



**Sustainable**  
Development Commission

## **The next steps**

An independent review  
of sustainable development  
in the English regions

November 2005



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# Executive summary

## 1. Introduction

The English regions have a crucial part to play in advancing sustainable development in England. Important policies are developed, decisions taken, and resources deployed in the regions. Regional Development Agencies (RDAs), Regional Assemblies (RAs) and Government Offices (GOs), as well as the Greater London Authority (GLA), have influential strategic responsibilities. Others, such as the Environment Agency, the Health Protection Agency and many other public bodies, have regional elements to their organisations and command significant resources and powers. So too do many businesses and organisations in the voluntary sector.

In every region, new partnerships and partnership bodies with advocacy roles, such as the regional sustainable development roundtables, feature in the complex institutional landscape. Regional bodies also have a key role or potential for promoting and encouraging sustainable development at more local levels, acting as partners and facilitators for stimulating action at that level.

Each of these actors at the regional level has the potential to incorporate the goal of sustainable development at the heart of all their own individual plans and activities. And when they act together, they have a still greater potential capacity to transform their regions in a more sustainable direction.

Regions in which all actors play their parts for sustainable development separately and collectively could and should have a key role in the implementation of the UK Government Sustainable Development Strategy, *Securing the Future* (March 2005). There are important regional and local dimensions to many of the policies in the Strategy.

In particular, regions should have an important role in helping to deliver the four shared priorities for UK action:

- Sustainable Consumption and Production
- Climate Change and Energy
- Natural Resource Protection and Environmental Enhancement
- Sustainable Communities.

In a truly sustainable region, all actors in the public, private and voluntary sectors would incorporate sustainability requirements at the heart of all their operations and in their procurement and construction activities. They would create powerful alliances and initiatives for promoting energy efficiency and greater use of renewable sources of energy. They would enhance the natural environment and tackle past pollution and land degradation. They would co-operate together to ensure that all new developments are created on sustainable development principles and that existing communities are encouraged and assisted to evolve in more sustainable directions.

Some good progress has been made in recent years on all these goals, and there is evidence of excellent, if sporadic, practice at the regional level. But much remains to be done.

In order to review progress and to stimulate further action, *Securing the Future* included the commitment that:

“The Sustainable Development Commission will review the overall arrangements for delivering sustainable development in the regions – including Regional Sustainable Development Frameworks, regional sustainable development networks, liaison between central Government and the

regions, and the role of major bodies and strategies – and make recommendations for improving effectiveness.”<sup>1</sup>

## 2. This review

### 2.1 Aims of the review

The starting point for this review was to examine leadership, decision-making and delivery processes for sustainable development at the regional level, assessing the current effectiveness, and making recommendations for improvement. The findings and recommendations of this study are targeted at both national government, which can rapidly address some of the failings in regional accountability for sustainable development, and at regional bodies themselves to whom we have targeted many of the recommendations for improving institutional performance on delivery of sustainable development.

### 2.2 Gathering the evidence

In carrying out this review we have conducted interviews with a range of individuals in all the major regional institutions, practitioners from public sector, including health, as well as representatives from Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs). We have also examined the literature on institutional delivery of sustainable development, and sent out initial scoping questionnaires to relevant regional bodies to develop an understanding of their roles, terms of reference and responsibilities.

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<sup>1</sup>HM Government, *Securing the future: delivering UK sustainable development strategy*, March 2005, p160.

## 3. Institutional Leadership

### 3.1 Regional leadership

We found the lack of consistent leadership at the regional level to be a major obstacle to the delivery of sustainable development in the English regions. In most, no single body is acting as the lead advocate for delivering sustainable development principles and priorities as defined in *Securing the Future*. The roles of RDAs, RAs and GOs are not defined clearly enough in relation to sustainable development. In London, the Mayor is leading the delivery of sustainable development, but this is an exception.

The three main regional institutions (RDAs, RAs and GOs) need also to strengthen integration of sustainable development throughout their organisations. All bodies will therefore need to re-examine their organisational structures with a critical eye.<sup>2</sup> Our recommendation on good institutional governance is as follows:

#### Recommendation 1

All regional government institutions should develop a proper accountability framework as they set about embedding sustainable development, including:

- a. Identifying leadership and ownership of sustainable development at management board level, which is needed for driving forward strategy implementation and setting targets
- b. Creating a well-defined business case explaining why sustainable development matters to the delivery of the organisation’s

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<sup>2</sup> The SDC’s SDAP guidance will be useful in ensuring this is done effectively - SDC, *Sustainable Development Action Plans – Getting Started*, August 2005 – [www.sd-commission.org.uk](http://www.sd-commission.org.uk)

- c. objectives, and creating and maintaining an effective strategy for delivering sustainable development
- c. Developing a network of sustainable development champions, established at all levels of the organisation, to communicate and inspire delivery throughout the organisation
- d. Defining sustainable development objectives and targets in all parts of the organisation – including policy delivery, human resources, estates/facilities management
- e. Establishing clear indicators of successful delivery, which are properly monitored and reported on regularly.

In *Securing the Future*, the Prime Minister stated that “Government will lead by example”. To support the delivery of *Securing the Future* and the ‘good governance’ principle, and to demonstrate leadership in the regions, RDAs and GOs should also lead by example, ensuring that their own operations are sustainable. As such, there are a number of actions that all RDAs and GOs could undertake immediately (if they have not already) in order to visibly demonstrate their commitment to sustainable development:

#### Recommendation 2

As their contribution to the Government’s priorities for action on climate change and sustainable consumption and production, all RDAs and GOs should:

- a. Sign up to the Carbon Trust’s carbon management programme to improve the energy performance of the regional government estate
- b. Commit to signing up to the national action plan for

- c. sustainable procurement across the public sector, to be developed by the Sustainable Procurement Task Force in 2006 (which will encompass social, environmental and economic sustainability issues).
- c. Sign up to the new Framework for Sustainable Development on the Government Estate, when it is published in 2006<sup>3</sup>
- d. Sign up to the UK Government commitment that 10% of all their vehicles will be low carbon by 2012
- e. Work with Government to join the commitment to offset all carbon emissions from official air travel.

### 3.2 Regional Development Agencies

Our review has found that the RDA impact on sustainable development in the regions, whilst improving, is highly variable. A number of RDAs do not appear to recognise that economic outcomes should be delivered in such a way that environmental and social inclusion objectives are secured *at the same time*. Integrated outcomes rather than crude trade-off is what RDAs should now be aiming at, as a matter of course.

A key tool in this process is project appraisal. In conjunction with the East of England Development Agency (EEDA), the lead RDA for sustainable development, the SDC is proposing, in 2006, to review all project appraisal processes used by RDAs to create a benchmark for good practice.

The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), as the RDAs’ sponsor Department, is responsible for assessing RDA performance, and for creating the frameworks which guide RDAs in

<sup>3</sup> ODPM already reports for all GOs under the current Framework for Sustainable Development on the Government Estate ([www.sustainable-development.gov.uk](http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk)).

delivering their statutory duties (one of which is contributing to sustainable development). It is therefore vital that the DTI is engaged in the process of assisting RDAs to deliver SD through the Tasking Frameworks and appraisal mechanisms they support.

We are aware that work is ongoing in Government looking into the impact of RDA performance in the regions, and we recommend that the outcome of this work is that independent assessments (rather than RDA self-assessments) are carried out in each region. The inconsistency of RDA performance in this area suggests to us that the DTI mechanisms for appraisals should be examined and improved for delivery of sustainable development.

Our feedback from RDAs also demonstrates that the DTI is insufficiently engaged in assessing the performance of RDAs in delivering sustainable economic development.

#### Recommendation 3

In view of the ongoing reviews by Government of RDA performance, we recommend that DTI in particular should re-examine the effectiveness of its current target-setting and performance appraisal processes for RDAs' delivery of sustainable development.

### 3.3 Regional Assemblies

During our study, interviewees were generally positive about the performance of RAs in relation to sustainable development. However, there remains much confusion as to their precise role. In some cases, the RAs are failing to integrate sustainable development principles into their deliberations on their Regional Spatial Strategies (RSSs). Another problem is that the UK Government has not yet set out a clear plan for RAs following the 'no' vote in the referendum on an elected regional assembly for the North-East.

#### Recommendation 4

ODPM and Defra should clarify the role of the RAs in relation to sustainable development to ensure that sustainable development is their primary purpose. A key role for RAs should be to help motivate and stimulate activity on the sustainable development agenda at local authority level.

### 3.4 Government Offices

Although GOs have to contribute to their sponsor departments' delivery of their sustainable development responsibilities, our research has found that they are not giving sustainable development the priority that *Securing the Future* requires.

Furthermore, we found that while RAs, the GLA and RDAs each have duties to contribute to sustainable development, Government Offices have no comparable duty. However, as non-statutory bodies, we recognise that a formal duty on GOs would not be possible, and therefore our recommendation is proportionate to the status of GOs.

#### Recommendation 5

The UK Government should ensure that the 'primary purpose' of GOs is to deliver UK Government sustainable development policy through *all* their activities in the region. All sponsor departments should sign up to this new 'primary purpose'.

Our research found that GOs, like the other major regional bodies, must embed responsibility for delivering sustainable development into all levels of the organisation, and especially at the highest level.

#### Recommendation 6

Regional Directors should be made responsible for delivering against this new primary purpose.

*Securing the Future* contains the commitment that:

“All central government departments and their executive agencies will produce focussed sustainable development action plans [SDAPs] based on this strategy by December 2005 and will report on their actions by December 2006 and regularly thereafter.”(p153)

This commitment does not specifically include GOs. To ensure that *Securing the Future* priorities and commitments are delivered at the regional level, GOs need to be required to produce both their own SDAPs, based on the Strategy, and to contribute fully to their sponsor Departments’ SDAPs.

#### Recommendation 7

- a. GOs should be required to produce their own SDAPs by June 2006, in collaboration with their regional partners, to drive forward delivery of the *Securing the Future*. This should be done in line with the SDC’s SDAP guidance, *Sustainable Development Action Plans – Getting Started*.<sup>4</sup>
- b. Government Departments should ensure that, in the future, GOs fully contribute to the sponsor Department’s own SDAPs to ensure delivery of their commitments at the regional level.

### 3.5 National leadership

A lack of joined-up regional policy and processes within central government create problems in the regions. The departments with the major influence

<sup>4</sup> SDC, *Sustainable Development Action Plans – Getting Started*, August 2005 – [www.sd-commission.org.uk](http://www.sd-commission.org.uk)

on regional government activities often send conflicting guidance, or create policy frameworks which make it very difficult for regional government to pursue sustainable development goals. The Cabinet Office published a report and guidance on incorporating regional perspectives into policy-making in October 2002. That study, in part, sought to address this problem. However, the review only involved government departments and Government Offices.

#### Recommendation 8

The Cabinet Office should follow up its 2002 study of government policy and its impact on the regions, *Incorporating regional perspectives into policy-making*, with a wider review involving a range of regional stakeholders, including RAs, RDAs and local government bodies. The review needs to identify and resolve any conflicts at the regional level that undermine sustainable development. The objective of the review should be to identify solutions that enable a long term approach to the delivery of crosscutting objectives at the regional level.

There is also a need for a clear mechanism to review *overall* progress of the GOs performance on sustainable development in order to assess how far they are delivering the Government’s sustainable development priorities in the regions. Such an assessment could then inform regional funding allocations from government departments. The body responsible for assessment could also reflect the learning back to GOs in each region, highlighting good practice and areas for improvement.

#### Recommendation 9

Working closely with the Sustainable Development Commission, the Regional Coordination Unit (RCU) should develop the skills and capacity required to monitor GOs and provide an overall

assessment of performance across all the English regions. RCU should then:

- a. take these findings back to government departments to influence their funding allocations for regional programmes
- b. work with the GOs to reflect the learning from this overall assessment back to each region, highlighting good practice and learning from each GO's experience.

#### 4. Regional frameworks and strategies

There are too many regional strategies to be effective. In every region, there is a growing trend to produce more and more strategies, often at the behest of national government departments or agencies, but these are often in conflict with the move towards 'integrated' regional strategies of one kind or another.

UK Government guidance envisages that Regional Sustainable Development Frameworks (RSDFs) should provide a shared vision and shared objectives for sustainable development in the region and inform other regional strategies. Our research, however, produced little evidence to suggest that RSDFs are either overarching or influential. We found that:

- There is a widespread confusion as to the purpose of RSDFs
- RSDFs are not recognised by stakeholders as a the overall regional framework
- RSDFs lack influence.

##### Recommendation 10

New government guidance should be developed by the UK Government (including ODPM, Defra, and DTI) to assist regional bodies in integrating

strategies. This guidance should cover all the main strategies, such as Integrated Regional Frameworks, Integrated Regional Strategies, and Regional Sustainable Development Frameworks. It should clarify the roles of the different bodies and documents. It should make clear that the overall purpose of strategy integration is to contribute to achieving the goal of sustainable development by ensuring that regional strategies take a long term, cross-cutting approach.

RSDFs are already widely used as the basis of sustainability appraisal. This can include appraisal of regional strategies, sub-regional and local level strategies, and even project funding bids. Our research found that there was overwhelming support for RSDFs to be used as a sustainable development appraisal tool and/or as a basis for sustainable development assessment. However, we believe the RSDFs need to be examined critically to see if they fulfil the full scope of a sustainability appraisal, and, where there are gaps, these should be filled so that each region develops and employs a sustainability appraisal tool that is genuinely fit for purpose.

##### Recommendation 11

Working with a cross-section of regional practitioners, the Sustainable Development Commission should, in 2006, provide specific guidance on how to develop a suite of sustainability appraisal tools to be used by all regional bodies and applied to all regional strategies. In some regions, the existing RSDF will form the basis for those appraisal tools; in other regions, the RSDF may prove to be unsuitable for that purpose.

#### 5. The role of major bodies: coordination and integration

Interviewees agreed that the co-ordination of activity for sustainable

development was crucial for achieving sufficient focus. Those with experience of voluntary agreements or action plans found them to be useful confidence-building tools to facilitate joint working. However, they emphasised that they would only work if there was already a commitment within the different organisations to work together. Collaborative working by the RDA, Regional Assembly and Government Office could be highly effective, as with other regional organisations, such as the NHS.

### Recommendation 12

All regional bodies should make use of voluntary agreements to facilitate joint working. These have been found to be highly effective if clearly structured and partnered.

## 6. Regional Sustainable Development Roundtables

All regions have found advantages in establishing a regional sustainable development roundtable or similar body. Although each is organised very differently, there are similarities in their role and activities. However, despite the advantages, our research for this report also identified a number of problems. The most commonly identified included:

- A lack of independence
- A lack of resources
- A lack of crosscutting support and buy-in
- A lack of clarity as regards their role
- Getting business support and engagement
- Not being 'action-oriented'.

