



Home Office

Sustainable Development Minister:
Joan Ryan MP

SDC Assessment



Checklist

Sustainable Development Action Plan

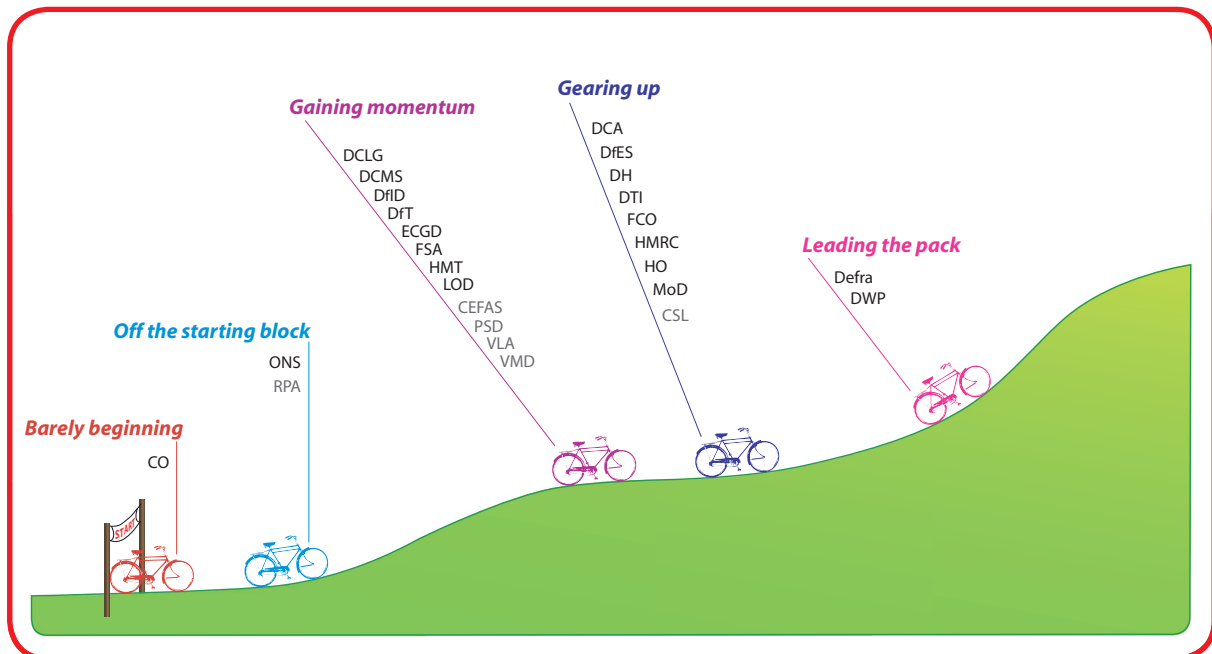
1	Does the plan specify the period of time it will cover?	✓	Plan explains that the actions are for 2006 and long-term actions will be completed in three years.
2	Does the plan specify which organisations it covers?	✓	
3	Has the organisation articulated what SD means for them?	✓	
4	Does the plan describe the benefits of having an SD approach to the organisation?	✓	
5	Does the plan acknowledge the Government's sustainable development goal?	✗	The plan does not acknowledge the overarching cross-government sustainable development 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> ?	✓ ✓	Plan acknowledges <i>Securing the Future</i> sets out priorities for actions and lists some of them.
7	Does the plan identify links to the priorities of <i>Securing the Future</i> ?	✓	The plan sets out its operational commitments in the context of the priorities.
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> ?	✓ ✓	Plan acknowledges principles and mentions some of them.
9	Does the plan identify links to the principles of <i>Securing the Future</i> ?	✓	Plan sets some of the operational commitments in the context of their contribution to some of the principles.
10	Have the organisation's relevant executive agencies produced their own plan?	✗	Plan commits agencies to produce their own plans in future.
11	Does the action plan contain a work programme?	✓	
12	Does the plan include actions relating to commitments from the SD strategy?	✓	Tackles some of the departmental commitments from <i>Securing the Future</i> , e.g. volunteering.
13	Does the action plan cover government policy?	✓	
14	Does the action plan cover operations?	✓	
15	Was the plan publicly available by 13th January 2006?	✗	

