

sustainable development commission

**2006 Sustainable Development
Action Plan Progress Report**

Veterinary Laboratories Agency
With SDC Commentary

November 2007

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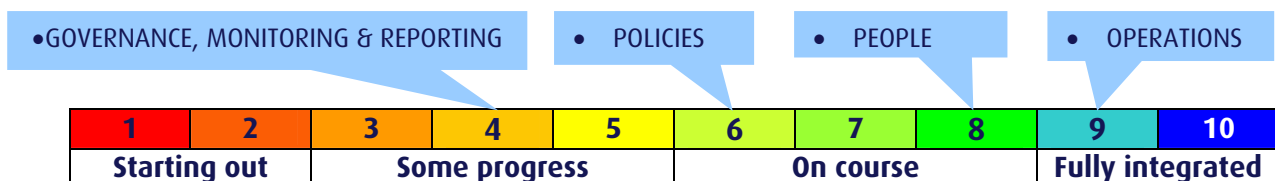
VLA'S SELF-ASSESSMENT SUMMARY

This is a summary of VLA's progress report; the full version begins on page 6.

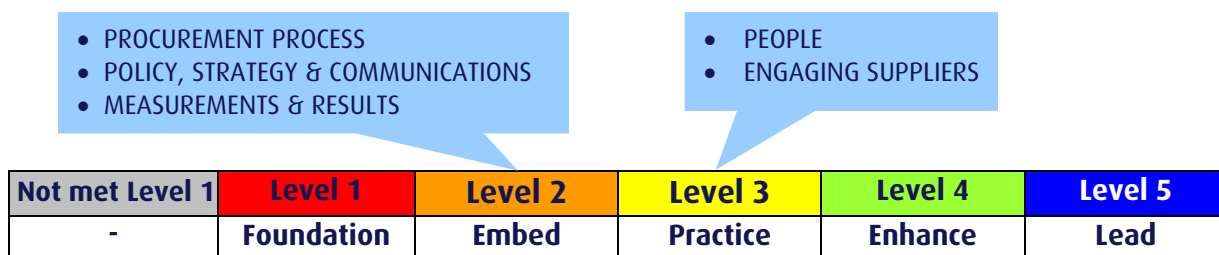
The Veterinary Laboratories Agency (VLA) is an Executive Agency of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). It is responsible for meeting the Government's requirement for veterinary research and surveillance. As such, VLA safeguards public and animal health and provides the ability to respond to a wide range of disease emergencies.

Progress against actions: All actions were reported as complete or on target.

Embedding sustainability



Procurement – Flexible Framework



SDC'S SUMMARY COMMENTS

This is a summary of SDC's commentary; the full version begins on page 4.

VLA reported good progress against the actions set out in its SDAP, and on embedding SD into its people and operations. Less progress was reported on embedding SD into governance, monitoring and reporting, which remains an area of concern.

Strengths:

- VLA reported that all actions in the SDAP were either complete or on target
- Reported that it was making good progress on embedding sustainable development into its operations
- Enthusiasm of staff - but this needs to be better harnessed.

Weaknesses:

- Overall lack of evidence and commentary. In particular, very little rationale was provided to support the self-assessment levels chosen for embedding sustainability and measuring progress on procurement.
- It was not clear how VLA had assessed the impact of its actions.

Challenges for next year's SDAP progress report:

- Demonstrate how VLA has considered the contribution of its actions to the UK's shared priorities
- Provide detailed rationale to support the level of progress reported
- Ensure appropriate mechanisms are in place to monitor and report on progress against the SDAP, and on sustainable development generally.

INTRODUCTION

Government has made it clear that it wants the public sector to be a leading exponent of sustainable development (SD). The UK SD strategy, *Securing the Future*,¹ requires all central government Departments and their Executive Agencies (EAs) to produce Sustainable Development Action Plans (SDAPs) and report progress on them regularly. An SDAP sets out the strategic actions that the organisation intends to take to integrate sustainable development into its decision-making and everyday operations. It thereby helps the organisation make its required contribution to the delivery of the Government's commitments and goals set out in *Securing the Future*.

Securing the Future also empowers the Sustainable Development Commission (SDC) to act as the Government's watchdog for sustainable development. This includes "scrutinising and reporting on Government's performance on sustainable development".

