



Briefing:

Addressing sustainable development within CPA self-assessments and Best Value

It is essential that performance improvement frameworks, particularly CPA and Best Value, fully consider how to translate corporate commitments (from the community strategy and elsewhere) into sustainable practice. To do this they must consider how effectively the authority has:

- mainstreamed sustainable development
- addressed crunch issues
- achieved integrated solutions that promote economic, social and environmental objectives at the same time.

Mainstreaming, crunch issues and integration

Mainstreamed sustainable development – absorbed sustainable development into the authority’s policies and from there into practice (such as service delivery, planning and funding decisions), rather than being treated as a side issue that is distinct from the core work of the authority.

Addressed crunch issues – identified and confronted clear tensions between corporate objectives and how these are put into practice, and searched for innovative ways to reduce these conflicts. Addressing crunch issues often implies that things cannot continue ‘as usual’, perhaps with some minor mitigation measures. A radical change in approach may be necessary.

Integrated solutions – achieved solutions that support social, economic and environmental objectives *at the same time*, and minimise conflicts between them.

For example: Promoting community safety with measures that enhance the feeling of safety so that: a) residents feel more comfortable about visiting local facilities and letting their children play out or cycle to school; b) local economies are supported by encouraging more use of local facilities; c) people’s health and the environment are helped by encouraging everyone to walk and cycle and take more exercise. An example of poor integration would be community safety measures that encourage a ‘fortress’ mentality where people are advised to stay in their homes and their cars and to avoid unsafe areas, and local firms and services are encouraged to install intimidating security measures that deter or exclude access.

(For more information see the briefing “[Policy integration](#)” in the ‘Sustainable development defined’ Resources area.)

This briefing note suggests what a performance improvement framework might look like that addresses sustainable development. It draws on lessons from the surveys for WWF, IDeA and Audit Commission and the Pathfinders’ project described in the briefing “[Experience to date](#)”. The key components are summarised in the box below.

Components of a performance improvement framework that addresses sustainable development

CPA self-assessment

- Addresses sustainable development within each stage of the CPA self-assessment:
- setting the scene
- four headline questions (key lines of enquiry)
- action plan.
- Identifies strengths and weaknesses in the way that the authority promotes sustainable development.
- Recommends (if necessary) improvements in sustainable development management and performance.

Best Value performance plan

- Reports how the authority's corporate objectives support sustainable development.
- Reports on sustainable development performance strengths and weaknesses, derived from CPA self-assessment and corporate assessment or other reviews (such as Best Value, scrutiny, peer or reviews).
- Details planned improvements in sustainable development management and performance arising from CPA or other reviews.
- Reports on progress against planned improvements in sustainable development management and performance.
- Presents trends in quality of life/sustainable development indicators with discussion of whether these reveal sustainable or unsustainable trends.

Best Value reviews

- Addresses sustainable development in all best value reviews:
- considers sustainable development throughout the review process
- provides support to Review Teams on sustainable development.

Sustainable Development reviews (not essential, but may be useful if a more detailed review of how sustainable development is promoted within the authority is thought necessary.)

- Cross-cutting reviews.
- Consider outcomes as well as process.
- Focused and manageable.

This note may be divided into four separate briefings on:

- 1 Addressing sustainable development in CPA self-assessments.
- 2 Addressing sustainable development in all Best Value reviews
- 3 Reporting on sustainable development in Best Value performance plans
- 4 Sustainable development reviews.

Addressing sustainable development in CPA self-assessments

There are three components of Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) that investigate corporate and cross-cutting performance:

- the peer challenge
- the self-assessment
- the corporate assessment

These are the most valuable elements for assessing an authority's overall effectiveness in promoting sustainable development. Self-assessment is the responsibility of the local authority. This note therefore suggests how local authorities might address sustainable development within the self-assessment, but the methodology is equally applicable to the peer challenge and corporate assessment.

The Audit Commission's guidance¹ on district council self-assessment notes that "the self-assessment approach seeks to:

- Encourage councils to identify areas where they perform well and those in need of improvement if they are to make a real difference to their communities and deliver service improvement."

A core duty of all local authorities is to promote sustainable development, and usually this is expressed within the council's corporate objectives and the community strategy. The self-assessment should therefore assess the effectiveness with which the authority promotes sustainable development. To do so, thought must be given not only to how councils "make a real difference to their [current] communities," but also how they contribute to the lives of global communities and future generations.

