



Capability for Local Sustainability

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Executive Summary

The Capability for Local Sustainability project

Despite the increasing incentives and drivers to do so, local authorities and their partners are not yet maximising the enormous potential they have to contribute to sustainable development. Although the research has uncovered numerous examples of good practice, the research also demonstrates that delivery is being hampered by limitations in capability for local sustainability and limitations in the support available to help deliver sustainable development.

Through a process of engagement and research, the Sustainable Development Commission's (SDC) 'Capability for Local Sustainability' (CLS) project brings together key Government departments and national stakeholders to explore ways to improve the capability of local government and its partners to deliver sustainable development. The SDC has defined 'capability' in this context as *'the degree to which organisations have the leadership, attitudes, knowledge, culture, skills/competencies, tools and resources to put sustainable development into practice through their own policies and programmes'*.

The project particularly focuses on the support that is needed to ensure that local areas are equipped to put the key 'place-shaping' mechanisms of Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs), Sustainable Community Strategies (SCSs) and Local Area Agreements (LAAs) *'at the heart of creating sustainable development at the local level'* (Local Government White Paper, CLG, 2006). In addition, the project considers the feasibility of, and develops recommendations for, the creation of a local sustainable development benchmarking tool.

CAG Consultants were commissioned to carry out research in two related parts. Part A of the research aimed to:

- a. consolidate and assess the existing research and knowledge base on capability for local sustainability;
- b. identify current good practice in delivering sustainable development through LSPs, SCSs and LAAs;
- c. identify the key (replicable) factors that enabled the good practice to happen; and
- d. identify what support would be needed to strengthen the capability of all local areas to replicate good practice in delivering sustainable development through LSPs, SCSs and LAAs.

Part B of the research aimed to:

- a. assess the role a benchmarking tool could play to strengthen local capability to deliver sustainable development (covering LSPs, SCSs and LAAs); and
- b. put forward a set of options for how a benchmark tool might work in practice.

The research methods included a review of the existing evidence base, the development and analysis of case studies of good practice, a workshop with local practitioners, telephone interviews with key stakeholders and a workshop with the project's national partners, which include government departments and other national agencies.

Part A

Key findings

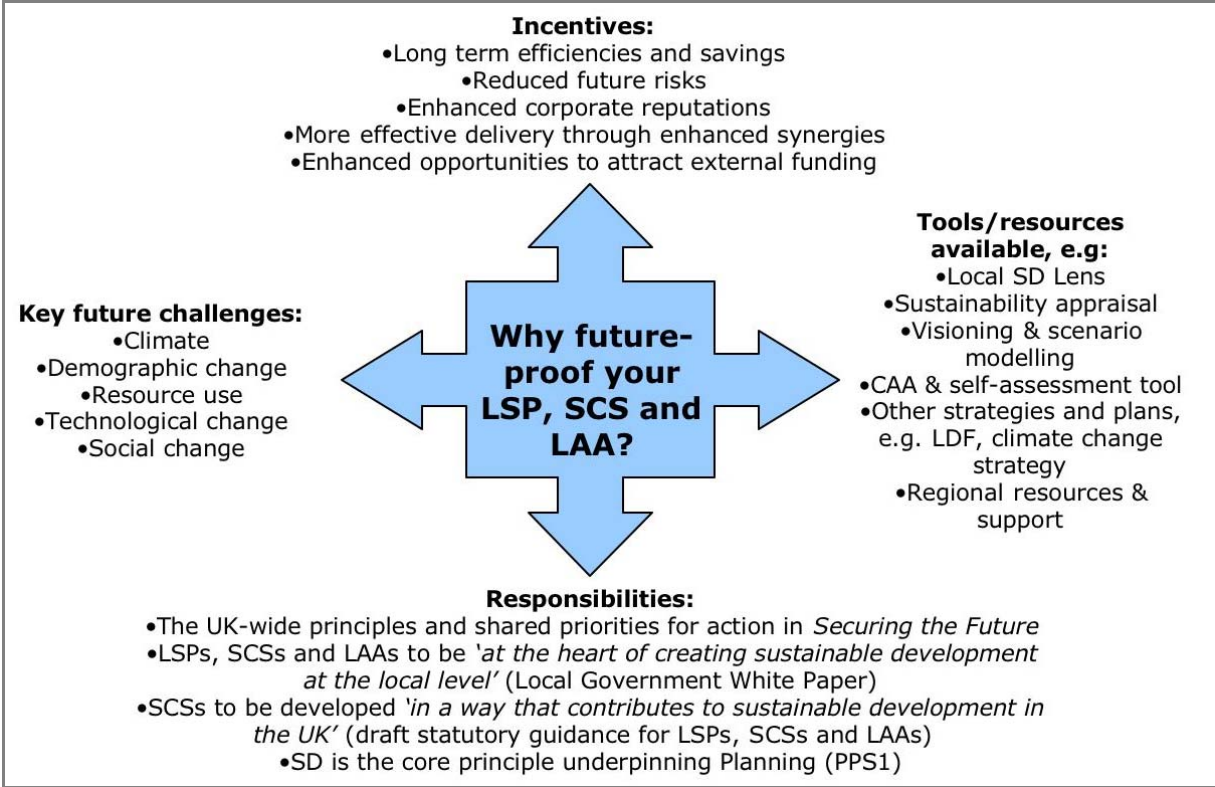
Although there are examples of good practice, the research suggests that there is a relatively poor understanding of sustainability at the local level and a lack of corporate priority given to sustainable development. Significant efforts are needed to promote a clearer and more consistent understanding of what sustainable development means, particularly amongst senior and political management, something which can only be achieved if there is also consistency and clarity in government policy in relation to sustainable development.

However, there is also a need to more effectively communicate the relevance of sustainable development at the local level, particularly through:

- making the links between sustainable development and terms and concepts which are better understood, such as resilience, 'future-proofing' (related to risk management), improving quality of life etc;
- emphasising the benefits of taking a sustainable development approach, particularly in terms of efficiency savings, performance management and corporate reputation and CSR;
- national/regional bodies and SD professionals targeting mainstream priorities such as procurement and climate change as 'trojan horses' for sustainable development/'future-proofing'; and
- more clearly articulating the existing duties and 'proxy duties' to deliver sustainable development at the local level.

Figure A on the following page summarises the key elements of the message which needs to be communicated to local actors about addressing sustainable development, framed in the language of 'future-proofing'.