Most Departments published their first SDAP in 2006. These plans contained commitments for 2006/07, and the SDC is now reporting on progress made by Departments against those commitments.

The purpose of progress reporting is three-fold:

1. To see what progress had been made against the first plans
2. To encourage Departments and others to evaluate the quality, purpose and contribution of their SDAPs, as well as the individual actions and policies, in regards to the UK's SD goals
3. To strengthen the quality of future SDAPs and reporting by identifying strengths, weaknesses and priority areas for improvement.

To help Departments and EAs produce quality progress reports, the SDC designed a self-assessment guidance tool. The tool covers the following areas:

¹ *Securing the Future – Delivering the UK Sustainable Development Strategy*, HM Government, March 2005.

- **Progress against actions:** Report progress against 2006/07 commitments and against any significant actions that did not feature in the original SDAP
- Consider the impact of actions and the contribution these actions would make to the SD "shared priorities for immediate action"² (from here on referred to as the "SD shared priorities")
- **Embedding sustainability:** Consider how well SD had been embedded into policies, people, operations and reporting mechanisms
- **Procurement:** Gauge progress on sustainable procurement against the criteria in the Flexible Framework³ or a suitable alternative
- **Taking stock:** Identify what had helped and hindered the organisation in delivering its SDAP.

This report comprises the SDC's commentary, followed by the Veterinary Laboratories Agency's (VLA's) full progress report.⁴

The SDC's commentary evaluates the progress reported by VLA, as well as the quality of its self-assessment.⁵ All ratings/levels reported are the organisation's own judgement of performance, and there was no process of external verification by the SDC.

The commentary does not review the content of the original SDAP. As such, comments should not be taken as an endorsement of actions and policies pursued. The SDC has already commented on Departments' first SDAPs and provided summarised assessments in the 2006 report *Off the Starting Block*.⁶

² The SD shared priorities for immediate action, as outlined in *Securing the Future*, are: sustainable consumption and production, climate change and energy, natural resource protection and environmental enhancement, and sustainable communities.

³ *Procuring the Future*, Defra, June 2006 – see Section 2 for more details.

⁴ Reported progress against: *'Sustainable Development Action Plan'*, VLA, December 2005.

⁵ Please see SDAP Progress Report methodology paper – www.sd-commission.org.uk.

⁶ *Off the Starting Block*, Sustainable Development Commission, November 2006.

SDC'S COMMENTARY

Progress against actions

The Veterinary Laboratories Agency (VLA) reported excellent progress against the actions in its 2006 SDAP.

- All actions were reported as complete or on target
- VLA considered that its actions overall made a good contribution to one or more of the UK's shared priorities.

However, evidence was not provided in all instances, and very little commentary was provided. For example, VLA set itself a target to reduce road transport vehicle carbon dioxide emissions by at least 10%, but it did not report how well it had performed against this target; and reported that it completed a staff survey, but did not say how SD was covered.

Some actions were reported as being "on target" when the target date had passed. In these cases, the actions should have been assessed as "complete" or "behind target". Further, there were some actions with multiple parts which were reported as "complete", even though some of the parts appeared to be outstanding. For example, an environmental purchasing policy was published, but no detail was provided about monitoring and reporting even though these tasks were part of the action. **SDC would like to see more information on progress against actions in future reports.**

The rationale for impact ratings was not provided for any of the actions. **SDC would like VLA to demonstrate how it is considering the impacts of its actions on the UK shared priorities.**

Embedding sustainability

VLA reported that it had made "some progress" on embedding SD into its mechanisms for *governance, monitoring and reporting*; was "on course" for embedding SD into *people and policies*;

and that SD was "fully integrated" into *operations*.

However, SDC considers that VLA's comments did not support the ratings chosen. This is not to say that the levels were not appropriate. Rather, **SDC would like to have seen more commentary in relation to the criteria provided in the self-assessment tool.** For example:

- On *policies*, SDC would have liked to see how VLA was aligning its policy with *Securing the Future*, joining up policy goals under the SD umbrella, and engaging with stakeholders and delivery partners. If VLA considered that criteria on policy were not relevant, given that it does not have policy making functions, then this should have been reported.
- Although VLA assessed itself as being towards the upper end of the "on course" rating for embedding SD into *people*, it did not comment on key areas such as its core vision and values, its staff training and development, or how it engaged with staff on SD.
- *Operations* was reported as one of VLA's main strengths. A fully functioning environmental management system (EMS) was in place and it had ISO14001 certification. No information was provided on how VLA was performing, however.

