



Sustainable
Development Commission

Office for National Statistics

**Sustainable Development Minister:
John Healey MP**

SDC Assessment



Checklist

Sustainable Development Action Plan

1	Does the plan specify the period of time it will cover?	✗	It is not made clear what the timeframe of the plan is. ONS explained they see it as a long-term plan up to 2010.
2	Does the plan specify which organisations it covers?	n/a	
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 mention the 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> ?	✓ ✓	The plan explains that <i>Securing the Future</i> sets out four priorities for action and lists them.
7	Does the plan identify links to the priorities of <i>Securing the Future</i> ?	✗	The plan does not demonstrate departmental contributions to the four 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 <i>Securing the Future</i> sets out the guiding principles and lists them.
9	Does the plan identify links to the principles of <i>Securing the Future</i> ?	✗	The plan does not explore how the principles link into their work.
10	Have the organisation's relevant executive agencies produced their own plan?	n/a	
11	Does the action plan contain a work programme?	✓	
12	Does the plan include actions relating to commitments from the SD strategy?	✓	
13	Does the action plan cover government policy?	✗	The plan only contains operational commitments.
14	Does the action plan cover operations?	✓	
15	Was the plan publicly available by 13th January 2006?	✗	

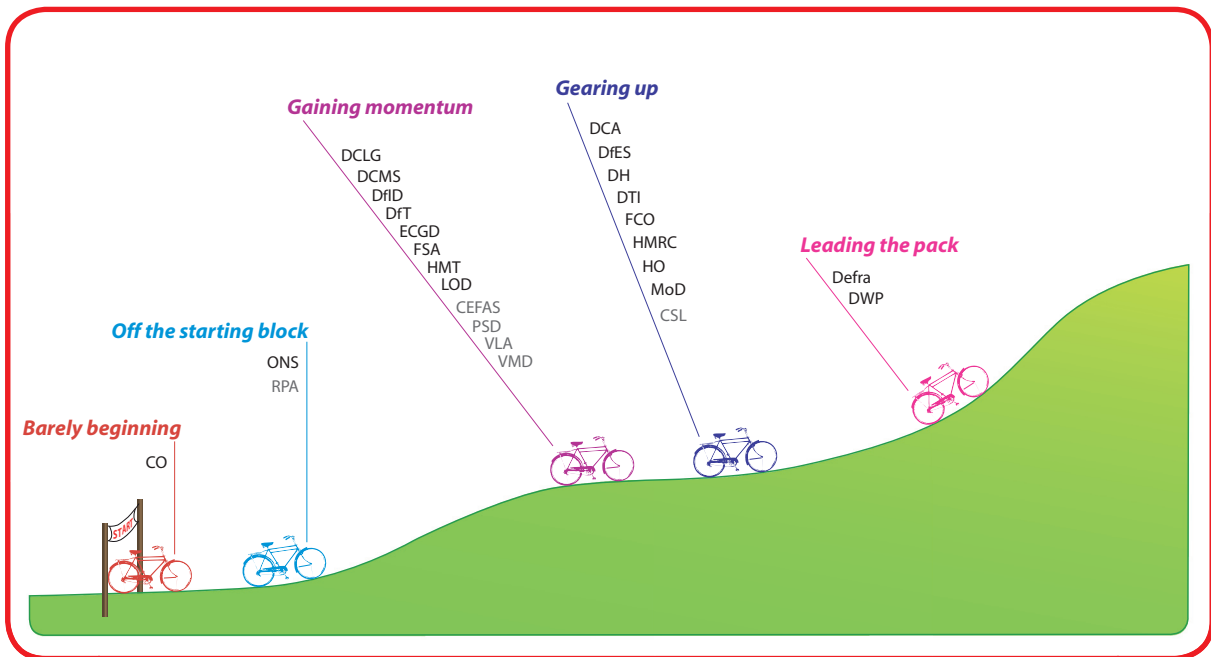
16	Does the plan outline any arrangements for strengthening SD capacity in the organisation?	✓	E-learning package being developed which will include sustainable development.
17	Does the plan describe the infrastructure in place to deliver the plan?	✗	Mentions infrastructure but not specifically related to 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?	✓	Head of Property Services has overall responsibility for sustainable development.
20	Does the plan explain how the organisation will monitor progress against the plan?	✗	Plan does not explain how progress will be monitored. ONS explained that it will be monitored through the SDiG process.
21	Does the plan describe how the organisation will report against the plan?	✗	Will report against SDiG targets on their websites. Plan does not explain how it will report against overall performance against the plan.
22	Does the plan describe how it links in to other reporting mechanisms within the organisation? E.g. the annual report	✗	Plan only mentions SDiG reporting.
23	Does the plan commit to reporting against the plan on a defined regular basis?	✗	Explains that plan will be reviewed annually but does not explain if ONS will report progress on an annual basis.

