

ADAPTING GOVERNMENT PRACTICE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT:

UNITED KINGDOM REGIONAL INSTITUTIONS

James Medhurst, GHK

United Kingdom

Introduction

This report provides an update to the previous review¹ of the UK institutional structures responsible for delivering sustainable development. In particular, the paper provides a review of the recent institutional changes and ideas being introduced at the regional level in the UK and their contribution to improving governance for sustainable development, directly and indirectly, through links upwards to central government and downwards to local authorities. The paper is informed by discussion with a number of representatives of bodies involved in or advising relevant institutions and the author's own experiences of researching regional development issues, both in the UK and the EU.

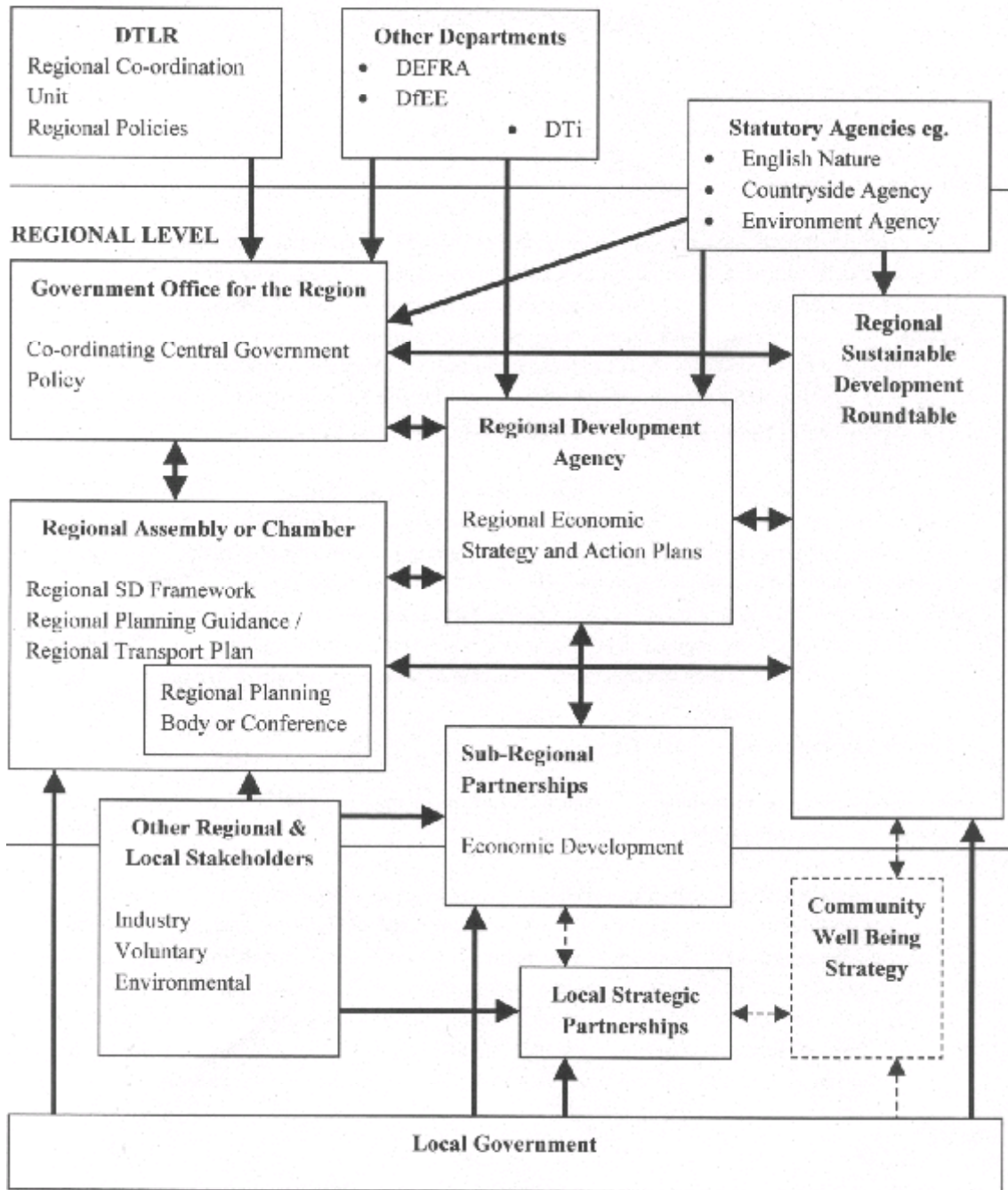
The focus of the paper is on the eight² English regions, excluding London. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland all now have a form of devolved decision-making body led by elected members, as does London. The focus of attention in the UK has now shifted to the role and status of the English regions. A central debate covered here concerns the need and desirability of introducing regional elections of representatives to a regional body, replacing the current indirect representation through the appointment of local representatives to a regional body.

Institutions in the English Regions

The current structure for regional governance in the English regions and the links with central and local government (see Figure1) comprises:

FIGURE 1: STRUCTURE OF ENGLISH REGIONAL GOVERNANCE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

NATIONAL LEVEL



LOCAL LEVEL

- **Government Office for the Region (GO)** – brings together central government policy responsibilities and interests (especially environment, trade and industry, transport, education and employment) and seeks the regional implementation of central government policy, overseen by the regional policy co-ordination unit in central government (Department for Transport, Local & Regional Government – DTLR). Given their responsibility to bring together policy interests there is an obvious latent potential to actively promote sustainable development (SD).
- **Regional Assembly** (sometimes called **regional chamber**) – brings together stakeholders, local authorities and also other statutory agencies, business, and NGOs. The assembly provides limited accountability through the appointment of local representatives in the absence of a directly elected assembly. The assembly is responsible for producing the Regional Sustainable Development Framework (RSDF) which provides a regional focus to the national SD strategy (Box 1 provides an example of this translation into regional SD objectives). Guidance on the construction of these frameworks (Box 1) emphasises process over content, with emphasis on the translation of the national strategy into regional targets and the need for regional-level monitoring of related indicators. Partly because of a lack of a strong regional SD vision in the RSAF (they simply tend to be a wishlist of ‘motherhood and apple pie’ statements), it is not clear whether the RSDF are being fully integrated into the working of regional bodies and agencies.

Box 1

South East England Regional Assembly (RSDF): SD Objectives

1. To ensure that everyone has the opportunity of a decent and affordable home.
2. To improve the health and well being of the population and reduce inequalities in health.
3. To reduce poverty and social exclusion and close the gap between the most disadvantaged communities and the rest.
4. To stimulate economic revival in priority regeneration areas.
5. To raise educational and achievement levels across the Region and develop opportunities for everyone to acquire the skills needed to find and remain in work.
6. To reduce crime and the fear of crime.
7. To create and sustain vibrant communities.
8. To encourage the development of, and participation in, cultural, creative and sporting activity, and a buoyant sustainable tourism sector.