SDC is aware that VLA has started to explore how it could work together with another Defra Agency (Veterinary Medicines Directorate), with whom it shares its site. However, this was not reported in VLA's progress report. **SDC looks forward to hearing how VLA and VMD work together in future to bring about operational improvements on their shared site.**

VLA reported that it had been unable to make any significant progress on *governance, monitoring and reporting* during 2006/07, due to a lack of resources. SDC would like to see details of what had been

achieved. For example, whether the Senior Management Group reported progress to the Chief Executive, as planned, or whether the SDAP was reported on in the Annual Report and Accounts.

Rather worryingly, VLA reported that this situation was unlikely to change in the near future. **SDC encourages VLA to identify how it might overcome this barrier to establish appropriate mechanisms and processes to record and report on progress on its SDAP.** Such systems are vital to ensuring that sustainability becomes embedded across the organisation.

Procurement

VLA reported that it followed core Defra policies on procurement. Progress was reported against the Flexible Framework. VLA assessed itself as being at the “embed” level for *procurement process; measurements and results; and policy, strategy and communications*. For *people and engaging suppliers*, it assessed itself as being at the higher “practice” level. However, no commentary was provided against criteria in the Framework, so it is not possible to comment on the appropriateness of these ratings.

SDC would like VLA to provide information in support of its procurement self-assessment in future progress reports.

Taking stock

VLA reported that staff awareness and enthusiasm helped the delivery of the action plan. However, progress was hampered by a lack of resources. Further, cuts were made to its estates’ budget and VLA found it difficult to prioritise sustainable initiatives on its estate over outstanding essential maintenance. SDC encourages VLA to consider sustainability as part of its essential maintenance programme, rather than something separate and additional.

VLA reported that it did not hold or collect any information relating to the SD impact of its overall policies, projects and activities, beyond that included in its EMS.

Summing up

Overall, VLA reported good progress against the actions set out in its SDAP, and on embedding SD into its people and operations. However, very little evidence was provided to support the self assessment. **SDC would like to see more rationale in future progress reports to support VLA’s assessment of progress on embedding sustainability and against the Flexible Framework.**

VLA reported less progress on embedding SD into governance, monitoring and reporting, and this remains an area of concern.

sustainable development commission

**2006 Sustainable Development
Action Plan Progress Report**

**Veterinary Laboratories Agency's
Self-Assessment**

18th June 2007

1 EMBEDDING SUSTAINABILITY

VLA was asked to consider whether the activities arising from its SDAP enabled it to capture the opportunities of sustainable development for its customers, partners and staff and, if so, how.

Regarding the work programme outlined in its SDAP, and based on progress towards actions, VLA rated itself out of 10 for its

performance on embedding sustainable development in its:

- Policies
- People
- Operations (i.e. operations policy)
- Governance, monitoring and reporting.

The following scale was used:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Starting out		Some progress			On course			Fully integrated	

VLA's response

Level: 6	Policies: On course	VLA's comments in support of this rating:
<p>Criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Much alignment of policy with Government SD Strategy, UK Framework and related guidance • Much joining-up policy goals under the SD umbrella • Much signalling SD in external partnerships and relationships • Much embedding SD in policy approval processes / Regulatory Impact Assessments (RIAs) • Much effective stakeholder engagement • Much building SD capacity among delivery partners 		<p>VLA is on course with embedding sustainability into its policies. On issues such as procurement we follow core Defras' lead and guidance, so are confident that sustainability is fully embedded in our procurement policies. Our Estates Management policy, which also covers our site redevelopment and all works carried out at any of our sites, fully reflects our ISO14001 status and also takes account of the need to meet the Ministerial targets on sustainability.</p>

