited their work planning.

**In the preparation of future plans, the SDC expects to see evidence that all departments/agencies are taking an active approach to reviewing how their existing work programmes and infrastructure contribute to, and support, sustainable development.**

### **3. Who delivered their SDAP on time?**

The only department to submit neither a final plan nor draft is the Cabinet Office. A sketch outline was produced by the Cabinet Office in August, just before publication of this report. The Cabinet Office is therefore not included in the SDC’s assessment of government’s performance.

The table below sets out the status of plans as submitted to the SDC. Only **five** departments submitted their SDAP by the

December 2005 deadline – Defra, DFID, DWP, DfT and ECGD (at this time DTI’s website gave details of who to contact for their draft SDAP). Defra’s agencies also submitted plans to time – the Central Science Laboratory, Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science, Pesticides Safety Directorate, Veterinary Laboratories Agency and Rural Payments Agency. Departments were late to submit their plans for a variety of reasons. For example, DTI had no sustainable development Director in place whilst others such as DfES and FSA felt they needed to take more time to consult with their stakeholders<sup>12</sup> on the priorities of their plans. DCLG explained that it had difficulties finalising its SDAP as it reflected ongoing policy developments such as DCLG’s new work on climate change and response to the Barker review.

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<sup>12</sup> Stakeholders are all those who are affected by, can affect, or can bring information to a decision. Stakeholders can be organisations or individuals in the public, private, voluntary or community sectors. They may include staff, politicians, the general public or communities.



SDAP Progress Table (Table 2)

Dept	Strategy deadline met/ December 2005	SDAP published	Latest draft received	Current status
CO	✗	✗		Sketch outline produced in August, too late to be included in this assessment.
DCA	✗	17.07.06		
DCLG	✗	17.03.06		
DCMS	✗	28.02.06		
Defra & Agencies	✓	15.12.05		
DfES	✗	27.03.06		
DFID	✓	22.12.05		
DfT	✓	22.12.05		
DH	✗	24.03.06		
DTI	✗	31.03.06		
DWP	✓	22.12.05		
ECGD	✓	23.12.05		
FCO	N/A	N/A	N/A	FCO's sustainable development strategy which was published in 2005, has been subject to a separate SDC audit. See <a href="http://www.fco.gov.uk">www.fco.gov.uk</a>
HMRC	✗	16.03.06		
HMT	✗	17.03.06		
HO	✗	18.09.06		
LOD	✗	✗	17.03.06	Latest draft received
MoD	✗	22.02.06		
ONS	✗	✗	14.03.06	Latest draft received
FSA	✗	23.02.06		

The SDC published its SDAP progress table on its website in January 2006 and has kept it updated since. In view of the wide range of departments failing to meet the December deadline, the SDC set a March 17 deadline for departments/agencies to provide final plans or final drafts upon which it would base its assessment. The SDC received 14 final SDAPs from central government departments and six final plans from Executive Agencies in time for this deadline.

DCA, HO, LOD and ONS submitted final drafts which were used as the basis of their bilateral. DCA and HO have since published their plans.

**The SDC requires the three departments which have yet to publish a final plan (CO, LOD and ONS) to do so as a matter of urgency.**

It should be noted that two departments have slightly different arrangements:

**FCO:** SDC agreed a request from the FCO in June 2005 for its March 2005 action plan (which accompanied its March 2005 sustainable development strategy) to be accepted as meeting its SDAP commitment for 2005. This strategy/plan had been based on *Securing the Future*. The SDC's agreement was subject to FCO preparing an SDAP for 2006, informed by a spring progress review against its strategy in conjunction with a strategic audit of its strategy by the SDC which is currently underway.<sup>13</sup>

**ECGD:** Due to major restructuring of the department throughout summer and autumn 2005, ECGD's plan is primarily a scene-setting document that sets out the actions, and an associated time schedule, that will be undertaken in 2006 to produce a comprehensive SDAP before the end of 2006. This approach was approved by ECGD's Management Board.

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<sup>13</sup> See [www.fco.gov.uk](http://www.fco.gov.uk) & [www.sd-commission.org.uk](http://www.sd-commission.org.uk)

## 4. Contributing to Sustainable Development

### 4.1 What sustainable development means for each department

All departments have made a good attempt at explaining what sustainable development means for their organisation. HMT recognises that it has an important role in delivering sustainable development through its role as a finance and economics department at the centre of government. DTI acknowledges that several of the department's PSA targets are intrinsically linked to sustainable development and much of the department's work can contribute to achieving a more sustainable economy. DWP's SDAP explains that "in its main role of tackling poverty and social exclusion, the department supports and contributes to the development of a just society".

However, some departments have not always clearly explained how sustainable development fits in with the organisation's core business, activities and objectives. For example, DFID's plan states that sustainable development is vital to its mission of fighting global poverty, but does not demonstrate the links to its core business through its PSA which relates to eliminating poverty in poorer countries by ensuring environmental sustainability.

### 4.2 Are there benefits to taking a sustainable development approach?

The majority of departments have attempted to articulate the benefits of taking a sustainable development approach. HO, DWP, FSA and Defra have made a better attempt than most to relate the need to take a sustainable development approach to core business both in terms of policy and operations. For example, FSA explains that sustainable development is about taking a longer-term view of their actions and that it is in consumers' long-term interests that

agency policies, decisions and advice are as sustainable as possible. They explain that by taking this approach, the agency is likely to be more successful in identifying the implications and impacts of proposals. Similarly, taking a narrower view may mean that important impacts are overlooked.

Departments/agencies seem more comfortable articulating the benefits of a sustainable development approach in terms of improved estates management which will reduce the running costs of the organisation by using resources more efficiently. DCLG, DCMS, DFID, HMT and LOD's plans do not explore the likely benefits of sustainable development to their core business and most departments/agencies do not articulate any risks of not taking an active sustainable development approach.

HMRC, however, has made a good attempt at articulating the risks of it not taking action, in terms of the likely significant consequences for wider society. Their SDAP explains that lack of incentives in place for the development and take up of renewable energy sources "will contribute to global warming and climate change".

### **4.3 Acknowledging the benefits to core business**

The bilaterals revealed that departments which don't seem totally convinced of the need to take a sustainable development approach have, in most cases, produced plans which merely co-ordinate existing activities into one document. Departments which are clear on how sustainable development links with their core business and understand the potential benefits of sustainable development to their operations and policy making, are more likely to have taken an active approach to producing the plan, examining what gaps need to be tackled.

For example, the FSA plan explains that sustainable development is about taking a longer-term view of their actions and that it is in consumers' long-term interests that agency policies, decisions and advice are as sustainable as possible. By taking this

approach the agency are likely to be more successful in identifying the implications and impacts of proposals. Similarly, the plan explains that taking a narrower view may mean that important impacts are overlooked. The FSA SDAP priority therefore, is to ensure staff carry out sustainability appraisals effectively.

Bilaterals with Defra's executive agencies revealed that as they are sponsored by Defra, sustainable development is very much reflected in their work. The agencies' work is science based and staff are receptive to sustainable development which is understood to be part of the core business. The general level of awareness amongst staff of sustainable development issues is generally high due to the nature of their work. As a result, staff have been more actively involved with the sustainable development action plans, and 'leading by example' seems to be a resonant theme amongst agency staff who like to feel that their organisation is making its contribution to sustainable development.

**It is evident that departments/agencies will follow a 'business as usual' route unless they are able to clearly articulate what sustainable development means for their core business and understand the potential benefits of taking a sustainable development approach through policy making and delivery, based on the goals, priorities and principles of *Securing the Future*.**

## **5. Links to the UK government sustainable development strategy: *Securing the Future***

*Securing the Future* sets out the government's purpose for sustainable development, five principles (with a more explicit focus on environmental limits), and four shared priorities for immediate action. These have all been agreed across the UK. In the Foreword to *Securing the Future*, the Prime Minister calls on every government department to produce its own action plan

to contribute to the commitments set out in *Securing the Future* and ensure delivery.

### **How are departments/agencies contributing to *Securing the Future*?**

Most of the SDAPs the commission assessed demonstrate a basic understanding of how the current work of the relevant organisation links to *Securing the Future's* goal, principles and priorities. However, this does not always logically progress through to the actions identified.

## **5.1 The sustainable development goal**

The goal of sustainable development, as set out in *Securing the Future*, is to “enable all people throughout the world to satisfy their basic needs and enjoy a better quality of life, without compromising the quality of life of future generations”. *Securing the Future* explains that for the UK government and the devolved administrations, that goal will be “pursued in an integrated way through a sustainable, innovative and productive economy that delivers high levels of employment; and a just society that promotes social inclusion, sustainable communities and personal wellbeing.”

*Securing the Future* states that this will be done in “ways that protect and enhance the physical and natural environment, and use resources and energy as efficiently as possible. Government must promote a clear understanding of, and commitment to, sustainable development so that all people can contribute to the overall goal through their individual decisions.”

### **What sustainable development goal are government departments/agencies working to?**

Most SDAPs include some variation of the definition of the sustainable development goal, but many have not set this out in the context of a common purpose which has been agreed by the UK government and the devolved administrations.