Box 2

Guidance on Drafting the Regional Sustainable Development Framework (RSDF)

The RSDF should:

- set the priorities for regional targets and indicators
- identify areas where a regional approach to policy would be advantageous
- suggest monitoring approaches to regional policies
- provide a basis for informing the reviews of Regional Planning Guidance (RPG) and the Regional Economic Strategy (RES).

The assembly, as the Regional Planning Body, is also responsible for Regional Planning Guidance (RPG), which provides the long term spatial and land use planning framework for the region, including the regional transport plan. RPG has previously been the responsibility of the regional planning conference, comprising mainly local authorities. The traditional focus has been the regional allocation of housing land between local authorities. The emphasis has shifted significantly from land use to a broader spatial perspective (partly reflecting emerging work on European Spatial Development Perspectives) which fully recognises and promotes SD.

- **Regional Development Agency (RDA)** – responsible for co-ordinating and promoting the economic development and regeneration of the region, and specifying the long-term regional economic strategy (RES). The RDA is a government agency of the Department of Trade and Industry (DTi), with a Board of centrally appointed directors, mainly from business. Interests of local authorities, trade unions and the voluntary sector are also represented. The RDA has a statutory responsibility for promoting sustainable development, with the sustainability of the RES subject to scrutiny. Implementation of the RES is conducted through Action Plans defined in terms of particular themes and geographic areas, involving partnerships with different stakeholders.
- **Regional Sustainable Development Roundtable** – set up to oversee the contribution of regional plans and policies to sustainable development. These are non-statutory bodies, with no formal guidance governing operations. Consequently, their origins and links to other regional bodies vary between regions. Their role in actively promoting the integration of SD into regional policy is complicated by the need for independence from mainstream policy making as a consequence of their non-statutory basis (i.e. their role is strictly advisory) and by the ambiguous nature of their responsibility and accountability.

Vertical Integration

The regional structure has evolved from a combination of central and local government interests and responsibilities.

- Central Government – the Government Office of the region provides the formal link between central government and the region. The RDA, as an agency of the DTi, has separate links with government (although funding is channelled through GO). However, the RDAs are securing greater autonomy from central government. Central government agencies (semi-autonomous bodies) have developed their own regional structures, although they are standardising on the basis of GO boundaries. For example the Environment Agency and English Heritage revised their regional structures to the same regional boundaries as the GO. These agencies have also taken responsibility for SD and seek to work with the regional structures. Regional offices of these agencies are also examining their working relationships to better support SD, i.e. how can the agency, within it's statutory remit, interact with other agencies to further common objectives.
- Local Government – the regional assembly/chamber are principally comprised of representatives of local authorities, with a select group of elected local authority members responsible for the activity of the assembly. Local government, through the assembly, seeks to influence the RDA and GO. The assembly has a statutory responsibility for oversight of the RES. There is also strong local government involvement in sub-regional partnerships, mainly focused on the delivery of the RES and informing reviews of the RES. New relationships between the regional and local levels can be expected as a result of local government's growing responsibility to promote community well being, requiring new local strategic partnerships and the development of community strategies (see Appendix 1).

Statutory Responsibilities for SD

The statutory basis for the regional governance structure and sustainable development is summarised in relation to the RDAs and for RPG. We also note the statutory basis of the Greater London Assembly, a possible model for any subsequent move to directly elected assemblies in the English regions.

Regional Development Agencies Act 1998

«A regional development agency shall have the following purposes :
(a) to further the economic development and the regeneration of its area,

- (b) to promote business efficiency, investment and competitiveness in its area,
- (c) to promote employment in its area,
- (d) to enhance the development and application of skills relevant to employment in its area, and
- (e) to contribute to the achievement of **sustainable development** in the United Kingdom where it is relevant to its area to do so.»

Planning Policy Guidance Note 11: Regional Planning

Regional Planning Bodies, in consultation with the GOs and other regional stakeholders, are responsible for reviewing RPG, preparing new draft RPG and for ensuring that a **sustainability** appraisal is carried out. The draft RPG is then subject to public examination before being issued in final form by the Secretary of State. In carrying out the appraisal, the RPB and other regional stakeholders should have regard to the objectives set out in any regionally endorsed **sustainable development framework**.

The appraisal is an integral part of the production of RPG, providing feedback from an iterative process. It should help enable the emerging RPG to play its part in assisting the economy, reducing social exclusion, enhancing the environment and ensuring the prudent use of natural resources. It should also help avoid, reduce or mitigate any adverse impacts in these key areas. The potential direct, indirect and cumulative impacts of different strategic options need to be appraised in order to integrate **sustainable development** objectives in the formulation of policies and inform decisions on which options should be promoted in the draft strategy.»

Greater London Authority Act 1999

«Its principal purposes will be to promote economic development and wealth creation in Greater London, promote social development in Greater London; and promote the improvement of the environment in Greater London. In determining whether and how to exercise its power in pursuit of its principal purposes the Authority must have regard to the effect the proposed exercise of the power would have on the health of people in Greater London, and the effect it would have on the achievement of **sustainable development** in the United Kingdom.»

Structure of the Paper

The focus of the paper is guided by the interest in the key institutional issues that influence the effectiveness of governance to promote sustainable development³. In

particular we examine the performance of the new UK regional structures, directly and indirectly, in terms of their ability to develop and apply methods to integrate decision making. This includes consideration of a range of criteria, including the extent to which the governance structures encourage citizen and civil society participation in decision making and promote a long term-view in developing policy.

The indirect contribution of the regional structures depends on the extent of vertical integration between levels of government, and the ability to use this to encourage more effective governance.

Given the comparatively recent introduction of the new regional structures, there is still much that needs to evolve in the definition of roles and responsibilities. Moreover, there are important distinctions between regions, and generalisations are sometimes difficult to sustain. Yet because the regional institutions are still evolving, there is considerable scope for influencing this evolution for the better delivery of progress to sustainable development, in part by exchanging information between UK regions and between the UK and other countries.

Integrated approaches to decision making

The Idea of Integration

A major failing of government approaches to sustainable development is the inability to understand and appreciate the significance of the relationships between traditional policy areas. So called 'silo' thinking represents a significant barrier to improved governance, not least because of the failure to provide a basis for understanding how to respond to perceived trade-offs between policies. In the UK, attempts to secure better integration have been made, with formal recognition of the need for more 'joined-up' thinking. A key constraint to integration continues to be 'cultural inertia', the failure to adequately change attitudes and perspectives fast enough, because of an unwillingness to let go of previous methods and approaches to decision making. Changes in regional and local decision-making, with the devolution of responsibility for economic development and spatial planning, as well as the readiness to consider at a regional level issues traditionally seen as local (such as housing and transport) provide opportunities to side-step cultural inertia.