The tables below recommend an approach that is based on the three stages of self-assessment described in the Audit Commission's guidance, namely:

- setting the scene
- corporate assessment
- action planning.

The tables also refers to the Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE) recommended by the Audit Commission.

¹ *Self-assessment Guidance for District Councils*, Version F1.1 Audit Commission, April 2003.

Setting the scene

Audit Commission advice on what to include	What to include on sustainable development
Contextual information on the locality.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality of life indicators (provided by the Audit Commission) and any other community strategy and sustainable development indicators. • Commentary on the above regarding: which aspects of objectives are progressing well and which are not; thoughts on why some elements are not progressing well, ie. what are the contributory factors?

Corporate assessment

Headline questions and KLOE recommended by the Audit Commission	What to consider on sustainable development
<p>What is the council trying to achieve?</p> <p>Ambitions:</p> <p>1.1 Does the council have specific longer-term ambitions for the area?</p> <p>1.2 How realistic and robust are the council's ambitions?</p> <p>Prioritisation:</p> <p>2.1 Has the council made clear what its priorities for improvement are?</p> <p>2.2 Is there a clear basis for these priorities?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do the council's corporate objectives reflect the community strategy? • Do the community strategy and council's corporate objectives promote sustainable development? In other words: • Do they include a commitment to promote sustainable development? • Are they expressed in sustainable terms, such as <i>promoting health</i> rather than <i>increasing health services</i>. • Do they draw on local community and stakeholder priorities as well as national and global objectives. • Do they encompass key sustainable development objectives, including impact on future generations and global communities? (<i>See general sustainable development objectives in the briefing "What is sustainable development?" in the 'Sustainable development defined' Resources area</i>) • Do they set targets to reverse unsustainable trends? • Do the council's priorities aim to reverse unsustainable trends (based on information from trends in quality of life/sustainable development indicators)?
<p>How has the council set about delivering its priorities for improvement?</p> <p>Capacity:</p> <p>4.1 Does the council have the capacity and skills that it needs to achieve change?</p> <p>4.2 Are officers and members clear about what they are responsible</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the council have sufficient capacity and skills in sustainable development, and at a sufficiently senior level, in order to be able to promote sustainable development effectively? • Are officers and members clear that they are responsible for promoting sustainable development? • Do effective mechanisms exist to: • mainstream sustainable development into council policies

<p>accountable for?</p> <p>Performance management:</p> <p>5.1 Do members and managers have the right mechanisms and information to enable them to both measure and manage performance effectively?</p> <p>5.2 Do staff know what is expected of them and do managers know if they are achieving it?</p>	<p>and practice?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify and address crunch issues where there are significant tensions between corporate objectives? • achieve integrated solutions that promote economic, social and environmental objectives at the same time? • monitor how well the council is effectively promoting sustainable development through its policies and practice? • Do staff understand the specifics of what is needed to promote sustainable development in their own jobs? • Are managers aware if staff are effectively promoting sustainable development in their jobs?
<p>What improvements has the council achieved/not achieved to date?</p> <p>Achievement in quality of service:</p> <p>6.1 What level of quality is the council currently achieving in its service delivery?</p> <p>Achievement of improvement:</p> <p>7.1 / 7.2 What is improving and not improving in services and in cross-cutting areas?</p> <p>7.3 Are these improvements in line with priorities?</p> <p>7.5 How much progress has the council made?</p> <p>Investment:</p> <p>8.1 Is the council putting the right building blocks in place which will enable future improvements in services and cross-cutting issues?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the council achieving integrated sustainable services that promote social, economic and environmental objectives at the same time, and that do not significantly conflict with any community strategy, corporate or other sustainable development objectives? • Is progress being made in achieving community strategy/corporate targets and turning around unsustainable trends? • Is the progress sufficient to achieve targets and reverse unsustainable trends in the foreseeable future? • Is the council investing adequate time and resources in the corporate mechanisms and service improvements that are necessary to achieve targets and reverse poor sustainable development performance?
<p>In light of what the council has learnt to date, what does it plan to do next?</p> <p>Learning:</p> <p>9.1 How self-aware is the council about what it has done well and the problems that it still faces?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the council understand how effectively it is promoting sustainable development, and what are its key strengths and weaknesses?