Figure A: Promoting sustainable development at the local level



Leadership

The importance of local authority leadership on SD within LSPs is clearly apparent from the research. The particularly important aspects of leadership on SD within LSPs appear to be:

- encouraging strategic and long term thinking, beyond short term priorities;
- championing integration between strategies and policy areas;
- facilitating collaboration and building partnership; and
- leading by example, for example, local authorities committing funding for demonstration projects or taking sustainable approaches to capital spending.

Leadership, in most cases, is provided by sustainability officers within the local authority. The importance of engaging, and gaining support from LSP officers, particularly the LSP manager, is also apparent. At officer level, some of the key roles appear to be lobbying, networking and providing the practical advice and information necessary for sustainable decision-making.

However, the research indicates that leadership for the delivery of sustainable development in practice is generally not fully understood, under-prioritised and under supported. The research highlighted particular difficulties in gaining high-level

commitment to sustainable development from local authority members and senior officers, as well as the LSP board.

The table below summarises the key demands/needs in relation to leadership identified by the research and our recommendations for how these might be addressed.

High priority
Medium priority
Low priority

Demand/need (drawn from evidence)	Support required
More effective leadership for SD amongst local authorities and LSP partners	<p>Training and advice in leadership for SD aimed at political & senior management within local authorities (particularly Council leaders and Chief Executives) and amongst LSP partners, which may best be integrated within other activities and material aimed at political and senior management.</p> <p>Further reinforcement of the need for the Sustainable Community Strategy to be the 'plan of plans'.</p>
Improved knowledge of opportunities for sustainable development through LSPs	<p>SD awareness-raising and training for LSP managers, which may best be integrated within other activities and material aimed at LSP managers.</p> <p>Clearer articulation of the duties and proxy duties to deliver sustainable development at the local level, which could be incorporated in the place-shaping guidance.</p>
Continued and improved peer support for SD professionals	<p>Need for LSP SD networks, not just LA ones</p> <p>Continuation of ESCCape (Environmental Sustainability and Climate Change Community of Practice), networking events, sharing of experience (rather than good practice) and mentoring.</p> <p>Ensure that regional SD peer support networks currently facilitated by Regional Assemblies or Regional SD Champion Bodies are not lost following the sub-national review and support new/enhanced regional and sub-regional networks where there are gaps.</p>
Consistency of Government policies with sustainable development principles and <i>Securing the Future</i> .	<p>Improved joint working between government departments to ensure greater consistency of policies and communications to local authorities and their partners.</p> <p>External scrutiny to ensure this happens</p>

Attitudes

Particularly within local authority partners, but as far as possible amongst other partners as well, an understanding and acceptance of SD as a cross-cutting issue, ideally *the* most important such issue, enables integrated approaches to be developed.



Risk aversion, particularly amongst senior managers, who have yet to appreciate the value which SD could add to their service delivery, seems to be a significant block to such attitudes to SD.

Practitioners particularly highlighted the need to overcome negative perceptions often found amongst partners, such as:

- that SD is too big an issue to deal with, without immediate relevance to their priorities; and
- that SD is too ‘worthy’ an issue, without a clear business case¹.

Positive attitudes towards sustainable development amongst the wider community were also highlighted as being significant in some of the case studies.

The table below summarises the key demands/needs in relation to attitudes identified by the research and our recommendations for how these might be addressed.

Demand/need (drawn from evidence)	Support required
Positive attitudes towards sustainable development amongst LSPs	Use government communications on climate change and procurement to make the links with and promote the need for sustainable development
Address the perception amongst senior managers that integrated approaches are too risky	Continue to develop and communicate the business case and (financial and outcome) benefits of sustainable development at the local level.

Knowledge

The research shows that an understanding of SD is still limited to a relatively small number of professionals and that a good knowledge and understanding of SD is not often found amongst political and senior management.

Confusion clearly still surrounds the definition of SD, with it often understood as being simply about the environment. This is said to persist not only amongst LSP partners but also amongst the regional bodies, including Government Offices, who engage with them.

This research points to the need for greater clarity in the messages provided by Government about sustainable development. In particular, there is demand for greater consistency in the use of the terms ‘sustainable development’ and ‘sustainable communities’, and in ensuring that all government policies promote, and do not conflict with, sustainable development.

¹ By business cases we mean the full environmental, social and economic benefits of taking a sustainable development approach, both within the organisation itself and in the wider local and global community.

The table below summarises the key demands/needs in relation to knowledge identified by the research and our recommendations for how these might be addressed.

Demand/need (drawn from evidence)	Support required
Knowledge and expertise within Government Offices to promote sustainable development e.g. intergrating SD within LAAs.	Provide guidance and support (including resources) for Government Offices to help identify opportunities to integrate sustainable development within LAAs
Clearer and more consistent understanding of what sustainable development means, particularly amongst local-level political and senior management	Consistency and clarity across all Government departments and regional Government Offices about what sustainable development means. Clarifying the distinctions and relationship between 'Sustainable Development' & 'Sustainable Communities' is seen to be critical.

Culture

The research reveals that the delivery of local sustainable development is aided by a culture of joint working at the local level and the appropriate partnership structures to support it. This enables the development of integrated, collaborative solutions. This is important, both between partners, and within individual partner organisations, particularly the local authority.

Within individual partner organisations, particularly the local authority, a culture of joint working (formal and informal) can also be key, particularly between LSP officers, sustainability officers and those involved in other key policy documents such as the Local Development Framework.

The research highlighted the particular importance of a corporate culture amongst partners which supports new learning and some risk-taking, although few organisations were said to be demonstrating such a culture.

The table below summarises the key demands/needs in relation to culture identified by the research and our recommendations for how these might be addressed.

Demand/need (drawn from evidence)	Support required
Promoting a culture of joint working and partnership.	Peer-support to support learning across LSPs about how to create culture of joint working and partnership.
Promoting a corporate culture within partner organisations which supports new learning and appropriate risk-taking.	Promote involvement of business in LSPs through e.g. renewable energy and climate change projects.



Skills/competencies

Strategic thinking is identified as a key skill necessary for delivering local sustainability. This includes seeing beyond short term priorities, something made difficult by short term policy and funding cycles, but aided, on the other hand, by the increasing prominence of the long term issue of climate change. It also includes being able to see the bigger picture and focus on the most important, as opposed to the easiest, issues.

Skills for partnership working are also crucial in generating sustainable solutions, as is demonstrated by a number of the case studies

A number of the case studies also demonstrate that fundraising skills can significantly increase the capability to deliver local sustainable development.