As a result of our investigations, we are recommending that the Roundtables, or equivalent bodies, should be strengthened to become bodies that are able to advise regional institutions on the potential impacts of proposals on

sustainable development, and also to act as a scrutiny body – or 'critical friend' – of the regional institutions. It is important that such a body is sufficiently independent of the regional institutions but, at the same time, well enough connected to provide the right balance between being outside the regional institutions' decision-making processes, whilst but sufficiently "inside" to have access to relevant information.

To ensure independence, some regions may decide that representatives from the RDA, GO and RA should participate on the Champion body in a personal capacity, if their employment by the institution is perceived to be a problem. In other regions, full, representative, membership of regional stakeholders, including the RDA, GO and RA, may be deemed necessary in order to facilitate delivery of projects. In both cases, it is crucial that the Champion bodies are still effective in their functions as both advisor and scrutineer.

The SDC itself, whose Commissioners are members in a personal capacity, has to balance advice and advocacy with critique, in its relations with Government Departments, and finds the Commission can work very effectively.

### Recommendation 13

GOs and RAs should be jointly responsible for coordinating the development of a sustainable development Champion body for each region. The new bodies will be responsible for advising on and critiquing the performance of regional institutions in delivering sustainable development. Each should comply with the characteristics defined below.

Working with key stakeholders in the region, including RDAs, we recommend that the GOs and RAs should either redefine the remit of the existing roundtable or create a new Champion body. Proposals for development of the

new bodies should be made within six months of the publication of this review.

It is critical that proper resources are identified to enable these bodies to work properly, and that these resources should be secured from regional sources. This should not require new resources, but a reallocation of existing resources in each region.

An effective Champion should be:

- a. Independent (by acting as the 'critical friend' to the RDA, the RA and the GO)
- b. Inclusive (with wide cross-sectoral representation)
- c. Influential (as a result of its membership and actions)
- d. Capable of delivering campaigns, programmes and projects that exemplify sustainable development excellence
- e. Well-networked (through partnerships within and beyond the region, including the SDC)
- f. Sustainable (with a core professional team, resourced through secure funding by regional partners to ensure stability).

#### Recommendation 14

The Champion bodies should monitor and scrutinise regional sustainable development performance and identify areas of weakness that need strengthening. This should include an assessment of GOs' performance against their SDAPs.

Roundtables were keen to establish links with the SDC. Several suggested that the SDC should convene regular meetings between all the roundtable/Champion bodies' Chairs and SDC Commissioners. Several also suggested the establishment of a formal network for the exchange of information between the roundtables /Champion bodies and the SDC secretariat. It was

suggested that information about good practice needs to be better communicated and shared within and between regions, and that the SDC could have a role in facilitating this.

#### Recommendation 15

With the creation of the new Champion bodies, the SDC will initiate the creation of a network of Champion bodies which would include a twice-yearly meeting between the Chairs of Champion bodies and relevant SDC Commissioners, and appropriate arrangements between the secretariats. These meetings will focus on developing solutions to problems of mutual concern. The SDC will facilitate the exchange of information on good practice on the basis of experience across the whole of the UK, and will gather evidence from the regional Champion bodies of good practice in the regions.

## 7. Indicators, monitoring and scrutiny

### 7.1 Indicators

We found that there is a lack of clarity over the role and purpose of regional sustainable development indicators, and a need for clear lines of responsibility in their delivery. There is insufficient linkage between the high level 'state of the region' indicators and the performance delivery indicators to make them sufficiently useful to the region.

#### Recommendation 16

We encourage the use of regional sustainable development indicators and national strategy indicators. Regions should agree at the outset the purpose of the indicators, how they will be measured and assessed, how they will respond to negative trends, and the reporting arrangements. Based on these indicators, Regional Observatories, in conjunction with the Office of National Statistics, should produce an annual

'state of the region' report in order to provide an overview of regional progress towards sustainable development. Monitoring and evaluation must be focussed on outcomes.

## **7.2 Monitoring and Scrutiny**

The performance of the major bodies in the regions is monitored in line with their own plans and strategies. The DTI, for example, requires RDAs to incorporate an assessment of strategic performance into their corporate plans. However, there is no systematic consideration of how regional institutions contribute to the delivery of *Securing the Future*.

Furthermore, our research found that, where it does happen, scrutiny is hindered by both a lack of capacity and a lack of focus. We make recommendations for new monitoring and scrutiny in Recommendations 1, 3, 9 and 14.

## **Glossary of abbreviations**

Defra	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
DTI	Department of Trade and Industry
ERN	English Regions Network
GLA	Greater London Authority
GO	Government Office
IRF	Integrated Regional Framework
IRS	Integrated Regional Strategy
LDA	London Development Agency
LSP	Local Strategic Partnership
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NHS	National Health Service
ODPM	Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
PSA	Public Service Agreement
RA	Regional Assembly
RCU	Regional Coordination Unit
RDA	Regional Development Agency
RES	Regional Economic Strategy
RSDF	Regional Sustainable Development Framework
RSS	Regional Spatial Strategy
RTS	Regional Transport Strategy
SDC	Sustainable Development Commission
SSP	Specialist Strategic Partnership
UKSDS	UK Government Sustainable Development Strategy, <i>Securing the Future</i>

# 1 Introduction

In the new UK Government Sustainable Development Strategy (UKSDS), *Securing the Future*,<sup>5</sup> the Sustainable Development Commission (SDC) and the UK Government agreed that the SDC should undertake a review of sustainable development in the English regions.

*Securing the Future* outlines five new principles of sustainable development (set out in Annex A), as agreed across government and the Devolved Administrations, and these are intended to guide policy development and policy delivery at all levels of government – national, regional and local. It expressed the view that a key task will be to strengthen regional leadership for sustainable development.

Central to the SDC's objectives is the need for sustainable development to be **mainstreamed** into the heart of policy making and policy delivery at every level of governance. By 'delivery of sustainable development at the regional level' the SDC means ensuring a balance between environmental, social and economic policy objectives to make certain that the five new principles of sustainable development are put into practice.

## 1.1 The context

The English regions (see diagram 1) have a crucial part to play in advancing sustainable development in England. Important policies are developed, decisions taken, and resources deployed in the regions. Regional Development Agencies (RDAs), Regional Assemblies (RAs) and Government Offices (GOs), as well as the Greater London Authority

(GLA), have influential strategic responsibilities. Others, such as the Environment Agency, the Health Protection Agency and many other public bodies, have regional elements to their organisations and command significant resources and powers. So too do many businesses and organisations in the voluntary sector.



Diagram 1: the nine English Regions<sup>6</sup>

In every region, new partnerships and partnership bodies with advocacy roles, such as the regional sustainable development roundtables, feature in the complex institutional landscape. Regional bodies also have a key role or potential for promoting and encouraging sustainable development at more local levels, acting as partners and facilitators for stimulating action at that level.

Each of these actors at the regional level has the potential to incorporate the goal of sustainable development at the heart of all their own individual plans and activities. And when they act together, they have a still greater potential capacity to transform their regions in a more sustainable direction.

<sup>5</sup> HM Government, *Securing the Future: delivering UK sustainable development strategy*, March 2005.

<sup>6</sup> Source: [http://www.mla.gov.uk/action/regional/regions\\_map.asp](http://www.mla.gov.uk/action/regional/regions_map.asp)

Regions in which all actors play their parts for sustainable development separately and collectively could and should have a key role in the implementation of the *Securing the Future*. There are important regional and local dimensions to many of the policies in the Strategy.

In particular, regions should have an important role in helping to deliver the four shared priorities for UK action:

- Sustainable Consumption and Production
- Climate Change and Energy
- Natural Resource Protection and Environmental Enhancement
- Sustainable Communities.

In a truly sustainable region, all actors in the public, private and voluntary sectors would incorporate sustainability requirements at the heart of all their operations and in their procurement and construction activities. They would create powerful alliances and initiatives for promoting energy efficiency and greater use of renewable sources of energy. They would enhance the natural environment and tackle past pollution and land degradation. They would co-operate together to ensure that all new developments are created on sustainable development principles and that existing communities are encouraged and assisted to evolve in more sustainable directions.

Some good progress has been made in recent years on all these goals, and there is evidence of excellent, if sporadic, practice at the regional level. But much remains to be done.

We recognise that the regional level of government fits into the wider landscape of government and works within the constraints and incentives that stem from the need to take forward Government policy for the regions, yet with delivery often at the local government level.

We also fully appreciate that there are significant differences between the regions in the challenges that they face, in their institutional relationships, and in the extent to which sustainable development has moved from the margins towards the mainstream. We realise that generalisations are difficult and that one simple recommendation will not necessarily be appropriate for all. Indeed, this diversity is the strength of delivering sustainable development in the regions as well as its weakness. Nevertheless, our findings are applicable across the regional spectrum.

In some regions we found widespread frustration and impatience with the fact that so much effort by so many in the regions has produced so little in the way of tangible results. Different regions revealed different weaknesses in their institutional structures, in some it was the lack of consistent leadership, in others it was the lack of an independent scrutineer keeping the regional institutions up to the mark with critiques of lack of progress, and in others it was an unwillingness to empower the sustainable development enthusiasts both within, and external to, the institutional structures.

## **1.2 Recommendations for change**

The evidence shows there is a long way to go for sustainable development to be mainstreamed in the English regions. In common with many who are active in the regions, we do not consider that minor refinements to “business as usual”, such as additional Whitehall guidance, is a sufficient response to the serious sustainability deficit at the regional level.

Equally, we recognise that it is not within the SDC’s mandate to propose fundamental changes in regional structures. In any event, the urgency of

the task requires urgent action. We therefore set out specific recommendations capable of short-term implementation.

A core recommendation that we believe to be essential (and around which the others fit) is the creation of strong regional Champion bodies of sustainable development. Building on the experience and lessons of the various models of regional sustainable development roundtables we strongly advocate, for each region, the formation of a partnership body that champions sustainable development that is:

- a. Independent (by acting as the 'critical friend' to the RDA, the RA and the GO)
- b. Inclusive (with wide cross-sectoral representation)
- c. Influential (as a result of its membership and actions).
- d. Capable of delivering campaigns, programmes, projects that exemplify sustainable development excellence
- e. Well-networked (through partnerships within and beyond the region, including the SDC)
- f. Sustainable (with a core professional team, resourced through secure funding by regional partners to ensure stability)

The sustainable development Champion bodies must be managed within, and by, their region for their region.

This review is not seeking more money from Government for regional bodies. We are seeking a change in the delivery of sustainable development at the regional level and this will mean reallocating resources to achieve effective movement towards sustainable development. The SDC is ready to play its active part in guiding and networking these champions in the interest of the delivery of *Securing the Future*.

## 2 This Review

### 2.1 The aims of this review

The starting point for this Review was to examine leadership, decision-making and delivery processes for sustainable development at the regional level, assessing the current effectiveness, and make recommendations for improvement. The findings and recommendations of this study are targeted at both national government, which can rapidly address some of the failings in regional accountability for sustainable development, and at regional bodies themselves, to whom we have targeted many of the recommendations for improving institutional performance on delivery of sustainable development.

This study particularly examines the effectiveness with which the 'good governance' principle of sustainable development (as agreed in *Securing the Future*) is put into practice regionally. Such analysis reveals the effectiveness, or otherwise, with which the regional government institutions are operating.

Some policies, such as those relating to planning, through the regional spatial strategies, transport provision, health provision and the emphasis on learning and skills, are key to the delivery of sustainable development. We recognise that national policy strongly influences regional decisions. Nevertheless, regional government has a clear remit to translate national policy into regional delivery and its role in doing that is crucial to achieving the national sustainable development goal.

This study revealed clearly that the limitations of regional government in delivering sustainable development, which had been identified during the UKSDS consultation process, *Taking it On*, were strongly confirmed. We found no convincing evidence to suggest that

current regional arrangements are effective. It is for this reason that we are recommending a step change in the institutional structures for sustainable development, and only once this is achieved can we expect government to look forward confidently to the implementation of the five new principles of sustainable development as set out in *Securing the Future*.

Decisions are increasingly taken at a regional level. GOs were set up in 1994, followed by RDAs and RAs in 1999, and the GLA in 2000. Together with other organisations in the regions, they now play a critical role in developing and implementing a wide range of regional strategies. At the same time, national policy initiatives inevitably place constraints on the strategic decisions that regions can take for themselves; and national priorities, when translated to the regional level, do not always accord with regions' own strategies.

To facilitate a coordinated approach to sustainable development, the UK Government's 1999 Sustainable Development Strategy, *A Better Quality of Life*, encouraged regions to prepare Regional Sustainable Development Frameworks (RSDFs). These set out the vision, principles, objectives and priorities for sustainable development in each region. Evidence has shown that RSDFs vary markedly, both in structure and in content, reflecting different regional circumstances. Now that the structures for delivery of sustainable development have been in place for several years, the UK Government and the SDC agreed in March 2005 that it was a suitable time to review progress. *Securing the Future* therefore included the commitment that:

"The Sustainable Development Commission will review the overall arrangements for delivering sustainable development in the regions – including RSDFs, regional

sustainable development networks, liaison between central Government and the regions, and the role of major bodies and strategies – and make recommendations for improving effectiveness".<sup>7</sup>

## 2.2 Gathering the evidence

In carrying out this review we conducted interviews with a range of individuals in all the major regional institutions – RDAs, RAs, GOs, practitioners from public sector, including health, as well as representatives from Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs).

We also examined the literature on institutional delivery of sustainable development. These included responses to the consultation for *Securing the Future*; Regional Sustainable Development Frameworks and Integrated Regional Strategies; other regional strategies (such as spatial, economic, housing and health strategies); government strategies and policy statements; and academic research. This phase provided context, identified practical examples of the strengths and weaknesses of existing arrangements, and established key issues for further study.

Initial scoping questionnaires were sent to relevant regional bodies (GOs, RDAs, RAs and sustainable development roundtables), to develop an understanding of their roles, terms of reference and responsibilities.

Interviews took place with 43 people from a wide range of public, private and voluntary sector organisations. Issues picked up in the literature review were discussed along with the interviewees' own experience of developing and delivering sustainable development

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<sup>7</sup> HM Government, *Securing the future: delivering UK sustainable development strategy*, March 2005, p160.

objectives and priorities in the regions. Those interviewed included people with an explicit sustainable development remit (such as members of regional sustainable development roundtables or their equivalents) and others whose role may contribute to sustainable development but without, necessarily, an explicit sustainable development remit (such as RDA leads on Regional Economic Strategies). Interviewees also included advisors from government departments on policies that are key for the delivery of sustainable development in the regions (such as policy on Regional Spatial Strategies, transport, housing, health and learning and skills).

Each region's processes and experiences for delivering sustainable development are different. Interviewees were therefore selected to provide a good sample of views from different regions and different sectors, although the interviews were not representative in a statistical sense.

We were also advised by an expert steering group (see Annex C). The quality of evidence and contributions has been very high and we would like to thank all those involved. The central findings however, are those of the SDC.

