



Belfast City Council.

Report to:	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.
Subject:	Sustainable Development Action Plan 2006 – 2009. Year 2 Annual progress report.
Date:	24 th October 2008.
Reporting Officer:	David Cartmill, Acting Head of Corporate Services Directorate. Ext. 6084.
Contact Officer:	Alastair Curran, Sustainable Development Manager. Ext. 3309.

Relevant Background Information.

In August 2006, Belfast City Council adopted a new 3 year Sustainable Development Action Plan (SDAP). The plan was designed to enable the Council to demonstrate leadership by addressing the priority action areas as described within the 2006 Sustainable Development Strategy for Northern Ireland.

Performance management of the Action Plan requires the provision of annual progress reports to the SP&R Committee. This paper summarises year two activities and seeks to bring emerging sustainable development issues to the Committee's attention. New issues relate predominantly to measures aimed at addressing the sources of climate change across the city. Local Government, particularly in large urban areas, is deemed to have a critical role in implementing practical remediation measures. Members have already identified challenges and opportunities associated with the climate change debate during the current corporate planning process.

In addition, the Committee is reminded that the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister has introduced a statutory obligation upon local authorities to exercise their functions in the way "best calculated to contribute towards the achievement of sustainable development". This duty commenced in April 2007 and requires local authorities to integrate sustainability considerations within their decision making processes.

The Council's Sustainable Development Action Plan comprises seven priority work areas;

- Improving organisation efficiency via the introduction of environmental management systems.
- Reducing our emissions of greenhouse gases via energy conservation activities.
- Encouraging our suppliers to adopt more sustainable business practices through the incorporation of environmental criteria in the Council's procurement decisions.
- Providing 'green' transport opportunities for staff in order to reduce reliance upon the private car and to reduce emissions from our own vehicle fleet.
- Introducing measures to protect and enhance Belfast's environment and natural resources.
- Reducing our waste by maximising recycling and reuse levels.
- Making our staff and the public more aware of sustainability issues through the provision of briefings, publications and by benchmarking our environmental stewardship activities against other private and public sector bodies.

Key Issues - Year Two Progress.

1. Introduction of an environmental management system (EMS).

The Council has chosen to introduce BS8555:2003, which provides for the phased introduction of an environmental management system. Environmental co-ordinators, located throughout Departments or Services, have been working towards completing phase 3 of the 6 phase process, which requires the development of targeted action plans, designed to mitigate the adverse environmental impacts associated with service delivery. This means has been selected in recognition of the fact that not all services have a large impact on the environment. Areas of greatest significance, for example, Fleet Management and Procurement Units continue to maintain ISO14001 accreditation, deemed the most rigorous EMS. Other sections of the Council such as the Waste Management Service are currently working towards achieving formal accreditation.

Key Issues - Year Two Progress Continued.

2. Energy Conservation.

This measure has attracted additional significance given escalating energy costs for the Council. A new Energy Conservation Strategy, designed to significantly reduce both the Council's energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions, is included within the overall SDAP. The Council's Energy Conservation Manager continues to work closely with building managers to ensure that appropriate conservation measures are practiced within our highest energy consuming premises. Additionally, a strategic assessment of Renewable Energy Provision for Belfast City Council has been completed in collaboration with the Carbon Trust. One recommendation completed during the year is the biomass and solar energy installation at the newly refitted Stables Complex in Sir Thomas and Lady Dixon Park. The Council has also become a partner in the Energy Savings Trust (EST) Key Account Management Programme. The EST assessment of Council activities, completed in March 2008, describes a range of actions the Council could take to tackle climate change through the introduction of sustainable energy management practices. The Council's Energy Conservation and Sustainable Development Managers are currently identifying actions which the Council will be pursuing, supported by EST funding. The Council continues to purchase green electricity with some 70% of our load currently generated from renewable sources.

3. Green Procurement.

Activities within this section of the action plan are designed to mainstream the Council's green procurement policy, which requires Departments to consider the adverse environmental impacts as a component of the tender evaluation processes. Over the past 12 months, out of 62 tenders awarded, 49 companies have indicated that they are actively pursuing environmental considerations as part of the assessment process. In addition, the Procurement Unit continues to heighten awareness of the 'green' purchasing requirements by providing appropriate training to Business Support Managers.

4. Green Transport.

The Greener Vehicle Group continues to promote the Council's car share and bike to work schemes amongst other transport initiatives. Both schemes provide staff with the opportunity to choose sustainable forms of transport, thereby reducing road congestion and air pollution. The Council's bike to work scheme membership continues to grow with 181 staff having joined the scheme to date. A short user survey has revealed high levels of satisfaction with the scheme. Sixty-five percent of participants now routinely commute by cycle and 64% indicated that cycling had shortened their commuting time. Publicity surrounding the scheme has resulted in a range of other employers across the city introducing the scheme including the Belfast Health Trust and Translink. The Greener Vehicle Group is also currently facilitating a review and update the Council's Transport Policy. It is anticipated that the new policy, which will establish the Council's vision of transportation for the City until 2015, will be completed in early 2009. Findings from this exercise will be used to progress a project initiated by the Council, involving a sample of major employers in the city, to encourage greater use of public transport.

