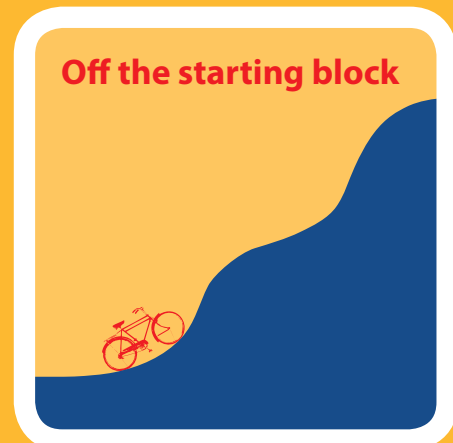




## **Rural Payments Agency**

Chief Executive: Tony Cooper

**SDC Assessment**



# Checklist

## Sustainable Development Action Plan

|    |   |     |  |
|----|---|-----|--|
| 1  | Does the plan specify the period of time it will cover?                             | ✓   |  |
| 2  | Does the plan specify which organisations it covers?                                | n/a |  |
| 3  | Has the organisation articulated what SD means for them?                            | ✗   | SDAP explains that RPA will 'mirror' Defra's policies.   |
| 4  | Does the plan describe the benefits of having an SD approach to the organisation?   | ✗   | Plan does not refer to the benefits of a sustainable development approach.   |
| 5  | Does the plan acknowledge the Government's sustainable development goal?            | ✗   | There is no mention of a sustainable development goal.   |
| 6  | Does the plan acknowledge the priorities of <i>Securing the Future</i> ?            | ✗   | The plan does not explain that <i>Securing the Future</i> sets out immediate priorities for action.  |
|    | Does the plan mention one or more of the priorities of <i>Securing the Future</i> ? | ✗   |  |
| 7  | Does the plan identify links to the priorities of <i>Securing the Future</i> ?      | ✗   | None of the actions are set in the context of contributing to the priorities.  |
| 8  | Does the plan acknowledge the principles of <i>Securing the Future</i> ?            | ✗   | The plan does not explain that <i>Securing the Future</i> sets out five guiding principles.  |
|    | Does the plan mention one or more of the principles of <i>Securing the Future</i> ? | ✗   |  |
| 9  | Does the plan identify links to the principles of <i>Securing the Future</i> ?      | ✗   | Plan only mentions need to embed sustainable development principles into all contracts for goods and services but it is not clear if plan refers to the guiding principles of sustainable development. |
| 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?                                       | ✓   |  |
| 14 | Does the action plan cover operations?  | ✓   |  |
| 15 | Was the plan publicly available by 13th January 2006?                               | ✓   |  |

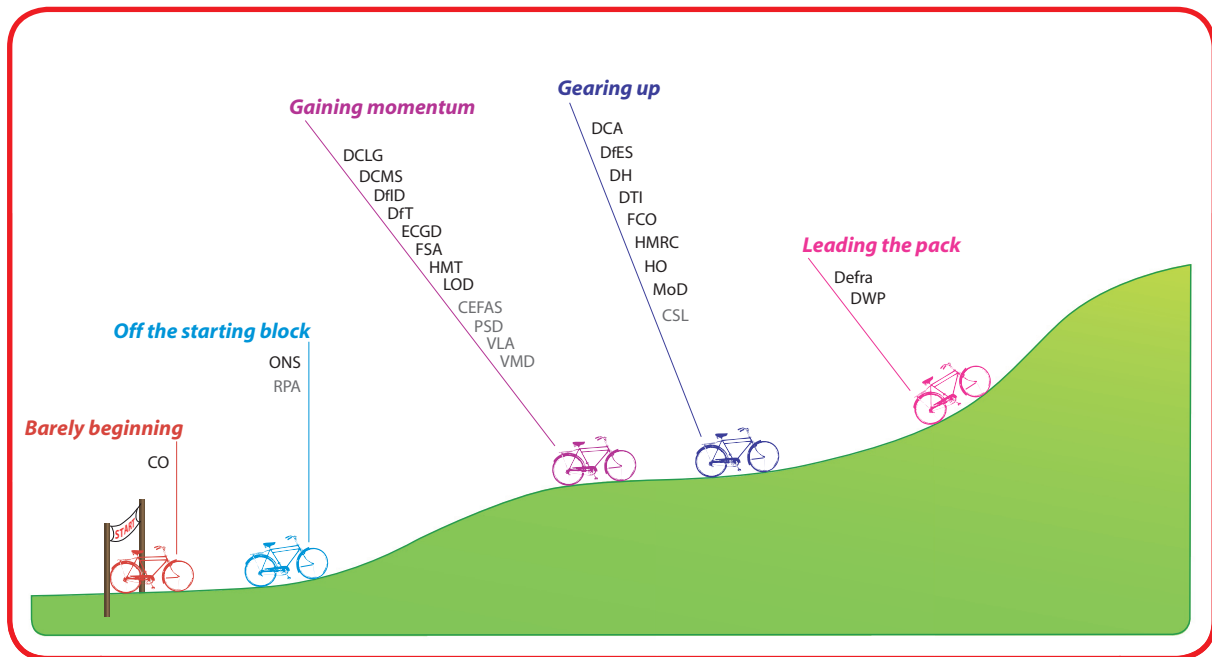
|    |  |   |  |
|----|--|---|--|
| 16 | Does the plan outline any arrangements for strengthening SD capacity in the organisation?                            | ✓ | There is an action point to ensure relevant staff are trained in sustainable procurement.                            |
| 17 | Does the plan describe the infrastructure in place to deliver the plan?  | ✓ |  |
| 18 | Does the plan make it clear who signed it off?   | ✗ | RPA explained in bilateral discussions that due to internal difficulties the plan had yet to be signed off.          |
| 19 | Does the plan designate who is accountable for the delivery of the overall 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?  | ✗ | RPA explained that the Agency expect to report on progress in their Annual Report at the end of each Financial Year. |
| 22 | Does the plan describe how it links in to other reporting mechanisms within the organisation? E.g. the annual report | ✗ |  |
| 23 | Does the plan commit to reporting against the plan on a defined regular basis?                                       | ✗ |  |