Level: 8	People: On course	VLA's comments in support of this rating:
<p>Criteria:</p> <p>SD is greatly reflected in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Core vision and values • Training and development (e.g. core skills, induction, leadership development) • Performance management (e.g. competency framework) • Recruitment • Career planning and placements • Internal communications • Volunteering • Fund raising 		<p>VLA is on course with embedding sustainability into its People. The nature of VLA's work does make initiatives like home-working difficult as many people are laboratory based and cannot, for reasons of Quality and Health & Safety, work from home. But wherever this, and hot-desking (Or 80/20) working are possible they are encouraged subject to management consents.</p>

Level: 9	Operations: Fully integrated	VLA's comments in support of this rating:
<p>Criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full structure around the Framework for Sustainable Development on the Government Estate including: • An EMS & ISO14001 corporate certification • Energy/Water/Waste policies • Travel policy • Sustainable procurement • Sustainable redevelopment • Biodiversity • Positive social and community impacts 		<p>VLA has a fully functioning EMS in place and has corporate ISO14001 certification. We have an action plans for energy and water use reductions, and we recycle or re-use the vast majority of our waste.</p> <p>Following core Defra's policies on procurement we are able to claim sustainable procurement and again guided by core Defra colleagues (Estates Division and Shared Services) we ensure that all refurbishment and redevelopment work complies with all the necessary sustainability requirements, and are future proofed to allow us to meet the stretching Ministerial targets on energy and water use.</p> <p>We have a diverse portfolio of property, and try to encourage biodiversity wherever we can.</p>

<p>Level: 4</p>	<p>Governance, Monitoring and Reporting: Some progress</p>	<p>VLA's comments in support of this rating:</p>
<p>VLA rated itself based on how it felt it is progressing on creating and embedding the appropriate mechanisms and processes to record and report progress of SDAPs, and sustainable development generally. This was a subjective assessment, with no pre-defined criteria.</p>		<p>Due to a lack of resources VLA has been unable to make significant progress in this area. VLA is aware that a lot more needs to be done, but given the requirements for more reductions in staff numbers it is unlikely that this will be progressed much further in the near future.</p>

2 PROCUREMENT

Procurement is an area of key importance to delivering sustainable development. Sustainable procurement (policy, processes and operations) should be embedded into all areas of organisations, and should be incorporated in the whole SDAP process.

The Flexible Framework (detailed in *Procuring the Future*⁷) identifies 5 key themes which are, in effect, the key behavioural and operational change

programmes that need to be delivered in each public sector organisation to deliver sustainable procurement. For each theme, compliance criteria for five levels are detailed.

For each theme in the Flexible Framework, VLA identified the level it has reached, and provided information in support of this self-assessment.

⁷ *Procuring the Future*, The Sustainable Procurement Task Force National Action Plan. Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, June 2006.

VLA's response

PEOPLE	
Level 3: PRACTICE	
<p>Criteria: Targeted refresher training on latest sustainable procurement principles. Performance objectives and appraisals include sustainable procurement factors. Simple incentive programme in place.</p>	<p>VLA's comments: VLA follows core Defra policies on procurement – all staff are trained and aware of VLA/Defra rules and commitments.</p>

POLICY, STRATEGY & COMMUNICATIONS	
Level 2: EMBED	
<p>Criteria: Review and enhance sustainable procurement policy, in particular consider supplier engagement. Ensure it is part of wider Sustainable Development strategy. Communicate to staff, suppliers and key stakeholders.</p>	<p>VLA's comments: In process of being embedded in practice</p>

PROCUREMENT PROCESS	
Level 2: EMBED	
<p>Criteria: Detailed expenditure analysis undertaken, key sustainability risks assessed and used for prioritisation. Sustainability is considered at an early stage in the procurement process of most contracts. Whole life cost analysis adopted.</p>	<p>VLA's comments: Processes embedded in VLA practice and policies – almost becoming Practice at this stage.</p>

ENGAGING SUPPLIERS

Level 3: Practice

Criteria:

Targeted supplier engagement programme in place, promoting continual sustainability improvement. Two way communication between procurer and supplier exists with incentives. Supply chains for key spend areas have been mapped.

VLA's comments:

Ongoing developments in this area.

MEASUREMENTS & RESULTS

Level 2 : EMBED

Criteria:

Detailed appraisal of sustainability impacts of the procurement activity has been undertaken. Measures implemented to manage the high risk impact areas.