The research findings demonstrate that most recognised SD expertise lies within local authorities, as well as parts of the voluntary sector in some cases. However, the level of SD expertise clearly varies very significantly across the country. Most of the case studies of good practice involved a dedicated local authority sustainability officer or team with corporate-wide responsibilities but many authorities still have no such role. Dedicated sustainability staff within most partner organisations is even rarer.

In addition, maintaining expertise was identified as an issue due to the turnover of staff. This may be due to the fact that sustainable development as a profession is still relatively emergent.

As well as the generic skills discussed above, a wide range of topic specific skills will also be necessary in delivering local sustainability. However, because SD necessitates the integration of social, economic and environmental disciplines, the range of topic-specific skills potentially needed to deliver sustainable development in any locality is endless. Furthermore, the research demonstrates that what are most important for the development of sustainable approaches within LSPs are not technical skills in all policy areas, but people with a broad understanding of these policy areas and the ability to promote integrated approaches between them.

The table below summarises the key demands/needs in relation to skills/competencies identified by the research and our recommendations for how these might be addressed.

Demand/need (drawn from evidence)	Support required
Skills in integrating economic, social and environmental objectives in strategy	National guidance on the place shaping mechanisms to directly address the integration of sustainable development
Long term, strategic thinking and planning	Government place shaping guidance to support LSPs in seeing beyond the short term priorities and three year funding cycles.



Demand/need (drawn from evidence)	Support required
Embedding SD within partner organisations	Appropriate information resources and learning on SD for the wide range of LSP partners (much is currently seen to be only appropriate for local authorities).
Greater understanding of the core skills needed for SD and greater recognition of SD as a profession.	Investigate demand for professionalisation of SD skills.
	Continue promotion of SD skills amongst key professions e.g. planners, built environment professionals, performance management and procurement staff.
Stakeholder engagement and inclusivity	Provide peer support for LSPs and SD professionals to help improve engagement of different stakeholders and sectors, such as the business and voluntary and community sectors.

Structures/tools

Structures

As already discussed, effective partnership working is critical to delivering local sustainability. Amongst LSPs, this necessitates the ongoing development of locally appropriate, robust & fit-for-purpose partnership structures & governance arrangements. Earlier evaluations of LSPs were critical of the progress made in establishing such structures and arrangements but some of the case studies demonstrate that significant progress has been made in recent years.

LSP partnership structures and governance arrangements can promote sustainable development in other ways. For example, establishing close relationships between the arrangements for developing the Sustainable Community Strategy and the arrangements for developing the LAA will increase the chances of sustainable development being translated into the LAA.

The research highlights the particular importance of effective partnership structures in two-tier areas, where involvement at district and county levels can be both complex and burdensome. This is made all the more important by the need to make close links between district-level Local Development Frameworks and county-wide Sustainable Community Strategies. A number of participants in the research highlighted the potential for LDFs, because of their longer-term nature and their requirement to address sustainable development, to enhance the sustainability of Sustainable Community Strategies. For the County-wide strategies, these and other benefits can only accrue, however, where districts are effectively engaged in the County-wide partnerships.

A number of the case studies also highlight the benefits of having a theme group or sub-group within the LSP with a specific sustainability remit, as opposed to it being

dealt with by an environment sub-group or not at all, providing that such a group has high level support and the influence and resources necessary to work at a strategic level across the partnership.

Tools

Collaborative tools and approaches, such as sustainability appraisal tools, are useful in promoting integration between policy areas and developing more sustainable approaches. The way in which such appraisal tools are developed and applied is significant. Of particular significance:

- a. utilising appraisal in an iterative way throughout each stage of the development of the SCS or LAA, starting from the earliest stage of development, ensures that the process has the most impact;
- b. utilising appraisal tools in a collaborative fashion, normally involving a panel representing a range of social, economic and environmental interest, helps in identifying integrated policy solutions; and
- c. developing appraisal tools locally with the involvement of partners helps to build local ownership and greater enthusiasm for their use.

There is evidence that the use of sustainability appraisal-type tools has helped to facilitate the hard decision-making necessary for SD, promote integration between policy areas and overcome the LAA block structure, which in many cases hinders integration. In addition, the use of such tools has helped to build understanding of sustainable development and appreciation of the benefits of promoting a sustainable approach.

The table below summarises the key demands/needs in relation to structures/tools identified by the research and our recommendations for how these might be addressed.

Demand/need (drawn from evidence)	Support required
Greater co-ordination and coherence in the support for local areas on SD	Bring together key national and regional partners to identify areas of duplication, gaps and future areas for development, building on existing research commissioned by IDeA and SDC in 2007.
Awareness of existing SD requirements, mechanisms and tools for SD	Develop and promote directory of existing tools, mechanisms and levers. Promote tools to support the SD elements of the forthcoming statutory guidance in LSPs, SCSs and LAAs.



Demand/need (drawn from evidence)	Support required
Improved scrutiny of local areas' performance on SD	<p>Ensure CAA process and self-assessment tool are optimised for improving performance on sustainable development by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeking to communicate a 'better futures'/future proofing' approach, rather than brand as sustainable development; • Ensure a focus on living within environmental limits, alongside the existing social justice agenda to reflect national SD goals; • Include process as well as outcomes; • Ensure local priorities are cognisant of national objectives and targets; • Focus on seeking integrated solutions; • Ensure consistency with LAA and the Local SD Lens².
Ability to benchmark performance on SD	<p>Ensure that the Local SD Lens allows benchmarking of SD and comparisons with regional and national averages, plus some measurement of excellent to poor performance; includes appropriate local, regional and national targets, where available; and develops a mechanism to promote integrated solutions.</p>
Ongoing development of locally appropriate, effective and robust partnership structures and governance arrangements, particularly within two-tier areas	<p>Provide on-hand diagnostic support for LSPs on structural and governance arrangements.</p>
Clearer linkages between the structures for developing the SCS, LAA, LDF and MAA	<p>Ensure Place-Shaping guidance and subsequent communications provide clear linkages between the structures for developing SCS, LAA, LDF and MAA and between those leading on them.</p>

Resources

LSPs, SCSs and LAAs place significant pressure on staff resources, particularly within local authorities and resource-strapped partners, such as the voluntary and community sector. At the same time, sustainable development, can often be seen as an additional burden on resources, rather than a way of maximising benefits and reducing risks and costs in the long term.

The biggest resource issue highlighted in the research is the pressure on staff resources. Some local authorities have (normally small) SD teams and their role in the place-shaping mechanisms are critical in many of the case studies. However, many authorities have either no SD team or a single SD officer. Where local authorities have a dedicated SD staff resource, LSPs appear to be heavily reliant on it for addressing sustainable development issues.