**Senior Accountable Officer:** Ian Pittock, *Group Manager Agency Security*

Status of Plan: Published 15.12.05

**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 RPA doing?



### Background

The RPA is one of Defra's six Executive Agencies. It has responsibility for the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) payment functions. The key services it provides include: making rural payments, carrying out rural inspections, and livestock tracing.

### Context

The RPA has produced an SDAP despite 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). There is currently a temporary Chief Executive in place.<sup>1</sup> 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. Although the Agency produced and published its plan in time to meet the December 2005 deadline, the plan has not yet been signed-off and currently has no senior management buy-in. The Hunter Review, which is an inquest into why the payments are not going out on time, is expected to report in 2007, and is likely to be followed by significant changes in the RPA. The Agency is unlikely to review its current plan until the Hunter Review is complete, so that the outcome of the review can be reflected in the plan.

## Organisational view of Sustainable Development

RPA sees its role of implementing the Single Payment Scheme (SPS) through the CAP Reform package as very much rooted in sustainable development. The aim of the scheme is to progress economic, social and environmental improvements by giving farmers greater freedom to farm to the demands of the market, as subsidies will be decoupled from production, and environmentally friendly farming practices will be better acknowledged and rewarded. The implementation of the CAP reform is central to England's strategy on Sustainable Farming and Food.

It was explained in the bilateral that at the present time, RPA feels it can make its biggest contribution to sustainable development through its operations only, due to its uncertain future.

### Benefits of taking a sustainable development approach

The plan does not identify the benefits of taking a sustainable development approach nationally, or to the organisation itself. It was explained in the bilateral that currently the RPA views the main benefits of taking a sustainable development approach as the reduction of the running costs of their buildings and focusing attention on the need for an integrated approach on travel and procurement.

It is important that SDAPs make clear how a sustainable development approach supports core business and where the department recognises that it reduces risk.

## Link to *Securing the Future*

### Guiding Principles

The plan does not acknowledge the five guiding principles as set out in *Securing the Future*. The SDC would expect to see future plans indicating how the Agency is accounting for, and using, the five guiding principles in its work.

### Shared priorities for UK action

The plan does not set out the agency's contribution to the four priorities of *Securing*

*the Future*, despite the particular contribution the Agency's work will have on the Natural Resource Protection and Environmental Enhancement priority through its work in rewarding farmers for environmentally friendly farming practices.

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

## Policy priorities

RPA's policy priority is 'the successful implementation of the new SPS'. The plan does not specify how this will be carried out as this is currently subject to review.

It was explained in the bilateral that the sustainable development team found it difficult to incorporate policy commitments into the

Agency's SDAP as they were unable to approach project managers at the time of developing the plan. This was due to the sensitivities and overriding priorities associated with the internal restructuring and ongoing review of the Agency's work. However, project managers will provide input into future plans.