16	Does the plan outline any arrangements for strengthening SD capacity in the organisation?	✓	Covers only initial steps of skills audit but does not explain future intentions etc.
17	Does the plan describe the infrastructure in place to deliver the plan?	✓	
18	Does the plan make it clear who signed it off?	✓	
19	Does the plan designate who is accountable for the delivery of the overall plan?	✓	Director General Financial and Commercial is accountable for the delivery of the plan.
20	Does the plan explain how the organisation will monitor progress against the plan?	✓	
21	Does the plan describe how the organisation will report against the plan?	✓	
22	Does the plan describe how it links in to other reporting mechanisms within the organisation? E.g. the annual report	✓	Will report on progress in annual sustainable development report.
23	Does the plan commit to reporting against the plan on a defined regular basis?	✓	Will report annually in sustainable development report.

Senior Accountable Officer: Helen Kilpatrick, *Director General, Financial and Commercial Group*
Status of Plan: Published 14.09.2006

Please note that the SDC rating is based on a competency framework and not straight addition of the scores in the table above. Please see main report for full explanation of the methodology.

How is HO doing?



Background

The Home Office is the government department responsible for ensuring that “we live in a safe, just and tolerant society by putting public protection at the heart of all we do.”¹ The department is responsible for the police in England and Wales, national security, the justice system and immigration.

Context

The Home Office was subject to structural and leadership changes in May 2006. As a result, the publication of the departmental action plan was delayed and at the time of the bilateral it was still in draft form.² The plan which the SDC has assessed was prepared prior to the structural changes and includes actions in some policy areas which have now been transferred to DCLG. The draft articulates the department’s activities at the time in a sustainable development context. Bilateral discussions revealed that this is due to the lack of funds available in the department to set new aspirations and commitments.

Coverage

The action plan covers the Home Office group, including the Forensic Science Service and all of their Executive Agencies. In 2007, the Executive Agencies and other stand alone bodies will develop their own plans.

Departmental view of Sustainable Development

The Home Office SDAP explains that through its work and purpose to build a safe, just and tolerant society, the department can make a significant contribution to the sustainable development agenda. The plan explains that much of the departmental work underpins key aspects of *Securing the Future*, through reducing crime and the fear of crime, and through

supporting strong and active communities.

The plan also recognises the significant contribution it can make to sustainable development through the management of its estate and highlights the compatibility of the departmental 'value for money' agenda and sustainable development.

Benefits of taking a sustainable development approach

The department acknowledges the need for the Government to be seen to lead by example on sustainable development. The SDAP explains that investing in Home Office staff by "improving staff training and skills will produce long term benefits of greater staff productivity and loyalty". An inclusive employment policy will ensure that valuable skills are not lost to the department. The SDAP also explains that taking a sustainable approach to consumption

will contribute to increased economic efficiency and that "greater value for money can be recognised for a multitude of consumable goods ranging from stationery to plant equipment." Whilst the SDAP clearly acknowledges the benefits of taking a sustainable development approach in terms of resource efficiency, the plan does not refer to the benefits of taking a sustainable development approach in terms of better policy making.

Link to *Securing the Future*

Guiding Principles

The plan explains that the Home Office is "committed to ensuring the principles of sustainable development are integral to its policies and operations" and that HO's work to minimise the department's environmental footprint will contribute to the guiding principle of 'living within environmental limits.'

The plan does not however set out the relevance of the five guiding principles to Home Office policies.

Shared priorities for UK action

The Home Office SDAP recognises the potential impact and contribution the department can make to climate change and energy, sustainable consumption and production and natural resource protection through the management of its estate. The HO's SDAP only identifies its contribution to the priorities of the Strategy in the context of its operational delivery priorities. The department explained in the bilateral that initial drafts did try to link policy commitments to the *Securing the Future* priorities but were unable to do so in a structured way. The department therefore decided to set only operational priorities in this context. The SDAP does however demonstrate how the department's policy commitments link, and contribute to, the sustainable development indicators.