Criteria (from OECD)

The scope for integrated decision making, as described by the OECD, depends in part on the ability of governance structures to facilitate:

- Considering SD early in the policy making process
- Adopting measurable targets that set the sights for stakeholders
- Clearly defining responsibilities and accountability for SD
- Establishing policy priorities by reference to SD objectives
- Establishing cross and vertical integration (across and between levels of government)
- Establishing procedures for the implementation of policies that promote SD
- Monitoring and reporting on progress, with ‘oversight’
- Training for government officials and other stakeholders
- Citizen participation in decision making
- Longer term perspectives on policy

We will next consider how the recent UK changes in English regional governance fit these criteria and contribute to SD.

Early Consideration of SD in Regional Policy Making

In the recent evolution of the regional governance structure, sustainable development has been a prominent theme which has informed both the operation of the various bodies (e.g. in terms of representation, and in the terms of reference) and the principle policy statements (the RES and the RPG). As the regional structure evolves, it is likely that there will be an expansion of policy that seeks to adopt a regional perspective with a strong SD focus. For example, housing policy, which has largely been the responsibility of local authorities and statutory agencies (such as the Housing Corporation) is beginning to be framed in regionally strategic terms, (all GO currently produce a Housing Statement). SD objectives have had an important influence on more recent policy, and a broader partnership of interests is beginning to participate in the preparation of the housing statement. It is likely that the current housing statements, which although acknowledging the wider policy context, are predominantly concerned with the allocation of public expenditure for housing, will become formal strategies, setting out policy objectives that relate to the regional spatial and economic strategies.

Through regular review and revision of policy, the regional structure also allows for the opportunity to test and improve the sustainability of policy. Both the RES

and RPG are subject to almost continuous monitoring (see below) with periodic formal review exercises. However, the terms of reference of the review need to ensure that contributions to SD are taken into account alongside more operational objectives.

The ability to ensure SD considerations are present at early stages and in review processes also depends upon who is responsible for the continuous monitoring of SD outcomes at a regional level, and their ability to influence decision makers and stakeholders. We return to this below.

Adopting Measurable Targets

The UK government has embraced with enthusiasm the concept of setting targets and defining indicators to measure public policy. This philosophy extends from the formal adoption of public service agreements by central government departments and, as an agency of central government, by the RDAs, which provide an agreed basis for assessing performance and for the allocation of funding, through to the use of Best Value targets in local government.

One of the requirements of the Regional Sustainable Development Framework (RSDF) was to articulate SD objectives in terms of particular targets, which would then inform public policy more generally. A good example is provided by the West Midlands RSDF (Box 3), which sets out ten targets. It is generally recognised that setting targets and using indicators is an imperfect approach, not least because there are aspects of SD which are not measurable, such as the balance of interests affected when making important trade-offs.⁴ However, current work is leading to a clearer view of baselines and the establishment of more coherent approaches to judging the effectiveness of public policy for SD.

Box 3

West Midlands RSDF: SD Targets

The SD framework puts forward ten targets which were selected to make the best use of the current data available. A more useful set of statistics with which to measure improved quality of life is currently being collected. The ten targets are:

- *Make sure that, on average, only half the journeys made each week are by car, by 2010*
- *Reduce the number of 16 and 17 year olds not in education or training from 18% to 10% by 2005*
- *By 2003, all companies should invite local businesses to compete for the provision of products or services*
- *Make sure that 30% savings are achieved in household energy consumption by 2010*
- *Encourage all villages to implement a shared services strategy by 2005*
- *Households and businesses aim to recycle or compost 30% of all waste by the end of 2010 and to ensure that less than 50% goes to landfill*
- *Aim to build 65% of new housing, in the region as a whole, on brownfield sites up to 2010*
- *Ensure that survival rate of new small and medium sized enterprises exceeds 75% by 2006*
- *Ensure that delivery of the region's Biodiversity Action Plans is on target by 2010*
- *Make sure that at least 50% of new buildings incorporate grey water systems by 2010*

The setting and use of targets has, however, not been accompanied with any great insight as to how the resulting information might be used. For example, there is no obvious means by which the assembly or roundtable could direct policy should particular targets be missed. Rather, the failure to achieve particular targets would provide a backdrop for policy reviews, and inform the policy revision processes within the assembly, Government Office and the RDA.

Establishing Clear Responsibilities and Accountability

The recent evolution, partly because of the relative infancy of structures, does not provide any clear definition of responsibility or accountability for SD at the regional level. SD is a shared responsibility which all public policy and all relevant bodies should seek to promote. Hence the RDA and the assembly would both see it as their responsibility to promote SD. However, since most SD policy at regional level consists of 'motherhood and apple pie' statements, the strong level of consensus for SD and the willingness of the various bodies to accept responsibility

may be indicative of a lack of ‘bite’ in current SD policy objectives, which do not force difficult decisions.

The lack of directly elected regional assemblies means that there is no obvious hierarchy within which to locate responsibility for SD, and no direct accountability. This is one reason why links with the Roundtable and the adoption of the RSDF is often ambiguous and varies region to region. The RSDF was supposed to provide the over-arching SD framework, within which all subsequent regional policy and strategies would be set. However, the failure of RSDFs to provide a strong SD vision statement and to develop coherent scenarios which describe more sustainable futures has meant that other vehicles have been used to this end, in particular Regional Planning Guidance. However, while RPG is subject to public examination and therefore a degree of scrutiny, its purpose is not overtly to develop SD policy per se, but rather to describe future spatial patterns of development consistent with SD. RPG is however subject to sustainability appraisal, where the appraisal criteria derive from the assembly, and allows some coherence between the RSAF and the RPG.

Arguably, the lack of a clear central responsibility for SD at the regional level does not matter as long as the objectives of public policy all seek to engage with the SD debate. Individual policies can then be assessed on their own terms, in that they are guided by SD considerations. However, this tends to assume that SD does not raise serious conflicts of interest, when obviously it should. When policy is unpopular, but important to deliver SD (such as higher road fuel prices or road user charges) the lack of a central responsibility and elected assembly allows easier evasion of the issue. It is interesting that in London, where there is an elected assembly that does have a clear SD responsibility, the use of road charging remains a firm proposal, while it has been quietly dropped in other regions.