² The SDC has developed proposals for a voluntary basket of indicators - linked to the national indicator set - that can be used to guide and track progress towards sustainable development at the local level. These proposals are being published on the SDC website – www.sd-commission.gsi.gov.uk.

Some authorities have been successful in attracting significant levels of funding for their sustainability staff team and other related initiatives, which can then benefit the LSP.

The advice and guidance provided by regional bodies is also important in supporting work on sustainable development in some regions. Government Offices are particularly important in the negotiation of LAAs, where they have the opportunity to promote sustainable development. The regional SD champion bodies and regional assemblies also play important roles, particularly in terms of providing SD training and peer support networks for SD officers, although this varies considerably from region to region.

The research also highlighted resource issues for the statutory agencies, who are reported to have difficulty finding the resources to engage with LSP processes.

The table below summarises the key demands/needs in relation to resources identified by the research and our recommendations for how these might be addressed.

Demand/need (drawn from evidence)	Support required
Sufficient resources for LA SD team to effectively engage in place-shaping mechanisms and deliver SD	Identify and support resource- and staff poor LSPs (particularly in non-NRF-funded areas) to identify other local authority staff (e.g. performance managers, partnership managers) and partners who may be able to assist.
Income generation	Develop targeted training for SD professionals on income-generation opportunities and skills and on 'bending' of mainstream resources.
Need for greater SD expertise within Government Offices	A programme of support to build sustainable development expertise within GOs.

External factors

The research highlighted a number of external factors which are assisting, or can assist, in the delivery of local sustainable development, including:

- competition between areas, which is said to be driving improved performance on SD, as well as breaking down barriers and encouraging people to look to other areas for ideas;
- Comprehensive Area Assessment, which is seen to have the potential to promote sustainable outcomes, particularly in relation to climate change; and
- increased media coverage of sustainability and climate change.

To help drive sustainable development, particularly in poor performing areas, some practitioners saw a need for a new statutory duty for local areas and LSPs to deliver sustainable development. However, others, particularly those areas that are leading



change, as well as national bodies point to the variety of 'proxies' for a duty, which can help drive change. These include:

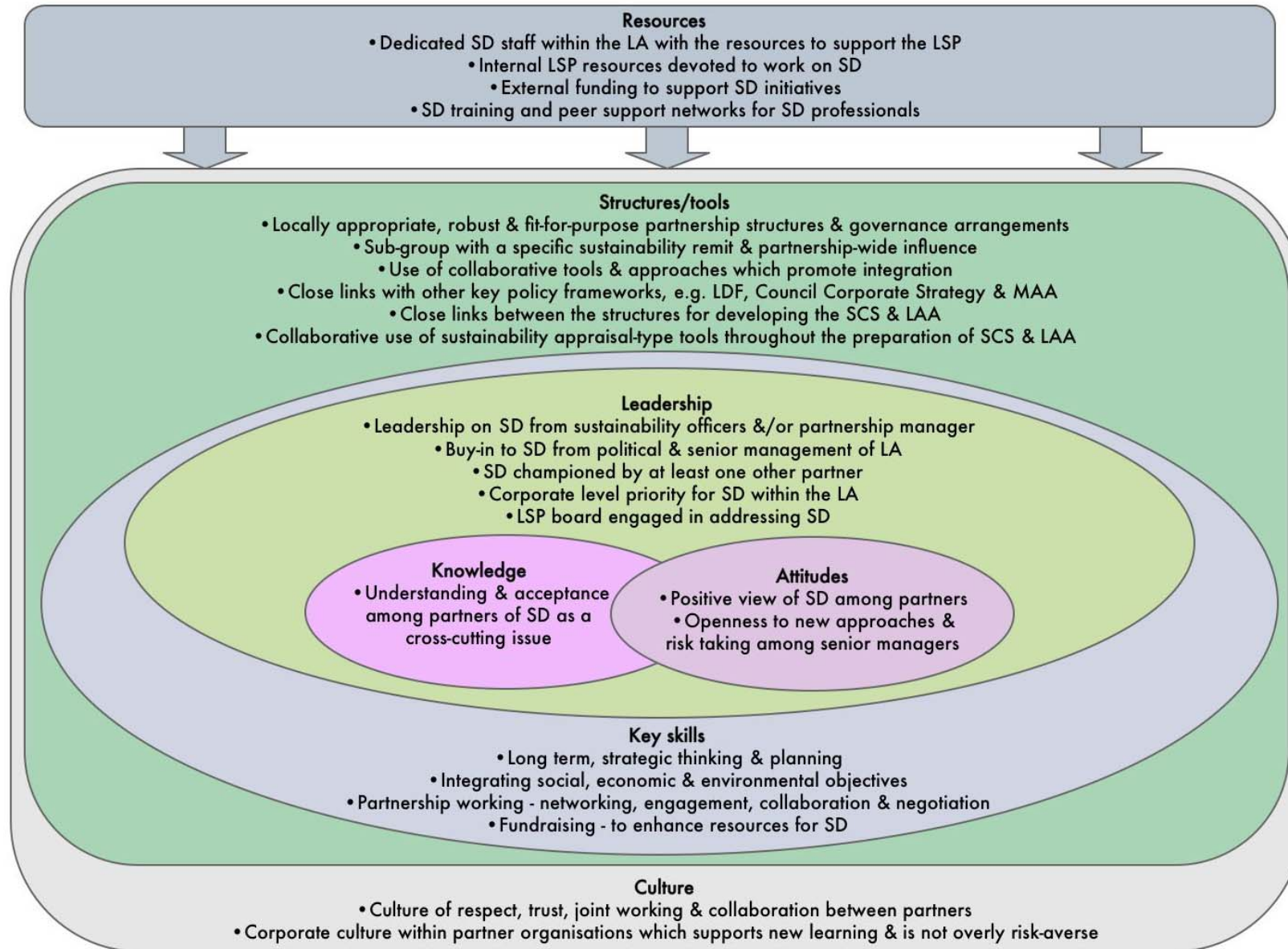
- the national SD strategy *Securing the Future* which sets out UK-wide principles and shared priorities for action;
- national policy e.g. the Local Government White Paper, which suggests that LSPs, SCSs and LAAs will be '*at the heart of creating sustainable development at the local level*'.
- the draft statutory guidance for LSPs, SCSs and LAAs, which puts SD at the heart of these processes and suggests that SCSs should be developed '*in a way that contributes to sustainable development in the UK*';
- the duty to deliver sustainable development in Planning and the close relationships intended between Planning and place-shaping processes.

