Sustainability Committee

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Inquiry into mainstreaming sustainability into Ministerial portfolios

by Andrew Davies, Minister for Finance and Public Service Delivery

Introduction

1. This paper sets out examples of how sustainability is shaping the work across my portfolio. Sustainable Development (SD) is one of the Welsh Assembly Government's key principles and this is reflected in the way my departments conduct their business. Our approach to public services is underpinned by the core Sustainable Development principles of Involvement and Integration, detailed in One Wales - One Planet, the revised SD Scheme currently being consulted upon.

Value Wales

2. Value Wales, through its sustainable procurement programme, is embedding sustainable development principles into the procurement processes of all public sector organisations within Wales. Value Wales is also responsible for internal procurement within the Welsh Assembly Government, which we intend will be an exemplar of good practice.

3. The Sustainable Procurement Assessment Framework (SPAF) was developed in 2005 in conjunction with Forum for the Future. This tool enables public sector organisations to benchmark their performance on sustainable procurement and compile action plans for improvement. The SPAF is increasingly being used by Public Sector organisations and the Welsh Assembly Government is aiming to achieve the highest level attainable (5) by 2010. To achieve this level, we will have to demonstrate that we are building sustainability into all parts of the procurement process - from specification design, to supplier selection, to contract award, and to contract management.

4. The Sustainable Risk Assessment template (SRA) was developed in 2007 in conjunction with the Environment Agency. This tool requires procurers to consider the social, economic and environmental impacts in specification design, supplier selection, contract award and contract management. The SRA is being increasingly used across the public sector, and is routinely used by the Welsh Assembly Government for all competitively tendered contracts over £25,000.

5. Value Wales promotes the use of these tools through all its policies and procedures, which can be found on the Procurement Route Planner on the buy4wales web site. Value Wales also promotes sustainability in its short course training programme and the "Making it Happen" Sustainable Procurement training.

The Wales Spatial Plan

6. The Wales Spatial Plan Update 2008 was adopted by the National Assembly of Wales last July. This followed an active consultation to reach all stakeholders in Wales, including young people. It has undergone a rigorous Sustainability Appraisal, incorporating the Strategic Environmental Assessment of the plan.

7. The Spatial Plan aims to deliver sustainable development through its six Spatial Plan Area Strategies, covering the whole of Wales. It has close links with One Wales - One Planet, the updated Sustainable Development Scheme. The Spatial Plan embodies the core SD principles of Involvement and Integration and the strong link with the Spatial Plan's approach is reflected in the SD Scheme's supporting principle 'Reflecting Distinctiveness'.

8. At the Spatial Plan's core is the development of sustainable visions and delivery frameworks for each area of Wales in a way designed to integrate the relevant activities of all sectors. The SD Scheme recognises this crucial role of the Spatial Plan area groups with their broad cross-sectoral representation. It is therefore important to ensure that the area work reflects social, economic and environmental considerations by enabling the genuine involvement of all sectors. We have taken measures to ensure that sectors that have found it difficult to contribute are heard. This has involved offering additional formats of engagement (such as business panels) or funding co-ordinators (in relation to the voluntary sector and equality matters).

9. The Spatial Plan Area groups have an important role in taking forward the Environment Strategy and its Action Plans. They are translating the Environment Strategy into specific priorities for each Spatial Plan area, setting out how they will be delivered and monitoring progress. The development of the concept of a networked environment region in South East Wales illustrates this. The intention is to improve and connect the environmental infrastructure of the city-region as a foundation for social and economic development. It will do this by connecting habitats, enabling wildlife to move around and by making the landscape more accessible for people. In this way, it can help both society and wildlife to adapt to climate change, improving the quality of life, promoting healthier lifestyles, increasing tourism, and enhancing the image of the area.

10. Key action 4 of the consultation SD scheme sets out the Spatial Plan's commitment to develop eco-footprint reduction strategies and how each of the six Spatial Plan areas can move towards becoming a low carbon region. This work has already begun, led by the Sustainable Development Commission.

Public Sector Management Wales (PSMW)

11.   Working in partnership with the Department for the Environment, Sustainability and Housing, PSMW has delivered a suite of leadership programmes focusing on Wales' sustainability challenges. These have targeted senior leaders for a programme facilitated by Jonathon Porritt, as well as cohorts of function specific managers and leaders to help them examine sustainability issues within their particular fields. Following the consultation period for One Wales - One Planet, PSMW will develop a further package of learning programmes continuing this emphasis.

12.   Partly in response to the economic downturn as well as to our sustainability priorities, PSMW is encouraging providers to promote on-site learning and to reduce dependence on expertise that is geographically distant and accompanying travel.