## Leading by example

The Agency's operational priorities are centred on the five priorities identified in Defra's five year strategy and correspond to key areas of the Framework for Sustainable Development on the Government Estate (SDiG). These are: travel, waste, water, energy and procurement. It was explained that travel has a particularly significant impact for the Agency, due to the

number of travelling officers carrying out farm inspections. The CAP specifies a certain number of visits to each farm and the Agency therefore faces difficulties in reducing travel. The actions included in the plan on travel, such as 'reviewing car hire procedures' are initial first steps to a longer-term approach to reducing the Agency's impact of travel on the environment.

## Securing the Future commitments

### Departmental commitment

There are no specific commitments from *Securing the Future* for which RPA has the lead across government.

### Cross-government commitments

The plan includes actions on procurement, but does not set them in the context of contributing to the strategy commitment on sustainable procurement. As well as ensuring sustainable development is embedded in all contracts, the Agency has committed to ensuring that all relevant staff are appropriately trained in sustainable procurement.

It was explained in the bilateral that staff will receive training from Defra and the Office of Government Commerce (OGC). However, as many staff are currently employed on a temporary basis, not all procurement staff have had the full training.

### Target setting

The Agency has made a good attempt at setting targets. All actions have a timescale for completion and an indication of the accountable directorate. However, there are no milestones and it is not always clear how the Agency will achieve some of the desired high-level targets.

## Policy making

### Sustainable development 'proofing'

The RPA is a delivery agency and does not formulate government policy. The sustainable development team were unclear as to whether the Agency provides Defra with policy advice and whether this advice is sustainable development-assessed.

that there is no induction process at present and Agency staff are trained on the job. The Agency needs structure and stability for staff in order to move forward with sustainable development. There have been some sustainable development seminars and presentations e.g. in Exeter, which was previously a Defra site. The RPA will have access to Defra's online training package, which will allow them to monitor take-up once things have settled down in the Agency.

### Sustainable development skills

The plan does not outline arrangements for strengthening sustainable development capacity within the agency. It was explained in the bilateral

RPA's 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 outlines the basic infrastructure in place to deliver the plan. The Chief Executive has overall responsibility for sustainable development and this is delegated through the Executive Board to key operational managers. It was explained in the bilateral that the Sustainable Development Manager will be responsible for the delivery and monitoring of the plan and will report, via the Finance and Resource Director, to the Board. It must be noted that the Chief Executive is only in post on a temporary basis (as were the last two).

### Engagement

The plan includes a commitment to raise awareness of the sustainable operations agenda and ways in which staff can contribute to its success. It was explained in the bilateral that the permanent RPA staff have a good level of environmental awareness. However, at present, many of the staff are temporary.

Currently, the agency uses the notice boards and the intranet to display its operational performance and highlight key efficiency messages. The intranet has sustainable development on the homepage and encourages staff to share good practice and ideas.

Once the period of unrest for the agency is over, the sustainable development team intends to launch the plan and will ensure staff are aware of how they can contribute to it.

## Monitoring and reporting

The operational targets in this plan will be monitored and evaluated quarterly by the Sustainable Operations Team, who will report progress to the Executive Board annually. The plan does not set out how the Agency will

report on progress publicly. The sustainable development team explained in the bilateral that they expect to report on progress in their Annual Report at the end of each Financial Year.

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<sup>1</sup> Since bilateral discussions, Tony Cooper has been appointed as interim chief executive in succession to Mark Addison.









| Strengths to build upon   |   |
|---|---|
|    | Tackling the Agency's environmental impacts of travel.  |
|    | Include milestones when setting targets.  |
|   |   |
| Challenges for 2007   |   |
|    | Sign-off the plan and ensure senior level buy-in.   |
|    | Consult with project managers on policy contributions for future plans.   |
|  | When permanent staff are in place, work to raise awareness and SD capacity across the organisation to support the plan.                           |
|  | Indicate how the Agency is accounting for and using the five guiding principles in its work.  |
|  | Clearly set out how the Agency is contributing to the four priority areas of <i>Securing the Future</i> with corresponding, prioritised, actions. |



**Sustainable**  
Development Commission

**England**

(Main office)

Ground Floor, Ergon House,  
Horseferry Road, London SW1P 2AL  
**020 7238 4995**  
[enquiries@sd-commission.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@sd-commission.org.uk)

**Scotland**

1-H (N) Victoria Quay,  
Edinburgh EH6 6QQ  
**0131 244 0140**  
[Scotland@sd-commission.org.uk](mailto:Scotland@sd-commission.org.uk)  
[www.sd-commission.org.uk/scotland](http://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](mailto:Wales@sd-commission.org.uk)  
[www.sd-commission.org.uk/wales](http://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](mailto:N.Ireland@sd-commission.org.uk)

**[www.sd-commission.org.uk](http://www.sd-commission.org.uk)**