Action planning

Audit Commission advice	What to include on sustainable development
<p>A high level summary action plan which describes the actions that the council is going to take over the next three years around its key priorities and the outcomes it is seeking to achieve.</p>	<p>Action that the council is planning to take to improve areas of weakness in its sustainable development performance. This might include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plans to improve: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • corporate mechanisms to assist the effective promotion of sustainable development across the council • priority sustainable development outcomes (that are currently showing adverse trends or trends that are insufficient to achieve sustainable outcomes) • the way the council addresses crunch issues where corporate objectives are in significant conflict • the capacity of staff and members to promote sustainable development • monitoring and reporting of the council's sustainable development performance and feeding this back into decision-making. • More detailed investigations into the council's sustainable development performance through dedicated sustainable development Best Value reviews (see below) or scrutiny reviews (see the 'New structures' Resources area).

Addressing sustainable development within Best Value reviews

Best Value reviews normally investigate only one slice of an authority's activities. As such they can not draw overall conclusions about the authority's effectiveness in promoting sustainable development. (This is the role of CPA or a dedicated sustainable development Best Value or Scrutiny review.) But reviews are an important occasion for taking a much more detailed look at how to improve the sustainable development performance of the activities under consideration. If this is not done the review could miss opportunities for improving sustainable development performance, and may recommend improvements that are contrary to sustainable development. A crucial task of the review will be to consider how well the activities under review are taking an integrated approach that promotes economic, social and environmental objectives at the same time.

This note suggests:

- 1 How to promote sustainable development throughout the review process:
 - promoting integrated solutions.
 - the baseline assessment
 - the four Cs
 - options appraisal
 - the improvement plan
- 2 What support to give to review teams.

Considering sustainable development throughout the review process

As explained in the briefing "[Experience to date](#)", review teams have typically considered sustainable development during the baseline assessment, but have forgotten to carry the conclusions from the baseline assessment through to the rest of the review process.

A review process that fully considers sustainable development will:

- 1 check that corporate objectives used for the review support sustainable development.
- 2 identify the *significant* effects and *crunch issues* for the activities under review early in the review
- 3 consider the *significant* effects and *crunch issues* throughout the four Cs
- 4 include proposals for better integrated sustainable solutions in the improvement plan.

The process is described in more detail below, with brief examples for library services.

Checking corporate objectives

Any Best Value reviews would normally start by considering how well the activities under review support community strategy objectives and the council's corporate objectives (if different). The objectives should first be checked to see if they support sustainable development, ie:

- are expressed in sustainable terms, eg improving health rather than increasing health services.
- consider the full range of sustainable development issues, including impact on global communities and future generations, e. conserving resources

and adapted if necessary.

This exercise does not need to be undertaken for every Best Value review. Ideally this will be automatic whenever the community strategy or corporate objectives are revised. But if this has not already happened, the objectives may need revision before being included in the Best Value manual and applied to the Best Value review.

Baseline assessment

At the baseline assessment *significant* impacts (see box) may be identified using (*perhaps adapted*) objectives derived from the community strategy and/or the authority's corporate objectives.

The choice of significant impacts may be revised later in the review as new evidence is collected, but it is vital to keep these in mind throughout the remainder of the review process.

Significant impacts

All council activities have the potential to impact on community strategy/corporate objectives. But most impacts will be very small. The purpose of determining significance is to make sure that the review focuses on the really important impacts and does not fritter away its efforts on relatively unimportant issues. Significance includes *potential* positive and negative impacts.

The choice of significant impacts comes down to judgement. Common sense suggests that the potential contribution of libraries to life long learning is much greater than that of Trading Standards, even though the latter has the potential to inform adult learning. Despite the reliance on judgement, there is usually surprising consensus on significant impacts.

Some activities will have significant impacts right across a range of economic, social and environmental objectives. Large regeneration initiatives typically have significant positive and negative impacts on many community strategy or corporate objectives. Similarly land use planning has wide-ranging significant impacts. Other services (see libraries example) will have fewer significant impacts. Internal council services (such as finance) often assume that they have negligible impact on wider social, economic and environmental objectives, but as the Newcastle case study illustrates, this is not necessarily the case. Services with a strong social slant, like education and libraries, can have significant economic and environmental impacts that are often lost in the overall thrust of the service to meet social objectives.

Libraries example

Library services may potentially have a significant impact on the following typical community strategy/corporate objectives (shown in italics):

- *Improve access to library services* for all users, including disabled.
- *Promote equality of opportunities* by meeting the needs of diverse users.
- *Promote social inclusion* by making libraries affordable for all.
- *Promote life long learning* by offering facilities and resources for learners of all ages.
- *Enhance participation in decision-making* by hosting supporting consultations and making public information available.
- *Conserve energy use* in buildings and vehicles.