## **2.3 The Sustainable Development Commission**

The SDC is the Government's independent advisory body on sustainable development. We report to the Prime Minister and the First Ministers of the Devolved Administrations. Chaired by Jonathon Porritt, with Commissioners drawn from academia and the private, public and not for profit sectors, the SDC works across many areas of policy and practice, including energy, transport, climate change, health, local and regional

governance, education, consumption and economic growth.<sup>8</sup>

## **2.4 Management of the review**

The review was carried out by the SDC secretariat between April and November 2005.

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<sup>8</sup> Go to [www.sd-commission.org.uk](http://www.sd-commission.org.uk) for more on the SDC.

### 3. Institutional Leadership

#### Summary of findings

- There is a lack of consistent leadership at the regional level in most English regions, and no single body is acting as the lead advocate for delivering sustainable development principles and priorities as defined in *Securing the Future*.
- The roles of RDAs, RAs and GOs are not defined clearly enough in relation to sustainable development.
- RDAs' impact on sustainable development in the regions, whilst improving, is highly variable.
- Interviewees were generally positive about the performance of RAs in relation to sustainable development. However, there remains much confusion as to their precise role.
- GOs are not giving sustainable development the priority that *Securing the Future* requires. Furthermore, while RAs, the GLA and RDAs each have duties to contribute to sustainable development, GOs have no comparable duty.
- A lack of joined-up regional policy and processes within central government create problems in the regions. The Departments with the major influence on regional government activities often send conflicting guidance, or create policy frameworks which make it very difficult for regional government to pursue sustainable development goals.

#### 3.1 Background

The consultation process for *Securing the Future* - called *Taking It On*<sup>9</sup> - identified that no single institution was taking the lead role in championing sustainable development at regional level. Our

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<sup>9</sup> In April 2004, DEFRA published *Taking it on, developing UK sustainable development strategy together*. This was a consultation document produced as part of the development of *Securing the Future*. The consultation process included 'Regional Dialogues'. Developed in each of the English regions, these involved discussion of issues that would require action at both the national and regional levels. They included at least one event in each region to bring stakeholders together. Other activities, varying between regions, included surveys, working breakfasts with key stakeholders, and workshops with regional groups: [www.sustainabledevelopment.gov.uk/documents/publications/finalsummary.pdf](http://www.sustainabledevelopment.gov.uk/documents/publications/finalsummary.pdf).

research confirmed this. As such, *Securing the Future* identified leadership in the regions as a priority: "a key task will be to strengthen regional leadership".

Indeed, as at any level, strong, clear leadership on sustainable development in the regions is crucial to its delivery. It provides an example for others to follow, signals to others the significance of the problem and ensures that resources and capacity are devoted to the issue. It is clear that the regional bodies also influence local government's delivery of sustainable development, and as one interviewee during our research stated, "leadership needs commitment from *all* regional bodies. Only then will local authorities do the same". Regional groupings have a stronger voice in relation to national government, and can pool expertise and

resources to tackle issues which are often shared across a region, but are distinct from concerns in another region.

Leadership from national government is also vital. Clear and coordinated regional policy, set within a rational policy framework, is required from key Government Departments, such as the Office of the Deputy of the Prime Minister (ODPM), the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and the Department for Environment, Food and Agriculture (Defra).

This chapter examines the leadership role required from the three 'main' political organisations in the regions - the RDAs, the RAs and GOs - as well as that of central government. It examines the degree to which each of these three are taking a lead on sustainable development.

## 3.2 Regional leadership

We found lack of leadership by any one institution to be a major obstacle to the delivery of sustainable development at the regional level. In most regions, except London, no single body is acting as a lead advocate for delivering the sustainable development principles and priorities as defined in *Securing the Future*.

### 3.2.1 Findings of previous studies

The *Taking it On* consultation found that a lack of leadership was seen as a major problem for the delivery of sustainable development at the regional level. The summary findings report from *Taking it On*, for example, found that there was widespread support "for improved leadership and coordination of sustainable development at the regional level".<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>[www.sustainabledevelopment.gov.uk/documents/publications/finalsummary.pdf](http://www.sustainabledevelopment.gov.uk/documents/publications/finalsummary.pdf).

Furthermore, partly to ensure improved leadership, six of the nine regions recommended that a statutory obligation be placed on regional bodies to contribute to sustainable development.

Interestingly, two of the main regional bodies - RDAs and RAs - already have some form of a statutory obligation on sustainable development. GOs, however, have no formal sustainable development requirements. We consider this issue in more detail later.

### 3.2.2 Regional leadership: SDC findings

Our research confirms the findings of the *Taking it On* consultation. The view of a majority of those interviewed was that, with the exception of London, there was no clear lead on sustainable development in the regions and that this was a major obstacle to its delivery. Even the very small number of interviewees who felt that regional organisations *were* taking a lead on sustainable development, recognised that leadership was not always consistent throughout the regions.

One problem was that interviewees felt that the roles of RDAs, RAs and GOs on sustainable development and strategy integration were not clearly enough defined. One comment, for example, was that "the problem is that there is no effective governance or leadership at the regional level. The leadership roles of regional organisations are ill-defined".

The one region where leadership was not raised as a significant issue was London, where the Mayor has a statutory sustainable development duty. London was cited several times as a region where sustainable development is taken seriously at the highest level. Here, the Mayor was seen as "the key leader in the region [who] acts as a spur to bring people together".

So what makes London different to other regions? The main reasons cited for the success in London were: the existence of a statutory duty that requires the Mayor to promote sustainable development;<sup>11</sup> the character and drive of the Mayor himself; and a strong sustainable development advocacy and advice body. One comment, for example, was that “nobody is taking the lead on sustainable development, except in London. The Mayor has a statutory duty and the London Sustainable Development Commission. He has asked it to play a role ... the problem in the other regions may be that there is no statutory duty in the other regions or that there is ‘no Ken’”.

### 3.2.3 Embedding sustainable development into regional institutions

Leadership stems from within an organisation. The three main regional institutions (RDAs, RAs and GOs) need to strengthen integration of sustainable development throughout their organisations. This is particularly important in the light of our research, which found that capacity within the three institutions will need to be greatly improved. Many interviewees identified capacity as a problem. Specifically, the interviews found that:

- there was a lack of commitment to sustainable development at management board level
- there was often a lack of understanding of what

<sup>11</sup> The GLA Act 1999 (<http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1999/19990029.htm>) states the GLA should:

- Have regard to the effect of all it does on the achievement of sustainable development in the UK
- When preparing or revising strategies, include policies and proposals best calculated to contribute towards the achievement of sustainable development in the UK.

sustainable development actually means, or why it is important

- organisations sometimes lacked the skills to implement good sustainable development policy.

All bodies will therefore need to re-examine their organisational structures with a critical eye.<sup>12</sup> Our recommendation on good institutional governance is as follows:

#### Recommendation 1

All regional government institutions should develop a proper accountability framework as they set about embedding sustainable development, including:

- Identifying leadership and ownership of sustainable development at management board level, which is needed for driving forward strategy implementation and setting targets
- Creating a well-defined business case explaining why sustainable development matters to the delivery of the organisation’s objectives, and creating and maintaining an effective strategy for delivering sustainable development
- Developing a network of sustainable development champions, established at all levels of the organisation, to communicate and inspire delivery throughout the organisation
- Defining sustainable development objectives and targets in all parts of the

<sup>12</sup> The SDC’s SDAP guidance will be useful in ensuring this is done effectively - SDC, *Sustainable Development Action Plans Getting Started*, August 2005 [www.sd-commission.org.uk](http://www.sd-commission.org.uk)

- organisation – including policy delivery, human resources, estates/facilities management
- e. Establishing clear indicators of successful delivery, which are properly monitored and reported on regularly.

Through decisions about the goods and services they buy and the way they manage their own estates, regional institutions have the potential to make a considerable contribution to sustainable social, environmental and economic development in the regions.

The public sector, for example, buys £125 billion of public goods and services each year. Of this, a significant proportion is spent within the English regions, through RDAs, GOs, local authorities, the NHS and many other public sector organisations. The public sector in the Yorkshire and Humber region alone spends an estimated £5.5 billion a year on goods and services;<sup>13</sup> and between them, RDAs and GOs are responsible for almost £11 billion of public money.

In *Securing the Future*, the Prime Minister stated that “Government will lead by example”. To support the delivery of *Securing the Future* and the ‘good governance’ principle, and to demonstrate leadership in the regions, RDAs and GOs should also lead by example, ensuring that their own spending and operations are sustainable. As such, there are a number of actions that all RDAs and GOs could undertake immediately (if they have not already), in order to visibly demonstrate their commitment to sustainable development:

<sup>13</sup> Yorkshire and Humber Assembly, *Towards sustainable procurement: a guide for public sector organisations*, January 2005.

## Recommendation 2

As their contribution to the Government’s priorities for action on climate change and sustainable consumption and production, all RDAs and GOs should:

- a. Sign up to the Carbon Trust’s carbon management programme to improve the energy performance of the regional government estate
- b. Commit to signing up to the national action plan for sustainable procurement across the public sector, to be developed by the Sustainable Procurement Task Force in 2006 (which will encompass social, environmental and economic sustainability issues).
- c. Sign up to the new Framework for Sustainable Development on the Government Estate, when it is published in 2006<sup>14</sup>
- d. Sign up to the UK Government commitment that 10% of all their vehicles will be low carbon by 2012
- e. Work with Government to join the commitment to offset all carbon emissions from official air travel.

### 3.2.4 The role of the RDAs

Sponsored by the DTI, RDAs were set up by the UK Government to promote sustainable economic development in England. They are primarily business led. Their main tasks are to help the English regions improve their relative economic performance and reduce social and economic disparities within and between regions.

<sup>14</sup> ODPM already reports for GOs under the current Framework for Sustainable Development on the Government Estate ([www.sustainable-development.gov.uk](http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk)).

There are nine RDAs: One NorthEast; the Northwest Development Agency; Yorkshire Forward; Advantage West Midlands; the East Midlands Development Agency; the East of England Development Agency; the South West of England Regional Development Agency; the South East England Development Agency; and the London Development Agency.

With the exception of London, each RDA is led by a Chair and a Board of 15 people, appointed by, and reporting to, DTI Ministers. The Chair and Board of the London Development Agency (LDA) is appointed by the Mayor and accountable to the Mayor and the London Assembly. The LDA has its targets set by both the Mayor and the UK Government.

Under the Regional Development Agencies Act 1998, each Agency has five statutory purposes, which are:

- To further economic development and regeneration
- To promote business efficiency, investment and competitiveness
- To promote employment
- To enhance development and application of skill relevant to employment
- To contribute to sustainable development.

The last of these is particularly significant in terms of this review. With a total budget of £1.8billion in 2004/05, the RDAs are a key regional delivery body. The impact of RDA activity on the delivery of sustainable development in the regions therefore should not be underestimated.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Since April 2002, RDAs have been financed through a Single Programme whereby funding from contributing Departments (DTI, ODPM, HM Treasury, DfES, DEFRA and DCMS) is pooled into one single budget. Once allocated, the budget is available to the RDAs to spend as they see fit to achieve the regional priorities identified in their

Our research found that a key challenge to achieving integrated outcomes that contribute to sustainable development will be to develop the skills, knowledge and capacity within RDAs. One interviewee, for instance, found that “all RDA staff need to have basic sustainable development knowledge. More training is needed and sustainable development needs to be built into staff competencies. RDAs tend to have small sustainable development teams but knowledge amongst other staff is limited”. Many RDA staff have traditional regeneration knowledge and training and are therefore not always equipped to deal with the broader challenges of sustainable development, of which regeneration is only one. The partners in sustainable development are not the same as the partners in regeneration as traditionally framed. Unless all those working in RDAs are equipped with the right skills and knowledge, RDAs won’t have the capacity to make decisions and develop policies that contribute effectively to sustainable development.

This is particularly important at board level, where it is not clear from our interviews that sufficient skills, knowledge or commitment exist. One interviewee, for instance, noted, “the challenge is to get sustainable development knowledge at board level”. Improving capacity is part of the wider challenge of ensuring that sustainable development is fully embedded into all aspects of *all* regional bodies’ work, but RDAs should take particular notice of Recommendation 1.

Overall, our review found that RDA impact on sustainable development in the regions, whilst improving, is highly variable. One comment, for instance, was that “RDAs are getting better at taking on sustainable development.

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Regional Economic Strategies and the targets set in their Corporate Plans.

However this may be down to a few individuals”.

We recognise, of course, that RDAs’ focus is mainly economic; the SDC has no problem with the fact that the *principal* responsibilities of RDAs relate to the delivery of key economic outcomes. Nevertheless one of RDAs’ five statutory purposes is “to contribute to sustainable development”. Yet a number of RDAs do not appear to recognise that economic outcomes should be delivered in such a way that environmental and social inclusion objectives are secured *at the same time*. Integrated outcomes rather than crude trade-off is what RDAs should now be aiming at as a matter of course.

**A key tool in this process is project appraisal. In conjunction with the East of England Development Agency (EEDA), the lead RDA for sustainable development, the SDC is proposing, in 2006, to review all project appraisal processes used by RDAs to create a benchmark for good practice.**

The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), as the RDAs’ sponsor Department, is responsible for assessing RDA performance, and for creating the frameworks which guide RDAs in delivering their statutory duties (one of which is contributing to sustainable development). It is therefore vital that the DTI is engaged in the process of assisting RDAs to deliver SD through the the Tasking Framework<sup>16</sup> and the appraisal mechanisms that it supports.

The Tasking Framework requires each RDA to show in its Corporate Plan how,

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<sup>16</sup> The RDA Tasking Framework requires each RDA to show in its Corporate Plan for 2005-08, how, in support of its statutory role and responsibilities, it will address the priorities identified in the RES for its region and contribute to the delivery of the Government’s PSA Targets on Regional Economic Performance, Sustainable Development and Productivity/Rural Productivity and through these to the delivery of a range of other PSA Targets – [www.consumer.gov.uk](http://www.consumer.gov.uk).

in support of its statutory role and responsibilities, it will address the priorities identified in the Regional Economic Strategy (RES) for the region and contribute to the delivery of the Government’s PSA Targets, including Defra’s PSA 1 Target on sustainable development.<sup>17</sup>

However, we are not convinced that the RDA’s *target* framework<sup>18</sup> takes into account the new sustainable development principles (Annex A). One of the key principles, for example, is ‘living within environmental limits’; but this principle is not supported by any targets (except, perhaps, for a ‘brownfield land’ target), which focus on economic and social areas.

The inconsistency of RDA performance on sustainable development suggests to us that the DTI mechanisms for appraisals should be examined and improved for delivery of sustainable development.

One interviewee commented that: “there are many competing pressures on regions and sustainable development is just one of them. For example, RDAs all want their region to be amongst the top for economic growth. I am not convinced that the sustainable growth model is implicit in what the Government wants”.

Furthermore, our feedback from RDAs demonstrates that the DTI is insufficiently engaged in assessing the performance of RDAs in delivering sustainable economic development.

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<sup>17</sup> Defra’s PSA 1: “Promote sustainable development across Government and the country as a whole as measured by achieving positive trends in the Government’s headline indicators of sustainable development” - <http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/performance/DEFRA.cfm>.