VLA's comments:

Working towards this being Practice.

3 TAKING STOCK

The SDC asked VLA a series of questions designed to reflect on the success, barriers and progress of its SDAP, and to identify what helped or hindered. VLA's responses to these questions are detailed below.

1. What has helped your organisation to deliver its SDAP? e.g., capacity, funding, culture, leadership, policies, procedures and/or organisational arrangements.

VLA staff on the whole, being animal scientists, are very aware of their environment and are by nature committed and enthusiastic about implementing measures to enhance the biodiversity and preserve the environment. However a lack of funding and a lack of resource to direct this enthusiasm has meant that we have been unable to fully exploit it so far.

2. What has hindered the delivery of your SDAP? e.g., capacity, funding, culture, leadership, policies, procedures and/or organisational arrangements.

A lack of resources and time availability has hindered the delivery of the SDAP, although most targets have been achieved due to the commitment of the staff concerned. Funding is also a major issue as Estates budgets are regularly cut by the core department and no inflation is built into the baselines. This does mean that VLA has a backlog of maintenance work, which makes it difficult to prioritise sustainable initiatives above outstanding essential maintenance.

3. What information do you hold and collect relating to the sustainable development impact of your organisation's overall policies/projects/activities? e.g., Regulatory Impact Assessments (RIA).

No information held or collected at present.

4. Were there any key updates/changes to your 2005/06 SDAP? Please briefly list.

New SDAP not yet drafted – awaiting core Defra guidance before it is produced.

4 PROGRESS AGAINST ACTIONS

The tables that follow report VLA's progress against specific actions in its 2006 SDAP. The table was designed by the SDC as part of the self-assessment tool for Departments, and encourages critical assessment of the value of each action, as well as the progress achieved.

Progress is represented using a RAG+ Analysis (red, amber, green, +blue) (column E), and provides a subjective indication of the completion of an action towards its stated objectives:

- **Complete** indicates that an action is complete, and the associated output/outcomes fully realised
- **On target** indicates the action is incomplete in one or more aspects, but is still on target
- **Recoverable** indicates that an action is behind target, but recoverable
- **Behind target** indicates that an action is far behind target and that recovery is unlikely.

Column F details evidence to verify the reported progress made, such as:

- Published strategies, policies, Bills, guidance, literature
- Objective performance measures, indicators and associated sources of data
- Reports of events, particularly outcomes and next steps
- Auditable correspondence
- Auditable activities.

In column G, VLA reported whether this evidence is readily available for scrutiny by the SDC.

While each action is important in itself, the aim of the SDAP is to help organisations fulfil their contributions to the Government's wider sustainable development priorities for

immediate action, as set out in its 2005 strategy, *Securing the Future*⁸. These are:

- Sustainable consumption and production
- Climate change and energy
- Natural resource protection and environmental enhancement
- Sustainable communities.

Column H contains VLA's critical assessment of how each action impacts on these priority areas, using a scale of 1-4 (see table below).

Column H Level	Contribution of action to one or more of the priority areas
1	Zero or small
2	Fair
3	Good
4	Outstanding

⁸ *Securing the Future – Delivering the UK Sustainable Development Strategy*, HM Government, March 2005.

VLA's self-assessment of progress towards SDAP actions

A Ref	B Action	C Target	D Responsibility	E Progress (RAG analysis)	F Evidence/ crosscheck used to measure action	G Readily available?	H Impact (1-4)	I Comments
1	To review performance against SDAP and associated policies.	Quarterly 2006	Chief Executive	Complete	None	✘	2	Reviews now annual & will be minuted
2	To review performance against ISO 14001	Quarterly 2006	Chief Executive	Complete	Management Review Minutes	✓	2	Corporate certification achieved February 2007
3	To obtain Agency wide ISO 14001	End 2006	Business Director	Complete	Certificates available for inspection	✓	3	Corporate certification achieved February 2007
4	To publish an environmental purchasing policy (and monitor and report performance)	Sept 2006	Business Director	Complete	Defra Sustainable Procurement Strategy	✓	3	VLA follows core Defra guidance/rules on procurement.

