

Report to: Executive Board -

**SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT TASKFORCE**

<p><b>Report of:</b> Business Manager - Strategic Policy &amp; Research</p> <p><b>Report Author:</b> Sue Rees &amp; Jon Bilson , Strategic Policy &amp; Research, 01865 252131, srees@oxford.gov.uk</p> <p><b>Lead Member Responsible:</b> Environment Portfolio Holder</p> <p><b>Overview and Scrutiny Committee Responsibility:</b> Environment</p> <p><b>Key Decision:</b></p>	<p><b>WARDS AFFECTED</b></p> <p>ALL</p>
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**SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This report sets out a brief background to the concept of Sustainable Development, why it is important to Oxford and proposes mechanisms for integrating it into the work of the whole authority.

The report has staffing implications in that officers and members currently in post will be required to commit to the work of the Taskforce.

The Executive Board is ASKED to;

- confirm the formation of the Sustainable Development Taskforce
- approve in principle the terms of reference and working methods of the Taskforce
- agree the initial projects for the Taskforce

1. Fundamental to sustainable development are the wide ranging implications it has

for the “how” and “why” of policy making and the need to go beyond the “departmentalist” thinking . It opens up new possibilities to tackle a wide range of established problems such as environmental degradation, underemployment and a lack of democratic participation , and to achieve this it is critical that policy making on sustainable development breaks out of established policy making.

2. Sustainable Development provides a way of ensuring all the competing needs and aspirations of and for Oxford are weighted and balanced to make the best possible use of all resources. It give a “level playing field” to economic, environmental and social factors and demonstrates commitment to the best possible use of all resources (not just the financially cheapest option every time)

3. The main mechanism for achieving this will be the sustainability task force It’s key aim will be to achieve real change in the authority, at a corporate and individual level. It should be convened by Strategic Policy and research and draw in relevant staff for limited time periods on the grounds of their ability to influence decisions in the authority, their commitment to the principles of sustainable development, their willingness to achieve changes in ways of working, both corporately and personally and their professional expertise in a particular subject.

4. The principle aim of the Taskforce will be to achieve real change in the authority, at corporate and individual level. It will be convened by Strategic Policy and Research and draw in relevant staff for limited time periods on the grounds of their ability to influence decisions in the authority, their commitment to the principles of sustainable development, their willingness to achieve changes in ways of working, both corporately and personally and their professional expertise in a particular subject. It will work closely with colleagues from the County Council, other district councils and other local organisations to enhance the outcomes.

5. Provisional areas for the Sustainable Development Taskforce to address include projects to “put the Council’s own house in order” such as

- Premises - energy and water consumption - financial savings , energy usage, Distinct Auditors report on Environmental Stewardship, heat, light, water, Insulation, Town Hall, Community Centres and Leisure Centres - Temple Cowley Pool energy report.
- Council’s Purchasing policy - new tendering process, stationery contract, energy, water use.
- Waste Management - office paper, water consumption, heat, light

6 Further work could include and would lead to reports on Sustainability appraisals, Best Value reviews, Environmental Management System, Training and Personal development, Reports and Modernisation, sustainability indicators, Local Agenda 21 Strategy, Local Strategic Partnership and Community Strategy.

7. The attached “Sustainable Development Taskforce - position paper” provides further details on Sustainable Development, the role and purpose of the Taskforce and projects which the Sustainable Development Taskforce will deal with.



**THIS REPORT HAS BEEN SEEN AND APPROVED BY:**  
Cllr Clarkson - Environment Portfolio Holder

Background papers:  
Position paper on Sustainable Development Task force

**1. Introduction**

1.1 This paper sets out a brief background to the concept of Sustainable Development, why it is important to Oxford and proposes mechanisms for integrating it into the work of the whole authority.

**2. What is Sustainable Development ?**

2.1 Unfortunately there is no quick, easy answer to this - as with all wide-ranging and developing ideas there are as many definitions as people working on it but the one set out in *A better quality of life - A strategy for sustainable development* produced by the DETR in 1999 encapsulates most of them -

“...the simple idea of ensuring a better quality of life for everyone, now and for generations to come....”

and echoes the most widely accepted international definition

“..development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs...”(Our Common Future- The Brundtland Report)

The UK strategy for sustainable development also identifies four key objectives

- social progress which recognises the needs of everyone
- effective protection of the environment
- prudent use of natural resources
- maintenance of high and stable levels for economic growth and employment.

It is, therefore, frequently placed at the heart of the local government modernisation processes.