<sup>18</sup> DTI, *RDA Performance and monitoring framework guidance 2004/05* - [http://www.dti.gov.uk/rda/info/Performance\\_Monitoring\\_and\\_Reporting.htm](http://www.dti.gov.uk/rda/info/Performance_Monitoring_and_Reporting.htm)

### Recommendation 3

In view of the ongoing reviews by Government of RDA performance, we recommend that DTI in particular should re-examine the effectiveness of its current target-setting and performance appraisal processes for RDAs' delivery of sustainable development.

We are aware that government is continuing to look into the impact of RDA performance in the regions, and we recommend that the outcome of this work is that independent assessments (rather than RDA self-assessments) are carried out in each region.

#### 3.2.5 The role of the Regional Assemblies

RAs, sometimes referred to as 'Regional Chambers', were set up in the late 1990s at the same time as RDAs under the 1998 Regional Development Agencies Act. They are sponsored by ODPM.

RAs are partnership bodies which bring together representatives from the public, private, voluntary and community sectors. The exact profile and number of Assembly Members varies from region to region. In general, 70% of Members are elected local authority councillors and 30% are partners drawn from sectors, such as business, arts and culture, education, faith groups, community, voluntary and the environment. Members of the European Parliament are also Members of some Assemblies. The RAs are voluntary organisations and the Members are put forward by their nominating bodies.

There are eight RAs, with London having different arrangements through the GLA.<sup>19</sup> The 2002 White Paper 'Your

<sup>19</sup> In London, the Greater London Authority (GLA) offers a unique form of strategic citywide government made up of a directly elected Mayor and a separately elected Assembly. The Mayor is

Region, Your Choice', established RAs as one of three key regional governance organisations alongside RDAs and GOs. The majority of funding comes from central government. Some RAs also receive money from other sources such as local authority subscriptions.

All RAs perform the same three core activities, they may also engage in other work according to regional circumstances and priorities:

- Regional Planning - as Regional Planning Bodies, RAs are responsible for preparing statutory Regional Spatial Strategies (RSSs) including Regional Transport Strategies (RTSs). This work involves developing, monitoring and reviewing strategic planning and transport policies.
- Advocacy and Policy Development - representing the voices of regions to Whitehall and European institutions. RAs provide a strategic focus for integrating regional strategy development and partnership working.
- Accountability - scrutinising the work of RDAs. Some RAs also hold other public sector bodies to account.<sup>20</sup>

Interviewees were generally positive about the performance of RAs in relation to sustainable development. Of the main

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London's spokesperson and leads the preparation of statutory strategies on transport, spatial development, economic development and the environment. The Mayor also sets budgets for the GLA, Transport for London, the London Development Agency, the Metropolitan Police and London's fire services, and chairs Transport for London. The Assembly scrutinises the Mayor's activities and decisions, and is also able to investigate other issues of importance to Londoners, publish its findings and recommendations, and make proposals to the Mayor.

<sup>20</sup> Source:

<http://ern.smartregion.org.uk/page.asp?id=4>

regional bodies, interviewees identified RAs as the body that, above all, should lead on sustainable development. A smaller number felt RAs were already doing this job: “in some regions the Regional Assembly drives sustainable development. It should be the Regional Assembly that does so”.

However, there remained much confusion as to their precise role, especially in relation to sustainable development.

In some cases, the RAs are failing to integrate sustainable development principles into their deliberations on their Regional Spatial Strategies (RSSs). The focus on RSSs has also meant that wider sustainable development priorities have been sidelined: “Regional Spatial Strategies are taking up a lot of Regional Assemblies’ time and have resulted in Regional Sustainable Development Frameworks taking a back seat”.

Interviewees also expressed concern that confusion over the RAs’ role is increasing: “the whole confusion around the role of RAs is a real and growing problem”. Part of the problem is that the UK Government has not yet set out a clear plan for RAs following the ‘no’ vote in the referendum on an elected regional assembly for the North-East in October 2004.

The UK Government’s Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Act 2003 provided for referendums to be held in the regions on the establishment of directly elected RAs. These plans included a commitment that elected RAs would have a sustainable development duty. At present, the RAs do have a duty through the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.<sup>21</sup> However, unlike

<sup>21</sup> Part 3 of the Act includes the formal requirement that regional and local plan-makers have a duty to exercise their functions with a view to contributing to the achievement of sustainable development - [www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2004/20040005.htm](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2004/20040005.htm)

the proposed duty for the elected RAs, this is far from being a duty which puts sustainable development at the heart of what the RAs do, and leaves them with a less than clear sustainable development responsibility.

#### Recommendation 4

**ODPM and Defra should clarify the role of the RAs in relation to sustainable development to ensure that sustainable development is their primary purpose. A key role for RAs should be to help motivate and stimulate activity on the sustainable development agenda at local authority level.**

### 3.2.6 The Role of the Government Offices

The nine GOs in England also manage significant spending programmes on behalf of 10 Government Departments (£9 billion in 2003/04):<sup>22</sup>

- The Cabinet Office
- The Home Office
- The Department for Culture, Media & Sport
- The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
- The Department for Education and Skills
- The Department of Trade and Industry
- The Department for Transport
- The Department for Work and Pensions
- The Department of Health
- Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

Their influence should not therefore be underestimated.

GOs bring together the activities and interests of these Departments within a single organisation. This makes them

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.gos.gov.uk/aboutus/>

uniquely placed to take a cross-departmental approach and to provide a more coherent view of the operation and interactions of Government programmes. They work with regional partners, including local authorities, RDAs and other organisations, to achieve the Government's aims in a more joined-up way.

Each GO is headed by a Regional Director. The Regional Co-ordination Unit (RCU) is the corporate centre of the GOs and represents them in Whitehall, providing a regional voice into the heart of Government.<sup>23</sup>

This is especially important in relation to sustainable development. *Securing the Future* is signed up to by the Cabinet, is applicable across government, and incorporates a wide range of government policy areas, including sustainable communities, climate change, health, natural resources, transport, education, public health and more. These are all areas which GOs have responsibility for through their various sponsor departments. GOs therefore are ideally placed to join together these policy areas under government-wide policy on sustainable development.

However, although GOs have to contribute to their sponsor departments' delivery of their sustainable development responsibilities, our research has found that they are not giving sustainable development the priority that the *Securing the Future* requires. Of those interviewees who commented on the GOs, only one felt that their performance on sustainable development was good. The others argued that GOs needed to exercise more leadership, were inconsistent, or were not helpful in delivering

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<sup>23</sup> Source: [www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm\\_govof/fices/documents](http://www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_govof/fices/documents)

Government objectives on sustainable development.

In the Northwest, the GO was criticised because it "challenged the RSS for being based on sustainable development principles". Another commented, "I often forget that the GOs are there. They are not taking the lead on sustainable development".

Evidence found on the websites of the GOs supports the findings that sustainable development is not being given the priority it requires.<sup>24</sup> On all websites, for instance, the GOs list 13 areas of responsibility, such as 'people and sustainable communities', 'economy', 'transport' and 'environment and rural'. Of these, sustainable development falls under the 'environment and rural' alongside issues such as waste, food and farming and energy. This signals that sustainable development is not seen by GOs as the cross-cutting issue it is, but a sub-strand of environmental and rural issues.<sup>25</sup>

As we have seen, there is already a statutory obligation on both the RDAs and RAs to promote sustainable development. However, GOs have no comparable duty. Evidence from the *Taking it On* consultation findings suggest that there is strong support for a sustainable development duty on all regional bodies (see above). A duty on GOs, in conjunction with this new guidance, would help to ensure that they give the appropriate priority to sustainable development. However, GOs are non-statutory bodies, so we recognise that a duty on them would not be possible and therefore our recommendation is proportionate to the status of GOs.

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<sup>24</sup> All Government Office websites were reviewed between 4<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> November 2005.

<sup>25</sup> In addition, two of the websites – Government Office London and Government Office East Midlands were still using objectives from the 1999 UK Sustainable Development Strategy.

### Recommendation 5

The UK Government should ensure that the 'primary purpose' of GOs is to deliver UK Government sustainable development policy through *all* their activities in the region. All sponsor departments should sign up to this new 'primary purpose'.

Our research found that GOs, like the other major regional bodies, must embed responsibility for delivering sustainable development into all levels of the organisation, and especially at the highest level.

### Recommendation 6

Regional Directors should be made responsible for delivering against this new primary purpose.

*Securing the Future* contains the commitment that:

"All central government departments and their executive agencies will produce focussed sustainable development action plans [SDAPs] based on this strategy by December 2005 and will report on their actions by December 2006 and regularly thereafter (p153)"

This commitment does not specifically include GOs. To ensure that *Securing the Future* priorities and commitments are delivered at the regional level, the GOs need to be explicitly part of the commitment to produce both their own SDAPs, based on the Strategy, and to contribute fully to their sponsor Departments' SDAPs.

### Recommendation 7

a. GOs should be required to produce their own SDAPs by June 2006, with their regional

partners, after consultation with relevant government Departments, by June 2006, to drive forward delivery of the *Securing the Future*. This should be done in line with the SDC's SDAP guidance, *Sustainable Development Action Plans – Getting Started*.<sup>26</sup>

b. Government Departments should ensure that, in the future, GOs fully contribute to their own SDAPs to help them deliver on their commitments at the regional level.

These SDAPs will need to be fully monitored. We examine the need for monitoring and scrutiny in Chapter 7.

## 3.3 National leadership

A lack of joined-up regional policy and processes within central government create problems in the regions. The Departments with the major influence on regional government activities often send conflicting guidance, or create policy frameworks which make it very difficult for regional government to pursue sustainable development goals. Annex A outlines the national sustainable development context as regards the regions.

### 3.3.1 Findings of previous studies

A common theme from several previous studies was that greater clarity was needed over the relationship between regional and national policy. A report for ODPM by Brook Lyndhurst on the relationship between regional economic competitiveness and sustainable development found that one of the challenges for sustainable development was, "within a framework in which different departments set different

<sup>26</sup> SDC, *Sustainable Development Action Plans – Getting Started*, August 2005 – [www.sd-commission.org.uk](http://www.sd-commission.org.uk).

targets for different elements of regional government, how will the respective agendas of competitiveness and sustainable development be integrated? How much will take the form of 'guidance' and how much will be 'requirement'?"<sup>27</sup> It therefore recommended, "greater transparency will be required from government departments as to the mutual limits to decision-making; and greater precision will be required about what is meant by 'sustainable'.

A study by Regional Futures of the low carbon economy found, "respondents argued that regional policy should be directed by national policy but not constrained by it". However "those interviewed were uncertain about the links between regional and national policy, and many felt regions were not fully consulted and their views not always taken into account".<sup>28</sup> The report recommended that national government, "must provide a strong, seamless direction if regional and local government, business and industry are to achieve more than isolated activities".

Likewise, Regional Futures' study on spatial planning found, "there is a lack of understanding about the mutual interdependence of activities, and a lack of 'joined-up-ness' between regional delivery organisations, government and local authority level".<sup>29</sup> It noted, "a tension is ... present between regional and national policies". It explained, "regions know what they want in the region, but are dependent on national influence". Conversely, it gave the example of a regional airport noting, "this national intervention may have implications for SD in that region".

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<sup>27</sup> Brook Lyndhurst, *Level playing fields and minimum standards: can competitive regions promote sustainable development?*, May 2004, p36.

<sup>28</sup> Regional Futures, *Low carbon economy in the regions*, June 2004, p20.

<sup>29</sup> Regional Futures, *Spatial planning in the regions*, October 2004, p14.

More recently, the *Taking it On* consultation in 2004 found that UK Government sustainable development suffered from a lack of collaboration between departments and a lack of joined up thinking across government. At the regional level, all of the regional dialogue reports, and many other responses, called for greater leadership from central government on sustainable development. The *Taking it On* summary report<sup>30</sup> notes that "comments include that the Government needs to lead by example with clearer and more consistent policy and guidance, and with better co-ordination between departments". Publication of *Securing the Future* has now set out the clear framework for sustainable development, but policies on key issues relevant to sustainable development, remain inconsistent with these goals.

### **3.3.2 National leadership: SD findings**

*Securing the Future* helped to join many sustainable development issues into a coherent whole. One interviewee said, "the UK Sustainable Development Strategy did a good job of getting join up. We are more joined up than ever at official level and Ministers have tried hard. But one or two departments have not fully engaged".

Nevertheless, most interviewees confirmed the findings from the *Taking it On* consultation, that Government policy is not joined up and that there is a real need for better regional policy alignment. Many interviewees said that a lack of joined-up policy-making between and within key Departments, such as ODPM, Defra, and the DTI, caused frustration amongst interviewees, and was identified as a clear barrier to effective delivery of sustainable development at the regional

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<sup>30</sup> [www.sustainable-development.gov.uk](http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk)

level. Interviewees identified local strategic partnerships (LSPs) and sub-regional strategic partnerships (SSPs) as key partners for the delivery of regional objectives. Several interviewees identified work being done in their region to improve links with these organisations but recognised that more needed to be done.

Interviewees also felt that *Securing the Future* was not yet being promoted and supported within Government, which has had consequences for sustainable development at the regional and local level: "Government has failed to promote sustainable development within government departments. Its own principles of sustainable development are not widely promulgated within government. Government has been unable to drive this down to the regional and local level, for example through the audit process".

Our research also found that:

- Central government needed to provide more leadership to the regions
- There is a lack of understanding of the regions within central government
- Cross-departmental Public Service Agreements (PSAs) would help to join-up policy
- ODPM's Chapter 2 Agenda should be revised to incorporate sustainable development.

Government itself has recognised that policy needs to be better coordinated at a regional level. The Performance and Innovation Unit report, *Reaching Out*, found that "there are too many Government initiatives, causing confusion; not enough co-ordination; and too much time spent on negotiating the system, rather than delivering".<sup>31</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Policy and Innovation Unit, *Reaching Out: the role of central government at regional and local*

Following this report, in 2002, the Cabinet Office and ODPM undertook a study on incorporating regional perspectives into policy-making for the Cabinet Office and ODPM<sup>32</sup> with the aim of assessing how to make best use of regional perspectives when making policy and planning implementation. The report was accompanied by a toolkit to help Government Departments and GOs work together effectively to improve regional policy-making.<sup>33</sup>

Although the report and toolkit were aimed at integrating regional policy-making, the findings from previous studies, and the results of our own research, suggests that there is still much more to do. Government policy is still not effectively joined-up and there is a real need for better regional policy alignment. Furthermore, report and toolkit only focused only on the role of Government Departments and GOs and not on other important regional organisations, such as RDAs and RAs.

#### Recommendation 8

The Cabinet Office and ODPM should follow up their 2002 study of government policy and its impact on the regions, *Incorporating regional perspectives into policy-making*, with a wider review involving a range of regional stakeholders, including RAs, RDAs and local government bodies. The review needs to identify and resolve any conflicts at the regional level that undermine sustainable development. The objective of the review should be to identify solutions that enable a long term approach to the delivery of cross-cutting objectives at the regional level.