As the libraries example illustrates, many of the significant effects will typically already be considered good service practice. But there will be others that may not (such as energy use by libraries) and it is important that these are also considered.

The four Cs

The significant impacts should be considered throughout the four Cs:

Challenge

Questions that might be asked under 'Challenge' are:

- 1 What evidence is available on performance against the significant impacts?
- 2 How well are the significant effects are being managed/improved?
- 3 Are the activities focusing on a minority of objectives, and missing opportunities to promote other potentially significant impacts?
- 4 Are there *crunch issues* where the activities under review are having a seriously detrimental impact on other corporate objectives?
- 5 What could be done to promote more integrated solutions that meet social, economic and environmental objectives at the same time?
- 6 Are there any barriers to more integrated solutions, and how could these be overcome?

Libraries example

A *crunch issue* for libraries may be that its decision to support *access to library services for all users* by retaining small and uneconomic branch libraries may conflict with other objectives:

- reducing the cost per item loaned (*social inclusion*)
- providing a wide range of top class facilities in all libraries (*life-long learning*)
- reducing energy consumption (*conserving energy*).

The above might encourage the authority to close down old inefficient local libraries in favour of a small number of more efficient buildings, but this would conflict with the aim of supporting local access for all users.

The review could search for integrated solutions to overcome these conflicts, such as:

- increasing mobile and home services
- offering library services in other community or commercial buildings
- offering telephone or internet services.

Example from practice: Chesterfield BC conducted a Best Value review of leisure and cultural services covering grounds maintenance, indoor and outdoor leisure, ranger services, museums, galleries and tourist information. To encourage officers to 'think outside the box' and develop solutions to fit their own service, the council ran a half-day training seminar for all team members on sustainability. This included 'visioning' and 'scenario planning', providing officers with the opportunity for their thoughts to flow, and then to focus back on their specific review area. One exercise asked participants to consider what Chesterfield might be like in 2010 and how their services would contribute. The teams developed some interesting ideas to take further in the Best Value review and explore through the other process.

Consult

Consult on the significant effects and crunch issues and on any proposals for more integrated solutions identified under challenge. Review earlier consultation responses to the community strategy or other consultation exercises for any information on community and stakeholder views on the significant effects and crunch issues.

Libraries example

The review consults:

- diverse (potential) users, including minority communities, different age groups, young and adult students, etc on what services they would like from libraries, how easy it is for them to access the service, and if the service meets lifelong learning needs (*Promote equality of opportunities*)
- staff, unions, users and potential users about the proposal to tackle the crunch issue by:
- increasing mobile and home services
- offering library services in other community or commercial buildings
- offering telephone or internet services.

Compare

Compare how significant effects and crunch issues are tackled by other providers and, where appropriate, compare performance indicators. Look particularly at how best practice authorities are managing these effects.

Libraries example

- Investigate how other library services have retained local access to services while meeting other important objectives.
- Compare PIs on: accessibility of services; diversity of users; level of use by life-long learners, energy consumption.

Compete

Investigate if other potential providers could provide more integrated solutions.

Libraries example

- Investigates the cost and quality of providing some library services through community organisations in community centres.

Options appraisal

Best Value reviews will commonly arrive at a number of options for improving performance. Options appraisal is a technique for comparing how well different options compare against different criteria, such as cost and quality of service.

Options appraisal should include a comparison of how well alternative options perform against the significant impacts and promote integrated solutions that overcome crunch issues. If none of the options perform well, it may be necessary to consider if there are any other options that might perform better.

Libraries example

Four options are considered:

- Status quo
- Close some smaller uneconomic branches and replace with mobile facilities, internet and static facilities in other community buildings.
- Close some smaller uneconomic branches and enhance depth and diversity of facilities in remaining branches.
- Spread specialist facilities more evenly between main and smaller branches.

Each option is tested to see how well it performs against each of the significant sustainable development impacts identified at the beginning of the review.

Conclusions on the comparative performance of the options draws on findings from consultations, experience of other library services, information on alternative potential providers, and other evidence collected during the review.

