



Powys County Council

Powys county council's Local Agenda 21 review examined the work of the council's local futures service. This was primarily a broad service review.

The Local Agenda 21 review was conducted in Year 1 (2000-1). Its remit was to examine the council's local futures service, with particular consideration of:

- the formulation of the la21 strategy for powys
- the activities and progress of the local futures round tables
- the development and adoption of environmental management systems
- the authority's own commitment to sustainable development.

There was a 3 person review team comprising: head of strategic planning and information; head of environmental policy and minerals; and the local futures officer. (Since this review the authority has recognised the need for external challenge and has broadened the composition of review teams, including involving elected members.)

Challenge

Key questions asked were:

- why does the council have to provide the la21 service?
- why is the service provided by planning, economic development and regeneration department?
- why provide the service in this way?
- who else could provide this service?

Consultation

The review identified a range of stakeholders (such as elected members, staff, local community, local business) that might be consulted, but concluded that 'the LA21 service is very small and the resources do not exist to carry out extensive consultation.'

Instead the review team sought to consult additional local authorities over and above those already consulted by the informal LA21 BV review group in Wales and to obtain the views of partners who are involved in the LA21 round tables, including other Powys CC departments and some PCC members. The consultation was through questionnaires, and asked about the effectiveness of the local futures service and how it could be improved.

Comparison

This relied on a questionnaire that was sent to 12 local authorities, 6 in Wales and 6 in England. No local BVPIs were used for comparison. The questions included:

- which department co-ordinates sustainable development?
- the number of staff and budget?
- has a LA21 strategy been produced, and what are its key components?
- what management mechanisms are used to integrate sustainable development into the work of all departments?
- is an environmental management system being implemented?
- is sustainable development considered in key corporate documents, such as the UDP and community care plan?
- what type of sustainable development training and education is provided to councillors, staff and outside organisations?
- how is community participation being managed?
- how are other organisations involved in sustainable development?

The results from the all-Wales LA21 benchmarking group consultation were also considered, this covered very similar issues.

Competition

Concluded that 'it is very difficult, if not impossible, to provide evidence of the efficiency and effectiveness of the current LA21 service in Powys in comparison to other providers elsewhere', and 'that an in-house LA21 service is essential if the council wishes to set the pace and lead by example.'

Key recommendations

Need for an internal forum to co-ordinate departmental responses to sustainable development

Generate more publicity for the work of the LA21 unit.

Produce a Local Futures Strategy for the authority (internal aspects)

Need to integrate EMAS which will be taken forward by Head of Environmental Policy

Take the principles of sustainability more seriously within the authority and put it more firmly in the UDP and at corporate level

Monitor the processes and actions of the authority for sustainability.

Contact: Heather Delonnette, Sustainable Development Co-ordinator, Powys County Council.
Tel: 01597 827550. E-mail: heatherd@powys.gov.uk