*level*, February 2000, <http://www.strategy.gov.uk/downloads/su/reaching/regions/default.htm>

<sup>32</sup> Cabinet Office and ODPM, *Incorporating regional perspectives into policy-making: report*, October 2002.

<sup>33</sup> Cabinet Office and ODPM, *Incorporating regional perspectives into policy-making: toolkit*, October 2002.

We also found that the monitoring of regional institutional delivery of sustainable development is not a core part of the audit/evaluation process. Leadership on sustainable development will only really succeed over the long term if measurement of each institution's success is also based around sustainable development goals. This appears to be particularly important for the evaluation of RDAs' performance carried out by DTI, and hence our proposal (Recommendation 3) that this should change.

There is also a need for one body to review *overall* progress of the GOs performance on sustainable development in order to assess how far they are delivering the Government's sustainable development priorities in the regions. Such an assessment could then inform regional funding allocations from government departments. The body responsible for assessment could also reflect the learning back to GOs in each region, highlighting good practice and areas for improvement.

The role of the Regional Coordination Unit (RCU) is to work with the GOs to improve the regional and local delivery of government programmes. As the link between government departments and GOs, it is therefore well-placed to perform this overall assessment role.<sup>34</sup> We recognise, however, that at present the RCU lacks the skills and capacity to perform this function effectively, and we reflect this in the recommendation below.

#### Recommendation 9

Working closely with the Sustainable Development Commission, the Regional Coordination Unit (RCU) should develop the skills and capacity required to monitor GOs and provide an overall assessment of performance across all the English regions. RCU should then:

- a. take these findings back to government departments to influence their funding allocations for regional programmes
- b. work with the GOs to reflect the learning from this overall assessment back to each region, highlighting good practice and learning from each GOs' experiences.

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.gos.gov.uk/rcu/>

## 4. Regional Frameworks and Strategies

### Summary of findings

There are too many regional strategies to be effective. In every region there is a growing trend to produce regional strategies, often at the behest of national government departments or agencies, but these are often conflicting with the move towards 'integrated' regional strategies of one kind or another.

UK Government guidance envisages that RSDFs should provide a shared vision and shared objectives for sustainable development in the region and inform other regional strategies. Our research, however, produced little evidence to suggest that RSDFs are either overarching or influential.

Our research found that there was overwhelming support for RSDFs to be used as a sustainable development appraisal tool and/or as a basis for sustainable development assessment. RSDFs need to be examined critically to see if they fulfil the full scope of a sustainability appraisal, and where there are gaps, that these should be filled so that each region develops and employs full sustainability appraisal tools.

### 4.1 Background

There are numerous regional strategies and plans produced by the key regional bodies. These cover areas as varied as the economy, planning, education and skills, transport, culture, sport, tobacco and the environment. The key regional strategies are set out in Table 1. A summary of these strategies can be found in Annex B.

Two of the core strategies are the Regional Economic Strategy (RES) and

the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS), and are required by the Government. The RES is prepared by the RDA, and the RSS is drafted by the RA and submitted to the Government for final preparation and publication. These are seen by the regions as the two lead delivery strategies. Other regional strategies are produced by voluntary regional partnerships.

**Table 1. The key regional strategies**

Strategy	Acronym	Responsible Body
Regional sustainable development framework	RSDF	RA
Integrated Regional Framework	IRF	RA
Integrated Regional Strategy	IRS	RA
Regional Economic Strategy	RES	RDA
Regional Spatial Strategy	RSS	RA

Most regions also have 'overarching' or 'integrating' strategies that are intended to frame and guide the various other strategies in the region. These vary in nature from region to region, but essentially there are three different types:

- **Integrated Regional Frameworks (IRFs)** aim to provide a vision and sustainable development objectives for the region. The key regional strategies (such as the RES and RSS) 'nest' within this framework
- **Integrated Regional Strategies (IRSs)** aim to set out a unified, single strategy for the region, working across economic, social, spatial and environmental issues
- **Regional sustainable development frameworks (RSDFs)** are intended to provide a high-level vision for moving towards sustainable development in the region and to define sustainable development objectives for the region.

Each region uses either one or a combination of these, as illustrated in Table 2 on the next page.

RAs play a leading role in drawing up, IRFs, IRSs and RSDFs with key players and a wide range of regional expert groups and stakeholders.

## 4.2 Strategy integration

Sustainable development requires the vision and objectives of regional strategies to be consistent. *Planning Policy Statement 11: Regional Spatial Strategies*, for example, warns that "if the RSS and other strategies are not aligned in their key objectives and vision, and [do not] support one another, the region's ability to deliver will be compromised".<sup>35</sup> This point is emphasised with particular reference to sustainable development in different studies. For example, a study by Regional Futures on spatial planning found that "a lack of a shared vision for what sustainable development means for a particular region, threatens to undermine the spatial strategy's potential to deliver sustainable development".<sup>36</sup>

Our research found that the need for effective strategy integration is becoming increasingly pressing. Many interviewees felt that there are too many regional strategies to be effective, and our own experience during visits to the regions confirms this view. In every region, there is a growing trend to produce more and more strategies, often at the behest of national government departments or agencies, but these often conflict with the move towards 'integrated' regional strategies of one kind or another.

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<sup>35</sup> ODPM, *Planning Policy Statement 11: Regional Spatial Strategies*, 2004, [www.odpm.gov.uk](http://www.odpm.gov.uk).

<sup>36</sup> Regional Futures, *Spatial planning in the regions*, October 2004, p2.

**Table 2. ‘Overarching’ strategies in the regions**

Region	RSDF Only	IRF& RSDF	IRF Only	IRS & RSDF
East Midlands			✓	
East of England				✓
London	✓			
North East			✓	
North West	✓			
South East			✓	
South West				✓
West Midlands	✓			
Yorkshire & Humber		✓		

### 4.3 RSDFs

UK Government *Guidance on Preparing Regional Sustainable Development Frameworks* envisages that they should provide an integrating vision, and that they should also provide objectives for sustainable development in the region and inform other regional strategies. The guidance states that RSDFs should:

- “define a **high-level vision** with wide-ranging support, for moving towards sustainable development in the region, considering the key social, economic, environmental, and resource issues and the inter-relationship between them;
- define sustainable development **objectives** for the region, and set priorities with the help of regional **indicators** and **targets** – in doing this the aim should be for **all the headline indicators to**

be moving in the right direction at regional level”.<sup>37</sup>

Five of the nine English regions currently have an RSDF. Of these, three have an RSDF alone, and the other two combine their RSDF with an IRS. This is illustrated in Table 2.

#### 4.3.1 Findings of previous studies

Despite this guidance, research has found that:

- *There is a widespread confusion as to the purpose of RSDFs*

A 2003 report to the English Regions Network (ERN) noted that, even amongst RSDF authors, opinions differed over their role: “there is a range of views about the purpose of RSDFs”. It contrasted the very different perspectives of the South West and the North West. The South West saw their RSDF primarily as a ‘process document’,

<sup>37</sup> Defra, *Guidance on Preparing Regional Sustainable Development Frameworks*, February 2000, [www.sustainable-development.gov.uk](http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk).

with the emphasis on “engaging stakeholders, promoting sustainable development and encouraging improved sustainability in organisations”. The North West, on the other hand, “placed much greater emphasis on performance management and refining objectives and targets”.<sup>38</sup>

- ***RSDFs are not recognised by stakeholders as a the overall regional framework***

Many regional stakeholders do not recognise the RSDF as the document that provides the overall objectives for their region. Instead, the RES or RSS often fulfil this role. A 2003 Regional Futures study “examined whether organisations and partnerships felt that they had common objectives for their region. Just under three-quarters of respondents believed that they did, with most respondents citing the RES as the source of these objectives rather than the [RSDFs]”.<sup>39</sup> Another Regional Futures study found that “some regions insist that the RSS is the overall framework for the region, others are equally insistent that it is not”.<sup>40</sup> One interviewee in our research, who is involved in regional energy strategy, said that “I know it exists but I have no knowledge of it”.

- ***RSDFs lack influence***

The evidence that they have shaped other strategies or influenced policy outcomes is also limited. The CAG report concluded that “it has been hard to identify firm outcomes for the RSDFs or to be able to firmly attribute particular changes of direction or emphasis in particular plans and strategies to the

existence of the RSDFs”.<sup>41</sup> However, it went on to say that there had been “a significant raising of expertise and understanding of regional sustainable development issues among the participants in the RSDF development process. This has then been applied in other spheres”.

- ***RSDFs are not overarching strategies***

The objectives in some RSDFs may also not be sufficiently wide ranging to fulfil an overarching role. An SDC report on RESs noted that “there is some concern that the RSDFs do not always make explicit the links to economic activity”.<sup>42</sup>

This concern was mirrored in a comparison by Regional Futures of regional sustainable development objectives in RSDFs and IRSs. This found a high degree of consistency between the regions on environmental and social objectives. The report noted, “environmental issues such as the protection of biodiversity, waste management, management of natural resources and developing renewable energy were made explicit in all regional strategies. Similarly, social issues such as crime reduction, development of regional culture, provision of education and the involvement of the public in decision-making and civic activity also received unanimous recognition”.<sup>43</sup> However, this consistency was not matched on economic objectives. The report found that “while there is clear consensus in the need for economic growth and employment, there is far

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<sup>38</sup> CAG Consultants and Oxford Brookes University School of Planning, *Research into Regional Sustainable Development Frameworks: final report to the English Regions Network*, May 2003, p79.

<sup>39</sup> Regional Futures, *Improving regional to local connections*, February 2003, p4.

<sup>40</sup> Regional Futures, *Spatial planning in the regions*, October 2004, p2.

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<sup>41</sup> CAG Consultants and Oxford Brookes University School of Planning, *Research into Regional Sustainable Development Frameworks: final report to the English Regions Network*, May 2003, p100.

<sup>42</sup> Environmental Resource Management Ltd (ERM), *Revision of the RDAs’ Regional Economic Strategies and the integration of sustainable development*, a report to the SDC, August 2002, p4.

<sup>43</sup> Regional Futures, *Comparisons between regional sustainable development objectives*, November 2004.

less consistency seen in promoting issues such as sustainable agriculture, sustainable tourism, sustainable construction, rural economy, sustainable business practices and reducing impacts on global communities". The report expressed concern that this "may suggest a lack of awareness at the regional level of what economic considerations are necessary to ensure sustainable development, which is often seen as a vehicle to promote environmental and social issues".<sup>44</sup>

- ***There are too many competing strategies***

The emergence of IRSs and IRFs is causing further confusion. Several regions now have, or are developing, IRSs or IRFs in response to the 2002 ODPM White Paper on the Regions.<sup>45</sup> This has increased the ambiguity over the role of RSDFs. The ERN report that "there is a common concern across the English Regions not to let sustainable development slip out of the frame by 'losing' the RSDFs within the IRSs". It goes on to explain, "partly as a consequence of this concern, there is a range of models being adopted for the development of Integrated Regional Strategies which vary from linking together existing strategies to producing a completely new and all encompassing strategy". It noted, "several regions are indicating they want to retain them [RSDFs] as distinct documents in order to highlight the importance of sustainable development".<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Regional Futures, *Comparisons between regional sustainable development objectives*, November 2004

<sup>45</sup> ODPM, *Your region, your choice*, 2002.

<sup>46</sup> CAG Consultants and Oxford Brookes University School of Planning, *Research into Regional Sustainable Development Frameworks: final report to the English Regions Network*, May 2003, p82.

- ***Messages from central government are conflicting***

Confusion at the regional level stems from having two competing policy drivers for strategy integration:

- The ODPM-led 'Chapter 2 Agenda' (see Annex B) encourages the preparation of IRFs or IRSs
- The Defra-led policy on RSDFs.

In some regions the IRF or IRS *is* the RSDF. In other regions, they are separate documents.

### **4.3.2 RSDFs: SDC findings**

Our own research confirmed all of these findings. In addition, interviewees also identified that RSDFs:

- Were marginalised by other strategies, including RESs, IRSs, IRFs and RSSs
- Lacked ownership (compared to IRSs for example)
- Had no specific funding attached to them
- Were too environment focussed
- Had no clear role or function
- Suffered from a lack of awareness
- Needed better guidance
- Did not always include key policy areas, such as health, and
- Had lost momentum.

Despite Defra guidance, only two interviewees identified that the purpose of the RSDF was to set a shared vision and objectives that would be the starting point for the development of regional strategies. In three regions, these shared objectives are in a separate IRF or IRS and the RSDF is explicitly for sustainability appraisal.

Taken together, our research and the findings from previous studies suggest that there is little evidence that RSDFs are either overarching or influential and

that there is a great deal of confusion as to their role and purpose.

One key factor contributing to this confusion is conflicting advice from Government. On the one hand, the 2002 ODPM White Paper encourages the development of IRFs and IRSs for the purposes of strategy integration. On the other, Defra guidance sets out that RSDFs should provide an overall vision for sustainable development. In our view, this is one and the same thing. All regions need an overarching, integrating strategy, one that is aimed at achieving the goal of sustainable development, and that ensures all regional strategies take a long-term cross-cutting approach, regardless of whether it is called an RSDF, an IRF or an IRS. The critical factor is that it should have buy-in and influence throughout the region.

*Securing the Future* includes a commitment that “Defra will produce updated guidance on [RSDFs], reflecting this new UK Strategy and including clarification of the role of RAs, pending the outcome of a review”.<sup>47</sup> We suggest that the focus of this guidance should be altered in line with our recommendation below.

#### Recommendation 10

New Government guidance should be developed by the UK Government (including ODPM, Defra, and DTI) to assist regional bodies in integrating strategies. This guidance should cover all the main strategies, such as Integrated Regional Frameworks, Integrated Regional Strategies, and Regional Sustainable Development Frameworks. It should clarify the roles of the different bodies and documents. It should make clear that the overall purpose of strategy integration is to contribute to achieving the goal of sustainable development by

<sup>47</sup> HM Government, *Securing the future: delivering UK sustainable development strategy*, March 2005, p159.

ensuring that regional strategies take a long-term, cross-cutting approach.

#### 4.3.3 Sustainability appraisal

According to Regional Futures, “sustainability appraisals were highlighted as one of the main ways to ensure policies are going in the right direction. Many regions undertake sustainability appraisals at several different stages to test the integration of policies”.<sup>48</sup>

RSDFs are already widely used as the basis of sustainability appraisal. The ERN study of RSDFs, for example, found that “sustainability appraisal was the most widely used mechanism for policy integration linked to the RSDFs”.<sup>49</sup> This can include appraisal of regional strategies, sub-regional and local level strategies, and project funding bids against sustainable development criteria.

Under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, sustainability appraisal is mandatory for RSSs. Statutory guidance on the preparation of RES requires RDAs to carry out a full sustainability appraisal of their emerging RES in order to identify how the RDA and its partners will contribute to sustainable development. It goes on to say that the appraisal should be informed by the RSDF or the equivalent in the region.