The Establishment of Policy Priorities by Reference to SD

RPG and RES are the two main policy statements that are the responsibility of the regional bodies. RPG has been issued for many years as long term guidance under the auspices of the regional planning conference comprising mainly LAs and statutory agencies, supported by regional office of the central government department responsible for land use planning. However, partly as an accident of timing most RPGs have been subject to review during the same period as saw the establishment of RDAs and assemblies/chambers. As a result the RPG review process has led the development of SD thinking at a regional level. This has been supported by recent central government guidance⁵ and the public examination

process (a quasi-judicial review) both of which have attempted to ensure that SD objectives are clearly and coherently reflected in the policy priorities of RPG.

The drafting of the RES, also by an accident of timing, was less fortunate in receiving guidance on how to set priorities with reference to SD. As a consequence, most RES, while acknowledging SD and attempting to show consistency with SD objectives, have not adopted strong SD objectives. Rather, RDAs have tried to integrate SD thinking into individual policies by treating it as a ‘horizontal issue’ cutting across all policies, which tends to promote a ‘tick-box’ mentality of limited thinking about the impacts that the RES policies have on SD. The forthcoming reviews of the initial RES will provide an opportunity to consider whether they sufficiently promote SD.

In setting priorities according to SD criteria, regional bodies have used ‘sustainability appraisal’ to inform the specification of more specific policy objectives for both the RES and RPG. Planned outcomes and outputs are assessed against SD objectives in a qualitative manner, providing feedback to the drafting process. While the appraisal process is capable of highlighting conflicts between SD and economic development or spatial planning policies, the approach separates the policy objectives in these strategies from overt SD policy objectives. While SD policy is specified in vague terms, then this may be desirable. However, by its very nature the approach prevents proper policy integration. An alternative approach would be to set up a clearly linked hierarchy of objectives, with high order SD objectives linked to lower order economic or spatial planning objectives. To some degree this is implicit in the drafting of the RES and RPG, but the absence of formal and explicit links hinders the priority setting process (see Box 4 for further discussion).

Sustainability Appraisal and Policy Objectives

The integration of SD thinking into mainstream public policy has largely been sought by defining separate SD objectives (actually broad aims) and then using these aims to define criteria against which to assess policy proposals. This approach has been adopted for both the RES and RPG, and has also been used in the required ex-ante appraisals of EC regional assistance programmes.

Exemplar criteria from the Yorkshire & Humber RSDF include

- Education and training opportunities which build the skills and capacity of the population
- Conditions and services which engender good health
- Safety and security for people and property
- Vibrant communities which participate in decision making
- Culture, leisure and recreation opportunities available to all
- Local needs met locally
- Quality housing available to everyone
- A transport network which maximises access whilst minimising detrimental impacts
- A bio-diverse and attractive natural environment
- Minimal pollution levels
- Minimal greenhouse gas emissions and a managed response to the effects of climate change
- A quality built environment and efficient land use patterns that make good use of derelict sites, minimise travel and promote balanced development
- Prudent and efficient use of energy and natural resources with minimal production of waste.

These criteria have formed the basis of RPG SD appraisal.

An alternative approach would be to develop the RPG objectives (recognising that they have to take account of national guidance) directly from and explicitly linked to these criteria, such that successful implementation would imply progress towards SD. Attempts to build an integrated decision framework that 'internalises' SD in the objectives and criteria of an organisation have been made by Forum for the Future (see Annex 2).

The issue of appraisal also extends to the problem of unambiguously identifying or judging whether the different impacts of a policy or project support or deter SD. The UK has strongly supported the use of cost-benefit analysis⁶ to resolve the *net* impact of proposals and the use of the public inquiry system) to resolve important development projects. However, there are major problems with both approaches – the former finds difficulty in articulating intangible monetary impacts, the latter is expensive and time consuming. New approaches to addressing the problem of options appraisal are being examined by central government and by statutory agencies (especially the Environment Agency).

However, it is far from clear how these approaches secure the necessary blend of objective analysis and political judgement that is required. Without progress in this area the determination of policy priorities remains too technocratic. However, it is interesting to note current proposals for greater parliamentary scrutiny and determination of large projects (e.g. major airport expansion) of national importance, as a complement to or replacement of the public inquiry system. Conceivably, a similar approach might be developed for regionally significant proposals in the context of emerging regional structures, perhaps building on the public examination of RPG.

Strengthening Government Coherence

We have acknowledged that the regional level has a powerful role to play in linking top-down with bottom-up perspectives on SD and aiding government coherence through improved vertical integration. For example, promotion of renewable energy -- while not a central government priority -- is encouraged. Yet it is constrained by local planning opposition. RPG has the potential to give renewable energy greater priority and to address local concerns. This role is important for a range of other key SD issues including economic regeneration of deprived communities, learning and skills, transport, agriculture, tourism, land use, biodiversity and the use of natural resources (especially water and minerals).

The regional structures themselves are not especially coherent and are not transparent to anyone other than those public officials and members who are directly involved (see Fig. 1). There have been recent attempts to strengthen the internal coherence or horizontal integration at the regional level, by developing formal memoranda of understanding in the form of agreed concordats defining common goals (Box 5). Other regions, especially the East Midlands, have adopted a corporate approach that explicitly links the strategies of the various bodies.

Box 5

Concordat between One Northeast, the North East Regional Assembly and the Government Office for the North East

«One Northeast, the North East Regional Assembly and GO-NE will work together to help improve the economic performance of the north east region to enhance the region's environment and to improve the social well being of all citizens within the region».

Procedures and Practices for Policy Implementation to Support SD

There are two main ways in which regional governance structures can encourage detailed policy implementation: 1) by introducing procedures based on SD criteria that require policy decisions or project proposals to be guided and tested against these criteria; 2) by scrutiny of policy decisions and proposals on a continuous basis (as opposed to the periodic review of a sustainability appraisal). Neither approach has yet been developed (probably a reflection of the short period of time that the regional bodies have been operating) although certain regions are beginning to investigate the possibilities.

Interestingly, there are regional lessons to be learned from the operation of EU assisted programmes in Objective 1 and 2 regions, where explicit guidance with project selection criteria has been used to ensure that projects conform to agreed norms. This has been used (albeit not especially well, generally using a reactive 'tick-box' approach) to ensure environmental protection and to reduce environmental impacts. Similar approaches could be developed by the RDAs.

Monitoring and Public Reporting on Progress, with Oversight

The regions have adopted explicit monitoring of regional 'quality of life' using baseline regional indicators and monitoring of policy output and outcome indicators. The development of these indicator frameworks has been largely driven by the need to monitor the RES and RPG. However, there has been some corporate response across bodies recognising cost and common interest in many of the indicators. To assist with the collection of baseline indicators, some regions (such as the East Midlands) have instituted indicator 'clubs' that combine the expertise and resources of different agencies to allow the necessary breadth in the indicator set. Boxes 6 and 7 give examples of current work.