Several departments have explained in the bilaterals that in order to ensure staff buy-in to the actions plans, they have felt more comfortable using their own language and definitions of sustainable development, rather than working to the common vision for the UK government as set out in *Securing the Future*. Putting the sustainable development goal in the appropriate organisational context is clearly sensible. However, it is also important that departments/agencies acknowledge that the UK sustainable development goal exists to link back to the wider cross-government context.

## **5.2 The Five Guiding Principles**

To achieve the sustainable development goal, *Securing the Future* sets out five guiding principles which have been agreed across the government of the UK. The principles are:

- Living Within Environmental Limits
- Ensuring a Strong, Healthy and Just Society
- Achieving a Sustainable Economy
- Promoting Good Governance
- Using Sound Science Responsibly

*Securing the Future* explains that these principles will form the basis for policy in the UK. For a policy to be sustainable, it must respect all five of these principles, though *Securing the Future* recognises that some policies, while underpinned by all five, will place more emphasis on certain principles than others.

### ***Did departments/agencies acknowledge their existence?***

Most departments acknowledge the five guiding principles, explaining that these should form the basis for policy making in the UK. Many departments commit to ensuring that the principles will be integrated into departmental decision making in the long-term.

Most departments also recognise their links to one or more of the five guiding principles. For example, Defra and its agencies

recognise the need for good evidence to deliver their strategic outcomes and the important role of “Using Sound Science Responsibly” has in helping determine the evidence and innovation needs of the department. DH, DWP, LOD, DCA and the FSA all recognise the contribution they can make to “Ensuring a Strong, Healthy and Just Society”, through their work on improving the public’s health, helping individuals fulfil their potential through work or through themes around fairness and justice.

Some departments/agencies acknowledge the particular relevance of some of the guiding principles to their work, but do not explain or explore these links. For example, DfT acknowledges that “Living within Environmental Limits”, “Ensuring a Strong, Healthy and Just Society” and “Achieving a Sustainable Economy” are particularly

important to the work of the department, but has not explained how. MoD, HMT, FCO, DFID and DCLG do not acknowledge the principles, nor explore in their plans or how these principles will affect their work.

**The five sustainable development principles which have been agreed across the UK are now supposed to underpin all government policy making. However, many departments are as yet unfamiliar with them and for the most part cannot demonstrate how they are using them.**

### 5.3 Four Priorities for Immediate action

*Securing the Future* sets out four priority areas for immediate action in the UK. These are set out in Box 1:

#### Box 1: Four Priority Areas for Immediate Action

- ∞ **Sustainable Consumption and Production** – Sustainable consumption and production is about achieving more with less. This means not only looking at how goods and services are produced, but also the impacts of products and materials across their whole lifecycle and building on people’s awareness of social and environmental concerns.
- ∞ **Climate Change and Energy** – The effects of a changing climate can already be seen. We will seek to secure a profound change in the way we generate and use energy, and in other activities.
- ∞ **Natural Resource Protection and Environmental Enhancement** – Natural resources are vital to our existence and that of communities throughout the world. We need a better understanding of environmental limits, environmental enhancement and recovery where the environment is most degraded to ensure a decent environment for everyone, and a more integrated policy framework.
- ∞ **Sustainable Communities** – Our aim is to create sustainable communities that embody the principles of sustainable development at the local level. This will involve working to give communities more power and say in the decisions that affect them; and working in partnership at the right level to get things done.

Source: *Securing the Future*, March 2005

#### ***Did departments/agencies acknowledge their existence?***

Many departments/agencies explain that *Securing the Future* sets out four priority areas for action and attempt to demonstrate what their contribution to these is.

Others have included actions in their plans which relate to the four priorities, but do not set these out clearly in that context. For example, much of DCLG’s plan contributes to Climate Change and Energy and Sustainable Communities. Their plan however does not explain that the actions

included are DCLG's contribution to the four priorities. Some departments have produced plans which are focused on the four priorities and departmental action is set out in this context. Defra for example has produced an action plan based on the contributions it can make and deliver to the four priorities in 2006.

Some departments/agencies (e.g. MoD, LOD and HO) have found it easier to demonstrate how their operational commitments can contribute to the four priorities i.e.

implementing reduction measures to water consumption will contribute to Natural Resource Protection and Environmental Enhancement, but have found it difficult to make the same links for their policy commitments plans.

Table 2 provides an indication of how departments will contribute to the four priorities of *Securing the Future* through the key actions included in their plans.

**Table 2: Department/agency contribution to *Securing the Future's* four priorities for immediate action**

<b>Priority for immediate action</b>	<b>Department/ agency</b>	<b>Key actions</b>	<b>Policy or operations based action?</b>
<b>Sustainable Consumption and Production</b>	Defra	Work with DTI to develop policy framework for sustainable products and publish set of measures for taking this forward.	Policy
	MoD	Implement actions arising from the Sustainable Procurement Task Force (SPTF).	Operations
	HMRC	Implement a sustainable procurement strategy.	Operations
	HMT	Support the work of the SPTF.	Policy
	DfES	Provide guidance to caterers and schools in procuring school meals.	Policy
	DfT	Examine how transport can contribute to economic growth and productivity within the context of sustainable development.	Policy
	DH	Ensure contracts reflect sound sustainable development policies.	Operations
	DTI	Help establish a National Manufacturing Skills Academy by September 2006.	Policy
	DWP	Review sustainable procurement policy to incorporate SPTF outcomes.	Operations
	ONS	Draw up a sustainable procurement strategy and a food procurement action plan.	Operations
	FSA	FSA's procurement portal will include advice and guidance on sustainability aspects of procurement.	Operations
	LOD	Implement the sustainable procurement strategy.	Operations
	VMD	Carry out audit to determine how much of office supplies are produced from sustainable sources and what action could be taken to increase supplies produced from such sources.	Operations
	VLA	Publish an environmental purchasing policy.	Operations



Priority for immediate action	Department/ agency	Key actions	Policy or operations based action?
Climate Change and Energy	Defra	Implement actions arising from Climate Change Review Programme.	Policy
	MoD	Develop a climate change strategy and implement actions arising.	Policy & Operations
	DCLG	Revision of part L of building regulations will be released delivering 25% increase in energy efficiency.	Policy
	HMRC	Continued administration and review of the Climate Change Levy.	Policy
	HMT	Ongoing discussions with business to examine how to improve energy efficiency investment.	Policy
	DfES	Complete scoping study into the carbon footprint of the schools estate.	Policy
	DfT	Take forward development of sustainable policy for aviation as part of the Future of Transport White Paper.	Policy
	DTI	Publish a microgeneration strategy by April 2006.	Policy
	FSA	Reduce energy consumption in Aviation House by 10% by 2010.	Operations
	LOD	Move towards using more renewable energy on LOD estate to reduce carbon emissions.	Operations
	RPA	Reduce impact of travel on the environment by promoting video-conferencing and reviewing car-hire procedures.	Operations
	VLA	Reduce road transport emissions by at least 10% of the baseline figure.	Operations
	CSL	Provide a minimum of four impact assessments to the wind farm industry to ensure that developments are economically and environmentally sustainable.	Policy
	CEFAS	Implement carbon offsetting for business air miles.	Operations



Priority for immediate action	Department/ agency	Key actions	Policy or operations based action?
Natural Resource Protection and Environmental Enhancement	Defra	Publish agreed vision for the natural environment and a policy document outlining next steps for delivery.	Policy
	MoD	Review baseline water leakage and consumption data from project Aquatrine and implement reduction measures.	Operations
	HMRC	To reduce and deter importation of wood from unsustainable sources.	Policy
	DfT	Work with the international Maritime Organisation and the EU to promote quality shipping that is clean, safe and sustainable.	Policy
	LOD	Monitor water use to show improved record keeping with a view of reducing consumption.	Operations
	RPA	Successful implementation of the Single Payments Scheme.	Policy
	PSD	Finalise the national strategy for sustainable use of plant protection products and put in place action plans in support of sustainable pesticides use.	Policy
	CSL	Offer scientific support in detecting and eradicating alien pests and diseases.	Policy
	CEFAS	Investigate using water from the reverse osmosis plant at Burnham for non-potable purposes.	Operations

Sustainable Communities	Defra	As part of Community Action 2020 agree action plan with voluntary sector to mainstream sustainable development into their work.	Policy
	MoD	Develop a framework for defence related social issues and implement actions arising.	Operations
	DCLG	Develop toolkits and other materials to support LAs and LSPs when reviewing and preparing their community strategies.	Policy
	HMRC	Develop a proactive closer working programme with marginalised customers.	Policy
	DfES	Develop a strategy and annual plan for social responsibility for the department.	Policy
	DfT	Improve road safety by 2010 e.g. 40% reduction in number of people killed or seriously injured.	Policy
	DCA	Ensure consistency and structure in innovative and good practice methods of working with communities.	Policy
	HO	Strengthen public participation through contributions to the shaping and implementation of key policies such as neighbourhood empowerment.	Policy

In many cases departments/agencies recognised in the bilaterals that their plans do not clearly outline potential contributions they can make to *Securing the Future's* priorities, how far they are realising that potential, or set out related actions. For example:

- DCMS recognises the contribution it can make to Sustainable Communities through culture and creativity, but does not include any related actions
- In its bilateral, MoD recognised the contribution it can make to sustainable communities through the development of the skills of young people, and to improved welfare resources through support for ex-service personnel.
- DWP acknowledged that much of its work contributes to sustainable

communities through programmes such as “welfare to work” and “pathways to work” which are aimed at those who need support to overcome barriers to work. DWP also acknowledged that Jobcentre Plus plays a leading role in the community through partnerships involved in regeneration and neighbourhood renewal.