Senior Accountable Officer: John Summerfield, *Senior Director*

Status of Plan: Draft submitted to SDC 14.03.06

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 ONS doing?



Background

ONS is the government department that provides statistical and registration services. ONS is responsible for producing a wide range of economic and social statistics. It also registers life events and holds the decennial census of the population.

Context

ONS assessed its most significant sustainable development impacts through its EMS to produce an operations-based SDAP. The plan sets out targets and actions based on its identified significant impacts and the Framework for Sustainable Development on the Government Estate (SDiG).

Coverage

ONS is a government department and an executive agency accountable to the Chancellor of the Exchequer. It has no related delivery agencies and the SDAP therefore covers ONS only.

Departmental view of Sustainable Development

ONS' SDAP explains that as a "relatively small, non-policy making department providing statistics for policy-making departments and others, we recognise that we have a role to play in Government by demonstrating that we can effect sustainable operational change." 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 predicting what the future may look like. As such, the SDC would

expect future plans to consider systematically the extent to which the data sets that ONS gathers support sustainable development evaluation and decision-making.

Benefits of taking a sustainable development approach

The SDAP explains that carefully planned investment in utilities infrastructure and logistics can lead to long term efficiency savings and that "recent energy audit reports confirm that there are significant savings to be realised, with minimum investment."

Link to Securing the Future

Guiding Principles

The plan acknowledges the guiding principles set out in *Securing the Future*. However, the plan does not explore how these principles apply to ONS's work. Bilateral discussions with the Property Management team revealed that the team do not have sufficient knowledge of the statisticians' work to know whether the five principles are of particular relevance to the department. There is no infrastructure in place to allow the team to engage with the statisticians on sustainable development issues.

Shared priorities for UK action

The SDAP acknowledges the four priority areas for immediate action as identified by *Securing the Future*, but does not set out

ONS's contributions to these, despite the fact that many of the operational commitments the department has included in the plan do contribute to them.

ONS acknowledged in bilateral discussions that the department can make significant contributions to several of the priorities. For example, the department is currently exploring how the National Census can be conducted in a way which is less damaging to the environment and are investigating the use of recycled paper which can have a significant impact on the Government's Natural Resource Protection and Environmental Enhancement goal because of the scale of the exercise.

In future plans the SDC would expect ONS to clearly set out how it is contributing to the four priority areas of *Securing the Future* with corresponding actions.

Policy priorities

The SDAP explains that ONS is a non-policy making department and therefore their contribution to sustainable development is based on operational activities.

ONS's remit and possible contributions to

Securing the Future were explored in bilateral discussions. The department undertook to ensure that future iterations of the plan will address policy related contributions such as ONS's role in environmental reporting and the

production of national satellite accounts, which take account of environmental impacts.

As the SDC SDAP guidance makes clear, departmental plans should cover both policy

and operations. We would expect ONS to ensure that its SDAP covers policy related issues and not just operational activity.

Leading by example

ONS achieved a four star rating in the SDC's 2005 review of government performance against the Framework for Sustainable Development on the Government Estate (SDiG). The department scored consistently well across most of the Framework and achieved a number of targets ahead of time.

ONS's SDAP lists the department's most significant sustainable development impacts which were identified through the development of EMS on their site. ONS confirmed that the table of actions in the plan was built around the significant impacts identified. It includes targets ONS are currently working towards.

ONS's priorities for 2006 are around energy consumption and reduction and CHP. The department explained that it is also about

to embark on a store rainwater project. ONS was also looking into a grey water piping scheme but explained that payback was over a long period and there are tensions between 'Finance versus Sustainability.'

The plan also recognises that "with a procurement budget of £100m, ONS is a small but significant element of Government expenditure and that as a significant buyer, ONS has the opportunity to influence the supply chain and buy more sustainable materials and equipment." The plan commits to drawing up a Sustainable Procurement Strategy, which will include clauses relating to environmental considerations in all contracts as well as developing a food procurement action plan.