Policy priorities

The Home Office plan commits to taking action on reducing crime and the fear of crime, volunteering, civil renewal and community cohesion. Some of the actions are centred around:

- working with OGDs and stakeholders to make the fullest possible use of the contributions they can make to reducing the crime and the fear of crime
- strengthening public participation through contributions to the shaping and implementation of key policies such as neighbourhood empowerment and
- significantly increasing the number of volunteers amongst groups at risk of social exclusion.

The plan does not make clear why the department has decided to concentrate its efforts on these areas. Bilateral discussions revealed that the department found it difficult to select the appropriate actions to include in the SDAP and the locus became on those actions which were part of existing departmental commitments and work programmes. This would ensure the plan was more than a strategic document and would deliver quantifiable outcomes to be reported on at the end of the financial year. Whilst the Commission appreciates the department's active sifting of

programmes to include in its SDAP, this thinking is not explicit in the plan. In future plans, the Commission would like to see the Home Office explain how and why it has prioritised its SDAP commitments.

Surprisingly, the plan does not explore the department's potential contribution to Sustainable Communities through HO policies beyond the specific action relating to *Together We Can* (see section on departmental commitments, page 5). Bilateral discussions revealed that omitting the *Securing the Future* priority on Sustainable Communities was an oversight.

Since the action plan was written, the Home Office has begun a process of reform which includes a new core purpose to protect the public. The *Together We Can* initiative now falls within DCLG's remit.

The department will now focus on six key priorities: protection from terrorism; cutting crime; enabling people to feel safer in their own homes; rebalancing the justice system in favour of the law-abiding majority; managing offenders; and securing the borders. Sustainable development is not explicitly mentioned in the Reform Action Plan and the SDC would expect next year's SDAP to explain how sustainable development fits in within the department's new purpose and its priority areas.

Leading by example

The SDAP sets out a variety of operational commitments for the short, medium and longer-term and these are linked to the relevant Government operational targets required by the Framework for Sustainable Development on the Government Estate (SDiG). This is useful as it sets out the direction of travel. The plan however does not make clear how the department is prioritising these operational commitments or how far they are aimed at addressing the department's particular areas of weakness.

The commitments in the SDAP are mainly aimed at extending EMS coverage across the

organisation, reducing water consumption and benchmarking energy use. The department is also committed to increasing the use of green energy and will pursue proposals to install a pilot wind turbine at one of the Prison Estate sites. The department is taking action on sustainable procurement by developing targets on food procurement for the entire Home Office family.

The SDC's 2005 assessment of progress against the SDiG targets³ showed that although the department was doing relatively well against the Government's waste and energy targets, it needed to increase its coverage of its

environmental management systems. Although there are relevant targets for EMS in the plan there is no sense of their relative priority.

The SDC would expect next year's SDAP

to address clearly SDiG weaknesses and set out the departmental approach to selecting operational targets.

Securing the Future commitments

Departmental commitments

The Home Office SDAP includes some actions relating to *Securing the Future* commitments for which they have a lead across government. For example, the SDAP contains an action to "establish a network of *Together We Can* champions in localities and agencies around the country" to address the department's *Securing the Future* commitment to "promote ways to help communities improve their environment and participate in plans which shape their area's future."⁴

However, the department does not make clear whether all of the Strategy's commitments are being pursued at once or whether the department is choosing to concentrate on certain ones this year. Although the plan includes actions in the short, medium and long term – not all of the Strategy commitments are included in the plan. It is also not always made clear which of the actions included in the plan are aimed at tackling their departmental commitments and what the likely contribution might be.

It was explained in the bilateral that the department investigated the contribution it can make to their strategy commitments in this action plan and have only included those for which specific contributions could be defined. For example, HO met with DCLG in an attempt to tackle their joint commitment to 'streamline their respective funding stream into a single

communities fund'. As there was no definite contribution that could be included at the time of drafting the plan, the Home Office did not include any actions to tackle this commitment.

This prioritisation is sensible. However, the plan should have explained this decision and made it clear that the department also had other commitments which will be addressed in future plans.