In order that this can be done effectively, the ERN report recommended that RSDFs have “better defined and prioritised objectives and associated targets”.<sup>50</sup> The study found that “several RSDFs failed to prioritise their objectives and this makes it

<sup>48</sup> Regional Futures, *Spatial planning in the regions*, October 2004, p11.

<sup>49</sup> CAG Consultants and Oxford Brookes University School of Planning, *Research into Regional Sustainable Development Frameworks: final report to the English Regions Network*, May 2003, p95.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p78.

difficult for the users to see direction and purpose”.<sup>51</sup>

CAG found that, “most recent sustainability appraisals of regional plans have used the objectives identified in Regional Sustainable Development Frameworks, adjusted as necessary for relevance to the strategy”.<sup>52</sup> It went on, “regional organisations have built up a considerable body of experience on sustainability appraisal ... recent advice on full appraisals issued by regional bodies ... closely follow national guidance”.<sup>53</sup>

However, the report also found that there are limitations to sustainability appraisal, pointing out that “policy-making is inevitably political in nature, so there is sometimes a clear tension between what the sustainability appraisal suggests and what is politically acceptable in the locality. ... sustainability appraisals have been able to identify these tensions but not resolve them”.<sup>54</sup>

*Taking it On* findings also found that there needed to be more use of RSDFs to provide an appraisal toolkit and that RSDFs need to be clearer and more understandable.

Our research found that there was overwhelming support for RSDFs to be used as a sustainable development appraisal tool and/or as a basis for sustainable development assessment. This is illustrated in Table 3.

Interviewees commented that “sustainability appraisal is the key role for the RSDF” and that “the RSDF should establish criteria by which to judge the

RSS, RES, etc. This should be its primary purpose”.

A number of interviewees therefore called for RSDFs to be made more fit for purpose as appraisal tools. At present, however, they are not designed specifically for the purpose of sustainability appraisal. Interviewees found that RSDFs do not always cover the full scope of what is required for effective appraisal. They can also be too generic to be applied to all regional strategies, plans and projects.

We believe that RSDFs need to be examined critically to see if they fulfil the full scope of a sustainability appraisal, and, where there are gaps, these should be filled so that each region develops and employs a suite of sustainability appraisal tools that are genuinely fit for purpose.

#### Recommendation 11

Working with a cross-section of regional practitioners, the Sustainable Development Commission should, in 2006, provide specific guidance on how to develop a suite of sustainability appraisal tools to be used by all regional bodies and applied to all regional strategies and plans. In some regions, the existing RSDF will form the basis for those appraisal tools; in other regions, the RSDF may prove to be unsuitable for that purpose.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p93.

<sup>52</sup> CAG Consultants, *Briefing on selected sustainable development tools: final report to the English Regions Network*, May 2003, p19.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p24.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p24.

**Table 3: What should the purpose of RSDFs be? – findings from SDC research**

The purpose of RSDFs is:	Number of interviewees who identified this purpose:
A tool for sustainable development appraisal and/or a basis for sustainable development assessment	23
A strategic vision	4
Putting sustainable development on the agenda	2
Defining sustainable development	2
Raising awareness	2
Balancing tensions	2
Informing other strategies	1
Setting targets	1
Setting priorities for action	1
Integrating policy	1
Policy scrutiny	1

## 5. The Role of Major Bodies: Coordination and Integration

### Summary of Findings

Co-ordination of activity for sustainable development is crucial for achieving sufficient focus. Interviewees with experience of voluntary agreements or action plans found them to be useful confidence-building tools to facilitate joint working. However, they emphasised that they would only work if there was already a commitment within the different organisations to work together. Collaborative working by the RDA, Regional Assembly and Government Office, together with other regional organisations, such as the NHS can be highly effective.

We have already examined the degree to which the three main regional bodies are taking a lead on sustainable development and made recommendations to ensure each body improves its leadership and delivery of sustainable development. Here, we examine the degree to which each of the three main regional bodies are working together to deliver sustainable development and how well their policies are integrated.

### 5.1 Coordination

Coordinated action is essential to sustainable development in the regions. Organisations need to work together to align their strategies and to ensure that sustainable development objectives and policies are integrated.

It is not only the main three regional bodies that need to have such an approach. Coordinated action and integrated action needs to incorporate all regional (and relevant local level) organisations involved in sustainable development policy-making and its delivery, such as the Health Protection Agency (HPA), the NHS, Local Government and the Environment Agency. The King's Fund, for example, found that "without integrated regional structures and common objectives for economic and health agencies in a region, there will be little incentive for the NHS to ensure its activities have a

positive economic, social and environmental impact".<sup>55</sup> It went on to recommend that "Regional Assemblies, RDAs, Government Offices, regional public health groups and SHAs need to coordinate their policies and administrative structures to ensure they are working towards similar policy aims for the NHS".<sup>56</sup>

A study by Regional Futures, meanwhile, argues that "where a region's scope is to influence the activity of others through strategy and policy direction, delivery is envisioned to happen at the local level. ... It is therefore crucial that there are strong links and a cohesive approach between regional organisations and local authorities".<sup>57</sup> Likewise, another Regional Futures report found that "RSSs will need to be based heavily on consensus and partnership with the local authorities in the region if these are to effectively implement the strategic decisions".<sup>58</sup>

#### 5.1.1 Findings of previous studies

Previous studies suggest that regional organisations are confident that they

<sup>55</sup> Kings Fund, *Good corporate citizenship and the NHS - a regional mapping*, January 2005, p3

<sup>56</sup> Kings Fund, *Good corporate citizenship and the NHS - a regional mapping*, January 2005, p3

<sup>57</sup> Regional Futures, *Low carbon economy in the regions*, June 2004, p18.

<sup>58</sup> Regional Futures, *Spatial planning in the regions*, October 2004, p12.

work together effectively. A study by the New Local Government Network (NLGN)<sup>59</sup> of the preparations in the northern regions for elected regional assemblies found that “current relationships within the regions were generally described in favourable terms and respondents were quite protective of them”. The study went on to say that “there was emphasis on partnership working”.<sup>60</sup> Similarly, a study by Regional Futures of regional and local links in the English regions outside London found that “generally regional organisations were quite positive about their relationship with each other”.<sup>61</sup>

Nevertheless, it is clear that there can also be significant gaps in joint working. The King’s Fund, for example, found that “the NHS and public health representatives are not routinely included in consultations [on regional waste strategies]”.<sup>62</sup> Equally, a Regional Futures study of regional and local links found that “links do not reach all organisations and partnerships” and that “many Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) and Strategic Service Partnerships (SSPs) link with only one regional organisation and need a coherent front presented by the regional organisations”.<sup>63</sup>

## 5.1.2 Coordination: SDC findings

Despite, or perhaps because of, the absence of a lead organisation on sustainable development, as evidenced in Chapter 3, our research found that there is a strong emphasis on partnership working within regions. The ways in which organisations worked together, and how closely they did so, varied. Methods used included: regular meetings at Chief Executive level; bilateral meetings; formal networks on individual issues; and informal officer level contacts. Interviewees suggested that the different approaches were the result of the personalities involved or cultural differences between regions. Nevertheless, although there was a generally positive view of partnership working in the regions, there remains inconsistency about how effectively this is done, which partners are involved, and how this impacts on sustainable development. Interviewees pointed out, for example, that in some regions GO involvement on sustainable development was minimal. Others felt that health bodies were not always sufficiently engaged.

Overall, the view was that although partnership working existed (and works in many cases), it needed to be more inclusive, more consistently applied, and better organised to support sustainable development: “many regional bodies need to know about sustainable development. It is currently a real mess and complicated, with a range of different partnerships”.

So how can sustainable development activity be better coordinated between regional bodies? Previous studies found that there are no standard mechanisms for coordinating activity in the regions, although two main mechanisms in particular are used quite widely to a greater or lesser extent: voluntary agreements; and action plans.

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<sup>59</sup> New Local Government Network, *Are we ready for regions?*, August 2004, p14.

<sup>60</sup> New Local Government Network, *Are we ready for regions?*, August 2004, p14.

<sup>61</sup> Regional Futures, *Improving regional to local connections*, February 2003, p26.

<sup>62</sup> Kings Fund, *Good corporate citizenship and the NHS – a regional mapping*, January 2005, p43.

<sup>63</sup> Regional Futures, *Improving regional to local connections*, February 2003, p28.

## 5.2 Voluntary Agreements

### 5.2.1 Findings from previous studies

Some regions use voluntary agreements or concordats as they also known - to define mechanisms for joint working and responsibility for specific areas of activity. Studies have found that voluntary agreements can improve trust and help build consensus. However, the targets set in voluntary agreements do not often differ significantly from business-as-usual projections.

Both a 2003 study on RSDFs for the English Regions Network (ERN)<sup>64</sup> and a 2003 'Briefing on sustainable development tools' by CAG Consultants<sup>65</sup> argued for voluntary agreements on sustainable development activity. The CAG briefing on sustainable development tools suggests that partnership agreements to progress the RSDF "could help to increase the commitment of regional partners to the [RSDF]. They would also strengthen the ability of partners to challenge apparently unsustainable behaviour by signatories".<sup>66</sup> The same report quotes a Defra study into voluntary measures for pesticides, which found that benefits of voluntary agreements are: "their ability to enhance the relations between the parties involved in the agreement; improve levels of co-operation and trust; build consensus; and increase levels of environmental awareness".<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> CAG Consultants and Oxford Brookes University School of Planning, *Research into Regional Sustainable Development Frameworks: final report to the English Regions Network*, May 2003

<sup>65</sup> CAG Consultants, *Briefing on selected sustainable development tools: final report to the English Regions Network*, May 2003

<sup>66</sup> *ibid*, p86.

<sup>67</sup> Eftec, CSERGE and ENTEC, *The Potential Cost and Effectiveness of Voluntary Measures in Reducing the Environmental Impact of Pesticides*, a report for Defra, February 2002.

However, the 2003 RSDF study points out the limitations of voluntary agreements by noting that "the limited empirical analyses that have been undertaken, suggest that the targets that were set in voluntary agreements in the past have not differed significantly from business-as-usual projections".

The report also found some examples of voluntary agreements being used in relationship with RSDFs:

"Concordats can be used to define:

- who is taking overall responsibility for co-ordination
- who is taking responsibility for specific aspects of an RSDF e.g. monitoring and review, action planning
- mechanisms for joint working".<sup>68</sup>

It added, "Concordats are also a clear signal to stakeholders that the regional partners mean business and that the RSDF has their full backing". The study also found some examples of stakeholders, "being asked to sign up to a certain set of principles or to implement some specific objectives. This seems to be a useful approach to building ownership and to disseminate particular aspect of what is covered by the RSDF".

### 5.2.2 Voluntary Agreements: SDC findings

There were mixed views about the value of voluntary agreements. Interviewees with no experience of voluntary agreements or action plans were generally sceptical about them. They considered them to be additional bureaucracy that would be unlikely to add much to their existing processes.

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<sup>68</sup> CAG Consultants and Oxford Brookes University School of Planning, *Research into Regional Sustainable Development Frameworks: final report to the English Regions Network*, May 2003, p87.

Another criticism was that voluntary agreements lack accountability. There are no formal mechanisms to ensure that such agreements are stuck to, which can mean that “they are not worth the paper they are written on”.

However, many more interviewees, who had experience of voluntary agreements, were more positive. Interviewees saw them as useful confidence-building tools to facilitate joint working, although they emphasised that they would only work if there was already a commitment within the different organisations to work together.

The overall view was they are a useful ‘first step’ to achieving greater coordination of sustainable development activity: “voluntary agreements are an important area, but they are just a stepping-stone and cannot be relied upon in the medium and longer term. Voluntary agreements are the first step. Action plans are the next step.”

### Recommendation 12

All regional bodies should make use of voluntary agreements to facilitate joint working. These have been found to be highly effective if clearly structured and partnered.

## 5.3 Action Plans

### 5.3.1 Findings from previous studies

Previous studies have found limited support for action plans as a tool to coordinate sustainable development activity in the regions.<sup>69 70</sup>

Nevertheless, the same studies have argued that actions plans could address gaps in progressing the objectives of

regional strategies and crunch issues that cut across a range of strategies.

The CAG study of sustainable development tools advised, “Action Plans can be used to address any gaps that exist in progressing the objectives of regional strategies or where there are crunch issues that cut across a range of strategies and plans that have to be addressed *and resolved*. This is where RSDFs can really add value and not duplicate the action planning that is already included in existing regional, sub-regional and local strategies and plans”.<sup>71</sup>

The study goes on to say that, “Action Plans are considered particularly useful as a technique to sign-up vital actors and to help monitor progress towards long-term goals. Being largely short-term they can be reported on at regular intervals and feed into longer term policy review processes”.<sup>72</sup> The report also adds that, “RSDF action plans will provide a much better defined framework for the scrutiny process than scrutiny across all RSDF objectives”.<sup>73</sup>

However, the report found that a limited amount of experience of preparing and reviewing action plans exists in the regions. Where they have been used the often amount “to little more than lists of aspirations without any indication of priorities, timescales, resource requirements or even responsibilities for implementation”.<sup>74</sup>

The RSDF study for ERN, meanwhile, went further than this by stating, “RSDF authors frequently argued that it was not the role of an RSDF to have an action plan with firm targets” arguing that, “the responsibility for detailed implementation including action planning lay with the regional partners

<sup>69</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> CAG Consultants, *Briefing on selected sustainable development tools: final report to the English Regions Network*, May 2003

<sup>71</sup> *ibid*, p3.

<sup>72</sup> *ibid*, p12.

<sup>73</sup> *ibid*, p37.

<sup>74</sup> *ibid*, p6.

and other stakeholders through specific plans and strategies". On the hand, it found, "other RSDf authors arguing for action plans to integrate regional strategies". It also found "A majority of stakeholders interviewed were asking for action plans with clear targets".<sup>75</sup>

### **5.3.2 Action Plans: SDC findings**

Our research found very strong support for the need for action plans on sustainable development. Only one interviewee said that there was no need for an action plan, although this was with reference to London, where strong leadership on sustainable development is already being demonstrated.

Despite the consensus on the need for action plans, however, interviewees warned that they would only be successful if they met certain criteria. They would need to:

- be closely monitored
- be back up an accountability framework
- be linked to funding streams; and
- have specific objectives, targets and timescales.

Recommendation 7 proposes that GOs should produce focused SDAPs, based on *Securing the Future*, by the end of 2005. GOs should ensure that their SDAPs meet the criteria above, as well as the general criteria set out in the SDC's SDAP guidance.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> CAG Consultants and Oxford Brookes University School of Planning, *Research into Regional Sustainable Development Frameworks: final report to the English Regions Network*, May 2003.

<sup>76</sup> SDC, *Sustainable Development Action Plans – Getting Started*, August 2005 – [www.sd-commission.org.uk](http://www.sd-commission.org.uk)

## 6. Regional Sustainable Development Roundtables

### Summary of Findings

All regions have found advantages in establishing a regional sustainable development roundtable or similar body. Although each is organised very differently, there are similarities in their role and activities.