Box 6

East Midlands Development Agency – Use of SD Indicators for Monitoring

As part of the Regional Economic Strategy for the region (Oct 2000), an emerging set of East Midlands Sustainable Development Indicators are presented. These will be tracked over time, to monitor the overall state of the region and its quality of life

Sustainable Development Indicators

An emerging set of sustainable development indicators for the East Midlands, prepared by regional partners will be closely monitored. The indicators are in the following areas:-

Agriculture
Air Quality
Built Heritage
Countryside Access
Crime Tranquillity
Culture Transport
Derelict Land & Development
Economy & Business
Education Wildlife Habitats
Health
Homelessness
Income,
Participation and Democracy
Social Cohesion
Unemployment & Poverty
Waste
Water

Box 7

Northwest England's Framework for A Better Quality Of Life

A regional framework for monitoring is being developed and a network of data providers established, building upon knowledge gained to date. A proposal to

develop an approach to regional monitoring for Action for Sustainability will be submitted to the Regional Assembly. This will include:

- monitoring progress against the targets in Action for Sustainability
- monitoring against additional baselines to facilitate ongoing review of the objectives and targets in Action for Sustainability
- monitoring the regional contribution to DETR's headline indicators of sustainability

The Action Plan links targets to relevant strategies and indicators. The indicators have been taken from the UK Strategy "Better Quality of Life", the local Performance Indicators for Best Value (which covers all services provided by Local Authorities) and the CLIP (Central and Local (Government) Information Partnership) project indicators.

The use of monitoring systems, including the use of targets and indicators, begs the question of how the monitoring informs a view on the progress being made to secure SD. A problem arises because the pursuit of SD requires trade-offs to be made, trade-offs that are impossible to capture in any broad sense. Political judgement must then determine the extent to which the consequences of the trade-offs are helpful or unhelpful. Tools for integrated decision making have been the subject of much study, but no approach has really been recognised as an acceptable means of judging the sustainability of policies, programmes or projects.

In addition to the monitoring systems based on specified indicators, the various regional bodies provide annual reporting of progress. RDAs and GO prepare Annual Reports⁷. The RDAs hold 'Annual General Meetings' for stakeholders at which there is some scope for semi-public debate.

The extent of oversight is limited to the review procedures for the RES and RPG, noted above. There are no formal oversight procedures.

Identifying Training Requirements

It is not known how far formal training in SD has been identified or applied. The bodies mentioned here make fairly extensive use of outside consultants in preparing and appraising the sustainability aspects of policies and programmes, which suggests a lack of sustainable development related competencies within the organisations. The Roundtable is to some degree expected to provide an ‘expert’ view, but it is not clear that they are perceived as such or used as a ‘resource’.

Citizen Participation

Direct Participation

There are no direct elections to the regional assembly, and no direct citizen participation in the regional governance structures. Unlike Wales and Scotland, the English regions have little cultural identity. The strength of identity varies between regions, with those regions furthest away from the capital having the greatest awareness of a regional perspective. The region is not perceived as a level of government, despite the existence of a regional policy which, albeit weak and largely related to issues not in the mainstream of policy (e.g. regional assistance to industry, minerals policy, land use planning), has existed for many years. It is likely that many citizens do not therefore consider the absence of regional elections to be an issue of concern. By the same token, they are not engaged in the current regional debates.

Central government is still considering the merits of instituting directly elected assemblies at the regional level. The concern is that voter apathy may lead to an undermining of the regional agenda. However, the absence of such elections limits the scope for promoting SD policy and resolving difficult policy issues.

Indirect Participation (via Local Government)

The lack of citizen participation at the regional level is to some extent compensated by a strong initiative at the local government level to engage citizens in broader ‘quality of life’ issues (though this initiative is framed by a specific neighbourhood renewal agenda for deprived communities). In particular, there is now a specific duty on Local Authorities to promote the economic, social and environmental well

being of communities, to be delivered through so called community strategies, partly financed by the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund. These strategies will be the responsibility of Local Strategic Partnerships comprising the LA plus community representatives and other stakeholders and will focus on education, employment, housing and crime reduction (see Annex 1).

Given the terms of reference for the community strategies, it seems clear that there is a direct relation to the SD agenda and in particular with the work of local Agenda 21 partnerships. Since the Act has only recently been brought in, there is no evidence as to how the links between these new responsibilities will support or drive the regional SD agenda, and how far it will provide a means of engaging citizens in the wider regional SD debate.

On a more particular point, the objectives of the RES are often couched in terms of a need to improve the competitive advantage of the regional economy and to increase employment, income, investment, etc. Reasons for pursuing these objectives, in terms of meeting the needs and aspirations of citizens, are sometimes poorly articulated and communicated. The approaches used can be somewhat technocratic, with RDA officers and their 'expert' advisors taking the lead in determining strategy and actions. To some extent RDAs are aware of this and are seeking to develop better working relationships at a sub-regional level, to enable a greater engagement with local authorities in particular. These sub-regional partnerships (which are themselves somewhat ad hoc gatherings of various LA and business interests) are seen as increasingly important in the process of 'growing' the RES from the bottom-up.

In this case, the question of responsibility and accountability of the sub-regional partnerships merits attention. For one, the move to these ad hoc arrangements begins to erode the ability to engage with less formally organised stakeholders, simply due to the time and cost of participation in a growing number of partnership arrangements and to the confusion of responsibilities and interests that the various partnerships represent.

Longer Term Perspectives

The longer term strategies which are the responsibility of regional structures, especially RPG, provide the basis for clear articulation of long-term changes that are desired (providing the normative element missing from RSDFs). This in turn provides a framework for other policy initiatives, including strategic transport plans (formally part of the RPG) and new housing strategies that seek to promote

sustainable communities (i.e. which have greater access to jobs and facilities, lower levels of exclusion, greater economic prosperity and improved physical environments, using land more efficiently). These strategies are explicitly set within longer time frames, typically 5 to 10 years, although RPG has a 15-year time frame subject to regular review.

The changes in regional governance structures, and the increased emphasis placed on regional policies and strategies (such as the RES and RPG), provide an important opportunity to introduce a much stronger long-term perspective. This opportunity stems in part from the overall change in governance to one which more readily uses targets and indicators for policy management purposes, thereby making more explicit the time dimension attached to policy.