Cross-government commitments

The department refers to some relevant areas of the cross-government commitments but does not set out actions in the context of contributing to them. The plan includes actions on sustainable procurement and includes a commitment to integrate the five principles into departmental decision making.

Target setting

The Home Office has set itself targets in the short, medium and long-term. Bilateral discussions revealed that the long term-targets have been included to set the direction of travel for each of the commitment areas. The department has made a good attempt at specifying SMART targets in the plan for the short and medium-term. All of the actions indicate the senior official responsible for delivery. However, it is not always clear from the plan what the desired outcome is for all of the actions.

Policy making

Sustainable development 'proofing'

The plan recognises that "there is a need to consider sustainable development as part of RIAs more consistently." The plan sets out how the sustainable development team will work closely with the Home Office Better Regulation Unit and Economic, Research and Analysis Group over the next year to improve policy making within the department and embed awareness of the need to address fully sustainable development issues. The plan does not include any specific actions aimed at tackling this.

The plan recognises the need to integrate the sustainable development principles into departmental business but there are no specific actions aimed at ensuring the five principles will be used in the policy making process. The SDC would expect to see future plans indicating

how the department is accounting for and using the five guiding principles which should now underpin all policy making in the UK.

Sustainable development skills

The current draft does not include actions aimed at strengthening sustainable development capacity in the department through training and other capacity building techniques. However, the bilateral revealed that the Home Office is planning to undertake a skills audit to identify any skills gap and is planning to develop a training plan which will meet the needs identified by the audit.

Future SDAPs should set out clear actions to develop staff awareness and capacity so that they can fully reflect *Securing the Future's* priorities and principles in their work.

Achieving Sustainable Development outcomes

Infrastructure

The plan explains that the Director General Financial and Commercial is the senior official responsible for sustainable development in the HO and is the member of the Home Office Group Executive Board who, along with the Sustainable Development Minister, signed off the plan. The head of the sustainable development team will report on progress against the plan on a quarterly basis to the Sustainable Development Minister and the Director General Financial and Commercial. The Group Executive Board will also be updated on progress on a quarterly basis and each of the directors of the Board will have personal responsibility to monitor progress on the commitments which relate to their Directorate. This may change under the new structure, which includes a new board and personnel changes at Director level. It is unclear what impact this will have on delivery of the action plan.

Engagement

The Home Office SDAP includes a commitment to work to develop practical measures aimed at ensuring the department works more closely with stakeholders. In an attempt to drive forward work to incorporate sustainable development into wider social responsibility projects, the department has included actions in their plan to devise a gateway for stakeholder communications to ensure better improved coordination and will host a series of stakeholder engagement events in 2006. The department has also committed to building a stakeholder contacts database as well as introducing contact details for every Home Office Unit to allow stakeholders to contact policy makers more easily.

Monitoring and reporting

The sustainable development team will be responsible for monitoring progress against the action plan. The Home Office has also committed to carrying out independent audits on progress on an annual basis which will be undertaken by the department's Audit and Assurance Unit.






The Home Office will report progress on the action plan in their Sustainable Development Report. It was explained in the bilateral that the department intends to do so annually and is hoping to cross reference the progress report in the departmental Annual Report.

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- 1 Home Office website
 - 2 The Home Office SDAP was published on 14th September 2006
 - 3 See www.sd-commission.org.uk/watchdog
 - 4 *Securing the Future* Chapter 2, page 19-22

Strengths to build upon

✓	Build on work to develop practical measures aimed at ensuring the department works more closely with stakeholders, as outlined in the plan.
✓	Take action to tackle skills gaps as identified in the skills audit and indicate in SDAP report and next plan how this audit has informed future action.

Challenges for 2007

	The reform of the Home Office provides an opportunity to integrate sustainable development commitments in the heart of the new department and in the priorities of the new leadership structure.
	Include actions aimed at integrating sustainable development into departmental decision making and indicate in future plans how the department is accounting for and using the five guiding principles which should now underpin all policy making in the UK.
	Ensure all targets are SMART and clearly indicate the desired outcome.
	Be clear about priority SDiG areas which the department is seeking to improve.
	Set out specific actions aimed at raising staff awareness and understanding of sustainable development and how it relates to their work.



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