5. Waste Management.

The principal aim of the 'In House' Waste Plan is to reduce the Council's waste to 90% of 2006 levels by 2012. A detailed waste characterisation study has been completed to establish baseline waste levels for Council properties and provision of recycling facilities has been extended to over 90 Council premises with collections undertaken by Cleansing Services. Staff have been provided with personal recycling bins and external recycling bins are 'chipped' thereby allowing building recycling levels to be accurately monitored. The provision of recycling services is to be further expanded to enable the Council to fulfil its obligations under the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Regulations and the Batteries Directive. A further waste characterisation survey is scheduled during 2009 to ensure waste levels are declining in line with plan objectives.

6. Natural Resource Protection and Environmental Enhancement.

Year 1 of the 3-year Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) has been completed resulting in six specific action plans for conserving priority species and habitats. Biodiversity considerations are also being routinely incorporated into parks' management decisions. Awareness of biodiversity issues is being addressed via the delivery of a training programme for Council staff and others on topics such as invasive species. A series of promotional events has also been co-ordinated including the Wild Belfast programme and the Biodiversity and the Built Environment public lectures. These activities have been supplemented by the development of partnerships to deliver biodiversity projects locally such as wetland creation at Sir Thomas and Lady Dixon Park, in partnership with Rivers Agency and the Lagan Valley Regional Park.

Key Issues - Year Two Progress Continued.

7. Natural Resource Protection and Environmental Enhancement (contd).

The Council has been successful in securing funds for biodiversity projects such as a 'Breathing Places' grant for woodland management and site improvements at Hazelwood Local Nature Reserve. We continue to provide advice on biodiversity-related issues to staff and outside organisations and maintain representation on the N.I. Biodiversity Group and a range of external organisations, management groups and funding bodies. One major action within the LBAP - the establishment of a detailed and up to date register of biodiversity in Belfast through surveys and research - has not yet been completed due to limited resources.

8. Sustainable Development Communication.

The Council's sustainable development initiatives continue to be routinely publicised via 'City Matters', BelNet, Core Brief and 'Intercom' including a regular 'Going Green' column in the latter publication. The Sustainable Development Steering Group continues to provide a sustainability briefing for new employees, delivered as part of the staff induction process. The Council is represented and recognised as contributing significantly to the Belfast Fairtrade Committee through specialist advice provided, including assistance with communications.

In demonstrating external validation of its environmental management activities, Council performance is benchmarked against the top 200 Northern Ireland companies, 26 local authorities, Health Trusts and the Education Sector via participation in the annual Arena Network Environmental Management Survey. This is one of the key performance measures for the Council SDAP. Despite the introduction of a much more rigorous survey in 2008, Belfast City Council has maintained its position within the highest performing sector. It is the only Council to have achieved this level of performance consistently over the past three years.

Future Sustainable Development Steering Group Activities.

The current SDAP and Energy Conservation Strategy are scheduled to be completed during 2009. One of the principal future priorities for the Group will be the development of a new three year work programme. The Sustainable Development Steering Group has already proposed a number of actions within the 'Better care for Belfast's environment' section of the 2008-2011 Corporate Plan including:-

- (i) Implementing the Local Biodiversity Action Plan for Belfast.
- (ii) Developing and implementing a sustainable transport strategy for the Council.
- (iii) Participating in the adoption of a Northern Ireland Local Government declaration on climate change and developing a prioritised action plan to address the causes and consequences of climate change within Belfast.

The Sustainable Development Steering Group has identified that many of these actions will have to be delivered in collaboration with outside bodies and local communities thereby enabling the Group to further extend the Council's civic and political leadership.

Resource Implications.

Financial

Minimal - The majority of costs associated with the delivery of SDAP activities are contained within various departmental estimates.

Human Resources

None - It is anticipated that remaining activities in the 2006-09 plan will be undertaken utilising existing staff resources across a number of Council departments.

Asset and Other Implications

To be established - With specific regard to improving the Council's energy conservation and minimising emissions of greenhouse gases, investment will be required as part of the Council buildings maintenance programme to ensure highest levels of efficiency within the Council estate.

Recommendations.

The Committee is invited to note the progress achieved during year two of the Council's Sustainable Development Action Plan and to note proposals to address emerging city-wide sustainable development issues, as reflected in the Council's current corporate planning process.

Key to Abbreviations.

SDAP – Sustainable Development Action Plan; EMS – Environmental Management System;
EST – Energy Savings Trust; LBAP – Local Biodiversity Action Plan

Documents Attached.

None

This page has been intentionally left blank.