



Cambridgeshire County Council

Cambridgeshire county council's overview and scrutiny committees have agreed that from autumn 2002 a sustainability checklist be completed by officers and attached to all relevant reports going to scrutiny committee.

Cambridgeshire county council's corporate plan sets out the overarching vision for the county, as being to achieve sustainable development that will ensure quality of life, both now and for future generations, through:

- a robust local economy,
- communities free of social exclusion, and
- a healthy and sustainable environment

The council has a number of mechanisms for ensuring that this vision is carried through into policies and programmes. However, involvement in the IDeA/LGA's sustainable development and Best Value pathfinder project provided an impetus to do more to ensure we take a consistent and strategic approach.

The council decided to focus on the council's scrutiny committees, which have a positive attitude to training and cross-party working. Sustainability checklists are a well-established mechanism which they thought would work for their members.

A preliminary draft of the checklist was submitted to the scrutiny management committee with a request for views on the best way of supporting scrutiny members in integrating sustainable development into its work. However, members were keen to adopt the checklist immediately and asked that from autumn 2002 it be completed by officers and attached to all relevant reports going to scrutiny committee. The draft checklist was then put to all four scrutiny committees (social services; environment and transport; education libraries and heritage; and resources) for comment.

The 2 page checklist sets out general principles, and examples of trigger points for particular scrutiny (e.g. proposals involving land or buildings). The second page gives a matrix of objectives and "buzz words" drawn from the council's policy framework, under the 3 "vision" headings.



The checklist was presented as an aid to:

- integrating cross cutting issues into the improvement and development of services.
- ensuring a corporate and consistent approach to the implementation of policy (as required under Comprehensive Performance Assessment)
- securing win/win win solutions
- avoiding waste and reducing costs long-term

Issues raised by Members in discussion included:

- importance of using checklist at the start of the policy/review process, not the end
- need to integrate with other material e.g. list of “key questions” for Scrutiny members
- requirement for more rigorous approach in some cases: e.g. sustainability appraisal
- need to eliminate all jargon

And conversely:

- lack of tangible evidence for benefits of this approach
- additional bureaucracy: we are doing sustainable development already

The next step will be to find examples to show how the checklist might be used to secure better decisions in particular areas of work.

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