2.2 It is this wide ranging nature that makes it popular and important with many sectors - it's greatest strengths (and weaknesses) are the expectations that it can reconcile economic development with the need to conserve natural resources and meet social objectives. To achieve this it requires mechanisms and frameworks where the connections between welfare provisions, employment, environmental and resource protection and the quality of life can be explored, understood and developed.

2.3 This is often easier in areas where tangible links can be easily made such as renewable energy, recycling and local food production, these are all activities which the Council either delivers or facilitates. The challenge is to make the links and progresses in areas more traditionally associated with economic development such as large scale manufacturing, gravel extraction and road building.

2.4 Fundamental to sustainable development are the wide ranging implications it has for the “how” and “why” of policy making and the need to go beyond the “departmentalist” thinking . It opens up new possibilities to tackle a wide range of established problems such as environmental degradation, underemployment and a lack of democratic participation. To achieve this it is critical that policy making on sustainable development breaks out of established policy making.

### **3 Why should Oxford City Council do anything ?**

3.1 There are a number of compelling reasons for action, these include;

- Sustainable Development provides a way of ensuring all the competing needs and aspirations of and for Oxford are weighted and balanced to make the best possible use of all resources. It gives a “level playing field” to economic, environmental and social factors and demonstrates commitment to the best possible use of all resources.
- Environmental Policy - the Council formally adopted an Environmental Policy on 15 October 2001 which commits the authority to “...safeguarding the natural and built environment and improving the quality of life in Oxford, now and for future generations, through the principles of sustainable development....”
- Meeting the standards we require of others - for example all the current Council pre-tender questionnaires have questions about a potential suppliers environmental management. The answers to which influence the award of the tender. We should be able to demonstrate our own environmental performance to at least to the standard we require of suppliers.
- Central government guidance requires all Best Value Reviews and Recommendations to “.....give effect to the principles of sustainable development....”
- A Better Quality of Life in the South East - produced by South East Regional Assembly, the Government Office for the South East (GOSE) , South East England Development Agency (SEEDA) , Environment Agency and the National Health Service adapts the same themes as the national strategy
  1. Social progress which recognises the needs of everyone,
  2. Effective protection of the environment,
  3. Prudent use of natural resources,
  4. Maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment.These “.....set out a Vision for the Region and a series of objectives and indicators to guide and help in monitoring the quality of life for our Region....” and will probably impact on resources allocations made by GOSE, SEEDA etc.  
The Local Agenda 21 (LA21) strategy covers some of these areas but focuses more strongly on the processes involved and prioritises community engagement as a means of delivering some of the environmental agenda.

### **4 How should Oxford City Council proceed?**

4.1 The authority has a reasonable track record in developing various environmental and sustainability initiatives. However, all too often these have been poorly co-ordinated across the authority without any strategic overview or interaction between projects to ensure the correct initiatives are being pursued in the best manner. The new structures and processes now being developed within the authority can be harnessed to ensure that sustainable development is at the heart of the Council’s decision making process and so assist with the effective realisation of the Councils strategic priorities in a structured and co-ordinated manner.  
A programme of targeted, focused, time limited activities will yield measurable and promotable results and long-term benefits and saving for the authority .

4.2 The main mechanism for achieving this will be the **sustainability task force**.

One of the principle aims of the task force will be to achieve real change in the authority, at a corporate and individual level. It will be convened and facilitated by Strategic Policy and Research and draw in relevant staff for limited time periods on the grounds of their ability to influence decisions in the authority, their commitment to the principles of sustainable development, their willingness to achieve changes in ways of working, both corporately and personally and their professional expertise in a particular subject.

4.3 The detailed terms of reference of the group should reflect the need to challenge the authority's existing work practises, policies and strategies in all areas, services and functions. This will bring about the changes which will make them more sustainable. Sustainable development requires holistic and often complex, long-term solutions which are not always immediately realisable for major issues, however there are a number of short and medium term measures, which lead to demonstrable improvements in sustainability which should be possible to implement reasonably quickly.

4.4 Clear terms of reference have been developed. In principle the Taskforce will ensure that each piece of work the task force undertakes will be described in clear terms outlining the aims and objectives, reporting and accountability procedures, membership, time scales and resource implications. Members of the Task Force will attend meetings with limited substitution and carry out pieces of work to agreed deadlines. They will contribute their professional knowledge, expertise, data and information in the interests of the authority as a whole in a clear and co-operative manner. They will maintain the confidentiality of the meetings, the information provided and the views expressed, and not to quote or use these outside the group without the expressed consent of all concerned. In so doing, all members of the Task Force will be expected to respect the professional judgement of their colleagues and come to and take collective responsibility for shared solutions to identified problems in a consensual manner.