More clearly articulating and communicating these duties, along with the potential benefits to be gained from pursuing sustainable development and the tools and resources which are available to assist this pursuit, will help to drive sustainable development upwards on local agendas.

Towards a framework for local capability

Based on our assessment of the existing evidence base on capability for local sustainability, as well as current good practice in delivering local sustainable development, the project has identified a number of key capability factors that enable good practice to happen. Figure B on the following page seeks to highlight the main capability elements that are needed within the place-shaping mechanisms and the wider local authority and community context in order to generate more sustainable outcomes, as well as providing an indication of the relationships between these elements. The diagram might be used by LSP managers or sustainability officers in order to identify ways of achieving a more sustainable approach to place-shaping.

Figure B: Towards a framework for local capability to deliver sustainable development



Part B

The research indicates that a local sustainable development benchmarking tool could play a role in communicating what sustainable development means in practice and how it might be achieved at the local level, particularly if it helped to drive greater integration in local policymaking and action. However, the research also identified a high degree of scepticism amongst stakeholders and practitioners about a new sustainable development benchmarking tool. Various tools or mechanisms already exist and it is not clear that a market exists for a new tool. In addition, concern was expressed about the potential for such a tool to add to the burden of measurement placed on local authorities and their partners. The potential benefits of a local sustainable development benchmarking tool may, therefore, be better achieved through existing and planned tools, particularly the CAA self assessment tool and Local SD Lens.

We therefore make the following recommendations in relation to a local SD benchmarking tool:

1. Existing tools, mechanisms and levers for sustainable development should be better coordinated and their availability and use promoted.
2. The CAA process and self-assessment tool should be optimised in terms of mainstreaming sustainable development. Key to this process would be:
 - seeking to communicate the relevance and importance of sustainable development, particularly through making links with other priorities such as climate change, procurement and quality of life;
 - ensuring a focus on living within environmental limits alongside the existing social justice agenda to reflect national SD goals;
 - including process as well as outcomes;
 - ensuring local priorities are cognisant of national objectives and targets;
 - focusing on seeking integrated solutions; and
 - ensuring consistency with the Local SD Lens.
3. The Local SD Lens should include an element of benchmarking, e.g. by:
 - including comparisons with regional and national averages, plus some measure of excellent to poor performance (e.g. top 10% and bottom 10%);

- including appropriate local, regional and national targets, where available;
 - developing a mechanism to promote integrated solutions.
4. If a stakeholder organisation feel that a local SD benchmarking tool is required in addition to the CAA self assessment tool, Local SD Lens and other tools, such a tool must meet the following key success factors identified in the research. The tool should:
- a. avoid duplication of, and integrate with other existing or planned tools and guidance; and, in particular
 - b. be clearly linked and complimentary to Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) and the CAA self-assessment tool, without distracting from these or undermining them;
 - c. support the development of an action plan for achieving sustainable development, and not just focus on the measurement of performance;
 - d. clearly demonstrate how integration between social, economic and environmental objectives can be achieved;
 - e. be very practical, accessible and easy to use, and include real examples;
 - f. be flexible enough to accommodate the wide local variations in sustainable development issues, as well as the variations in structures and governance – a ‘gold standard’ approach may alienate users;
 - g. be focused on LSP priorities and outcomes and in their own language;
 - h. avoid being too directive but, rather, provide guidance and help;
 - i. involve LSPs in developing, testing and piloting the tool to help refine it and demonstrate its value; and
 - j. be regularly reviewed and updated based on experiences with implementing it and changing circumstances.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Aims

Through a process of engagement and research, the Sustainable Development Commission's (SDC) 'Capability for Local Sustainability' (CLS) project brings together key Government departments and national stakeholders to explore ways to improve the capability of local government and its partners to deliver sustainable development.

The project particularly focuses on the support that is needed to ensure that local areas are equipped to put the key 'place-shaping' mechanisms of Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs), Sustainable Community Strategies (SCSs) and Local Area Agreements (LAAs) *'at the heart of creating sustainable development at the local level'* (Local Government White Paper, CLG, 2006). In addition, the project considers the feasibility of, and develops recommendations for, the creation of a local sustainable development benchmarking tool.

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- a. to consolidate and assess the existing research and knowledge base on capability for local sustainability;
- b. to identify current good practice in delivering sustainable development through LSPs, SCSs and LAAs;
- c. to identify the key (replicable) factors that enabled the good practice to happen; and
- d. to identify what support would be needed to strengthen the capability of all local areas to replicate good practice in delivering sustainable development through LSPs, SCSs and LAAs.

Part B of the research aims to:

- a. assess the role a benchmarking tool could play to strengthen local capability to deliver sustainable development (covering LSPs, SCSs and LAAs); and
- b. put forward a set of options for how a benchmark tool might work in practice.

1.2 Structure of the report

This report sets out the findings from the research. Sections 2 & 3 address part A of the research and sections 4 & 5 address part B. Appendix A presents the research methodology utilised for part A of the research and Appendix B the research utilised for part B. Appendices C & D provide summaries of workshops that informed the research.

Part A: Improving local capability for sustainability

2. What does the existing evidence base tell us?

2.1 Scope of review

This main focus of this chapter is a review of the existing evidence base on:

- a. the capability of local areas (LSPs, SCSs and LAAs) to deliver sustainable development;
- b. the support currently provided to enhance that capability; and
- c. how capability for local sustainability might be strengthened.

However, the review begins with a brief analysis of the theoretical basis for the concept of 'capability' in this context. This is followed by a summary of the key aspects of the policy context relevant to this research.

Little recent research has been carried out into the capability of local authorities and their partners to deliver sustainable development. Our analysis has drawn on the findings from recent general evaluations of LSPs, SCSs and LAAs, as well as exercises which have mapped support for sustainable development and climate change for local government. A full list of the reports reviewed is contained in the bibliography.

This review supports the SDC's view (as expressed in the project brief) that *'local authorities and their partners are not yet maximising the enormous potential they have to contribute to sustainable development'*. Although policy developments (summarised below) continue to open up fresh opportunities to deliver local sustainable development, delivery is particularly hampered by:

1. limitations in capability at the local level; and
2. limitations in the support available to deliver sustainable development.

2.2 What do we mean by 'capability'?

2.2.1 Defining capability

Improving the capacity or capability of local authorities and other organisations to deliver improvements in public services has been a priority for public sector reform for many years. The terms 'capability' and 'capacity' are often used interchangeably within the literature and by practitioners.