The opportunity also derives, somewhat paradoxically, from the lack of a strong political framework in that the 'short-termism' associated with the political process has less influence. It is interesting to observe tensions emerging in new sub-regional partnerships where the longer term strategic thinking of regional policy is to some degree frustrated by the political constraints which prevent local authorities from taking a similar view. Resolution of this tension depends on the local authorities, at elected member level, adopting clearer and longer term targets. It is precisely this requirement which has encouraged central government to introduce changes in local authority management structures including the option of an elected mayor (as in Greater London) to provide leadership (the council leaders have until now been appointed by the body of elected members).

The absence of local leadership is now often perceived as a major impediment to longer term perspectives and the adoption of more radical strategies for change. It is not clear whether the development of stronger regional level political structures will counter local conservatism, or introduce yet further political constraints.

Concluding observations

Emerging Regional Governance Structures

The regional governance structure in the English regions is complex and evolving quickly at the present time. The recent and continuing changes offer opportunities to create structures capable of promoting sustainable development, and to a greater extent than would have been the case without the changes. It is a fortunate coincidence of timing that the regional policy agenda has emerged at the same time

as the interest in SD objectives, although to some extent there were some common pressures relating to, for example, the need for more strategic direction of locally delivered policies such as transport and economic development in order to set policy in the context of wider economic, social and environmental changes.

The present evolution is far from complete. It remains to be seen how far different structures in the various regions will go in establishing regional governance, especially when the regional level confronts local or central government interests.

Regional Governance and Integrated Decision Making for Sustainable Development

This paper has reviewed the extent to which emerging regional governance structures are promoting integrated decision making for sustainable development. Though it is difficult to establish firm conclusions given the continuing evolution of regional structures, we can suggest the following :

- Regional governance emerged at a time when SD was at the fore of central and local government thinking. As a consequence SD has been identified as a central regional policy concern, relevant to all regional bodies and programmes. It continues to have the role of ‘transformer’ of national and global thinking into specific policy measures capable of implementation at the local level. Evidence of its intervention can be seen in relation to renewable energy, transport and housing, though much more could be done in certain areas such as resource efficiency;
- SD as reflected in the development of RES, RPG and newly emerging regional strategies (especially housing) has begun to be reasonably well defined and to recognise the necessity of long-term perspectives. The emerging approach of identifying long-term visions, as a basis for subsequently defining the short and medium term policies, seeks to overcome the traditional short-term political constraints. Moreover, deliberate attempts to define policy in terms of measurable objectives (partly influenced by greater interest in the efficiency of public policy) provides a basis for informing progress on SD;

However, the following key issues need resolution if regional governance is to build on a promising start and make a major contribution to sustainable development.

The Need for Democratic Accountability

Regional governance lacks a directly elected body charged with the regional policy agenda. Without such a body, the scope to introduce a radical policy agenda which threatens the status quo is limited. There are certain benefits with the current system, not least of which is the ability to have longer term perspectives, but arguably these do not fully compensate for the lack of real decision-making power that would be possible with active citizen participation. Still, in most regions the level of citizen awareness and interest in a regional assembly remains poor.

In order for further governance changes to occur, both central and local government must fully endorse elected assemblies and communicate their potential benefits in terms that are easily understandable. In this context, the emergence of community well being strategies may stimulate a wider debate concerning the attributes of sustainable communities (in terms of education, improved employment opportunities, better housing, improved environments, etc.), which might promote interest in the regional debate.

The Need for Rationalisation of Responsibility for Sustainable Development

The complexity of regional structures means that all agencies and programmes have responsibility for SD, while no single body has overall responsibility for evaluating and revising SD policy at the regional level. The regional assembly should be the natural location for such responsibility (articulated through the RSDF), but it is not clear to what extent the assembly could seek to revise regional policy were it considered to be at odds with SD. It has been suggested that this rationalisation should take the form of a merger of the RSDF, RPG and the RES. Yet it is difficult to see the benefits of this proposal, as it serves only to confuse policy responsibilities still further. A clear, visionary RSDF setting the long-term agenda and describing the preferred scenario of change, to which RPG, RES and other strategies relate through a linked hierarchy of objectives, seems a better and more plausible option.

The lack of clear responsibility and authority translates into an absence of real debate about the implementation of policy related to key issues affecting SD. This is because policy delivery is largely the responsibility of designated bodies and individual local authorities (noting that regional guidance is just that – guidance). There is no mechanism to require sub-regional partnerships or LAs to implement policies that support regional SD but that might be unpopular (such as with introducing incentives for reduced car use and renewable energy schemes). It is

also more difficult to guide new development where it best promotes SD if it is at odds with the development market. For example, premiums on certain greenfield commercial development are difficult to resist for an individual LA, even though development may not serve the wider regional interest.

The Difficulties of Appraisal

The implementation of policies that promote SD will require difficult decisions to be made. Decision makers will look to appraisal methods to highlight the costs and benefits of proposals. While helpful in terms of clarifying the issues, these methods are not capable of determining the best option -- this remains an essentially political decision. In the context of these appraisal difficulties, it is important that decision-making procedures allow the issues to be articulated and resolved. In the absence of elected assemblies, it is difficult to see how important but sensitive issues are to be addressed.

A contribution to a more explicit treatment of SD issues might be to create clearer links between mainstream regional policy objectives and SD aims, thereby placing the emphasis on the delivery of agreed strategies of regional, sub-regional and local partnerships. This is likely to increase tensions with local government unless there are complementary perspectives at elected member level. Current changes in LA management structures, the development of community well being plans, and improved vertical integration between the regional and local levels are all part of this solution.

APPENDIX 1

OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT OF PART I OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2000

1. Part I of the Local Government Act 2000 creates a new discretionary power for principal local authorities in England and Wales to do anything they consider likely to promote or improve the economic, social or environmental well being of their area. The power came into force on 18 October 2000.
2. The introduction of this new power forms an important part of the Government's wider approach to the modernisation of local government. This approach is designed to ensure that:
 - councils are empowered to lead their communities;
 - councils' political decision-making processes are efficient, transparent and accountable;
 - there is continuous improvement in the efficiency and quality of the services for which councils are responsible;
 - councils actively involve and engage local people in local decisions; and
 - councils have the powers they need to ensure that they can promote and improve the well-being of their areas and contribute to sustainable development.
3. The Local Government Acts 1999 and 2000 provide the statutory underpinning to deliver these goals.
4. The Government does not view the modernisation of local government as an end in itself, but rather as one of the means by which the quality of life of communities and individuals can be improved. Measures such as the strengthening of councils' community leadership role and the introduction of best value support the Government's ambitious programme for the reform of public services, designed to ensure that services are delivered in ways that:
 - are responsive to the concerns and needs of local communities;

- improve continuously, especially in areas where there has been a pattern of under-performance;
- are co-ordinated in ways which minimise duplication, maximise effectiveness, and present a concerted response to the causes of complex problems such as social exclusion and neighbourhood renewal; and
- suit the needs of the consumer or citizen (rather than the convenience of the provider).