**In this first year, the SDC has not been able to assess the quality or viability of each department/agencies actions across *Securing the Future's* four priority areas. However, it is clear that that cross-government action is evident on all fronts. There is not a particular priority area that is unduly neglected in the SDAPs. However, departments/agencies are required to regularly report against**

**their plans and these reports will assist the SDC in assessing whether progress is sufficient.**

**The SDC would like to see future plans clearly set out the key contributions that a department/agency can make to the four priorities for immediate action set out in *Securing the Future*. This will facilitate assessment and tracking of cross-government progress against the priority areas.**

## **6. Strategy commitments**

### **6.1 Departmental commitments**

*Securing the Future* sets out the high-level contributions each key government department can make to delivering the strategy. SDC compiled a public list of the 250 specific commitments which were made in *Securing the Future*. Defra circulated these to all departments to assist with their preparation of their action plans.

#### ***How have departments approached their commitments?***

Most departments have acknowledged at least some of their commitments from *Securing the Future* but have tended to take a rather 'pick and mix' approach without explaining why i.e. whether some are particular priorities for 2006 etc.

Defra, HMT, DCLG and DFID have done particularly well in basing their plans on the high-level contributions attributed to them in *Securing the Future*. For DFID this meant that its plan was largely based around the international commitments set out in *Securing the Future*.

The bilaterals provided the SDC with a better understanding of departmental approaches to *Securing the Future* commitments. For example:

- DH explained that they did not see the need to include departmental commitments from *Securing the Future* in their plan, as they report progress on

these commitments to the Sustainable Development Programme Board. Moreover, some of the commitments from *Securing the Future* are no longer relevant, such as the work around healthy communities, due to departmental restructuring and lack of funds. DH felt that the SDAP should be centred around new commitments and initiatives.

- DfES explained in the bilateral that they had rethought their contribution to sustainable development and re-orientated their work since the publication of *Securing the Future*. They had therefore moved on from their strategy commitments.

Whilst this reasoning provides some reassurance that the commitments made in *Securing the Future* are not being ignored, SDAPs are supposed to be based on *Securing the Future* and set out progress against these commitments.

**The SDC expects each SDAP to acknowledge the full range of relevant *Securing the Future* commitments and indicate their relative priority. This does not require department to list all of its *Securing the Future* commitments in its SDAP. However, there should be a transparent audit trail between the commitments and any future work programme re-orientation.**

### **6.2 Cross-government commitments**

*Securing the Future* also sets out a list of cross-government commitments which apply across departments. They are:

- A new sustainable development purpose and a new set of principles to guide policy-making
- A commitment to strengthen leadership capacity within departments and their agencies, for example by providing civil servants with better training in sustainable development
- A commitment to ensure that an understanding of how to apply

sustainable development principles is a key part of policy skills for the future and that all policies are properly appraised against the new principles of sustainable development

- Undertaking to set stretching targets for meeting government objectives on sustainable procurement through a National Action Plan for Sustainable Procurement
- A new goal to be recognised as amongst the leaders in sustainable procurement across EU member states by 2009
- A promise to integrate sustainable development commitments into the 2006 spending review and later spending rounds.

In the main, it is *Securing the Future's* cross-government commitments which have been omitted from plans. Most plans include some actions in the relevant areas, but do not acknowledge their contribution to the cross-government commitments.

For example, whilst most plans include actions on sustainable procurement, most do not set out how they intend to contribute to ensuring that the UK government is an EU leader on sustainable procurement by 2009. Most departments also include some actions relating to sustainable development skills. None of the plans explain that these are actions aimed at tackling the cross-government commitment on increasing sustainable development capacity within government.

It is clear that much of government seems unsure of how to approach or tackle these commitments and is waiting for a lead from a particular department or a cross-cutting task-force. There is an expectation amongst departments that Cabinet Office will provide the lead on skills and policy making and that Defra will lead on sustainable procurement.

**The SDC recommends that the government's Sustainable Development Programme Board, which monitors *Securing the Future*, considers how to best promote the cross-cutting commitments outlined in *Securing the Future*.**

## 7. Target setting

Most departments/agencies struggled to specify SMART targets (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-related), i.e. what's going to happen, who's going to do it, when is it going to be done by, and how achievement will be measured. This hinders their ability to effectively report progress against their SDAP as the outcome they are seeking is not clear. This is clearly not an issue limited to SDAPs; the recent House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee report, *Sustainable Development Reporting by Government Departments*<sup>14</sup> found the overall standards of sustainable development reporting to be disappointing and that any targets were often unambitious or vague. DfES, DWP and FSA are among those that have made a good attempt at specifying SMART targets.

Across departments/agencies, many of the targets specified are often vague and it is not always clear what the desired outcome of actions are, or how they relate to the key commitments set out by departments. For example, MoD's key policy commitment is aimed at "embedding sustainable development into defence" but the SDAP does not really give the reader a sense of what it might actually achieve. The related action is: "to develop a coherent policy framework for environmental management based on air, land and water as a key enabler of defence."

DfT allocated no milestones to its actions but acknowledged that in most cases these could be specified. DTI has made it clear that most of its actions are for 2006 but has set few specific milestones within this timeframe. DCLG has set vague targets but acknowledged in the bilateral that the department could have used the action plan as a means of specifying outcome focused actions to ensure the commitments were delivered.

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<sup>14</sup> House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee, *Sustainable Development Reporting by Government Departments*, seventh report of session 2005-06, page3

VMD and PSD (two of Defra's agencies) avoided specifying SMART targets in their action plans and chose to only set out key commitments. However, bilateral discussions revealed that the agencies wanted to identify what is achievable in 2006 before specifying targets.

**The lack of SMART targets in this first round of SDAPs is extremely surprising. SDC expects to see more robust and specific targets in future plans to facilitate effective monitoring, reporting and review. Future plans should have a work programme with SMART targets and milestones, as well as allocated responsibility for delivery.**

It should be noted that the SDC did not assess the extent to which the targets included in plans are ambitious or sufficiently challenging. The SDC's approach was to firstly ensure that plans include specific and measurable targets. As departments improve their performance in this area, the SDC will assess whether future plans are sufficiently challenging.

## 8. Policy priorities

The SDC SDAP guidance suggests that the SDAP should set out the departmental key commitments to be included in the plan. The guidance asks departments to highlight their priority areas and outline why they have chosen to concentrate their activities here.

### 8.1 How have departments prioritised their policy commitments?

A large number of plans do not clearly specify their priority areas for action or provide a clear explanation of why departments decided to concentrate their activities on the actions included in the plan. The bilaterals revealed that often a departmental decision has been made regarding the priority areas for the plan, but not articulated in the SDAP. For example, Defra decided only to include actions based on *Securing the Future* commitments that

could be delivered in 2006. DfES decided to concentrate its efforts on schools because that is where it was felt most progress could be made over the coming year. Neither clearly explain their approach in the plan.

### 8.2 Can't see the woods for the trees

For some of the plans it is difficult to guess what the key priorities are as they include long lists of policy actions. The Home Office explained that it was difficult for the department to select which actions to include. It therefore decided to include actions which are part of existing commitments and work programmes so that the department will be able to report on progress at the end of the financial year. DTI explained that the sustainable development team found the task of engaging with the relevant policy teams and prioritising departmental action on sustainable development extremely complex as they had no Sustainable Development Director in place at the time of drafting. The result was a lengthy, un-prioritised plan.

### 8.3 Future policy assessments

It must be noted that this initial assessment of departmental plans did not examine the policy commitments in depth to determine whether departments have set themselves ambitious programmes of work. However, SDC's ongoing strategy monitoring work and in-depth policy reviews will consider individual SDAPs in detail as relevant.

**The SDC expects future plans to set out prioritised key policy commitments. Plans should be transparent and auditable, fully describing the relevance of the policy commitments included in the plan and articulating why and how the department prioritised its commitments.**

## 9. Leading by example

### 9.1 Operational priorities

*Securing the Future* makes it clear that the government intends the public sector to become “a leading exponent of sustainable development”. The SDC SDAP guidance therefore asks departments to demonstrate how they will action sustainable development in their operations and lead by example.

The framework for Sustainable Development in Government (SDiG)<sup>15</sup> established common targets (mainly environmentally focused) across government in key operational areas such as energy and waste against which departments report annually.

All departments and agencies have highlighted areas for operational activity for the timeframe of their plan. However, most departments have not made it clear why they have decided to concentrate their efforts on particular areas or on a specific selection of targets.