4.5 The Sustainable Development Task Force will be expected to be both strategic and visionary in its thinking and recommendations. Participants in the Task Force would need to agree to contribute for the benefit of the whole authority and city and not just their immediate colleagues or area of work.

## **5 Other possible approaches which the Task force will review and develop reports for the Executive as appropriate will include ;**

- Sustainability appraisals - this is a technique which has been in existence for some time and is in use in an increasing number of local authorities. It asks decision makers to appraise any project, policy or other initiative against a checklist of key sustainability issues. It is not a way of preventing activity taking place - rather it is a systematic tool to help improve any plan, proposal, project or service delivery to become as sustainable as possible and to aid the decision making process.
- Best Value reviews - the reviews currently in progress are using tailored sustainability appraisals, to inform the decision making process.

- Environmental Management System - the preliminary stages of both Environmental Management and Audit System (EMAS) and ISO 14001 require an audit of a unit's activities and the impacts these have on the environment in order to establish system to manage them. This information is similar to that which needs to be collected for Best Value reviews and so could be collected once and used for both.
- Training & Personal Development - the Environmental Policy also commits the authority to "...educate staff, members and those it works with about environmental issues, the effects of their actions on and their responsibilities to the wider environment" Currently LA21 and Sustainable Development are covered on the Induction Training for all staff by means of handouts. This could easily and cheaply be expanded into a basic introduction to the principles of sustainable development and environmental management for all new joiners which could also be made available to those already in post (and new and established Members Input into any new guidance on business planning could expand on this for managers.
- Reports and Modernisation - Recommendations and decisions accompanying reports may be entirely in line with the authorities environmental or sustainable development policies but may equally well conflict with them. These conflicts need to be resolved positively or the cumulative impacts of many what may be considered small negative impacts could move the council away from its policy aims. To address this many councils have introduced sustainability appraisals into their reporting procedures to ensure the general thrust of the sustainable development policy is maintained over time. The typical outcome of this is an environmental/sustainability implications statement (SIS) or paragraph within reports. However this approach runs the risk of becoming of becoming just another bureaucratic hurdle to be jumped or easily fall into the "lets just tick the box because its the easiest option" syndrome. Another potential limitation of this approach is that authors may use SIS to further justify their recommendations - including only the positive impacts and ignoring any negative ones however large. These barriers can be best addressed by making the SIS an integral part of the process of developing, appraising, improving and deciding on which the recommendations to take forward.; and by informed members who are willing to debate SIS's fully at meetings and send back those which do not stand up to scrutiny.
- Sustainability Indicators - these have two main purposes, to report on progress towards sustainability and to raise awareness and influence behaviour affecting sustainable development. A set of 26 general and 10 headline indicators were proposed in March 2001, based mainly on the then current vision and the LA21 strategy. These need to be reviewed and indicators selected which more closely match current sustainability priorities and where possible use existing performance management indicators.
- LA21 strategy - this provides a framework for linking social, economic and environmental issues, developing strong local networks and good processes for community involvement which could usefully inform the development of LSP's and the Community Strategy.
- Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and Community Strategy - Mechanisms need to be developed to ensure sustainable development principles are clearly identified as

playing an important role in the development of the LSP and the Community Strategy, which are required to improve the sustainable economic, social and environmental well being of the city.

## **6 Projects for the Task Force to deal with**

6.1 Provisional areas for the Sustainable Development Task Force to address include projects to “put the Councils own house in order” such as;

- Travel & transport - Staff Travel Plan, Oxford Transport Strategy
- Premises - energy & water consumption - financial savings, energy usage, District Auditors report on Environmental Stewardship, heat, light, water, insulation, Town Hall, Community Centres and Leisure Centres - Temple Cowley Pool energy report
- Council’s Purchasing policy - New tendering process, stationery contract, energy, water use
- Waste Management - office paper, water consumption, heat, light

6.3 Possible funding sources

Many of the task forces activities will be self-funding, other many require resources which the task force will report on separately as they arise.

6.3 Current projects which the task force will continue to input into - building on success.

### Engaging with the public

- LA 21 strategy - City & County
- Communications Strategy
- Community Strategy
- Waste/recycling
- Biodiversity Action Plans
- Local Plan

### Improving the physical environment and quality of life for residents, local business and other stakeholders

- Public Realm Strategy
- Planning
- West End sector redevelopment
- Environmental Management System in Environmental Health
- Councils for Climate Protection
- Local Plan
- Biodiversity Action Plans

*Supporting paper to Sustainable Development Taskforce report to Executive Board and Environment Overview and Scrutiny committee May 2002.*