



## **Food Standards Agency**

Chief Executive: John Harwood

### **SDC Assessment**



# Checklist

## Sustainable Development Action Plan

1	Does the plan specify the period of time it will cover?	✗	FSA explained in the bilateral that the plan covers 2006 only.
2	Does the plan specify which organisations it covers?	✓	Plan also covers the Meat Hygiene service (MHS).
3	Has the organisation articulated what SD means for them?	✓	
4	Does the plan describe the benefits of having an SD approach to the organisation?	✓	
5	Does the plan acknowledge the Government's sustainable development goal?	✓	
6	Does the plan acknowledge the priorities of <i>Securing the Future</i> ?	✗	The plan does not acknowledge or mention the four priorities of <i>Securing the Future</i> .
	Does the plan mention one or more of the priorities of <i>Securing the Future</i> ?	✗	
7	Does the plan identify links to the priorities of <i>Securing the Future</i> ?	✗	The plan does not refer to or make any links between departmental commitments and the priorities.
8	Does the plan acknowledge the principles of <i>Securing the Future</i> ?	✓	The plan explains that <i>Securing the Future</i> sets out five guiding principles and lists them.
	Does the plan mention one or more of the principles of <i>Securing the Future</i> ?	✓	
9	Does the plan identify links to the principles of <i>Securing the Future</i> ?	✓	Plan explains that the five guiding principles will be used to formulate advice and highlights their contribution to <i>Ensuring a strong, Healthy and Just society</i> .
10	Have the organisation's relevant executive agencies produced their own plan?	✗	FSA explained that the MHS will produce separate plan in 2007.
11	Does the action plan contain a work programme?	✓	
12	Does the plan include actions relating to commitments from the SD strategy?	✓	Includes some actions in relevant areas such as integrating the five principles into policy-making and sustainable procurement
13	Does the action plan cover government policy?	✓	
14	Does the action plan cover operations?	✓	
15	Was the plan publicly available by 13th January 2006?	✓	Draft plan was available on departmental website.

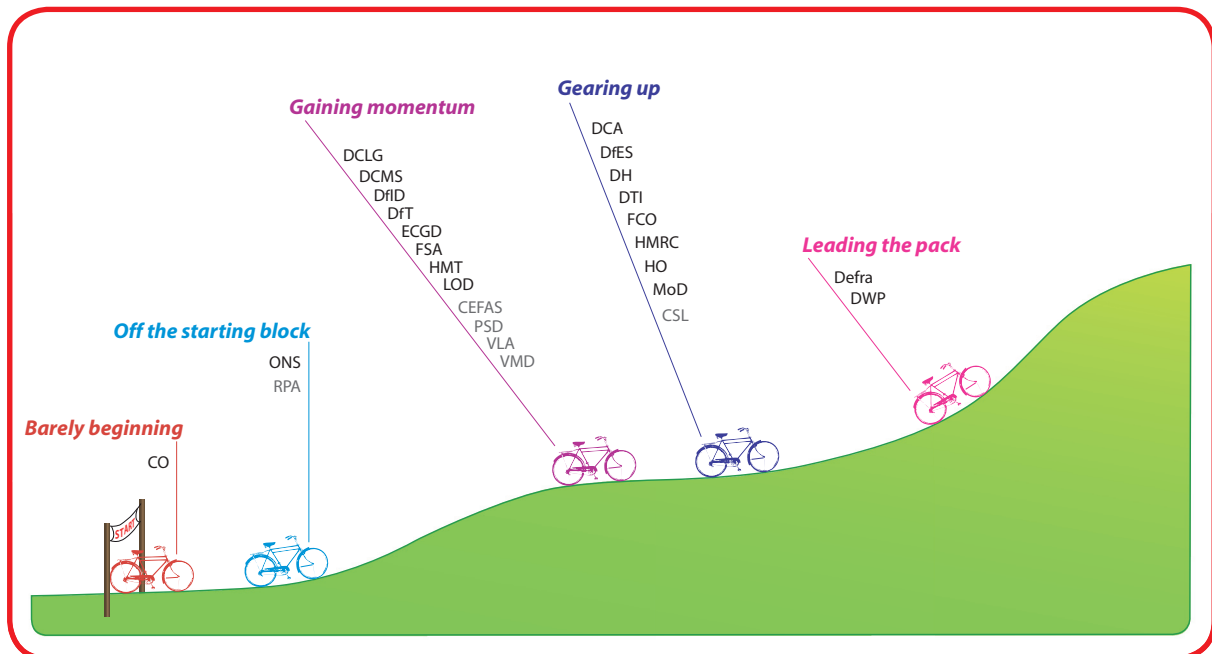
16	Does the plan outline any arrangements for strengthening SD capacity in the organisation?	✓	
17	Does the plan describe the infrastructure in place to deliver the plan?	✓	
18	Does the plan make it clear who signed it off?	✗	FSA explained that the Management Board signed off plan.
19	Does the plan designate who is accountable for the delivery of the overall plan?	✓	
20	Does the plan explain how the organisation will monitor progress against the plan?	✓	
21	Does the plan describe how the organisation will report against the plan?	✓	
22	Does the plan describe how it links in to other reporting mechanisms within the organisation? E.g. the annual report	✗	Sustainability assessments will feature in annual report.
23	Does the plan commit to reporting against the plan on a defined regular basis?	✓	From bilateral, FSA committed to reporting on regular basis.