Some departments however have made a good attempt at explaining their approach to their key operational commitments. For example, DCMS explains that the department’s overall operational target is to increase its SDiG star rating (as awarded by the SDC) from two stars to three. The plan explains that the department will need to improve its performance in energy, waste and carbon emission categories to do so. The plan includes specific targets in the areas outlined above.

**Future SDAPs should clearly specify any priority actions to improve performance against the government’s sustainable development targets.**

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<sup>15</sup> The ‘framework’ is the main vehicle for improving the performance of the government estate. It covers all key environmental and social impacts of the running of departments. The framework also contains guidance to support departments in achieving targets.

### 9.2 Sustainable procurement

*Securing the Future* sets a new goal to make the UK a leader in sustainable procurement across EU member states by 2009. Most departments have included actions in their plan relating to sustainable procurement. For most departments actions are often aimed at ensuring sustainable development is reflected in the department’s procurement strategy which was required by December 2005 as part of SDiG. Some, such as the MoD for example, have committed to implementing the actions arising from the Sustainable Procurement Task Force recommendations.

**It is likely that departmental performance against the National Procurement Plan will be measured and reported separately on an annual basis and scrutinised by the SDC, National Audit Office (NAO), Audit Commission and Healthcare Commission. However, departments/agencies should ensure that there is sufficient integration between their SDAP and future procurement reporting requirements.**

### 9.3 Impacts of having an Environmental Management System (EMS)

EMS is a method or tool for systematically working with environmental questions within an organisation. An EMS includes concrete objectives, plans of action and a clear division of responsibility for environmental management issues.

Under the new Framework, all departments are now mandated to have EMS based or modelled upon a recognised system.

Not surprisingly it would seem that those departments with an EMS in place are more likely to be clear about where they need to improve their operational activities. CSL for example explained in the bilateral that they have an EMS priority scorecard that rates all their operational areas. The score is automatically doubled if it is a Defra objective. DWP explained that they have targets and milestones within their EMS to



help the department deliver the Framework targets.

## 9.4 Interesting projects on the go

Overall the plans include some interesting operations based actions. For example:

- Defra, where practical, will develop water saving projects at Defra sites, to re-use rain water for non-potable purposes
- The Home Office will pursue proposals to install a pilot wind turbine at one of the Prison Estate sites
- HMT, in partnership with the Carbon Trust, intended to perform an energy review of its estate and implement the review's recommendations on energy efficiency by March 2006
- Defra has also committed to undertake a full review of energy management of its estate through an agreed Carbon Management Programme with the Carbon Trust
- DH will replace unused car parking spaces in London DH estate with cycle racks.

## 10. Policy-making

### What does *Securing the Future* say about policy making?

*Securing the Future* explains that since April 2004 all departments and their agencies have been required to include environmental and social costs and benefits, as well as economic costs and benefits, in the Regulatory Impact Assessments (RIAs) which they must produce and publish for all new proposals with significant public or private sector impacts.<sup>16</sup>

The NAO reports three main factors which characterise effective RIAs:<sup>17</sup>

- starting the process early

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<sup>16</sup> *Securing the Future* p155.

<sup>17</sup> *Better Regulation: Making Good Use of Regulatory Impact Assessments* (HC329 Session 2001-02).

- consulting effectively with those affected by the proposal, and
- analysing appropriately the likely costs and benefits of the proposal

*Securing the Future* stresses that the early identification of wider effects is crucial in seeking to devise more sustainable options, to maximise potential benefits and to reduce adverse impacts where these are unavoidable. *Securing the Future* commits to ensuring that this message is reinforced at all levels across departments.

A recent NAO report "Regulatory Impact Assessments and Sustainable Development" (2006) assessed the extent to which RIAs reflect the requirement to consider environmental and social impacts. The NAO reviewed a sample of ten RIAs that related to policies with likely significant social and environmental impacts. The conclusion was that most did not, as yet, take full account of wider sustainable development concerns. It was suggested that better guidance and training would help, coupled with a strengthened scrutiny role of the Better Regulation Executive in the Cabinet Office.

## 10.1 Sustainable Development Proofing

Whilst most departments acknowledged the need to ensure that sustainable development is embedded within the existing policy making process, many of the plans do not describe how far existing approaches are adequate.

Only few departments specified a need to improve the quality and monitoring of RIAs. DCMS recognised the need to "introduce a more robust quality control function to ensure impact assessments become an integrated part of policy development across the department". Defra acknowledged that internal processes such as RIAs and their "stretching the web" appraisal tools are being applied patchily and have committed to ensuring their consistent use across the department at an early stage in the process. MoD have committed to provide advice and guidance on RIAs and confirmed in bilateral discussions that the guidance would not re-

invent the Cabinet Office guidance but would explain to staff how it fitted with the MoD's own processes.

However, more encouragingly, DWP now requires all parts of the department who engage in policy making and strategic decision making to confirm in writing their processes for integrating sustainability in line with the aims of the action plan.

## 10.2 Future Impact Assessments

The Better Regulation Executive is currently consulting on proposals to revise the Regulatory Impact Assessment process. We hope the impact assessment can work to fully integrate sustainable development into policy analysis. The new structure will require policy makers to identify whether the policy complies with the sustainable development principles. Policy makers will need to "identify whether the policy option will underpin sustainable development principles; achieving a strong, healthy and just society within environmental limits."<sup>18</sup> Policy makers will also be asked to "include implications for future generations, social impacts such as on health and racial equality, and environmental impacts including greenhouse gas emissions, water use and biodiversity".

**The SDC expects future plans to set out clearly how departments/agencies will ensure that policies are appraised against the revised Impact Assessments, identifying where the policy option will underpin the sustainable development principles, as set out in the revised Cabinet Office guidance.**

## 10.3 Integrating the five principles into policy making

*Securing the Future* sets out the five guiding principles explaining that these principles will be used to guide policy-making across government. On the whole, many departments make a commitment to integrate the five guiding principles into

<sup>18</sup> *The Tools to Deliver Better Regulation -Revising the Regulatory Impact Assessment: A Consultation*

their policy making processes. However, it is not always made clear what mechanisms they will use to achieve this.

Other departments make similar commitments, but acknowledge the need to investigate how this can be achieved. DH for example "will take forward actions to include the sustainable development principles in DH policy development" and explain that detailed action will be developed in 2006/07 to ensure sustainable development is included in policy appraisal.

Departments clearly recognise the need to meet the commitment made in *Securing the Future* to integrate the five guiding principles into policy making. However, most are not clear on how they will ensure the principles become an integral part of the policy-making process. One of the biggest challenges for departments is ensuring their staff have the right skills to do this.

## 11. Skills and capacity to deliver

*Securing the Future* explains that no amount of guidance can be a substitute for giving people the skills they need to put sustainable development into practice. It includes a commitment to strengthen leadership capacity within departments and their agencies, for example, by providing civil servants with better training in sustainable development.

Sustainable development implies taking a long-term approach to policy making; handling considerable complexity from diverse viewpoints; and being inclusive of stakeholders as a policy development strategy. In short, longer-term, broader-based and inclusive working strategies based upon critical thinking and systems thinking skills. These features are also features of good policy making, yet they are not well established in the civil service or other parts of society, creating a major skills challenge.

Most departments have recognised the need to increase capacity and understanding of



sustainable development within their organisations and have included actions aimed at improving skills through sustainable development training. For example, to assess the level of skills within the department, Defra is conducting skills audits which include sustainable development, whilst MoD and DWP are reassessing the training needs across their organisations. All three departments have committed to addressing any skills and training gaps that might emerge as a result of the audits.

Many departments have included actions aimed at integrating sustainable development as part of the induction training for new staff. However, this does not often appear to be allied with any strategic approach to assessing sustainable development skills needs.

### 11.1 Policy skills

*Securing the Future* explains that a thorough understanding of how to apply sustainable development principles will need to be a key part of policy skills for the future.

Most departments have found this commitment difficult to tackle; plans often set out a programme of activity that is not yet adequately supported by a skills programme. Many departments have committed to integrating the five guiding principles into policy-making but most have not clarified how they will ensure policy makers have the rights skills to do so. Others, such as DH, recognise the need to develop appropriate training tools for staff but aren't yet clear on how they will do so. The department has committed to developing appropriate training tools for staff in this area in 2006/07.

### Innovative examples

There are some innovative practices emerging in relation to sustainable development skills. For example, DfES intends to develop a policy maker's toolbox comprising details of sustainable development principles and a simple to use policy appraisal method. The bilateral

revealed that to address further sustainable development skills and knowledge, the HR and Corporate Services team are currently looking at training for sustainable development skills in policy making and are holding discussions with the Learning Academy to explore possible training programmes.

The FSA is ensuring that staff are being provided with the necessary skills for implementing the principles of sustainable development through the *Guidance to Staff on Sustainability Assessments* and through in-house seminars and workshops in which staff work through an example of a sustainability assessment.

### 11.2 Role of the National School of Government (NSG)

The bilaterals revealed that a large number of departments are waiting for a lead on sustainable development skills from Cabinet Office and the National School of Government<sup>19</sup> or intend to seek support from NSG.

