

Brighton & Hove City Council

For general release

Meeting: Sustainability Commission

Date: 19 January 2005

Report of: Head of Sustainability & Environmental Policy

Subject: Findings of a survey of local authorities' approaches to sustainable development

Ward(s) affected: All

1. Purpose of the report

- 1.1 To inform members of the findings of the survey and their relevance to Brighton & Hove City Council.

2. Recommendations

That the sustainability commission:

- 2.1 Notes the survey's findings.
- 2.2 Discusses what policy implications they may have for the City Council's approach to sustainable development.

3. Background

- 3.1 English local authorities (LA's) were surveyed by MORI last spring to explore their approaches to sustainable development. The survey was on behalf of the Improvement & Development Agency (IdeA) and the Local Government Association (LGA).
- 3.2 There were 269 responses from the 388 authorities, representing a high response rate of nearly 70 per cent. Survey questionnaires

were sent to chief executives with an option to pass them on to the most relevant member of staff.

- 3.3 A report of the survey findings was published in December 2004 and a summary is available at:
<http://www.lga.gov.uk/Documents/Publication/SustainableFuturesummary.pdf>

4. How local authorities view sustainable development

- 4.1 Almost 90 per cent of LA's say that sustainable development (SD) is important to the work of their authority, with nearly a third regarding it as "very important". But four in five (83%) agree that more progress needs to be made.
- 4.2 The report says "A concerning finding is that over a third of respondents (36%) feel that sustainable development is viewed as being too complex by their authority". 27% also felt that their authority's view is that it can be ignored because it is non-statutory.
- 4.3 But authorities are positive about their commitment to SD: 63% feel more committed now than in 2000, and still more think they will be even more committed in future.

5. Integration of sustainable development into authority work

- 5.1 Evaluating a range of aspects of local authority work, authorities perceive waste management as the area in which SD is the most integrated, with over four in five feeling it is, and 27 per cent feeling it is very well integrated.
- 5.2 Three quarters regard both nature conservation and biodiversity and land use planning as areas that take account of sustainability and two thirds (67%) perceive the Community Strategy to incorporate SD. Twice as many respondents (31% cent vs 62%) who think the community strategy does *not* integrate SD think integration is improving.
- 5.3 Conversely, LA's are more likely to feel the following are areas where sustainability is not well integrated: procurement (64%), economic development (56%), tackling crime and disorder (54%) and property services (54%). The lowest levels of integration were felt to be in education (19 per cent) and social care and health (13 per cent).

- 5.4 Findings in relation to LA's Waste Resources Action Programme (WRAP) were generally very positive except for the market share of recycled materials in procurement, which was said to be very low. Total spend and recycled spend are not key performance indicators and in many cases LA's found providing this information difficult and time consuming. "Many authorities are not switched on to the issue and lack the information systems, personnel resources and political will to specify and monitor the procurement of recycled materials," says the report.
- 5.5 It was widely felt that integration would best be encouraged by making sustainable development part of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment and part of national government priorities. 46% thought that priorities in their authority's Community Strategy would also encourage integration.
- 5.6 The main barrier to integration is thought to be competition from other services or priorities (75 per cent).
- 5.7 "Seven in 10 (68 per cent) also cite the lack of officer knowledge about how to integrate sustainable development and a lack of financial resources dedicated to this issue, illustrating the need for a top-down mandate on the issue and making it a 'top of the list' priority," says the report.

6. Ownership and monitoring

- 6.1 For a fifth of authorities, the Environment Director is the most senior member of staff with specified responsibility for integration of SD into council work. For one in 7, it is a Local Agenda 21 officer, with 9% citing their chief executive and 7% the head of corporate policy.
- 6.2 At the moment, authorities are equally likely to use Best Value Performance Plans or Indicators, corporate plans or scrutiny reports/committees to measure and report on the impact of SD within the council (all on 42%). A fifth use Environmental Management Systems such as EMAS or ISO 14001.
- 6.3 In terms of measuring the impact of SD within the community, authorities are most likely to use their Community Strategy (49%). Two in five also cite the local quality of life indicators developed by

the Audit Commission (40%) and local performance indicators (35%) as measurement tools.

7. Working with other organisations

- 7.1 The IdeA is perceived to be the most useful organisation in helping LA's to incorporate SD into their work, though about half report that they find their Local Strategic Partnership (55%) and environmental NGO's (49%) useful.
- 7.2 Opinion is often mixed – roughly the same proportions find the LGA, their Government Office, Regional Assembly, Forum for the Future and the Sustainable Development Commission useful and not useful, probably reflecting that authorities will just depend more heavily on some organisations than others, depending on their needs.
- 7.3 Regional Development Agencies (RDA's) are perceived to be the least useful (56%). Just a quarter find them effective in promoting SD.

COMMITTEE REPORT APPENDIX



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<p>Financial implications Changes to current policy will be included within future reports. Each policy change will be assessed for financial implication. Alasdair Ridley 07/01/05</p>
<p>Legal implications None. Hilary Woodward 07/01/05</p>

<p>Corporate/Citywide implications The approaches of other authorities to sustainability could have direct relevance to citywide delivery.</p>	<p>Risk assessment None identified.</p>
<p>Sustainability implications Policy changes could have significant implications for sustainability but these are not yet clear as this report is for noting and to promote discussion.</p>	<p>Equalities implications None identified.</p>
<p>Implications for the prevention of crime and disorder Cited as an area with which most authorities perceive weak integration of sustainable development, but no direct implications.</p>	

<p>Background papers 1. http://www.lga.gov.uk/Documents/Publication/SustainableFuturessummary.pdf</p>
<p>Contact Officer Thurstan Crockett, Head of Sustainability & Environmental Policy</p>