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
Ref	Action	Target	Responsibility	Progress (RAG analysis)	Evidence/crosscheck used to measure action	Readily available?	Impact (1-4)	Comments
5	To publish and publicise a resource efficiency and waste policy (and monitor and report performance)	March 2006	Business Director	Complete	Published on IntraVet	✓	2	
6	To publish an Energy Policy (and monitor and report performance)	March 2006	Business Director	On target	Energy Review carried out actions ongoing	✓	3	Many actions included in FMR – depending on funding. Also all new builds meet energy targets.
7	To publish a Green Travel Plan and Policy	Nov 2005	Business Director	Complete		✓	3	To be reviewed and revised 2007
8	To consider sustainable development in all aspects of the planning for new builds and refurbishment projects. (Including the co-location project at IAH Pirbright).	Ongoing	Estates & Environment Manager Business Director Chief Executive	On target	BREEAM assessments, risk registers etc	✓	3	All buildings subject to BREEAM assessment and all achieved required standards. VLA now aims for BREEAM Excellent on all new build projects. A sustainability champion is assigned to each project.

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
Ref	Action	Target	Responsibility	Progress (RAG analysis)	Evidence/crosscheck used to measure action	Readily available?	Impact (1-4)	Comments
9	To publish and implement a Green Travel Plan	Nov 2005	Business Director	See item 7 above	See item 7 above	See item 7 above	See item 7 above	Duplicate item – see 7 above.
10	Reduce VLA road transport vehicle carbon dioxide emissions. - Reduce road transport vehicle carbon dioxide emissions by at least 10% of the baseline figure - Promote video conference usage as an alternative to travel.	- End March 2006	Business Director	On target	Staff encouraged to reduce business miles and to VC wherever possible.	✓	3	A challenging area for VLA given the nature of it's estate (ie, mainly rural) and nature of work that requires road travel.
11	To ensure VLA has a Sustainable Procurement and Purchasing plan	March 2006	Business Director	See item 4 above	See Item 4	See Item 4	See Item 4	Duplicate item - See Item 4

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
Ref	Action	Target	Responsibility	Progress (RAG analysis)	Evidence/ crosscheck used to measure action	Readily available?	Impact (1-4)	Comments
12	To include clauses relating to sustainability considerations in all contracts for goods, works and soft services (e.g. cleaning contracts)	March 2006	Estates & Environment Manager Business Director	Complete	Clauses published on intraVet and in purchasing guidance	✓	3	VLA follows core Defra on Procurement
13	Complete roll out of e-procurement across VLA	March 2006	Business Director	Complete	e-procurement now rolled out across VLA	✓	3	
14	Review printing/copying facilities – and consider setting policy for purchasing only networked duplex printers.	August 2006	Business Director	Complete	ITU purchasing advice pages now stipulate duplex and networked printers.	✓	2	Paper use remains high at VLA – in part due to nature of work and Quality system requirements.

A Ref	B Action	C Target	D Responsibility	E Progress (RAG analysis)	F Evidence/ crosscheck used to measure action	G Readily available?	H Impact (1-4)	I Comments
15	Induction training to include sustainable development	January 2006	HR Manager Estates & Environment Manager Business Director	Complete		×	2	
16	Sustainable development awareness programme continued for all existing staff via IntraVet , publications, poster displays and seminars	June 2006	Estates & Environment Manager Business Director	On target	IntraVet carries a lot of info – more seminars/talks needed.	✓	2	Roll out of ISO14001 underway to all regional labs. Seminars arranged for VLA annual conference 2007.

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
Ref	Action	Target	Responsibility	Progress (RAG analysis)	Evidence/crosscheck used to measure action	Readily available?	Impact (1-4)	Comments
17	liP –continued accreditation	Ongoing	HR Manager Business Director	Complete		✓	3	
18	Staff survey	Sept 2006	Business Director	Complete		✓	3	

VLA response signed by:

SD Reporting Officer: Liz Davies, VLA Estates & Environment Manager, 18/06/07

SD Responsible Officer: Chris Morrey, VLA Business Director, 18/06/07

SDC review and commentary:

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Peer reviewed by: Rachel Hurle, Policy Analyst, Watchdog Team

Authorised by: Tim Lang and Becky Willis, SDC Commissioners

Sign-off date: 30/10/2007