**The SDC is beginning work with the National School for Government to develop civil service expertise in sustainable development, to help embed it across government policy making and delivery, as well as organisational and operational activities.**

## 12. Engagement

There is an emerging recognition of the importance of engagement in government. *Securing the Future* explains that the ability to engage the wider public in the development and implementation of new ideas is integral to the delivery of sustainable development. The SDC believes that active participation by people in informing new policies and in adopting changes in behaviour is critical if the UK is to

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<sup>19</sup> The National School of Government is the business school for government dedicated to the public sector and is an organisation that works with public sector departments to help deliver their business priorities and the government reform agenda.

create the momentum and political will to achieve sustainable development.

In the SDAP guidance published in August 2005, the SDC suggested that the SDAP should set out:

- How departments will engage staff and stakeholders in the production, revision and delivery of the plan, demonstrating how the action plan will be 'owned' throughout the organisation.
- How departments will encourage continuing engagement and constructive stakeholder dialogue to ensure that each plan is a 'living' and evolving document.

### **12.1 How have departments engaged?**

All departments/agencies took the basic step of notifying staff in some way about the publication of the SDAP (see below). Some also managed to engage with staff and stakeholders in the production of the plan. For example:

- FSA actively sought feedback on their draft plan from staff and stakeholders. The agency posted its draft action plan on its website and notified its stakeholders of its existence, asking for feedback from organisations such as the Soil Association.
- DCA developed its plan under the overall direction of a department-wide Sustainability Steering Group and conducted interviews with key individuals across the department. The draft plan was posted on the intranet for internal feedback.

Most departments however have not demonstrated how they will build ownership of the plan across the department to achieve results, despite recognising the role staff have to play to ensure delivery of the plan. For example, DfES and DCA's plans explain that it is up to every individual within the department to contribute to the delivery of the plan but haven't clearly outlined the underlying

engagement process taken to ensure staff have sense of ownership of it and know how they can support its delivery.

When asked, most departments/agencies could not describe how they had advised their staff to use the plan and several departments, for example HMT and LOD, acknowledged in bilateral discussions that they could have given more thought to communicating the plan to staff.

### **12.2 Engagement in policy making**

Some departments/agencies have acknowledged the role of engagement as a key component of delivering sustainable development. Defra have committed to piloting innovative ways of engaging the public in policy-making in the future and aim to increase the number of teams who involve external stakeholders, whether within or from outside Defra, in their policy design process. The Home Office, in an attempt to drive forward work to incorporate sustainable development into wider social responsibility projects, has included actions in its plan to devise a gateway for stakeholder communications to better coordinate how communications flow to stakeholders and will host a series of stakeholder engagement events in 2006. DTI recognises that "for DTI, Sustainable Development demands a sea change in the way we develop, implement and communicate policy", but has not included any specific actions aimed at tackling this.

### **12.3 Engaging with staff**

Most departments/agencies attempt to engage with staff and raise awareness of sustainable development and sustainable development initiatives. This usually takes the form of lunchtime seminars and staff induction. In launching the actions plans, the majority of departments posted plans on their intranet sites with an accompanying news bulletin informing staff of the plan's existence. DWP accompanied the launch of their plan with a sustainable development Conference in January 2006 which was

attended by its Sustainable Development Minister and Permanent Secretary. The Sustainable Development Minister alerted staff and stakeholders to the existence of the plan.

## Future plans

The SDC would like departments/agencies to demonstrate awareness of the potential of engagement in achieving sustainable development outcomes by setting out the different types of engagement to be used in the integration of a sustainable development approach within the organisation. These can range from information-giving to education, consultation and co-delivery of desired outcomes.

Significant engagement is required to ensure interest, ownership, relevance, accountability, mainstreaming and delivery across the whole department, including synergies with other departments. Critical to this would be early engagement, for example engagement of key stakeholders in doing the thinking that shapes the action plan rather than commenting on the plan drawn up by one consultant/member of staff. We would be looking for evidence of departments engaging with stakeholders, including those from other departments, in the production of the plan.

**Departments must engage with stakeholders in the production of plans. The SDC would also expect departments to ensure each level of the organisation knows what the action plan means to them and how they can support it. Future plans should set out what steps the departments intend to take to ensure departmental-wide ownership of plans.**

## 13. Good governance?

The SDAP guidance suggests that plans need to be supported by the right organisational structures and processes and that departments/agencies need to consider what processes they have in place to ensure that sustainable development is embedded

in policy making (at the earliest stage) and day-to-day management of their estate. The delivery of the SDAP should be fully integrated into the department/agency's work - its priorities, strategies, other corporate plans, initiatives and white papers.

### 13.1 Ensuring delivery

Most departments describe the infrastructure in place to ensure the delivery of the plan. Several departments such as DH, DCMS and DfES have set up new cross-cutting groups which will be responsible for the delivery of plans, as well as the wider integration of sustainable development in the department. These groups are usually made of sustainable development Champions and are chaired by a senior official. Whilst DTI did not wish to create a formal group, it is also relying on sustainable development champions to integrate sustainable development into individual directorates. DfT, DFID and DCLG have not specified what mechanisms they have in place to ensure the delivery of the plan or facilitate a process of integration.

Some departments explained in the bilateral that they found it difficult to gain contributions for the plans from across the organisation as there was no mechanism in place that would enable them to do so. For example, ONS produced an operations based plan as there was no mechanism in place to enable the sustainable development team to gain contributions from their Environmental Accounts Unit. DTI explained in the bilateral that it faced difficulties in gathering contributions from the relevant policy areas.

**The SDC advises all departments/agencies to ensure that their plans are supported by organisational structures and processes which are sufficiently cross-cutting and cover all levels of the department.**

## 13.2 Interdepartmental arrangements for delivery

None of the departments/agencies have explained how they will work with other departments to deliver joint commitments (which have often been omitted from the SDAP). In some cases departments felt that existing co-ordination arrangements between departments ensured that work programmes were already aligned and they did not particularly need to highlight joint working.

It is also evident that departments have not coordinated their approach with other key departments to align their plans and check for compatibility. DCLG and DTI for example did not compare plans despite both having an interest in regional government. However, we are aware that there was some peer review of plans – for example DWP sought feedback from a range of departments and Defra sought external peer review from Marks and Spencer and the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) as well as DWP.

**The SDC recommends that future SDAPs should include joint commitments where relevant, and seek to ensure that plans are coordinated with other departments/agencies where applicable.**

## 13.3 Government Offices (GOs)

Government Offices represent central government departments in the regions. They work with regional partners to ensure the joined-up delivery of the policies of DCLG, DTI, Defra, DH, DfES, HO, DfT, CO, DCMS and DWP. All of these contribute to sustainable development, as set out in *Securing the Future*. For example, Regional Directors of Public Health and their teams work with the Government Offices to ensure that the public health dimensions of sustainable development are promoted and considered across a range of different policy areas.

*Securing the Future* explains that the government will continue to engage

regional stakeholders in policy development and will continue to explore ways to increase cross departmental ‘joined-up working’ with key regional stakeholders on national policy development and look for new ways to help regions contribute fully to sustainable development.

The Home Office is the only department to include an action point which relates to working with GOs in their action plan. The HO action relates to working in partnership with GOs to deliver HO targets on reducing crime.

**The SDC would expect to see departments including actions in future plans aimed at working with Government Offices (GOs) to ensure the delivery of sustainable development at the local level (for example through Local Area Agreements). Departments will need to work together to ensure they provide coordinated guidance for GOs.**

## 14. Leadership and accountability

The SDC SDAP guidance explains that a successful action plan will need to be owned by the Management Board (or equivalent) and the Sustainable Development Minister or Chief Executive. Plans will also require senior level responsibility for delivery.

### Do plans have senior level buy-in?

Most of the departmental plans were signed off by the Sustainable Development Ministers and the majority of plans indicate who is the senior accountable officer responsible for delivery of the plan. For example, DH’s plan was endorsed by the Sustainable Development Minister as well as the Permanent Secretary, demonstrating political leadership as well as signalling that sustainable development is a day to day issue for the department. The plans produced by Defra’s executive agencies were signed off by the Chief Executive and the Management Board.

Five departments have not made clear who signed off their plan. However, bilaterals revealed that all plans were endorsed by the Sustainable Development Minister or equivalent. Most plans identify the senior official responsible for the delivery of the plan.

**The SDC expects all future plans to indicate who signed off the plan, and who is the senior accountable officer.**

## 15. Monitoring and Reporting

The UK sustainable development strategy requires all departments and executive agencies to produce a Sustainable Development Action Plan (SDAP) by December 2005 and "report on their actions by December 2006, for example, in their departmental annual reports and regularly thereafter." The recent Environmental Audit Committee (EAC) report, *Sustainable Development Reporting by Government Departments*, expressed concern that "this clearly opens the way for valuable momentum to be lost" and recommended that "the government should remove the ambiguity inherent in this formulation by requiring departments to update SDAPs and monitor progress against them on an annual basis."<sup>20</sup>

**The SDC supports the EAC recommendation requiring departments to update SDAPs annually.** The SDC SDAP guidance explains that the actions plans should set out the monitoring, reviewing and reporting mechanisms established to monitor progress.