13.   PSMW is reducing its own environmental impact by reducing its dependence on printed material for information dissemination and emphasising electronic methods of communication. For example, in 2009, the existing 200 page Directory of Leadership & Management Development for the Welsh Public Service will be replaced by a web-resident searchable database which will improve customer service as well as reducing paper consumption. Where travel to learning events is essential, PSMW are encouraging the use of Car sharing through the Car-Share Wales web site.

Local Service Boards

14.   Local Service Boards (LSBs) are a relatively new leadership initiative to help solve difficult public service problems in Local Authority areas. There are six well established pilot LSBs, and we are now actively developing this work across Wales. Two of the pilot areas have chosen to focus on sustainable development issues. These are Gwynedd LSB's work on reducing the carbon footprint of public services, and a broader based sustainable development project in Carmarthenshire. Several other LSBs are currently considering sustainable development projects.

15.   All LSBs are developing projects which take forward sustainable development in its broader sense:

Tackling strategic challenges, such as: promoting health and wellbeing, affordable housing, reducing poverty, tackling economic inactivity and tackling climate change, which require co-production with citizens to achieve better, more sustainable outcomes

Improving operational delivery of complex cross-sector projects e.g. integrating health, social care and other services to support people with long term care needs, through multidisciplinary teams and sustainable resource pooling

Enabling change for example by creating systems for sharing information at the area or individual level to enable more integrated planning, sustainable delivery, and effective citizen engagement

16.   The LSB projects have been identified through the local strategic planning processes. A key element is the community strategy as the overarching vision for the area, with sustainable development as a key principle. We anticipate that LSBs will have an important leadership responsibility for community strategies.

Citizens First Wales

17.   Only by listening to what citizens say will we and our partners be able to provide services that are responsive to the social and environmental wellbeing of the citizens of Wales. Research such as the Living in Wales survey allows us to explore citizens' attitudes and opinions which is crucial if we are to continue to improve and shape modern services that deliver for Wales. Citizens First Wales will use the results of the 2007 and 2008 Living in Wales surveys to improve access and modernise delivery whilst developing a shared survey of citizens' views to gain results at national, regional and local level.

18.   Citizens First Wales are undertaking a series of studies to gather information on how citizens access public services in Wales in order to shape future development and delivery. We will use this information and work with public service colleagues, the Digital Inclusion Unit and other Welsh Assembly Government Departments to help ensure that citizens get the services they require through the most appropriate access channel for them. Modern services and self service delivery (mobile phones and internet) can be inexpensive, convenient and environmentally friendly.

Financial Planning

19.   The Strategic Capital Investment Framework (SCIF) agenda represents a step-change in the way we plan and deliver major capital investment projects. Recognising the importance of sustainability and the environment has been embedded into the SCIF decision making process.

20.   There are a number of high profile projects in the first tranche, announced in December 08, that will have a very positive impact on taking forward the sustainability and environmental agenda, particularly in terms of meeting our carbon emission targets.

21. In the Heads of the Valleys, SCIF is funding the creation of a Low Carbon Region which involves supporting the development, manufacture, supply and installation of low carbon technologies and energy reduction measures. SCIF is also funding a building programme to provide better heat insulation in households across Wales in order to reduce energy consumption and mitigate the impact of fuel poverty.

22. SCIF is also supporting

modal shift in public transport through a number of infrastructure schemes aimed at speeding up train journey times between north and south Wales, and west and east Wales.

better waste management through sponsoring the roll-out of anaerobic food digestion plants across Wales to reduce our dependency on landfill.

in coastal areas, the acceleration of the Environment Agency's flood defence programme to help protect properties and infrastructure at risk of tidal incursion.

23. The budget setting process involves aligning the strategic priorities of the Welsh Assembly Government with the allocation of its financial resources. Clearly, sustainability and the environment are important priorities for the Welsh Assembly Government and I have made a number of additional financial allocations in the 2009/10 to reflect these priorities. Additional funding has been provided for public transport improvements, the Sustainable Travel Towns initiative, flood risk management and promoting fuel efficiency.

Conclusion

24. This note sets out key examples of how my departments are translating our Sustainable Development principles into specific actions and are embedding them into their processes. The Public Service Improvement Fund, can also provide financial support for SD related projects. Our consultation document on the Inspection, Audit and Regulation of Public Services in Wales is relevant to the way in which sustainability principles will be promoted across key public services for the future. The Public Services Delivery Committee which I chair will take reports on progress through the lens of the Spatial Plan Areas. I recognise that mainstreaming sustainability is central to improving public services in Wales, now and for the way ahead.

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