The improvement plan

The improvement plan arising from the review is crucial. This may take the service towards or away from sustainable development. The improvement plan should therefore:

- take forward the option that was found to be most successful at promoting integrated solutions during the options appraisal
- set targets for improving performance against significant effects
- incorporate performance standards for all significant effects in any procurement contracts that result from the Best Value review
- subject the draft final improvement plan to further appraisal against the (adapted) corporate objectives to identify any other opportunities for improving the sustainability of the proposals.

Libraries example

The improvement plan proposes:

- a combination of closing some smaller branches, spreading specialist facilities to other small branches, and providing mobile facilities, internet and static facilities in other community buildings
- all contracts for book procurement to specify the level of provision in different languages, for different interest groups, life-long learning, and special needs
- vehicle procurement to specify disabled access and fuel efficiency standards.

What support to give review teams

An important conclusion from the IDeA study (see the briefing "[Experience to date](#)") was that reviews are likely to give much better consideration to sustainable development if the review teams receive support. Ideally this support would entail:

- 1 Advice in the authority's Best Value manual on how to consider sustainable development within the baseline assessment, the four Cs and the improvement plan.
- 2 Training on the above incorporated into general training for Best Value review teams, so that sustainable development is seen as integral to the review process.
- 3 Advice and support from a sustainable development 'champion' at key stages of the review. The champion does not have to be a member of the Review Team, but they should support the review team at critical stages such as the:
 - selection of the significant effects and identification of crunch issues
 - finalising the scope of the four Cs
 - options appraisal
 - agreeing the improvement plan.

The sustainable development champion might be a:

- Best Value officer who is supporting the review team
 - sustainable development officer
 - departmental sustainable development representative

 - OR a member of the review team, such as:
 - a member of the review team charged with being the ‘sustainability conscience’ of the team
 - a critical friend with specialist knowledge of sustainable development from outside the local authority.
- 4 Verification of the significant effects, the crunch issues and the Improvement Plan by a sustainable development specialist.

Example from practice: [Sandwell MBC](#) developed a process for simultaneously addressing the ‘core issues’ of sustainable development, equalities, community safety, risk management, and e-government in Best Value. An ‘impact assessment template’ for all of the core issues is considered by review teams in workshops, with further, specialist support available. The impact template allows the teams to identify what is most important to their service.

A core issues group has been set up, with champions from each of the five core areas. With the Chief Executive’s support their role is to push the mainstreaming agenda through all service activities, including Best Value and business planning. It has been helpful for sustainable development to be treated as a core issue alongside the other areas. It helps streamlining. For instance, a single message goes to heads of service, rather than five or six separate messages. There is less risk of competition between the core areas, and it has the benefits of ‘hunting in a pack’ – the sustainable development specialist need not be a lone voice any more.

Reporting on sustainable development in the performance plan

The purpose of the performance plan is to report on the authority's performance, its proposals for improving performance, and progress in implementing improvement measures. The performance plan should report on how effectively the authority is promoting sustainable development, what/if improvements are proposed, and progress on these.

Annex E of Circular 03/03 lists what should be covered in the authority's performance plan. This is summarised in the box below with recommendations for how sustainable development might be reported.

REPORTING ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE PERFORMANCE PLAN	
Circular 03/03 Annex E	Coverage of Sustainable Development
A brief summary of the authority's strategic objectives and priorities for improvement. This should be drawn from the authority's overall vision, community strategy, its corporate planning processes, and the opportunities and weaknesses identified in CPA, where applicable.	Including a summary of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the authority's commitment to promote sustainable development (or however phrased in the authority) how well the community strategy and authority objectives support sustainable development any opportunities for improvement and weakness in promoting sustainable development identified in CPA or sustainable development Best Value, Scrutiny or other sustainable development reviews.
Progress over the past three years in implementing improvement measures, including those identified in best value reviews and audit and inspection recommendations.	Progress in implementing measures to improve sustainable development performance identified from CPA or sustainable development Best Value, scrutiny or other sustainable development reviews.
Outcomes from, or impact of, improvement measures implemented over the past three years.	Measures taken to ensure that all improvement measures promote integrated sustainable solutions, and conclusions on how effective these measures have been.
Plans for improvement over the current and subsequent two years, including best value review and inspection programmes for the current year and, if available, future years.	Proposals for reviews (Best Value, scrutiny or other review) of the authority's sustainable development performance - if this has been identified as an area of weakness.
Details of past, current and planned performance against local and national performance indicators.	Details of trends in quality of life/community strategy/sustainable development indicators, with discussion of which trends are unsustainable and why.