There are also a number of problems that prevent roundtables being as effective as they might be. These included: a lack of independence; a lack of resources; a lack of crosscutting support and buy-in; a lack of clarity about their role; being unable to secure business support and engagement; and, not being 'action-oriented'.

We found that roundtables work best when they: are independent; have secure and sufficient funding and resources; have crosscutting support and representation; play a 'critical friend' role; have an influential and authoritative membership; are capable of delivering projects; and are well-networked.

There is a real need to share and communicate best practice in the regions. The SDC, together with new 'Champion' bodies, are well-placed to facilitate this.

### 6.1 Background

Regional sustainable development roundtables are forums that bring together a range of stakeholders across social, economic and environmental interests with a view to debating the practicalities of sustainable development in a particular region.

### 6.2 Findings

Roundtables differ considerably in their format and function. At the time our research was carried out, eight of the regions had a roundtable or equivalent body. The ninth, the South-East, were in the process of setting one up.

All roundtables were organised very differently, as Table 4 summarises. Some were formally constituted with their own funding and staff, whilst others were informal and relied on member organisations for their secretariat. Similarly, in some roundtables, members took part in a personal capacity, whilst in others they represented sectors or bodies.

However, we did find a number of similarities in roles and activities between the roundtables:

- The Regional Assembly, RDA and Government Office were represented on a roundtable in each region
- All the roundtables had sought to ensure that social, economic and environmental interests were represented. However environmental interests tended to be the best represented, with social interests having the weakest representation. Several interviewees felt that this weakened the authority of the roundtables
- The majority of the roundtables played a leading role in preparing their region's regional sustainable development framework (RSDF)

**Table 4. Summary of Regional Sustainable Development Roundtables and Equivalent Bodies**

Region	Name of Organisation	Limited Company	Secretariat Provided By	Membership in Personal or Representative Capacity	RA, RDA & GO are Members	Coordinates RSDF/IRF/IRS
East Midlands	EMRA Promoting Sustainable Development Group		Regional Assembly	Representative	✓	
East of England	Sustainable Development Round Table for the East of England		Government Office	Personal	✓	✓*
London	London Sustainable Development Commission		Greater London Authority	Personal	✓	✓
North East	Sustainability North East (Sustaine)		Sustainable Cities Research Institute	Representative	✓	✓
North West	Sustainability Northwest	✓	Own Staff	Representative		
	Action for Sustainability Management Board		Regional Assembly	Representative	✓	✓
South East						
South West	Sustainability South West	✓	Own Staff	Personal	✓	✓*
West Midlands	Sustainability West Midlands	✓	Own Staff	Representative	✓	✓
Yorkshire & Humber	Yorkshire & Humber Sustainability Commission		Regional Assembly	Representative	✓	✓*

\*: Region also has IRF or IRS not coordinated by roundtable.

- All the roundtables undertook a range of other activities with regional partners. The most common were the sustainability appraisal of regional strategies and projects on issues such as climate change, energy and sustainable construction

### 6.2.1 Advantages

Regions have found advantages in establishing a regional sustainable development roundtable or similar body. There are excellent examples of these bodies fulfilling valuable awareness raising and advocacy functions.

Interviewees felt that they were particularly good at bringing together key stakeholders in the region: “roundtables are important to bring together organisations. They need to agree shared objectives then commit people with authority to these objectives. They then need people below that level to make sure that these aims and objectives are taken forward”. Another interviewee commented that “roundtables are a pool of expertise. They will have people from all walks of life.”

In the South East, meanwhile, where there has not been a roundtable, the feeling was that one was needed because “no one group is was overseeing sustainable development in the region. Therefore it was felt there was a gap. Therefore a roundtable was proposed. It was agreed that they do not want a talking shop”.

Interviewees cited a whole range of valuable uses for roundtables based on their experience of existing bodies. These included:

- Problem-solving/overcoming contentious issues
- Good practice exchange

- Bringing key stakeholders together
- Being a source of expertise
- Awareness-raising
- Improving policy-making
- Identifying barriers
- Piloting policy and projects
- Preparing RSDFs, and
- Providing advice.

### 6.2.2 Problems

Nevertheless, roundtables have not been without their problems and there are a number of barriers that prevent them being as effective as they might be.

The SDC’s 2001 report on its visit to the regions, for instance, found that “there is tension between the strength of genuine independence and [being] cross-sectoral, and the weakness of lack of ownership by any of the key regional organisations”.<sup>77</sup>

Problems identified from the interviews for this report included:

- A lack of independence
- A lack of resources
- A lack of crosscutting support and buy-in
- A lack of clarity of their role
- Getting business support and engagement
- Not being ‘action-oriented’.

### 6.2.3 Ingredients for success

So far, we have outlined some of the strong and weak points of existing roundtables. The findings suggest that whilst they already perform valuable functions, roundtables should be strengthened to perform a more effective role.

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<sup>77</sup> Sustainable Development Commission, *Summary of findings of SDC visit to the regions, January 2002.*

By providing effective sustainable development advice, advocacy and scrutiny, roundtables could be an extremely important mechanism for advancing sustainable development objectives in the regions. But what characteristics are needed for roundtable to be effective?

The 2002 SDC report considered that “key success ingredients tend to be a stable and well resourced secretariat ..., cross-sectoral partnership with a defined number of representatives, and a clearly defined set of functions”. On funding, the report added that “our view, which was supported by most of those we interviewed, was that for [roundtables] to be successful and effective they needed to be wanted and supported from within the region, not centrally imposed”. The report also found that “it would not be necessary or effective to require each region to have one [a roundtable]. The important thing was to ensure that the functions needed in each region were being effectively carried out”.

Interviewees for this study identified a whole range of characteristics that a successful, effective roundtable should possess. These are illustrated in Table 5.

Based on these findings, we suggest that the key characteristics of any effective regional advice / scrutiny body are:

- **Wide cross-sectoral representation**  
To include for example health; culture/heritage; learning & skills; transport & access; planning & development; government; construction; tourism; media; energy; waste; retail; finance; biodiversity;

environmental protection; rural & urban; equalities; social enterprise & real business people from key sectors rather than representatives from business trade associations such as Chambers of Commerce/CBI/Institute of Directors/Federation of Small Businesses etc.

- **Enthusiastic & influential members**  
Who exchange ideas and best practice; promote a consensus on the best way forward for a sustainable region and support new initiatives.

Members have a stake in the sustainable development agenda. They bring together the experience and expertise of a wide range of sectors, meeting several times a year. Members join as individuals or as representatives of their organisations. It may be useful to hold meetings at which ‘Chatham House rules’ apply and individual opinions are not accredited. Members attend themselves and do not send deputies. Members give their time for free but travel expenses may be available. As champions of sustainability, each member also promotes sustainability within their own area of influence. Membership is regularly reviewed to ensure it reflects a wide range of interests and is representative of the current regional agenda. In return, members gain unique cross-sectoral networking opportunities and influence.

**Table 5. What are the characteristics of an effective roundtable? – SDC findings.**

Characteristics of a successful/effective roundtable	Number of interviewees who identified this characteristic
Independence (from the political process)	12
Capacity/resources/funding	9
Crosscutting support/buy-in	7
Scrutiny/'critical friend' role	5
Influential/authoritative membership (e.g. senior figures)	5
Action-oriented	4
Members attend in a personal capacity	3
Well-defined role and remit	3
Expertise	3
Advice role	2
Includes business	2
Security	2
'teeth'; political mandate; cross-regional coordination; executive status; accountable through links with the SDC; self-financing; debating arena; influence; full-time secretariat; linked to major regional bodies	1

- **'Independence'**

The organisation needs to be seen to act independently and not be dominated by any particular regional agency or organisation. This might be achieved through clearly defined terms of reference agreed with its regional partners or by having its own legal entity and preferably charitable status to indicate that it exists for the benefit of the common good. This lends credibility to the advice and initiatives it offers to the region as a whole and helps it to adopt the role of 'critical friend.'

Some regions may decide that members should sit on the body in a personal capacity, rather than as a representative of their own organisation, if their employment by their organisation is perceived to be a problem. In other regions, full, representative, membership of regional stakeholders, including

the RDA, RA and GO, may be deemed necessary in order to facilitate delivery of projects. In both cases, it is crucial that the Champion bodies are still effective in their functions as both advisor and scrutineer, and that their independence is not compromised.

The SDC itself, whose Commissioners are members in a personal capacity, has to balance advice and advocacy with critique, in its relations with government, and finds that this arrangement can work very effectively.

- **Strategic champion acting as a catalyst for change**

An effective organisation will raise awareness by championing key sustainability challenges for its region. Informed by the Regional Sustainable Development Framework (RSDF) or equivalent, the organisation will use a range of tools (see

below) to proactively influence decision makers; accelerate progress and act as a catalyst for change towards a more sustainable region. It translates the principles and priorities of the RSDF into real change of the ground. The organisation represents the region's sustainability interests at a national level, lobbying for policy which helps to support a more sustainable future for the region.

- **Delivering projects/activities**

To include:

1. Providing independent commentaries/appraisals/assessments of other regional strategies/plans/processes against the Region's RSDF
2. Contributing to regional leadership (for SD) including representation on key regional forums
3. Disseminating good practice and signposting to further help and support
4. Awareness raising and profile building by working effectively with regional media to promote key messages and provide comment on regional issues relevant to SD, effective communications materials (e.g. accessible website/publications)
5. Initiating partnership projects, such as, charters/campaigns/awards etc. – translating SD principles into good practice and making new connections across different sectors
6. Offering learning/workshops and commissioning research where required
7. Facilitating a link between the local/regional /national and international

8. Undertaking commissioned work to support particular organisations to integrate sustainable development principles into their policy and practice

- **Serviced by a basic core staff team**

A core team of staff is needed to enable the champion body to be effective, but this should be made up of contributions from a range of regional bodies, to avoid any risk of the funding influencing the champion body's voice. Funding in the regions for secretariat to support the current Roundtables is lamentably small. So far as we could judge the maximum allocation for these secretariats is around £70k/yr. champion body.

At a minimum a Director/Co-coordinator, administrator (possibly part time) & a projects officer are needed to allow the secretariat to function effectively. A unit such as this can maximise its effectiveness if it has secure funding to cover the costs of staff posts and a work base (including relevant office equipment). Funding for project work/further staffing can then be raised by the team.

- **Identifiably different from any previous 'roundtable' body**  
Any new or revised sustainable development body should be identifiably different from the roundtable bodies in order to reflect their new role and status. One interviewee, for example, suggested that "a roundtable should be renamed to indicate that it had moved on." We suggest that all new bodies be named sustainable development 'Champions' to reflect this. They could either be reconstituted

from existing roundtables or completely new bodies.

This review is not seeking more money from Government for regional bodies. We are seeking a change in the delivery of sustainable development at the regional level and this will mean reallocating resources to achieve effective movement towards sustainable development. The SDC is ready to play its active part in guiding and networking these champions in the interest of the delivery of *Securing the Future*.

### Recommendation 13

GOs and RAs should be jointly responsible for coordinating the development of a sustainable development Champion body for each region. The new bodies will be responsible for advising on and critiquing the performance of regional institutions in delivering sustainable development. Each should comply with the characteristics defined below.

Working with key stakeholders in the region, including RDAs, we recommend that the GOs and RAs should either redefine the remit of the existing roundtable or create a new Champion body. Proposals for development of the new bodies should be made within six months of the publication of this review.

It is critical that proper resources are identified to enable these bodies to work properly, and that these resources should be secured from regional sources. This should not require new resources, but a reallocation of existing resources in each region.

An effective Champion should be:

- a. Independent (by acting as the 'critical friend' to the RDA, the RA and the GO)
- b. Inclusive (with wide cross-sectoral representation)

- c. Influential (as a result of its membership and actions)
- d. Capable of delivering campaigns, programmes and projects that exemplify sustainable development excellence
- e. Well-networked (through partnerships within and beyond the region, including the SDC)
- f. Sustainable (with a core professional team, resourced through secure funding by regional partners to ensure stability).

### Recommendation 14

The Champion bodies should monitor and scrutinise regional sustainable development performance and identify areas of weakness that need strengthening. This should include an assessment of GOs' performance against their SDAPs.

We highlight the importance of monitoring and scrutiny in chapter 7.

## 6.3 Links to SDC

Most roundtables were keen to establish links with the SDC. Various reasons were stated. These included:

- increasing their own authority in the region through a formal link with the SDC. One interviewee, for example, argued that "strengthening the links between the roundtables and the SDC would increase their status in the eyes of senior people in the regions"
- drawing on the SDC's expertise
- and inputting a regional perspective into the SDC's wider work programme.

Several interviewees suggested that the SDC convene regular meetings (perhaps twice a year) between all the roundtable Chairs and key Commissioners. Several

have also suggested the establishment of a formal network for the exchange of information between the roundtable and SDC secretariat.

This exchange could facilitate the exchange of good practice in the regions (see Box 1) and provide an interface with Government and a conduit for policy from Government. The SDC could feed information up through the Champion bodies.

#### Recommendation 15

With the creation of the new Champion bodies, the SDC will initiate the creation of a network of Champion bodies which would include a twice-yearly meeting between the Chairs of Champion bodies and relevant SDC Commissioners, and appropriate arrangements between the

secretariats. These meetings will focus on developing solutions to problems of mutual concern. The SDC will facilitate the exchange of information on good practice on the basis of experience across the whole of the UK, and will gather evidence from the regional Champion bodies of good practice in the regions.

Both the East of England and South East regions have expressed interest in being pilot regions for implementing these recommendations on Champion bodies.

The SDC welcomes interest from other regions that are also keen to start this process, or any other of our recommendations, and are very encouraged by the positive reaction so far to our proposals.

#### Box 1. Liaison between regions – sharing good practice

Previous studies have found that regions are often duplicating the work on sustainable development. What is clear is that several regions are developing tools, guidance and training, often duplicating the same work. There are also many examples of good practice in some regions on specific sustainable development issues (e.g. integration of health policies).

Most interviewees in this study agreed that information and good practice needed to be exchanged between regions, and that more could be done in this respect.

However there were no clear views as to how this might be achieved. Interviewees were concerned to avoid creating talking shops or documents or websites that were not used. Many said that it was important for meetings and networks to focus on specific issues such as energy or construction rather than the whole sustainable development agenda. Another common view was that it was more useful to know about work in progress than completed projects. Some noted that the ERN and Regional Futures already performed important roles in this respect.

Many supported the idea that the SDC should have a role in exchanging and coordinating good practice, as well as facilitating formal links between 'Champion' bodies. Recommendation 15 therefore sets out that the SDC, with the new Champion bodies, should facilitate the communication of good sustainable development practice in the regions.

## 7. Monitoring and Evaluation

### Summary of findings

There is confusion over the role of regional sustainable development indicators. There is insufficient linkage between the high level, 'state of the region' indicators, and the performance delivery indicators to make them sufficiently useful to the region.

Scrutiny is hindered by both a lack of capacity and a lack of focus.

