



Taking action for a living planet

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Briefing

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Community Planning, Best Value and the Power to Advance Well-Being

This briefing summarises¹ WWF's views on the new guidance to local authorities regarding implementing the Local Government Act 2003. This is one of the biggest opportunities to deliver action at the local level to protect and improve the environment and the health and well-being of Scotland's communities.

The Local Government in Scotland Act was passed in January 2003. The Act includes:

- Duty to Secure Best Value, Statutory Basis for Community Planning and Power to Advance Well-Being

The detail for these three provisions is being determined by Scottish Executive guidance currently undergoing consultation.

WWF welcomes the general thrust of the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 and believes it has huge potential to deliver a more equitable and regionally sensitive approach to sustainable development, a central priority for action cutting across the entirety of government and local government activity. Our consultation response focuses on how the guidance could be improved to optimise the local authority contribution through these new provisions.

Why WWF?

WWF Scotland is committed to achieving a sustainable future and believes the provisions under the Local Government Scotland Act 2003 offer new opportunities for local authorities to play their part. We are working with local authorities to explore how the ecological footprint concept can help local authorities secure Best Value and measure their contribution to sustainable development.

A definition for sustainable development:

The Scottish Executive uses the Brundtland definition in *Meeting the Needs*:

‘development that meets the needs of the present without compromising
the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.’

In more everyday language, we could say it's about not stealing from our children.

Key points

- The Act contains exciting new provisions, which have the potential to transform the role of local authorities beyond service delivery to genuine community leaders concerned with the current and future well-being of their local areas.

¹ Full consultation response available from WWF Scotland, call 01887 820 449 or go to www.wwf.org.uk/research

- We welcome the Scottish Executive and UK Sustainable Development Commission initiative to develop specific guidance on Best Value and sustainable development. To be effective, it must be supported by consistent messages in the statutory guidance and audit framework. We also believe the exercise should extend to Community Planning and the Power to Advance Well-Being.
- The guidance should include definitions for ‘well-being’ and ‘contribution to sustainable development’ otherwise it simply perpetuates confusion over the term sustainable development.
- Examples of how sustainable development is applied as a cross-cutting theme should appear throughout the guidance (eg integrated provision, resource efficiency, promoting sustainable housing, renewable energy schemes and genuinely improving quality of life – not just increasing provision).
- The audit framework for Best Value and Community Planning must explicitly incorporate measures for progress on sustainable development.
- Ecological Footprint should be included in the guidance as 1) an excellent measure of a local authority’s contribution to sustainable development and 2) a means to assess relative priorities to determine the local authority’s best contribution to sustainable development in the Community Plan.
- The emphasis on community participation is welcome and requires support for capacity building and training for both communities and agencies to maximise the benefits.
- It is critical for SEERAD to be directly involved in the Community Planning process.

A definition for contribution to sustainable development:

A contribution helps achieve a national sustainable development strategy. In the absence of one, a contribution is a policy or practice which helps achieve targets set in *Meeting the Needs...Priorities, Actions and Targets for Sustainable Development in Scotland*.

What is Ecological Footprint?

Ecological Footprint is a robust, easy to communicate concept, which can help local authorities to deliver on Community Planning. It answers the simple question: how much nature do we have, compared with what we use? This helps us to judge how sustainable our lives are and what changes we might make to improve our quality of life, now and in the future. It pulls together data on waste, food, energy, water use and transport into one indicator to show how sustainable (or not) our lives are. The rather disturbing and ill-appreciated fact is that in Scotland we consume and pollute more than twice our fair share of the planet’s resources. If all countries behaved as we do, three more planets would be needed!²

For further information: Elizabeth Leighton, Senior Policy Officer or George Baxter, Public Affairs.

WWF resources for Local Authorities on sustainable development www.wwf.org.uk/communities.asp

Scottish Executive Consultations for the Local Government in Scotland Act www.scotland.gov.uk/consultations/localgov

² WWF Living Planet Index – go to www.panda.org