Sustainable development reviews

Sustainable development reviews are not essential for addressing sustainable development within Best Value, but may be valuable if the authority's management of sustainable development is identified as in need of improvement (perhaps as a result of a CPA self-assessment, peer challenge or corporate assessment.)

The review is an opportunity to look in more detail at how effectively the authority is promoting sustainable development, ask the opinion of others, and learn from the experience of other organisations.

This note suggests how to approach a cross-cutting review of sustainable development, but much of the advice could equally be applied to any review of broad cross-cutting objectives, such as *improving access* or *reducing climate change*.

What is a sustainable development review?

A cross-cutting sustainable development review asks how effectively the authority is promoting sustainable development. It asks:

Are the authority's objectives, policies, processes and practice achieving effective and efficient progress towards sustainable development?

To do this it will need to investigate if:

1. the authorities' corporate objectives support sustainable development
2. the corporate objectives are being mainstreamed into council activities, ie. translated into sustainable policies and practice that address crunch issues and promote integrated solutions
3. sustainable outcomes are being achieved
4. there are effective corporate processes in place to achieve items 1 to 3 above.

A sustainable development review must, therefore, focus not only on corporate **processes**, but also on the achievement of **outputs and outcomes**. For example, if a key corporate objective is *to improve access to services*, it might ask:

- Have corporate processes identified if/which local authority services need to be made more accessible and how? (*Process*)
- Have authority divisions included plans for improvement in accessibility within their policies and business plans? (*Process*)
- Have authority divisions ensured that their plans to improve access are integrated solutions that support other corporate objectives? (*Process*)
- Have these policies and plans been implemented? (*Output*)
- Has this improved access to services? (*Outcome*)

Clearly, without considerable care, a sustainable development review could easily mushroom into a huge and unmanageable process. This needs to be avoided through careful scoping of the review (see below).

Is a sustainable development review the best option?

Cross-cutting sustainable development reviews can be time consuming. Before launching into such a review, it is sensible to start by asking:

Is a Sustainable Development Review the best way to improve our sustainable development performance?

To date many of the improvement actions arising from sustainable development Best Value reviews are for the implementation of widely accepted corporate sustainable development good practice (see the briefing [Experience to date](#)). Is a resource intensive Best Value review really necessary, when a simple comparison with a checklist of good practice might lead to the same conclusions? On the other hand, perhaps the status of a Best Value review would be important for breaking down long standing barriers to progress on sustainable development?

Alternatives to a Best Value review might be to ask the executive or scrutiny committee to review current corporate sustainable development processes and outcomes against accepted good practice and by benchmarking with other local authorities.

Example from practice: [Durham County Council Overview and Scrutiny](#) conducted a review of the Council's sustainable environment policy. Recommendations from the review included increased training and awareness on sustainability and environmental issues, significantly increased investment in energy-efficiency measures, and a more formal system of monitoring and reporting the Council's environmental performance.

Keeping the review manageable

As we have seen, a sustainable development review could potentially become enormous if it considers all of the council's corporate objectives and how/if these are being translated into sustainable outcomes. The review needs to be kept manageable. This will be achieved by setting clear and tight boundaries to the review during the initial scoping and project planning stage.

A good way to keep the review manageable is to focus down from the initial broad question:

Do the authorities' corporate objectives support sustainable development?

to look at a sample of corporate objectives in more detail and asking if these are being translated into integrated sustainable outcomes. Tracking a sample of objectives should provide answers to the other important question:

Are the authorities' corporate processes achieving sustainable outputs and outcomes?

Separate guidance from the IDeA gives further advice on how to scope and plan cross-cutting reviews.²

² *Cross-Cutting Reviews*, Jane Foot & Mick Taylor for the IDeA 2003. Available from the IDeA Knowledge website.

Example from practice: [The London Borough of Sutton's Environmental Sustainability Review](#) considered corporate processes for promoting sustainable development, but also examined progress against several of the council's targets, including promoting the use of sustainable materials and resources and promoting healthy life styles.