**Senior Accountable Officer:** John Harwood, *Chief Executive*

Status of Plan: Published 23.02.06

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

## How is FSA doing?



### Background

The Food Standards Agency is an independent Government department set up by an Act of Parliament in 2000 to protect the public's health and consumer interests in relation to food.

### Context

The FSA has taken an active approach to writing their SDAP, and have engaged with staff and stakeholders through staff seminars and discussions with the FSA's stakeholders forum to decide on the priority areas of their plan.

### Coverage

The action plan covers both the FSA and their Executive Agency, the Meat Hygiene Service (MHS). The MHS will produce its own action plan in 2007.

## Departmental view of Sustainable Development

The SDAP explains that the Agency contributes to sustainable development through fulfilling its remit in relation to food safety standards; that is nutrition and helping consumers make informed choices.

It was explained in bilateral discussions that the Agency sees its contribution as mainly around the social aspects of sustainable development.

### Benefits of taking a sustainable development approach

The SDAP explains that sustainable development is about taking a longer-term view of the Agency's actions and that it is in consumers' long-term interests that Agency policies, decisions and advice are as sustainable as possible.

By taking this approach the Agency are likely to be more successful in identifying the implications and impacts of proposals. Similarly, the plan explains that taking a narrower view may mean that important impacts are overlooked.

## Link to *Securing the Future*

### Guiding Principles

The FSA's SDAP acknowledges the five principles of sustainable development and explain that by developing policies and advice to protect people's health, either by working to protect food safety or by helping consumers to choose healthy diets, the Agency is contributing to *Ensuring a strong, healthy and just society* – one of the principles of sustainable development. Although the SDAP does not set out how the Agency will take the five principles into account in developing policies, this is clearly set out in the Agency's *Guidance to staff on Sustainability Assessment*.

### Shared priorities for UK action

The SDAP fails to acknowledge the four priorities for immediate action as set out in *Securing the Future*. In particular, the plan does not explore the impact the Agency's nutritional advice has on Natural Resource Use and Environmental Enhancement – one of the shared priorities for immediate action. For example, the consumption of fish and fish oil can play an important part in a healthy diet, but also has implications for declining fish stocks. The SDC would like to see future plans explore the contribution the department can make to this shared priority.

## Policy priorities

The focus of FSA's SDAP is to embed sustainable development into policy and decision-making within the organisation. The plan sets actions aimed at ensuring staff take sustainable development into account by applying the FSA's newly developed assessment guidance. Bilateral discussions revealed that the Agency decided to concentrate its efforts on this as it is expected to have the greatest impact on

sustainable development within the Agency. The FSA explained that it is committed to complete transparency in the policy decisions it makes.

In the bilateral, the SDC explored whether the FSA felt that its role to help consumers make informed choices about food (related to safety and nutrition) included providing information in relation to the impact of different methods of

food production. e.g. organic/non-organic. FSA viewed sustainable food as a complex set of trade-offs between the environment, economic and social dimensions which were beyond its existing legal remit. The Agency felt that it did not have the expertise to address sustainable food consumption and production and would need to seek Defra's advice on such matters.

Despite the numerous studies published, there still appears to be significant uncertainty and divided opinion on the direct benefit of sustainable food production (e.g. organic

farming) for individual health. i.e. by reducing the amount of toxic chemicals ingested and increasing the amount of beneficial vitamins and minerals consumed. The SDC therefore accepts that it would be difficult for the FSA to give definitive, expert advice to consumers in this area. However, the SDC would like to see the FSA consider the role it could play in providing greater clarity to consumers about the current state of knowledge/debate within its existing remit and stated objectives.