### 15.1 Monitoring progress

Most departments attempt to outline the monitoring mechanisms in place to review progress against the plan. This is often set out in the context of the different groups in place to monitor specific areas of the plan. For example, HMT explained in the bilateral

that their Estates division will monitor progress against the operational targets, whilst the Environment Food and Rural Affairs team will monitor progress against the policy priorities.

MoD, DCMS and DfES have acknowledged in their plans that they do not have the right mechanisms in place to monitor progress against all the actions in the plan and have committed to devising appropriate monitoring systems to track progress against each of the targets in the plan.

The checklist and SDC assessment expects each department to set out the basic process in place to enable it to monitor progress against the plan. It does not examine the degree to which departments have a robust monitoring system in place. In most cases the bilaterals highlighted the further work to be done by departments to establish effective monitoring systems to enable them to report against progress of plans adequately.

**The SDC expects future plans to set out how progress will be monitored against all the actions in the plan, outlining the monitoring and review mechanisms in place.**

### 15.2 Reporting

The SDC guidance suggests that departments/agencies consider an SDAP reporting approach that best fits their own corporate approach to reporting whilst ensuring that it does not form an isolated process with no feedback mechanisms into core business systems.

Most departments intend to align their SDAP reporting with their annual reports or sustainable development reports. However, most plans do not show a clear forward reporting/review process beyond 2006. Further information about departmental thinking in this area has usually emerged from the bilateral meetings and most departments have indicated their intention to report on progress on an annual basis.

<sup>20</sup> House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee, *Sustainable Development Reporting by Government Departments*, Seventh Report of Session 2005-06.



The House of Commons EAC report has also recommended that SDAPs should be published alongside departmental annual reports in the spring and should set out departmental plans and priorities. The report also recommends that sustainability reports should be published alongside the Annual Report and accounts, and should set out results and performance. The sustainability report would cover achievement against the action plan and departmental contribution to *Securing the Future*.<sup>21</sup>

**The SDC expects future plans to set out how progress will be monitored against all the actions in the plan, outlining the monitoring and review mechanisms in place. SDC supports the EAC recommendation on annual reporting as outlined above.**

## **16. How far are Executive Agencies covered?**

Most departments chose to incorporate their executive agencies in their departmental plans for this year. This approach seems to have been favoured due to time pressures in meeting the December 2005 deadline. Only Defra's Agencies have reported separately. Most Agencies are now working towards having their own plans in 2006/7 with DCMS, DfES and Defra already encouraging their Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs) to produce plans.

DWP has taken an active decision to always include its executive agencies within its own plan to ensure effective delivery, cohesion and co-ordination. DCLG has also indicated that it does not envisage that its agencies will produce their own plans in the future, as their involvement is limited to sustainable operations. The agencies operational priorities are coordinated by DCLG.

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<sup>21</sup> House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee, *Sustainable Development Reporting by Government Departments*, Seventh Report of Session 2005-06.

## **How has Defra engaged with its agencies?**

Defra was the only department whose executive agencies prepared SDAPs this year. Defra held a seminar for its executive agencies in July 2005 to provide guidance in preparing their action plans. Bilaterals with Defra's agencies established that some agencies sought advice from Defra throughout the process of producing their plans. Several agencies also worked with each other to develop their plans, sharing drafts with organisations which have similar remits. Defra encouraged agencies, where applicable, to make the links between the agencies respective activities and *Securing the Future*.

Most of the agencies we spoke to in bilateral discussions felt that they had been well supported by their core department in the preparation of their SDAP.

## **How have other departments incorporated agencies?**

For most departments however, there was little evidence to suggest the active involvement of the executive agencies and contribution to the development of the departmental plans. It is not always clear how departments engaged with their agencies to explore and identify the specific contribution agencies can make to the overall departmental priorities, or how agencies will take forward the activities identified in plans. HMT and HMRC were unable to clarify in the bilateral whether their agencies were included in their departmental plan. Consequently, some agencies are not meaningfully covered by the SDAPs.

**SDC would expect Executive Agencies to report separately as required by the *Securing the Future* commitment unless the lead department can set out a clear business case for not doing so e.g. precedent in managing agencies. The SDC encourages departments to actively engage with their agencies in the preparation and delivery of their**



**action plans to ensure a coordinated approach in line with departmental priorities.**

## **16.1 Future coverage of SDAPs**

The current *Securing the Future* commitment is for all central government departments and executive agencies to produce plans. It is not clear whether this commitment also applies to non-ministerial departments. A number of non-ministerial departments already participate in sustainable development reporting initiatives such as that for the government's operations targets. They are the departments who prepared SDAPs this year: the Food Standards Agency, HMRC, ONS and ECGD. However, regulators such as the Office of Water Services (Ofwat) and the Office of Gas

and Electricity Markets (Ofgem) have not prepared plans.

Ultimately the SDC would like to see all public bodies, including NDPBs, required to prepare an SDAP. However, in these early stages it would seem sensible to have a phased approach and ensure that all departments, executive agencies and non-ministerial departments establish their plans first. It must be clear which organisations are required to prepare plans.

**The SDC recommends that the Energy and Environment Sustainable Development Cabinet Sub Committee (EE-SD) agrees a phased approach to extending organisational coverage of the SDAP commitment and clarifies the current extent to which the commitment applies across government.**

# Sustainable Development Action Plans – SDC critique

## Glossary of abbreviations

CEFAS	Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science
CO	Cabinet Office
CSL	Central Science Laboratory
CSR	Comprehensive Spending Review
DCA	Department for Constitutional Affairs
DCLG	Department for Communities and Local Government
DCMS	Department for Culture, Media and Sport
Defra	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DFID	Department for International Development
DfT	Department for Transport
DH	Department of Health
DTI	Department of Trade and Industry
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
EAC	House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee
ECGD	Export Credits Guarantee Department
EE-SD	Energy and Environment Sustainable Development Cabinet Sub Committee
EMS	Environmental Management System
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
FSA	Food Standards Agency
GO	Government Office
HMRC	HM Revenue and Customs
HMT	HM Treasury
HO	Home Office
LOD	Law Officers' Departments
MoD	Ministry of Defence
NAO	National Audit Office
NDPB	Non Departmental Public Body
NSG	National School of Government
ONS	Office for National Statistics
Ofgem	Office of Gas and Electricity Markets
Ofwat	Office of Water Services
PSA	Public Service Agreement
PSD	Pesticides Safety Directorate
SD	Sustainable Development
SDAP	Sustainable Development Action Plan
SDC	Sustainable Development Commission
SDiG	Sustainable Development in Government
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-related
SPS	Single Payment Scheme
SPTF	Sustainable Procurement Task Force
VLA	Veterinary Laboratories Agency
VMD	Veterinary Medicines Directorate
RIA	Regulatory Impact Assessment
RPA	Rural Payments Agency

## Annex A – SDC’s role: Support and Assessment

The SDC is responsible for assessing the UK government’s progress against *Securing the Future*. The SDAPs are a key indicator of this progress.

### SDC SDAP Guidance

The SDC published a guide for those preparing SDAPs in August 2005 (<http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/publications/downloads/SDC%20action%20plan%20guidance%20-%20formatted%20FINAL.pdf>). This set out what SDC considers to be the key elements of a good plan. SDC offered advice on initial drafts to help departments/agencies interpret the guidance and relevant areas of the *Securing the Future*. SDC did not however, officially endorse any finalised plans.

### SDAP Assessment Framework

The SDC assessed plans based on an framework the commission has compiled based on its initial guidance. This considers plans on the basis of the strategic context, content, and underpinning processes which they outline. A checklist of the key elements that need to be included in each plan was formulated, and each plan was assessed against it.

Annex B contains a sample checklist used to assess whether the essential elements of a plan are present, together with an explanation of our approach to each of the questions. It must be noted that the checklist identifies whether plans set out basic processes. Further work needs to be done to examine the degree to which the departmental systems in place are robust and the extent to which departmental commitments are ambitious.

The table in Annex D is a Competency Framework devised by the SDC. It outlines the degree to which departments cover the key elements against each of the questions included in the checklist. The column on the far right gives an indication of what the SDC would expect to see in future plans.

### Bilaterals

As part of the assessment process, the SDC held bilaterals with departments/agencies so that each had an opportunity to discuss the thinking behind their plan and associated actions, and to enable the SDC to set its critique in an appropriate context. A full list of bilateral dates is attached in Annex E. These meetings lasted approximately two hours and were attended by the principal SDAP contact in each department who has been fully engaged in the preparation of the action plan. The invitation was also extended to senior colleagues and other staff, as each departments felt necessary.

The SDC has conducted bilaterals with 18 central government departments and the six Defra executive agencies which produced a plan. For those departments that had not submitted a final plan, the SDC’s assessment/bilateral was largely based on the draft received by 17 March 2006. This was the final deadline issued by the commission.