Securing the Future commitments

Departmental commitment

Securing the Future commits ONS to "continuing to produce a set of national satellite accounts annually, which take into account a range of uncostered factors such as environmental impacts." ONS's SDAP does not address this commitment. Bilateral discussions revealed that the Property Management Unit who produced the SDAP were unaware of this commitment which falls within the remit of the Environmental Accounts Unit. The plan should address the key policy areas which relate to ONS's *Securing the Future* commitment.

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 contributing to sustainable procurement, as well as implementing training and awareness programmes on sustainable procurement for procurement staff and senior managers.

Target setting

The plan sets clear targets for the departments operational activity. However, not all actions specify the timescales for delivery and it is not made clear who is responsible for the implementation of the actions. For example, it is not clear what is the related timescale for completion of the water targets in the SDAP or who is responsible for the delivery of the action to 'continue to introduce water saving measures in refurbishment projects'.

Policy making

Sustainable development 'proofing'

ONS is a non policy making department and its plan therefore does not refer to the integration of sustainable development into the policy-making process.

Sustainable development skills

The SDAP explains that the department is currently developing an e-learning package which will feature sustainable development,

and will be used in conjunction with face-to-face training courses. Staff in key posts with sustainable development responsibilities are encouraged to attend NSG or similar courses. However, the plan does not include any SMART actions relating to sustainable development skills.

The Commission would expect to see future plans set out clear actions to develop staff awareness and capacity so that staff can fully reflect *Securing the Future's* priorities and principles in their work.

Achieving Sustainable Development outcomes

Infrastructure

ONS policy statement included in the SDAP, assigns responsibility for sustainable development to the ONS Chief Executive and day to day responsibility to the Head of Property Services who is the delegated senior official in ONS with responsibility for sustainable development. The Head of Property Services is accountable for the delivery of the plan.

It was explained in the bilateral that the infrastructure tends to cover the operational activities. In drafting the plan, the Property Management Team did not gain contributions from across the different units of the department (i.e. the Environmental Accounts Unit).

The SDC would expect the department to

ensure the SDAP is supported by the necessary infrastructure which should underpin the SDAP's formulation and delivery.

Engagement

The SDAP explains that the department aims to raise awareness of sustainable development issues through a dedicated database to which all staff have access. The plan also explains that articles relating to sustainable development regularly appear in newsletters and e-news announcements. ONS explained in the bilateral that the department is planning to use the World Environment Day as a vehicle for raising awareness about the departmental operations based priorities identified in the SDAP.

Monitoring and reporting

The SDAP does not set out how ONS will monitor progress against the plan. ONS explained in bilateral discussions that they plan to use the same monitoring systems as the Framework for Sustainable Development on the Government Estate for the SDAP. The EMS system will monitor other aspects such as training. ONS will review






their plan and policy statement once a year.

The SDAP explains that the department plans to report on progress against the plan on their website. Bilateral discussions revealed that ONS are planning to cross reference progress against the SDAP in their Annual Report.

Strengths to build upon

✓	Work to address ONS's significant operational impacts as outlined in the plan.
✓	Set out clear actions to develop staff awareness and capacity, ensuring new and existing staff benefit from sustainable development training.

Challenges for 2007

	Ensure <i>Securing the Future</i> commitment on producing national satellite accounts is acknowledged and addressed.
	Consider other possible policy related contributions, such as environmental accounts and indicators to support OGD's work on evaluating sustainable development outcomes.
	Ensure the SDAP is supported by the necessary infrastructure – covering both policy and operations.
	Explore the relevance of the five principles to the department's work.
	Ensure all targets specify timescales/milestones for delivery and indicate who is accountable for the delivery of targets.



Sustainable
Development Commission

England
(Main office)

Ground Floor, Ergon House,
Horseferry Road, London SW1P 2AL
020 7238 4995
enquiries@sd-commission.org.uk

Scotland

1-H (N) Victoria Quay,
Edinburgh EH6 6QQ
0131 244 0140
Scotland@sd-commission.org.uk
www.sd-commission.org.uk/scotland

Wales

c/o Welsh Assembly Government,
Cathays Park, Cardiff CF10 3NQ
029 2082 6382
Wales@sd-commission.org.uk
www.sd-commission.org.uk/wales

Northern Ireland

Room ES/11, OFMDFM
Castle Buildings, Stormont,
Belfast BT4 3SR
02890 257346
N.Ireland@sd-commission.org.uk

www.sd-commission.org.uk