The SDC has defined 'capability' as *'the degree to which organisations have the leadership, attitudes, knowledge, culture, skills/competencies, tools and resources to put sustainable development into practice through their own policies and programmes'*.

Analysis of these terms and their use by Rashman (2008) identifies a range of other dimensions of organisational capacity such as strategy, structure, learning, behaviour, systems, processes and accountability. Rashman's review of the academic and policy literature also suggests wider factors affecting an organisation's 'capability' including:

- learning and adaptation to change in the external environment;
- a supportive infrastructure of systems and accountability; and
- clarity and alignment of organisational and national policy goals and outcomes.

The SDC's use of the concept of 'capability' recognises the important difference between an organisation's or individual's 'capacity' or 'competency' and the wider context that affects a local area's 'capability' to deliver sustainable development, such as the support provided by partners and the ability of organisations to respond to external pressures.

A key aspect of 'capability' are the knowledge, skills and behaviours of individuals and organisations. A report by the World Business Council for Sustainable Development and the University of Cambridge Programme for Industry (2004) identifies the core 'competencies' that are required by individuals to integrate sustainable development into their work, as shown in figure 1.

This provides a useful framework for understanding the relevance of skills, knowledge and attitudes needed to deliver behaviour change for sustainable development. It recognises the importance of strategy, stakeholders and leadership in helping to make sense of the organisations' and individuals' role, build relationships and dialogue between key actors, and turn learning into action. This framework also highlights the importance of taking a holistic, inclusive and long term view of delivery for sustainable development.

2.2.2 Capability for local sustainability

To summarise, for the purposes of this project, the concept of capability encompasses:

- Leadership

- Attitudes
- Knowledge
- Culture
- Skills/competencies – both generic (e.g. integration, engagement, collaboration/partnership-working or long-term planning) and topic-specific (e.g. climate change, social inclusion or biodiversity)
- Tools
- Resources

One of the key challenges for this research was to develop a framework for understanding the scope of capability as it relates to local sustainability, for LSPs generally but also, specifically in relation to Sustainable Community Strategies and Local Area Agreements.

Capability issues will also vary depending on the type of area (e.g. rural/urban, unitary/two-tier, region, demographics, etc). Further research may also allow separate capability frameworks to be developed for these different contexts.

2.3 Policy context

Local government and its partners, through Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs), have enormous potential to make a significant contribution to sustainable development (SD).

2.3.1 UK Sustainable Development Strategy

As the UK Government's 2005 sustainable development strategy *Securing the Future* points out, 'local authorities and their partners, through Local Strategic Partnerships, are pivotal to delivering sustainable communities'.

The strategy set out the Government's action plan, developed with the Local Government Association, the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA), the Audit Commission and other stakeholders, to ensure the delivery of sustainable development at a local level.

Prior to *Securing the Future*, a number of statutory and non-statutory drivers aimed at encouraging and enabling local areas to deliver sustainable development were already in place. These included, for instance, a duty to develop community strategies that contribute to sustainable development in the UK, the power of well being, a sustainable development duty on local planners and recognition of the links between public health and sustainable development in the *Choosing Health* White Paper.

Figure 1: Sustainable development competencies

Competency Theme	Competency Element	Understanding – essential knowledge & skills (Know-what)	Experience – how understanding is translated into practical action (Know-how)	Attitudes – personal values and ways of working
Strategy Sense-making and planning	External Context	Understanding the local and global context in which your organisation operates, including the most significant opportunities and risks that it faces.	Prioritising issues in terms of the level of opportunity and risk they present to the organisation, now and in the future.	Holistic view: The importance you attach to balancing environmental, social and economic value.
	Internal Focus	Understanding how your organisation can respond to the opportunities and risks for greatest business and social value.	Formulating strategic objectives that address the organisation’s opportunities and risks supported by business cases ³ , resources and champions to put them into practice.	
Stakeholders Managing relationships	Stakeholder Approach	Understanding why a stakeholder approach is essential to your organisation’s long-term success.	Determining who your stakeholders are, how the organisation affects them, and what they think about the organisation.	Inclusive approach: The importance you attach to responding to the needs and aspirations of all people affected by your activities.
	Dialogue and Partnership	Understanding how to engage with stakeholders in order to foster co-learning and build effective relationships.	Engaging in dialogue with stakeholders and responding to their legitimate concerns in a transparent and effective fashion.	
Leadership Creating change	Learning	Understanding the competencies you need to help your organisation deliver its strategic objectives.	Developing and participating in learning and development processes that support the organisation’s strategic objectives at personal and team levels.	Long-term perspective: The importance you attach to recognizing the interests and rights of future generations.
	Action	Understanding the most effective approaches to influencing others and creating change in your organisation in line with its strategic objectives.	Demonstrating personal commitment to the principles and values of sustainable development, encouraging and enabling others to make this a focus of business action.	

Source: World Business Council for Sustainable Development & University of Cambridge Programme for Industry (2004)

³ By business cases we mean the full environmental, social and economic benefits of taking a sustainable development approach, both within the organisation itself and in the wider local and global community.

2.3.2 Local Government White Paper

More recently, the Government's 2006 Local Government White Paper, *Strong and prosperous communities*, placed greater expectation and responsibility on local government to be a strategic leader and 'place-shaper'; a convener of local agencies and groups to build a vision of how to respond to and address a locality's problems and challenges in a co-ordinated way.

In particular, LSPs, Sustainable Community Strategies (SCSs) and Local Area Agreements (LAAs) are expected to be increasingly important and integrated mechanisms for seizing this place-shaping agenda. Furthermore, the White Paper explains that using these mechanisms to address difficult cross-cutting issues (e.g. the economic future of an area, social exclusion and climate change) in an integrated way will be *'at the heart of creating sustainable development at the local level'*.

The consultation on statutory guidance for LSPs, SCSs and LAAs (CLG, 2007a) also puts sustainable development at the heart of these processes and makes a link to national SD priorities. In relation to SCSs, which are intended as *'the overarching plan for promoting and improving the well-being of the area'*, the guidance suggests that:

The purpose of a Sustainable Community Strategy is to set the overall strategic direction and long-term vision for the economic, social and environmental well-being of a local area – typically 10-20 years – in a way that contributes to sustainable development in the UK.

The guidance goes on to explain that this would require SCSs to respect the five principles for sustainable development set out in *Securing the Future*, and that:

...to a greater extent than previously, sustainability should be at the heart of decisions taken on the content of the strategy. Sustainable Community Strategy's economic, social and environmental priorities should therefore demonstrate how they support each other in an integrated way. The strategy should also address the area's longer-term needs and those issues which affect the area that can only be addressed by looking across-boundaries.