Composition of the review team

Cross-cutting review teams generally benefit from having a broad membership drawn from across the authority. External critical friends with a good overview of sustainable development may also make a valuable contribution, for example a sustainable development officer from a neighbouring authority, a representative from a sustainable development forum, or a relevant NGO. Separate guidance from the IDeA gives further advice on how to get the most out of cross-cutting review teams.³

The Review Process

A sustainable development review, like any other review, should follow the advice in the Best Value and Improvement Circular⁴ and in the council's Best Value manual. Below we suggest possible approaches to:

1. the baseline assessment
2. reviewing performance
3. conclusions and recommendations for improvement

1. The baseline assessment

The baseline assessment is a valuable opportunity to collect preliminary evidence on the questions listed under *Challenge* in the box below. It could use a variety of available evidence before the review launches into new information gathering. Available evidence might include:

- opinions expressed in previous stakeholder consultations
- trends in quality of life / sustainable development / community strategy indicators
- monitoring reports on business plans and sustainable development plans
- previous benchmarking exercises with other organisations
- findings from earlier Best Value reviews, corporate governance reviews, and CPA Self-assessments, peer challenge and corporate assessments.

This preliminary evidence might also be used to identify a sample of corporate objectives for closer investigation.

³ *Cross-Cutting Reviews*, Jane Foot & Mick Taylor for the IDeA, 2003. Available from the [IDeA Knowledge website](#).

⁴ Circular 03/2003. *Local Government Act 1999: Part 1 Best Value and Performance Improvement*, ODPM, March 2003.

2. Reviewing performance

The Best Value and Improvement Circular advises that “the broad principles for conducting reviews remain those identified in Circular 10/99. Authorities should:

- **challenge** why, how and by whom a service is being provided;
- **compare** their performance with others across a range of relevant indicators, taking into account the views of both service users and potential suppliers;
- **consult** with local stakeholders as to their experience of local services and their aspirations for the future;
- use fair and open **competition** wherever necessary as a means of securing efficient and effective services.”

The phrasing of the Circular is more suited to individual service reviews. A cross-cutting sustainable development review will need to follow an adapted approach. We noted above that the review should investigate if:

- the authorities’ corporate objectives support sustainable development
- the corporate objectives are being translated into sustainable policies and practice that address crunch issues and promote integrated solutions
- sustainable outcomes are being achieved
- there are effective corporate processes in place to achieve items 1 to 3 above

The box below suggests how these 4 questions might be considered within the 4Cs.

3. Conclusions from the review and recommendations for improvement

Use the findings from the baseline assessment and the four Cs to conclude and recommend:

- How effectively and efficiently is the authority promoting sustainable development?
- (How) could corporate processes to promote sustainable development be improved?
- How could the authority’s policies and practice to promote (*a sample of*) corporate objectives be improved?

A SUGGESTED APPROACH TO THE FOUR Cs

Challenge

Ask/investigate:

1 if the community strategy objectives and the authorities’ corporate objectives (which may be the same):

- are expressed in sustainable terms, *eg improving health rather than increasing health services.*
- consider the full range of sustainable development issues, including impact on global communities and future generations, *eg conserving resources.*

2 What corporate processes are in place to ensure:

- that each corporate objective is being progressed (through both policies and practice)?
- that corporate objectives are not pursued in isolation from others, and that solutions are sought that integrate social, economic and environmental objectives? (see the briefing [Policy Integration](#))

4. What progress is being made (outputs and outcomes) on each (*or a sample of*) corporate objective?
5. Are the policies and practice to promote (*a sample of*) corporate objectives following an integrated approach that promotes social, economic and environmental objectives at the same time?
6. What processes are in place to:
 - Track overall progress on corporate objectives/sustainable development outcomes?
 - Track whether corporate objectives are being progressed in integrated ways that promote sustainable development?
 - Feed information on sustainable development *outcomes* back into decision-making.

Compare

Compare with other local authorities and organisations:

- how, and how well, the authority is achieving (*a sample of*) its corporate objectives.
- the nature and effectiveness of corporate sustainable development processes.

Consult

Consult staff, elected members, partners and other stakeholders, on the following:

- Are corporate objectives expressed in sustainable terms, and are any important sustainable development objectives missing?
- Are corporate objectives being pursued in a way that promotes economic, social and environmental objectives in an integrated way, and how might this be improved?
- What progress is being made on (*a sample of*) corporate objectives?
- How well are corporate sustainable development processes working?

Competition

The recommendations arising from a sustainable development review are more likely to focus on corporate policies and processes than the delivery of services. It is therefore less likely than for some reviews to lead to recommendations about alternative means of delivering services. But it is possible that recommendations may arise about:

- alternative ways of delivering corporate processes, eg inviting other providers, such as local voluntary sector organisations to monitor sustainable development practice and outcomes
- alternative ways of achieving corporate objectives, perhaps by involving a wider range of partners.