## Leading by example

The department's SDAP includes actions on energy consumption, water usage, recycling and EMS in its plan, but does not explain why the department has decided to concentrate its efforts on these areas. It was explained in the bilateral that the operational priorities are based on the SDiG Framework, which the Agency shadowed in 2005.

The SDC would not expect plans to list all Framework targets. However, plans should clearly set out its operational priority areas and acknowledge any SDiG weaknesses that the department is aware of, with associated actions to improve these.

The SDAP explains that 'FSA NI has been working with the Department of Finance and

Personnel to develop guidance on integrating sustainable development into food and catering services across the public sector in Northern Ireland. Staff in Scotland and Wales follow the same procurement policies and guidelines required of all other Food Standards Agency employees.' Whilst the plan commits to ensuring that the Agency's 'Procurement Portal will include advice and guidance on sustainability aspects of procurement', it does not explicitly relate to the Agency's own policies on sustainable food procurement across the UK. Given the Agency's remit, the SDC would like to see the FSA leading by example on its own food procurement policies e.g. in its own staff restaurant, FSA events etc.

## Securing the Future commitments

### Departmental commitments

The FSA have no specific commitments from *Securing the Future* on which they need to lead.

### Cross-government commitments

The SDAP includes actions relating to some relevant areas, but does not describe these actions in the context of contributing to cross-government commitments set out in *Securing the Future*. The department has set actions

relating to the integration of the guiding principles into the policy-making process and providing civil servants with training on sustainable development. The Agency has also committed to including advice and guidance on the sustainability aspects of procurement in their Procurement Portal.

### Target setting

FSA has made a better attempt than most departments at setting SMART targets. Most

targets appear to be measurable and all actions indicate clear timescales for completion.

## Policy making

### Sustainable development proofing

The SDAP explains that RIAs will be the main vehicle for assessing sustainable development. Internally, the Agency has formal, documented quality assurance and sign off procedures for RIAs, and the FSA's Better Regulation Unit monitors all RIAs and will work to ensure sustainable development is taken into account.

Since publication of this SDAP, the Better Regulation Executive has published a draft new RIA which is out for consultation.

The Agency's guidance to staff explains that assessing a policy, project or intended consumer advice involves all five principles of sustainable development. To assess the sustainability of policies, the FSA has devised a set of questions included in a checklist.

### Sustainable development skills

The SDAP explains that the FSA is ensuring staff are being provided with the necessary skills for implementing the principle of sustainable development through the Guidance to Staff on Sustainability Assessments and through in-house seminars and workshops. The SDC welcomes this active approach.

The SDAP also includes targets on staff training. For example the SDAP commits to ensuring that '60% of staff (approximately 530) to have attended introductory training on sustainable development by May 2006 rising to 90% by May 2007'. The plan also includes a commitment to incorporate sustainable development training into the FSA's learning and development plan.

## Achieving Sustainable Development outcomes

### Infrastructure

The plan describes the basic SDAP monitoring and evaluation roles within the Agency. The Executive Management Board (EMB) which includes representation from all Directors, will monitor the delivery of the action plan and will report to the Board of the FSA on progress on a quarterly basis. Bilateral discussions revealed that the plan was signed off by the EMB and FSA's Board.

### Engagement

The SDAP explains that the FSA engaged with staff and stakeholders over the production of the action plan through lunchtime seminars, at which staff were encouraged to put forward their ideas on what the SDAP should include. Once the plan was published, the FSA publicised its launch in the in-house magazine and on the intranet.

The SDAP also explains that the Agency also has a range of awareness-raising measures including talks and seminars, articles in their weekly in-house news and a dedicated sustainable development section on their intranet site.

## Monitoring and reporting

The plan describes the basic mechanisms in place to monitor the delivery different aspects of the plan. For example, the Divisional Business Plans will be monitored for their incorporation of sustainable development performance indicators.

Progress against all targets and milestones will be reported annually on the FSA's website.







Strengths to build upon	
	Current work to integrate sustainable development into policy appraisals.
	Actively engage with policy-makers to ensure understanding of the need to include sustainable development in policy appraisals.
Challenges for 2007	
	Explore the contribution the Agency can make to Natural Resource Use and Environmental Enhancement – one of the shared priorities for immediate action, through the Agency's role of providing nutritional advice.
	Consider what role the FSA can play in providing greater clarity to consumers about the current state of knowledge/debate on sustainable food production, within the FSA's existing remit and stated objectives.
	Be clear about the priority operational areas that the Agency is seeking to improve.
	Take action aimed at 'leading by example' on the Agency's own sustainable food procurement policies.
	Progress monitoring by explaining how progress will be pursued and monitored against all actions.



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