The Local Government White Paper envisages LAAs as being the delivery agreements for SCSs. This is confirmed in the place-shaping guidance and in the operational guidance on the new LAA framework (CLG, 2007b), which suggest that the LAA is the shorter-term delivery mechanism for the Local Strategic Partnership's SCS. Should SCSs properly address sustainable development, this should therefore be carried through in to LAAs. The replacement of the 'Economy' block within LAAs with the 'Economic Development & Environment block' provides much greater scope for integration between economic and environmental objectives.

Although not explicit, the importance of partnership working through the LSP in achieving sustainable development, is to some extent also recognised in the place-shaping guidance:

Co-operation should take place through the LSP framework... rather than just between individual partner authorities and their responsible local authority. This is because the majority of LAA targets are expected to be cross-cutting, therefore meaningful co-operation can only occur if all relevant partners are represented during negotiations. (CLG, 2007a)

2.3.3 National policy initiatives

Other recent policy developments offer additional opportunities for local authorities and their partners to strengthen their contribution to sustainable development. These include:

- The Local Government Sustainable Procurement Strategy (LGA et al, 2007) which sets out local government's strategic intent through their spending for 'each Council and Local Strategic Partnership to Councils, working with local partners, will pursue the achievement of social, economic and environmental benefits through the Sustainable Community Strategy, Local Strategic Partnership and Local Area Agreement'.
- The Government focus on environmental sustainability in buildings, e.g. through the commitment to zero-carbon homes, eco-towns, the Code for Sustainable Homes, the new Planning Policy Statement on climate change etc.
- The strengthened policy focus on climate change, e.g. the inclusion of climate change mitigation and adaptation indicators in the National Indicator set, the Energy Measures Report, the Climate Change Bill and the Nottingham Declaration.
- The renewed focus within CLG on community engagement and participation.
- The incorporation of SD into the new NHS principles.
- DCSF's Sustainable Schools programme and SDC's work with DCSF to integrate the environment dimension into the Children's Plan.

2.3.4 Performance management

The new performance management framework also takes some account of sustainable development. The Comprehensive Area Assessment process will seek to assess the prospects for the local area and the quality of life for local people. In doing so, SCSs will play an important role. The guidance (Audit Commission et al, 2007) states that:

It [CAA] will recognise the importance of effective local partnership working, the enhanced role of Sustainable Communities Strategies and Local Area Agreements and the importance of councils in leading and shaping the communities they serve.

Separately the Audit Commission have committed to ensure that the new area risk assessment, which forms part of the CAA process, specifically addresses the risks to sustainability and the action being taken to reduce those risks (Audit Commission, date unknown). In addition, in the new use of resources assessment, *'the Audit Commission will strengthen its focus on how bodies use their resources sustainably, to include whether they have a strategic approach to managing and minimising their impact on the environment, and how they consider sustainability on commissioning and procurement'*.

The new National Indicator Set, made up of 198 outcome-focused indicators, encompasses climate change & energy, as well as important social and economic indicators such as 'access to services and facilities by public transport, walking and cycling' and health and wellbeing indicators. This provides the potential for local areas to track progress on the delivery of SD and Defra have proposed the development of a 'basket of SD indicators' from within the national set, which would serve this purpose. The SDC is currently in discussion with Defra, the Audit Commission and other key stakeholders regarding the development of a local SD 'lens'⁴ (LSDL), which would take forward this commitment and seek:

- to help local authorities and their partners to determine the way in which they achieve social, economic and environmental performance in a more balanced, integrated and strategic way. It will also help determine the way in which the local authority and local areas can champion SD more effectively at the local level;
- to help inform the development of a local area's Sustainable Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement (LAA) and the local authority's improvement plans. It can then also be used to track a local area's own progress towards SD;
- to help inform the Audit Commission's own understanding of local area progress towards SD, particularly through the area risk assessment in the new Comprehensive Area Assessment; and
- to help provide the UK Government with a better understanding of national progress on its 'litmus test' priorities for sustainable development (SD) by highlighting trends at the local level.

2.3.5 Regional partnerships

Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships (RIEPs) are being established (through the merger of the Regional Centres of Excellence and Regional Improvement Partnerships) to support local authorities and their partners in delivering against their new responsibilities, as expressed in their LAAs. Although largely focused on securing greater resource efficiency, the vision of the National Improvement and Efficiency Strategy (CLG & LGA, 2008), which the RIEPs are intended to help deliver, incorporates 'environmental sustainability' alongside the achievement of greater local prosperity.

⁴ a voluntary basket of local indicators that can be used to guide and track progress towards sustainable development at the local level.

Some of the RIEPs will provide specific support on sustainable development issues. For example, the North East and East of England Centres of Excellence provide support and guidance on sustainable procurement.

2.4 Capability of local areas (LSPs, SCSs and LAAs) to deliver sustainable development

2.4.1 Leadership for sustainable development through priorities

Confusing definitions of sustainable development

The evaluations of LSPs, SCSs and LAAs provide some insights into the extent to which these place-shaping mechanisms are helping to deliver sustainable development at a local level. However, different definitions of sustainable development are used throughout. For example, the evaluation of community strategies (ODPM, 2005) equates sustainable development with the term 'environmental sustainability'. In the survey of LSPs in 2004 (ODPM, 2005) 'sustainability' is grouped with biodiversity and no allowance is made for the cross-cutting nature of sustainability with many of the other themes in the survey. It appears from the questionnaire that no guidance was given in defining the themes so different respondents will have treated the themes differently. Therefore the key findings from these evaluations (presented below) need to be treated with caution, and have been reported as found, so not to be confused.