### The Canadian Experience

In compiling its assessment framework, the SDC drew considerably on the experience of the Office of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development in Canada (part of the Office of the Auditor General of Canada) which assesses the sustainable development strategies that each federal department is required to update every three years, and report

progress in their departmental performance reports. The third generation of departmental strategies were tabled in the House of Commons in February 2004 and this process of assessment is well advanced. The Canadian auditors indicated that assessments for the first round of action plans should be focused on ensuring that there are systems and processes in place within departments in order to facilitate the integration of sustainable development into departmental decision-making, and that departments have the necessary processes and systems in place to deliver, monitor and report on their commitments.

## Annex B - Sample checklist and explanation of SDC approach to the questions

1	Does the plan specify the period of time it will cover?	Is it made clear from the plan what timeframe it covers?
2	Does the plan specify which organisations it covers?	Plans should explain whether agencies are covered and list them in the plan.
3	Has the organisation articulated what sustainable development (SD) means for them?	Does the plan explain how sustainable development fits in with their organisation?
4	Does the plan describe the benefits of having an SD approach to the organisation?	Do the plans set out any benefits that may result from taking a sustainable development approach?
5	Does the plan acknowledge the government's sustainable development goal?	Do plans mention elements of the <i>Securing The Future</i> goal?
6	Does the plan acknowledge the priorities of <i>Securing the Future</i> ?  Does the plan mention one or more of the priorities of <i>Securing the Future</i> ?	Does the plan explain that <i>Securing the Future</i> sets out four priorities for immediate action?  Does the plan mention one or more of the priorities without acknowledging their source?
7	Does the plan identify links to the priorities of <i>Securing the Future</i> ?	Does the plan identify links between priorities and departmental work programme?
8	Does the plan acknowledge the principles of <i>Securing the Future</i> ?  Does the plan mention one or more of the principles of <i>Securing the Future</i> ?	Does the plan explain that <i>Securing the Future</i> sets out five principles to be used in policy formulation?  Does the plan mention one or more of the principles without acknowledging their source?
9	Does the plan identify links to the principles of <i>Securing the Future</i> ?	Does the plan demonstrate an understanding of how the principles may affect the department's work?
10	Have the organisation's relevant executive agencies produced their own plan?	Have all the EAs produced and published their own separate plans?
11	Does the action plan contain a work programme?	Does the plan include an indication of targeted areas of work for the department to action?
12	Does the plan include actions relating to commitments from <i>Securing the Future</i> ?	Does the plan include any actions relating to relevant areas of work highlighted in <i>Securing the Future</i> ?
13	Does the action plan cover government policy?	Does the plan cover or include any actions relating to government policy e.g. HO including actions on crime prevention?
14	Does the action plan cover operations?	Does the plan include any actions aimed at improving operational performance?
15	Was the plan publicly available by 13th January 2006?	Was the plan made available to the public by January 2006?
16	Was it published on the departmental website?	Was the plan published on the departmental website once finalised?
17	Does the plan outline any arrangements for strengthening SD capacity in the organisation?	Does the plan include any actions aimed at strengthening sustainable development capacity e.g. through training, raising awareness etc?
18	Does the plan describe the infrastructure in place to deliver the plan?	Does the plan indicate any mechanisms which will ensure delivery of the plan?
19	Is it clear in the plan who signed it off?	Does the plan make clear who signed it off?
20	Does the plan designate who is accountable for the delivery of the overall plan?	Does the plan explain who is the senior officer accountable for the delivery of the plan?
21	Does the plan explain how the organisation will monitor progress against the plan?	Does the plan describe the basic process in place to enable departments to monitor progress against the plan?

22	Does the plan describe how the organisation will report against the plan?	Does the plan explain where the department will publish its progress report
23	Does the plan describe how it links in to other reporting mechanisms within the organisation, e.g. the annual report?	Does the plan explain how the progress report will be cross-referenced with other departmental reporting mechanisms?
24	Does the plan commit to reporting against the plan on a defined regular basis?	Does the plan indicate whether the department plans to report on progress on an annual basis?



## Annex C – Departmental performance against the checklist

Department	DCA	DCLG	DCMS	Defra	DFES	DFID	DFt	DH	DTI	DWP	ECGD	FCO <sup>22</sup>	FSA	HMRC	HMT	HO	LOD	MoD	ONS
Does the plan specify the period of time it will cover?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗
Does the plan specify which organisations it covers?	✗	✗	✓	✓	n/a	n/a	✓	✓	✓	✓	n/a	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	n/a
Has the organisation articulated what sustainable development (SD) means for them?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Does the plan describe the benefits of having an SD approach to the organisation?	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓
Does the plan acknowledge the government's sustainable development goal?	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗
Does the plan acknowledge the priorities of <i>Securing the Future</i> ?	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
Does the plan mention one or more of the priorities of <i>Securing the Future</i> ?	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Does the plan identify links to the priorities of <i>Securing the Future</i> ?	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗
Does the plan acknowledge the principles of <i>Securing the Future</i> ?	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓
Does the plan mention one or more of the principles of <i>Securing the Future</i> ?	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓
Does the plan identify links to the principles of <i>Securing the Future</i> ?	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗
Have the organisation's relevant executive agencies produced their own plan?	✗	✗	✗	✓	n/a	n/a	✗	✗	✗	✗	n/a	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	n/a
Does the action plan contain a work programme?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Does the plan include actions relating to commitments from <i>Securing the Future</i> ?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Does the action plan cover government policy?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗
Does the action plan cover operations?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Was the plan publicly available by 13th January 2006?	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Was it published on the departmental website by the end of March 2006?	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗
Does the plan outline any arrangements for strengthening SD capacity in the organisation?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Does the plan describe the infrastructure which is in place to deliver the plan?	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
Does the plan make it clear who signed it off?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓
Does the plan designate who is accountable for the delivery of the overall plan?	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Does the plan explain how the organisation will monitor progress against the plan?	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗
Does the plan describe how the organisation will report against the plan?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Does the plan describe how it links in to other reporting mechanisms within the organisation?	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Does the plan commit to reporting against the plan on a defined regular basis?	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗

<sup>22</sup> The FCO's assessment is based on its sustainable development strategy which was published in March 2005.

<b>Defra's Executive Agencies</b>	<b>Cefas</b>	<b>CSL</b>	<b>PSD</b>	<b>RPA</b>	<b>VLA</b>	<b>VMD</b>
Does the plan specify the period of time it will cover?	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
Does the plan specify which organisations it covers?	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Has the organisation articulated what sustainable development (SD) means for them?	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓
Does the plan describe the benefits of having an SD approach to the organisation?	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓
Does the plan acknowledge the government's sustainable development goal?	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓
Does the plan acknowledge the priorities of <i>Securing the Future</i> ?	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗
Does the plan mention one or more of the priorities of <i>Securing the Future</i> ?	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗
Does the plan identify links to the priorities of <i>Securing the Future</i> ?	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗
Does the plan acknowledge the principles of <i>Securing the Future</i> ?	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓
Does the plan mention one or more of the principles of <i>Securing the Future</i> ?	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗
Does the plan identify links to the principles of <i>Securing the Future</i> ?	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓
Have the organisation's relevant executive agencies produced their own plan?	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Does the action plan contain a work programme?	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗
Does the plan include actions relating to commitments from <i>Securing the Future</i> ?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Does the action plan cover government policy?	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
Does the action plan cover operations?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Was the plan publicly available by 13th January 2006?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
Was it published on the departmental website by the end of March 2006?						
Does the plan outline any arrangements for strengthening SD capacity in the organisation?	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓
Does the plan describe the infrastructure in place to deliver the plan?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Does the plan make it clear who signed it off?	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗
Does the plan designate who is accountable for the delivery of the overall plan?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Does the plan explain how the organisation will monitor progress against the plan?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Does the plan describe how the organisation will report against the plan?	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓
Does the plan describe how it links in to other reporting mechanisms within the organisation?	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓
Does the plan commit to reporting against the plan on a defined regular basis?	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓

## Annex D – SDAP Competency Framework

This competency framework outlines the degree to which departments have met the key elements of the checklist. The column on the far right (scored 3) gives an indication of what the SDC would expect to see in future plans.

Departments were scored against the full competency framework and the median score was used to allocate them to the SDC categories: “Barely beginning”, “off the starting block”, “gaining momentum”, “gearing up”, or a “leading the pack”.