The power of well being

5. If local authorities are to play their full part in the achievement of these goals, they need the necessary statutory powers to do so. For many years, innovative actions by local authorities have been stifled by concerns over the scope of their powers. While some legislation contains deliberate and specific constraints on local authority activities, there has been considerable uncertainty over the extent of the enabling powers that have been conferred on councils. The result has been a necessarily cautious approach to innovation and joint action, and a concomitant limitation of councils' contribution to the improvement of their communities' quality of life.
6. The Government's purpose in introducing the well-being power is to reverse that traditionally cautious approach, and to encourage innovation and closer joint working between local authorities and their partners to improve communities' quality of life. The purpose of this guidance is therefore to acquaint local authorities with the breadth of the new power, and to encourage innovative and imaginative use of it. In particular, each local authority will want to consider how the power can promote the sustainable development of its area by delivering the actions and improvements identified in its community strategy, which could include tackling social exclusion, reducing health inequalities, promoting neighbourhood renewal and improving local environmental quality. Authorities will also wish to consider how the new power can help them to contribute locally to shared national priorities, such as action to combat climate change and encourage the conservation of biodiversity, and to contribute to shared priorities within other plans such as Health Improvement Programmes.
7. The new power is wide ranging, and enables local authorities to improve the quality of life, opportunity, and health of their local communities. Specific examples of the kind of action that can be taken are set out in section 2(4) of the Act. These include incurring expenditure, providing staff, goods or services to

any person, entering into partnership arrangements and carrying out the functions of other bodies. This list is for illustrative purposes only, and does not in any way limit how local authorities can use the new power. Section 2 builds on the provisions in the Health Act 1999, reinforced in the NHS Plan, which provide health authorities and local authorities with a power to work with one another where there is a clear crossover between the services being commissioned and provided by the local authority and NHS bodies. Joint working under the Health Act can take the form of pooled budgets, lead commissioning and integrated provision of services. The well-being provision extends the ability of local authorities to work in partnership with other bodies, in addition to the NHS.

8. There are two specific limitations on the well-being power, which are set out in section 3 of the Act. The power does not have any spending limits attached to it, but cannot be used to raise money. Neither can it be used to circumvent prohibitions, restrictions or limitations contained on the face of legislation. The Secretary of State also has a reserve power under section 3 to prevent local authorities from exercising the power to take specific actions.
9. The breadth of the power is such that councils can regard it as a ‘power of first resort’. Rather than searching for a specific power elsewhere in statute in order to take a particular action, councils can instead look to the well-being power in the first instance and ask themselves:
 - Is the proposed action likely to promote or improve the well-being in our area? (see paragraphs 22–30)
 - Is the primary purpose of the action to raise money? (see paragraphs 65–70)
 - Is it explicitly prohibited on the face of other legislation?
 - Are there any explicit limitations and restrictions on the face of other legislation? (see paragraphs 63 and 64)

If the answer to the first question is ‘Yes’ and to the next two questions ‘No’, then a council can proceed with the proposed action, subject to the answer to the fourth question, i.e. any restrictions or limitations that may apply by virtue of being spelt out on the face of other legislation.

In determining how to use the new power, an authority will need to use this statutory guidance. It must also develop a community strategy, which it has a duty to prepare under section 4 of the Act. This requirement is not intended to limit the scope of the well-being power, nor to encourage a ‘checklist’ approach to its use; it is intended instead to encourage local authorities to consider the effect that any

particular use of the power will have on the achievement of the goals and objectives contained in their community strategy (see paragraphs 24–26). Local authorities do not have to wait until their community strategies are in place before being able to exercise the power.

Context

10. Following extensive consultation, the Secretary of State has now issued statutory guidance to local authorities on preparing community strategies, and the two sets of guidance can usefully be read in conjunction with each other. The Government also issued (on 27 March 2001) non-statutory guidance on the ‘local strategic partnerships’ with whom it expects local authorities to work in order to prepare community strategies (see paragraph 36).
11. The creation of the new power confers a new function on local government, namely that of promoting or improving community well-being. As with all other functions, it will be subject to the general duty of best value. How authorities set about meeting the requirements of best value in relation to the well-being power will be up to them; but they should seek to reassess their best value review programme to ensure that it is cast in sufficiently strategic terms to support the delivery of improved well-being in a given area, in particular concentrating on cross-cutting issues such as community safety, neighbourhood renewal and social exclusion. Paragraphs 46–49 explain how the broader approach to best value links to the introduction of the well-being power.
12. It is obviously not possible at this stage to envisage every way in which authorities might choose to exercise the power. A power that encourages innovation has an inherent potential to be used in new and unforeseen ways. There are a number of restrictions which Parliament has laid down over the years in legislation in order to limit the scope of specific functional powers granted to local authorities. However, the piecemeal accretion of restrictions, regulations and limitations is now placing unhelpful restraints on local authorities’ effectiveness. Also, over time, as modernised authorities begin to use the well-being power to develop innovative approaches to service delivery, it is likely that other restrictions will be identified as being unnecessarily obstructive.
13. The power in section 5 for the Secretary of State to amend, repeal or revoke restrictions that obstruct the use of the well-being power provides a means by which the Government could respond to such developing circumstances,

without needing to wait for primary legislation. In addition, section 16 of the Local Government Act 1999 enables the Secretary of State to modify or repeal legislation that prevents local authorities from achieving best value and to grant new powers to local authorities accordingly. The Government has also introduced local Public Service Agreements 8 to explore how any relaxation in the statutory or administrative framework and financial incentives can drive further improvements in service delivery. Taken together, the powers in the 1999 and 2000 Acts provide an opportunity to deal with unnecessary restraints on local authorities' effectiveness.

14. The way in which the section 2 powers will be exercised by a council will partly depend on its new constitution under Part II of the 2000 Act. Details of the arrangements to be adopted under Part II and what this means for the well-being power are set out in the Annex to this guidance; separate guidance on executive arrangements sets out the ways in which local authorities can choose to exercise their functions and the contributions of individual councillors, as well as how they should take into account the views of the wider community.

APPENDIX 2

CASE STUDY: SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AS DIRECTION OR DISTRACTION - FORUM FOR THE FUTURE INTEGRATION FRAMEWORK

Forum for the Future is one of the leading UK sustainable development charities. It works through partnerships with 160 different local authority, regional government, central government, business and higher education to develop sustainable development solutions. The mission is to accelerate the building of a sustainable way of life, taking a positive, solutions-orientated approach.