### 7.1 Indicators

#### 7.1.1 Findings of previous studies

The CAG study to ERN study on RSDFs found that "a considerable amount of time and effort has been given to developing indicators for each RSDF. In some instances too much effort has been focussed on indicators and in some cases there are an unmanageable number indicators included in RSDFs".<sup>78</sup> It went on to say, "little thought has been given to how indicators will be used, and particularly how they will be used in monitoring of regional progress towards sustainable development".

The CAG/ERN study of sustainable development tools explained, "determining whether or not indicators are effective depends, of course, very much on what the indicators are trying to achieve. One of the problems for evaluators has been the lack of clarity about the original purpose of indicator sets, and often this has evolved over time".<sup>79</sup> It noted that few studies had been done on this type of sustainable development indicator but, "the two evaluations that are available concentrate on the capacity of local indicators to inform policy (rather than

influence public opinion). Both conclude that sustainability indicators have had little influence on policy making". The report concluded that "choosing and using sustainability indicators needs to be a political process that engenders debate. Those close to decision-making must be involved from the start in thinking about how and when indicators can be integrated into decision-making processes".<sup>80</sup>

The *Taking it On* consultation process found that: "the general consensus is that indicators should be more outcome focused. Six RD reports [out of nine] cite GDP as an example of an indicator that is of only limited value in measuring success and should be supplemented or replaced by a more outcome focused measure". "There is also support for regions setting their own additional indicators to measure progress against regional priorities"<sup>81</sup>

#### 7.1.2 Indicators: SDC findings

Several interviewees accepted that the region had developed indicators to accompany the RSDF but had only later considered how to use them.

Most agreed that there should be a small set of regionally specific indicators. They identified two types of indicators:

<sup>78</sup> CAG Consultants and Oxford Brookes University School of Planning, *Research into Regional Sustainable Development Frameworks: final report to the English Regions Network*, May 2003, p96.

<sup>79</sup> CAG Consultants, *Briefing on selected sustainable development tools: final report to the English Regions Network*, May 2003, p69.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p76.

<sup>81</sup> [www.sustainable-development.gov.uk](http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk)

- high-level 'state of the region' indicators to raise awareness of sustainable development issues; and
- performance indicators to assess whether the region was delivering on the actions that it had set itself - "only some specific indicators can pick up problems. The value of indicators is to tell when things are not working".

Views on the respective merits of the different types varied. On the whole, there was confusion over the role of regional sustainable development indicators and what their real value is. However, what does seem apparent is that there is insufficient linkage between the high level, 'state of the region' indicators, and the performance delivery indicators to make them sufficiently useful to the region.

Furthermore, those interviewed were not clear who should have responsibility for delivering on them. Some interviewees argued that the body responsible for delivering a particular objective should monitor and evaluate the relevant indicators. This would maximise the sense of ownership. Others argued that, to ensure transparency, an independent body, such as a Regional Observatory<sup>82</sup> or roundtable, should do this work.

In *Securing the Future*, the Government committed itself to "look for new ways to help regions contribute fully to sustainable development, as measured by the UK Strategy Indicators and any

<sup>82</sup> Regional Observatories have been established in the English regions by partnerships involving RDAs, GOs, RAs, and other bodies. Although each differ in their precise nature, the aim of Regional Observatories is to provide data analysis, disseminate research and to fill research gaps to support regional policy-making. This is done across a range of environmental, economic and social issues.

regionally selected indicators".<sup>83</sup> The SDC welcomes this commitment. In light of the confusion over the role and value of indicators, this is an area that will need careful and clear thought, and we look forward to helping the Government to take this commitment forward.

Clarity is needed now, however. We therefore make the following recommendation to achieve this. Once in place, these arrangements should then be subject to a full independent review to assess how well they are contributing to the delivery of sustainable development at the regional level.

### Recommendation 16

We encourage the use of regional sustainable development indicators and national strategy indicators. Regions should agree at the outset the purpose of the indicators, how they will be measured and assessed, how they will respond to negative trends, and the reporting arrangements. Based on these indicators, Regional Observatories, in conjunction with the Office of National Statistics, should produce an annual 'state of the region' report in order to provide an overview of regional progress towards sustainable development. Monitoring and evaluation must be focussed on outcomes.

## 7.2 Monitoring and scrutiny

The performance of the major bodies in the regions is monitored in line with their own plans and strategies. The DTI, for example, requires RDAs to incorporate an assessment of strategic performance into their corporate plans. However, there is no systematic consideration of how regional bodies contribute to the delivery of *Securing the Future*.

<sup>83</sup> HM Government, *Securing the future: delivering UK sustainable development strategy*, March 2005, p160.

## 7.2.1 Findings of previous studies

The SDC's report on its visits to the regions concluded that "scrutiny of detailed plans should be carried out and owned at the right level. In other words, regional organisations were best held to account by other regional organisations".<sup>84</sup>

The CAG study of sustainable development tools explains that "scrutiny allows [Regional] Assemblies to investigate whether policy implementation (as well as policies themselves) follows sustainable principles and the RSDF".<sup>85</sup>

However, whilst scrutiny is clearly important, the same CAG study found that "there is limited experience of sustainable development scrutiny practice by the regions. Our previous report on current regional practice identified few examples, and these rarely had established methodologies".<sup>86</sup> Equally, the findings from the *Taking it On* consultation showed that stakeholders in the regions themselves wanted more effective monitoring and reporting.

When scrutiny does take place in the regions, it can be hindered by a number of things, including:

- *A lack of capacity*  
A later report by CAG of a pilot to promote sustainable development through regional scrutiny found that the capacity of both panel members and scrutiny officers to address sustainable development was an

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<sup>84</sup> Sustainable Development Commission, *Summary of findings of SDC visit to the regions*, January 2002

<sup>85</sup> CAG Consultants, *Briefing on selected sustainable development tools: final report to the English Regions Network*, May 2003, p37.

<sup>86</sup> CAG Consultants, *Briefing on selected sustainable development tools: final report to the English Regions Network*, May 2003, p39.

obstacle to effective scrutiny.<sup>87</sup> The very wide range of issues, which can be raised by sustainable development, placed heavy demands on the panel. Panel members did not necessarily have sufficient expertise or understanding of sustainable development to tackle these. The report recommended steps to improve training and build up expertise within the assembly. It said "There also needs to be continuing support on SD throughout the review, from the assembly's scrutiny officer or SD officer, or from external advisors such as a regional SD roundtable".<sup>88</sup> However it also noted, "Difficulty of involving external SD organisations because they do not meet frequently enough to fit in with the scrutiny timetable".<sup>89</sup>

- *A lack of focus*  
The ERN report on RSDFs concluded, "there would be a lack of focus in external sustainability scrutiny if it were undertaken across all RSDF objectives trying to assess the broad swathe of RDA activity".<sup>90</sup> It instead recommended that scrutiny should focus on RSDFs' action plans as "these will have a limited number of objectives and defined targets/timetables providing a more defined framework for the scrutiny process".

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<sup>87</sup> CAG Consultants, *Promoting Sustainable Development through Regional Scrutiny: final report on the pilot for the English Regions Network*, November 2004.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p6.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p4.

<sup>90</sup> CAG Consultants and Oxford Brookes University School of Planning, *Research into Regional Sustainable Development Frameworks: final report to the English Regions Network*, May 2003, p96.

## **7.2.2 Monitoring and scrutiny: SDC findings**

The performance of the major bodies in the regions is monitored in line with their own plans and strategies. The DTI, for example, requires RDAs to incorporate an assessment of strategic performance into their corporate plans. However, there is no systematic consideration of how regional institutions contribute to the delivery of *Securing the Future*.

Furthermore, our research found that, where it does happen, scrutiny is hindered by both a lack of capacity and a lack of focus.

We make proposals for new monitoring and scrutiny arrangements to support delivery of *Securing the Future* in Recommendations 1, 3, 9 and 14.

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## Annex A: UK strategy for sustainable development

In March 2005, the UK Government and the Devolved Administrations published *One future – different paths*, the UK's shared strategic framework for sustainable development. This was launched in conjunction with *Securing the Future*. The framework sets out a common purpose the UK Government and the Devolved Administrations are trying to achieve:

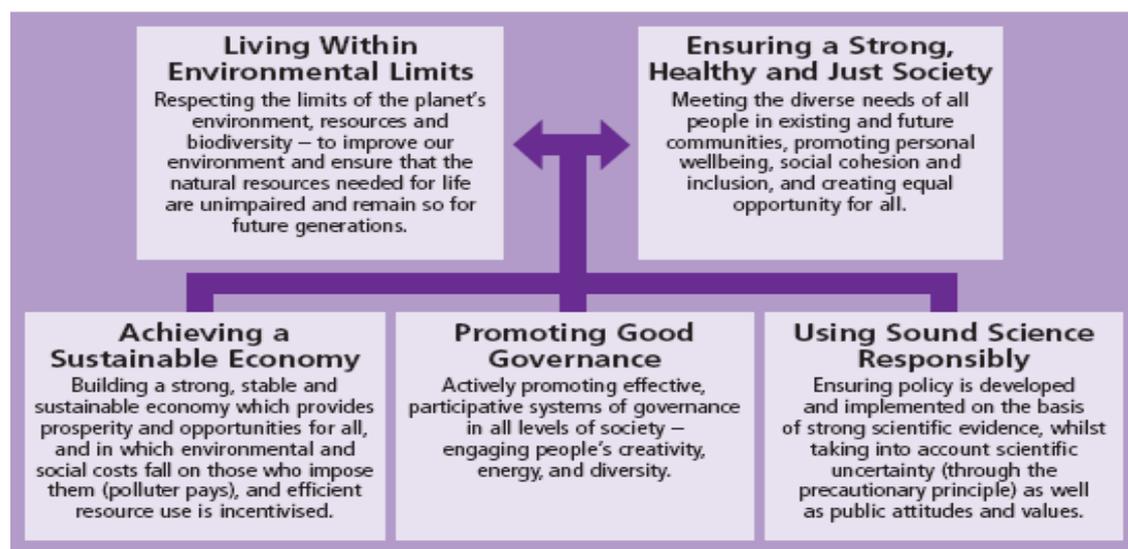
The goal of sustainable development is to enable all people throughout the world to satisfy their basic needs and enjoy a better quality of life, without compromising the quality of life of future generations.

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 well-being. 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.

Similar objectives will inform all our international endeavours, with the UK actively promoting multilateral and sustainable solutions to today's most pressing environmental, economic and social problems. There is a clear obligation on more prosperous nations both to put their own house in order, and to support other countries in the transition towards a more equitable and sustainable world.

A set of five shared principles underpin this purpose and the framework requires that a policy "must respect all five principles" in order to be considered sustainable:



These overarching principles should frame all policy and delivery at national, regional and local level.

## Annex B: Regional Strategies

### Regional Sustainable Development Frameworks

Government guidance on preparing Regional Sustainable Development Frameworks (RSDFs) – *Guidance on Preparing Regional Sustainable Development Frameworks* (February 2000)<sup>91</sup> envisaged that each region would have an RSDF in place by the end of 2000. RSDFs should set out objectives and priorities for sustainable development in the region and inform regional strategies, including Regional Economic Strategies, Regional Spatial Strategies, sub-regional strategies and Sustainable Community Strategies. The Government encourages RSDFs to:

- define a high level vision for moving towards sustainable development in the region, considering the key social, economic, environmental and resource issues and the inter-relationship between them
- define sustainable development objectives for the region, and set priorities with the help of regional indicators and targets
- provide a regional vehicle for meeting the national target for increasing production of renewable energy
- establish a process of monitoring and review, taking account of the role envisaged for the framework
- support and draw from existing work including community strategies.

### Integrated Regional Frameworks and Integrated Regional Strategies

In 2002, ODPM produced a White Paper 'Your Region, Your Choice'. Though the main focus of this document was proposals for elected regional assemblies, Chapter 2 set out what the Government has done to develop the English regions, with proposals for strengthening them further.<sup>92</sup> This is known as the 'Chapter 2 Agenda'. The report recognised "the significance of the regional dimension, reflected in the wide range of strategies that exist at the regional and sub-regional level, prepared by a variety of regional organisations to different timetables". The report encouraged the development of Integrated Regional Frameworks and Integrated Regional Strategies:<sup>93</sup>

**Integrated Regional Framework (IRF):** a document setting out a vision and sustainable development objectives for the region. The key regional strategies (such as the RES and RSS) 'nest' within this framework.

**Integrated Regional Strategy (IRS):** a document setting out a unified, single strategy for the region, working across economic, social, spatial and environmental issues.

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<sup>91</sup> <http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/delivery/global-local/documents/communityenvironment.pdf>

<sup>92</sup> [http://www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm\\_regions/documents/page/odpm\\_regions\\_607900-03.hcsp#P176\\_10984](http://www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_regions/documents/page/odpm_regions_607900-03.hcsp#P176_10984)

<sup>93</sup> Source:

[http://www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm\\_regions/documents/page/odpm\\_regions\\_607900-05.hcsp#P316\\_43871](http://www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_regions/documents/page/odpm_regions_607900-05.hcsp#P316_43871)

## Regional Economic Strategies

The Regional Development Agencies Act 1998 required the RDAs to develop a strategic vision for each of their regions, and issued statutory and non-statutory guidance to the Agencies on the formulation of RESs. The guidance encouraged RDAs to formulate clear priorities for seeking to improve regional economic performance, and to identify strategies for achieving them.<sup>94</sup> Specifically, the RES should set out:

- a regional framework for economic development, skills and regeneration which will ensure better strategic focus for and co-ordination of activity in the region whether by the agency or by other regional, sub-regional or local organisations
- a framework for the delivery of national and European programmes which may also influence the development of Government policy
- the basis for detailed action plans for the agency's own work, setting the wider aims and objectives for its annual corporate plan.<sup>95</sup>

## Regional Spatial Strategies

The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 meant that at a regional level Regional Planning Guidance (RPG) was replaced by a 'Regional Spatial Strategy' (RSS). The RSS is the region's planning framework that deals with the spatial implications of broad issues like healthcare, education, crime, housing, investment, transport, the economy and environment. It directs 'how much', 'how big' and 'where' in the region. As Regional Planning Bodies, Regional Assemblies are responsible for developing a RSS for each region.

Part 3 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act requires that Regional Planning Bodies have a duty to exercise their functions with a view to contributing to the achievement of sustainable development.

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<sup>94</sup> Source: <http://www.consumer.gov.uk/rda/info/>

<sup>95</sup> [http://www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1139503#P1579\\_225884](http://www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1139503#P1579_225884)

## **Annex C: Membership of Regional Advisory Group**

<b>Member</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
David Cooper	DEFRA Sustainable Development Unit
Yvette Dearden	East Midlands Regional Assembly
Paul Hinds	East England Development Agency
Walter Menzies	SDC Commissioner
Martin Oldham	East of England Government Office
Pam Temple	Office of Deputy Prime Minister
April Vessey	Department of Trade and Industry
Leslie Watson	Sustainability South West