	0	1	2	3
1	No indication of period of time covered	Specific timescale can be inferred from targets/plan	-	Timescale clearly specified
2	Does not specify which organisations covered	Confirms agencies covered/produced own plan, but does not specify which ones	-	Confirms agencies covered/produced own plan, and specifies which ones
3	Does not articulate what sustainable development (SD) means for them	Articulates SD but does not link to core business	Articulates SD and makes links to social, environmental, and/or economic issues within their remit	Articulates how an SD approach sits with their core business objectives
4	No benefits described	Refers to generic SD benefits but not specific to the organisation (e.g. reducing running costs of operations)	Refers to generic SD benefits specific to the organisation	Refers to both operational and policy (national or internal) benefits and explains expected outcomes
5	<i>Securing the Future</i> goal not acknowledged at all and no description of SD provided	States elements of the <i>Securing the Future</i> goal but does not acknowledge source	Describes the <i>Securing the Future</i> goal and refers to source	Describes the <i>Securing the Future</i> goal, refers to source and describes how it is to be used
6	No mention of the <i>Securing the Future</i> priorities	Mentions one or more of the <i>Securing the Future</i> priorities without acknowledging their source	Acknowledges there are priorities from <i>Securing the Future</i> but does not list any	Acknowledges and lists relevant <i>Securing the Future</i> priorities
7	No links made to the <i>Securing the Future</i> priorities	Identifies links between priorities and existing work programme	Makes links between the priorities and new operational <u>or</u> policy commitments	Makes links between the priorities and both new operational <u>and</u> policy commitments
8	No mention of the <i>Securing the Future</i> principles	Mentions one or more of the principles without acknowledging their source	Acknowledges there are principles from <i>Securing the Future</i> but does not list all of them	Acknowledges and lists the <i>Securing the Future</i> principles

	0	1	2	3
9	No links made or actions relating to the <i>Securing the Future</i> principles	Makes assertion to integrate the principles but not supported by related actions or Identifies links between the <i>Securing the Future</i> principles and existing work programme	Makes assertion to integrate the <i>Securing the Future</i> principles with some related actions	Explains relevance of the <i>Securing the Future</i> principles to core business and explains how they will be mainstreamed and inform work
10	Relevant executive agencies have not produced their own plan	-	Some executive agencies have produced their own plan	All executive agencies have produced their own plan
11	Does not contain a work programme	Has a work programme	Has a work programme and the majority of targets are SMART	Has a work programme with SMART targets and milestones, with allocated responsibility
12	No actions relating to commitments from <i>Securing the Future</i>	Refers to some relevant areas (e.g. skills, procurement) relating to commitments from <i>Securing the Future</i>	Includes actions relating to specific and/or cross-cutting <i>Securing the Future</i> commitments but does not acknowledge their source	Includes actions relating to specific and/or cross-cutting <i>Securing the Future</i> commitments and acknowledges their source
13	Does not cover government policy	Describes relevance of government policy but does not set out associated actions	Contains some actions on government policy	Fully describes relevance of government policy, contains actions and explains why prioritised
14	Does not cover operations	Includes actions on operations with no explanation of how they have been prioritised	Contains specific operational commitments/actions, which build on SDiG commitments	Contains specific operational commitments/actions, building on SDiG commitments and explains how they have been prioritised
15	Plan was not available by 13 <sup>th</sup> January 2006	Draft was available but on request	Draft published on website	Final plan available on website
16	Does not mention strengthening SD capacity	Mentions need to address SD capacity but does not set any actions	Contains actions on raising awareness and/or SD training	Contains specific actions/commitments to develop sufficient SD capacity to support plan. Contributes to the <i>Securing the Future</i> cross-cutting goal

	0	1	2	3
17	Does not describe internal infrastructure	Describes basic SDAP monitoring and evaluation roles	Describes SDAP delivery roles and basic cross-cutting infrastructure	Describes infrastructure that covers all levels of the department and roles related to delivery and monitoring of the plan
18	Plan does not indicate who signed it off	Plan indicates who is to sign off but in draft form	-	Plan makes it clear who signed it off
19	Does not designate who is accountable for delivery	Accountability for delivery of plan is implied	-	Plan clearly identifies who is accountable for delivery of the plan
20	Does not explain how the organisation will monitor progress	Contains action to develop a monitoring system	Only refers to infrastructure that will review the plan	Plan explains how progress will be monitored against all actions, and outlines monitoring and review mechanisms
21	Does not describe how the organisation will report against the plan	Statement that they will report on progress but no explanation of how	State how they will report on progress but not publicly	Describes the reporting mechanisms in place to publicly report against the plan
22	Does not describe how the plan links with other reporting mechanisms	Plan will be reported on in Annual Report with limited space	Will produce separate progress report but does not explain if will be cross-referenced in Annual Report	Separate report on SDAP progress will be cross-referenced in departmental Annual Report
23	Does not commit to reporting on a defined regular basis	Plan commits to reporting regularly	-	Plan commits to reporting on a defined regular basis

## Annex E – SDAP Bilaterals

Department	Attendees	SDC	Meeting
DfT	Nigel Dotchin (Head of Transport Policy Co-ordination Branch) Philip Smith (Policy Adviser)	Emma Downing Ronit Reiss Tamar Bourne Alison Pridmore	23.02.06
Defra	Eileen Mortby (Head, SD in Defra) Kate Perkins (Adviser, SD in Defra) Virginia Hall (Adviser, SD in Defra)	Emma Downing Ronit Reiss Tamar Bourne	06.03.06
ECGD	Steve Dodgson (HR Director) David Allwood (Business Principles Adviser)	Emma Downing Ronit Reiss Tamar Bourne	07.03.06
DWP	Alan Wickert (Head of Sustainable Development) Richard Fountain (SD Manager)	Emma Downing Ronit Reiss Tamar Bourne	17.03.06
DFID	Joanne Alston (Head of SD Group) Gareth Martin (Team Leader, Environment for SD) Anna Balance (Environment Adviser, Environment for SD) Marion Tierney (Environmental Management Officer)	Emma Downing Ronit Reiss Tamar Bourne	20.03.06
FSA	Dr Richard Harding (Head of Consumer Choice Food Standards and Special Projects Division) Dr Alison Spalding (Head of Standards and Sustainability Branch) Karen Dell (Standards and Sustainability branch)	Emma Downing Ronit Reiss Tamar Bourne	23.03.06
DCMS	David Roe (Director, Strategy Division) Pat Mandeville (Strategy Division)	Emma Downing Ronit Reiss Tamar Bourne	04.04.06
DTI	Tony Pedrotti (Director, Sustainable Development) Tony Kesten (Sustainable Development Directorate) Kerry Vitalis (Sustainable Development Directorate)	Emma Downing Ronit Reiss Tamar Bourne	06.04.06
HMT	Rebecca Lawrence (Head of EFRA) Paul Peglar (Operations) Tom Koczwarra (EFRA Team)	Emma Downing Ronit Reiss Tamar Bourne	25.04.06
HO	Greg Marshall (Head of the Sustainable Development Team) Julia Wright (SD Manager) Tony Edwards (Head of Buildings and Estate Management Unit)	Emma Downing Ronit Reiss	03.05.06
MoD	Dr Michael Rutter (Director Safety and Claims) John Cole (Environment Team Leader) Richard Brewin (Environment Team)	Emma Downing Ronit Reiss	08.05.06
ONS	Ian Lewis (Property Management Team – outgoing) Peter Gregory (Property Management Team – incoming)	Emma Downing Ronit Reiss	10.05.06



Department	Attendees	SDC	Meeting
DCA	Mark Seymour (Head of Major Projects which supports the Court Building program) Alex Limberg (Head of Sustainable Development and Energy)	Emma Downing Ronit Reiss Tamar Bourne	15.05.06
HMRC	Maureen Pamplin (Sustainable Development & Environment Manager) Geraldine Gallan (Corporate Responsibility Team)	Emma Downing Ronit Reiss Tamar Bourne	18.05.06
LOD	Jenny Rowe (personal secretary at the Attorney General's Chambers) Tim Dexter (Sustainable Development Advisor)	Emma Downing Ronit Reiss Tamar Bourne	23.05.06
DfES	Janice Lawson (Head of Excellence in Cities and Education Improvement Partnerships) Miles Simpson (Head of Speeches, Briefing, Articles and Whitehall Relations Unit) Kathrine McAleenan (SD Coordination – Whitehall Relations – outgoing)	Emma Downing Ronit Reiss Tamar Bourne	31.05.06
DH	Dr Gina Radford (Regional Director of Public Health) Hermione Lovel (Regional Public Health Group) Anne-Marie Diaper (Regional Public Health Group)	Emma Downing Ronit Reiss Tamar Bourne	02.06.06
DCLG	Jo Key (Divisional Manager - Climate Change & Sustainable Development) Mark Davis (Climate Change & Sustainable Development) Zoe Hasemann (Sustainability Manager)	Emma Downing Ronit Reiss Tamar Bourne	08.06.06
VMD	Chris Bean (Director of Corporate Business)	Emma Downing Tamar Bourne Tony Siantonas	19.06.06
VLA	Chris Morrey (Business Director), Liz Davies (Site Manager - Environment)	Emma Downing Tamar Bourne Tony Siantonas	20.06.06
PSD	Steve Milner (Director of Finance, IT and Corporate Services) Shaun McGarry (Head of IT)	Emma Downing Ronit Reiss Tamar Bourne	21.06.06
CSL	Helen Crews (Corporate Services Director) Paul Walker (Head of Facilities Management) John Blears (Energy Manager) Mark Clough (Energy Manager)	Emma Downing Ronit Reiss Tamar Bourne	22.06.06
CEFAS	Paul Gurbutt (Head of Estates & Vessel Management)	Emma Downing Ronit Reiss Tamar Bourne	28.06.06
RPA	Paul Harris (Contracts Manager) Nicky Langham (Sustainable Development Officer)	Emma Downing Ronit Reiss Tamar Bourne	30.06.06



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