As easy as D, C, D (Direction, Content, Delivery)

Forum is developing an integration framework for organisations based on the organisation's own objectives expressed in such a way as to encourage long term thinking (direction), consideration of economic, social and environmental issues (content), and a commitment to integrated action (delivery). Policies or activity can be assessed and monitored with relevant high-level indicators. The basic framework is illustrated below.

Integration Assessment Framework		Strategy, Policy, Project or Decision being Assessed	Example of Integration Assessment Framework Monitoring
<i>Key Stages</i>	<i>Example Key Criteria</i>	<i>Assessment Score</i>	<i>High Level Outcome Indicators</i>
Direction	1. What are the long-term implications?		Evidence of consideration of future generations
Content	2. What are the economic implications?		Increased employment

	3. What are the environment implications?		Improved environment
	4. What are the social implications?		Improved social cohesion
Delivery	5. How is it going to deliver 1-4 together		Evidence of improved effectiveness and efficiency of service delivery

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Using this framework encourages organisations to consider sustainable development as the only direction for the organisation and the only means of delivering the organisations objectives, rather than as a distraction of a bolt-on appraisal. It also has the benefit of using the language and objectives familiar to those in the organisation and adapting or adding to them in a framework that will help the organisation and promote sustainable development.

The framework has been guided by the following principles. The framework should:

- Be simple and easy to use
- Add value to existing assessment processes
- Be developed, owned and used by the organisation and key stakeholders
- Encourage long term planning (direction), consideration of economic, social and environmental issues (content), and new processes for bringing all this together (delivery).

The Integration Framework Product

The product must be simple and easy to use, provide a common agenda or vision owned and used by everyone within the organisation and ideally other key stakeholders. Often it is contained on a single side of A4 with 7 to 10 objectives, criteria or questions that have been agreed on by key stakeholders.

Integration does not guarantee improved outputs and outcomes. For this to happen a degree of long term planning (direction), consideration of economic, social and environmental issues (content), and new processes for bringing all this together

(delivery) need to be present in any framework used to assist integration. Therefore the 7 to 10 criteria must reflect elements of direction, content and delivery.

Often the framework uses the existing organisation mission or vision as the starting point for developing the criteria. If appropriate, the framework criteria can also be tested to ensure it resonates with the public and other relevant external stakeholders. The product can also be linked to 7- 10 simple high-level outcome indicators that resonates with the public in terms of quality of life.

Everyone within the organisation will be able to use the simple A4 framework with key assessment criteria. For those involved in more detailed assessments, the product can be further developed by providing a second more detailed tier of criteria linked to the key 7-10 criteria and outcome indicators. This is to support the more detailed use of the framework and the linking to existing assessment processes. The second tier of criteria will always be supplementary support for the framework to be used by those in more detailed evaluations and must never become part of the initial A4 framework since it would then no longer be simple and easy to use.

The Integration Framework Process

The framework must go through a process of development with stakeholders to develop the different key criteria and any supporting text required to explain each key criterion. This process is initially internal and eventually includes external stakeholders who can also use the framework if relevant (for example, for informing the objectives for setting up a Local Strategic Partnership or partnership area based initiative, or a vision for London for a diverse range of organisations).

Once the 7-10 key criteria are established, appropriate high-level outcome indicators can be identified. The supporting second tier of criteria and indicators is developed by specialists involved in existing detailed assessment processes.

The use of the product should empower everyone to think and innovate about integration. It should help to ‘mainstream’ the job of integration within the organisation. The product should be able to be used with a range of policies, projects and decisions. Its ongoing use should generate focused debate and solutions and identify legitimate tensions that require political decisions.

Finally the use of the integration product should not be onerous and should complement other existing detailed appraisals systems and indicator sets in

identifying the scope and scale of changes required, overall recommended actions, and duplication or gaps in monitoring.

An Exemplar

An early draft framework, being developed with the Greater London Authority and tested on recent Transport and Economic strategies, provides one example of the application of the framework:

GLA Integration Assessment Framework		GLA Strategy, Policy, Project or Decision being Assessed	Integration Assessment Framework Monitoring
<i>Key Stages</i>	<i>Key Criteria</i>	<i>Assessment Score</i>	<i>High Level Outcome Indicators</i>
Direction	1. To develop London as an exemplary sustainable world city		
Content	2. A prosperous city		
	3. A city for people		
	4. An accessible city		
	5. A fair city		
	6. A green city		
Delivery	7. Have potential conflicts, dependencies, and timescales been identified?		
	8. How will it be achieved through influence of ideas, corporate powers, internal resources, and leverage?		

	9. Will the direction and content (1-6) be delivered together?		
	10. Does it reflect the Mayor's style of governance?		

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Experience to date

Experience to date suggests that the benefits of using an integration framework are that it:

- Focuses diverse activities on to the delivery of high level visions, objectives and outcome indicators
- Realises potential synergies between apparently diverse activities
- Helps empower everyone to think and innovate about integration and mainstream the job of integration within the organisation.
- Generates focused debate and creative solutions
- Identifies legitimate tensions that require political decisions.
- Provides a framework within which the results of other existing detailed assessment processes can be mapped to identify the scope and scale of changes required, overall recommended actions, and duplication or gaps in monitoring.

For More Information

For more information see www.forumforthefuture.org.uk or contact Dr Simon Slater at s.slater@forumforthefuture.org.uk

NOTES

¹ Case Study Of The Governance For Sustainable Development In The United Kingdom: Institutional Aspects Of Sustainable Development: James Medhurst, Ecotec Research and Consulting Limited, 2000, for OECD.

² The eight English regions are: North West, North East, Yorkshire & Humber, West Midlands. East Midlands, South West, South East and Eastern.

³ See chapter 4, Institutions and Decision Making in, Sustainable Development: Critical Issues, OECD, 2001.

⁴ There is a strong interest in using cost benefit analysis for major policy.

⁵ Planning Policy Guidance Note 11 (PPG11).

⁶ H.M Treasury published its guidance "Appraisal and Evaluation in Central Government" (referred to as the Green Book) in 1997. The purpose of the guidance is to "...help government departments and agencies appraise and evaluate their activities effectively." It updates and extends the 1991 edition. The Green Book states that "Appraisal is essential to good decision making. Good appraisal calls for flexibility and imagination. It is not a ritual in which rigid rules are applied to the letter." Appraisal is defined as the analysis of the costs and benefits which underlie a policy, programme or project decision. The guidance notes that a wide range of factors need to be assessed. However, it recognises that an appraisal can never do more than inform a decision.

⁷ Government Office for the West Midlands Annual Report gives an overview of GOWM's work during the last year, sets out key achievements and introduces new objectives. This includes reporting progress on sustainability in the region. The report states that a priority for 2000 was to embed the sustainability concept into mainstream policy work in the region.