Focus on environmental sustainability

Environmental sustainability has become a cross-cutting theme for many LSPs and their community strategies. The evaluation of 50 community strategies in 2005 (ODPM, 2005), found that environmental sustainability featured as the most popular cross-cutting theme in (47) community strategies, followed by social inclusion. However, it should be noted that this survey used the term 'environmental sustainability' rather than a more integrated definition such as that being used in this research. The analysis of SD within LSPs in London (Community Environment Associates, 2005) probably has more direct relevance to this research, although the research was carried out four years ago. It found that:

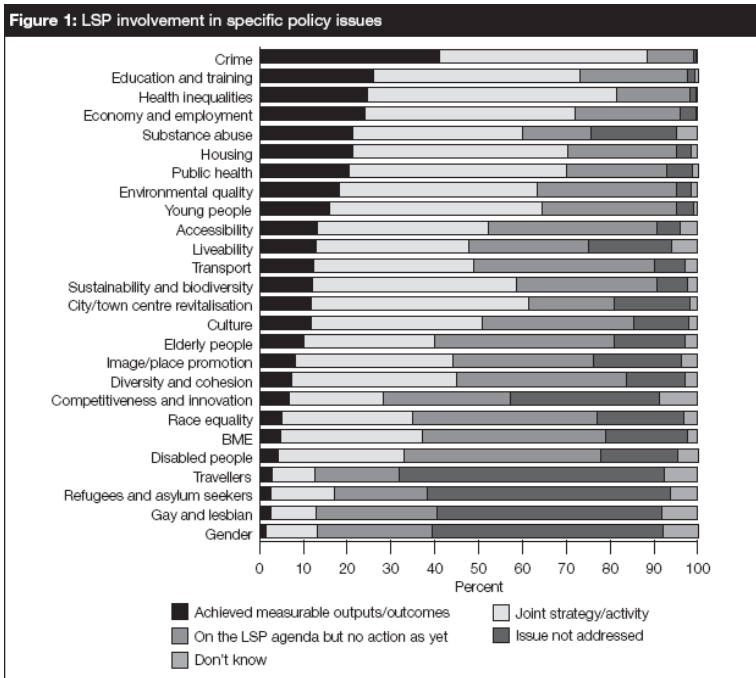
While Government guidance for LSPs specifically asks them to work within regional sustainable development frameworks, to date there is little evidence of such working. Few LSPs have any structured approach to sustainable development and in most cases sustainability issues are dealt with by a sub-group (usually environmental) of the core partnership. Environmental issues are being dealt with by LSPs, notably those relating to 'liveability' issues, but the links between these and social issues are rarely made, even though an LSP is, by nature of the many disciplines and sectors involved, an ideal framework for such cross-linking.

In other cases, environmental sustainability was set as a dedicated theme or priority in some community strategies, including Islington, Isle of Wight, Wiltshire (as part of a countryside theme), Wychavon, Guildford and West Suffolk. Examples included:

- o Barnsley: Specific projects and activities around public transport, a town centre living project, improvement of parks and recreational spaces and through introducing sustainable design principles.
- o Liverpool: sustainability is a principle of the strategy and there is a commitment to take forward the Local Agenda 21 strategy.
- o Wigan: the fourth principle is sustainable development. There are also initiatives to form a green business club, to encourage home working and to increase recycling.

Integrating environmental, social and economic priorities

‘Sustainability’ was considered less important than social and economic priorities such as crime, education, health and the economy by LSPs in 2004 (ODPM, 2005), with ‘sustainability and biodiversity’ being the 13th most common policy area on which LSPs have achieved measurable outputs / outcomes (see chart below). Similarly, an examination of 50 community strategies showed that in 2005 consideration of ‘environmental and sustainable development policies’ was partial, with few (only 7) making links to Local Agenda 21 strategies (Policy Research Institute et al, 2005).



Source: LSP evaluation, 2004 survey

Subsequent reviews of the community strategy process have shown that there are continuing on-going tensions between economic development and environmental priorities within more outcome-focused community strategies because of the difficulty

of balancing the needs and priorities of different groups (CLG, 2006b). The LSP evaluation report recommends greater engagement of districts in county LSPs to ensure a more locally responsive and community based application of strategic priorities (EIUA, 2006).

Sustainability did not sit easily within a strategic approach focused on priorities such as government floor targets, although many of those interviewed in the 2004 survey expressed support for the sustainability principle (EIUA, 2006).

Process and delivery

LSPs experienced some tension in deciding whether to take a strategic or delivery focused approach, and whether to act through the LSP (through sub-partnerships) or whether action should be taken by partners with collaboration or consent of the LSP (EIUA, 2006).

Much LSP activity and achievements focus on process outcomes. Many of these achievements could generate a strong sustainability benefit, but this is not necessarily the case (e.g. developing a strong vision, understanding partners priorities, sharing data and information, ensuring partners plans reflect the priorities of the community strategies) (EIUA, 2006).

The evaluations of LSPs, Community Strategies and LAAs also provide some analysis of capability factors which may impact on the delivery of sustainable development. These are summarised in the following sections.

2.4.2 Attitudes

LSPs have, in a relatively short time, established themselves as a vital part of the institutional arrangements of modernised local governance. The 2005 evaluation uncovered broad positive consensus on the principle and purpose of LSPs (EIUA, 2006).

Similarly, Community Strategies are intended, through the government's drive for plan rationalisation, to become recognised as the 'plan of plans'. However, the extent to which are treated as such has been found to be largely dependent on the attitude of the local authority. In particular, the Leader and Chief Executive was found to be critical in determining whether the Community Strategy achieves the status of 'plan of plans' (ODPM, 2005).

Council officers, councillors and LSPs have become more receptive to, and have more of an appetite for taking a sustainable approach, particularly because of high profile issues such as climate change. This perhaps explains the findings of the report into who's who in sustainable development and local government (CAG Consultants, 2007a), which found that there is a strong focus on climate change and energy (as well as sustainable consumption & production and sustainable communities) in the support provided for local government.

2.4.3 Knowledge

Despite the bedding down of LSPs, SCSs and LAAs, there seemed to be some confusion about the role and purpose of Community Strategies and LAAs, which may affect delivery of SD and their status as the 'plan of plans', as discussed in 3.4.2. Central government reportedly views the emphasis as being on a 'contract' between the centre and localities, whilst local actors see LAAs as dialogue between national and local priorities. These result in different expectations over the balance of priorities and highlighted the need for clarity about the role of LAAs which has been provided subsequently through government guidance.

The review of the Round 2 negotiations and early progress in Round 1 LAAs found that some areas and Government Offices felt that the guidance issued by different government departments contained contradictory messages about LAAs, and different interpretations of sustainable communities, and that this inconsistency in central government policy remains a barrier to local authorities and LSPs taking a decisive and ambitious approach (CLG, 2007e). This has also been suggested more recently by bodies championing SD, such as Sustainability South West, who have called for a consistent definition of what a sustainable community looks like by government (Channon, date unknown).

At the same time, Sustainability South West has suggested that there is a lack of up to date understanding of SD and sustainable solutions amongst LSP members and council officers (Channon, date unknown).

Government Offices lack knowledge and expertise on policy areas such as social care and older people, rural housing and in relation to the fourth LAA block (economic development and enterprise) which has hampered them in spotting the gaps and linkages within LAAs (CLG, 2006). Their knowledge of local areas has been strengthened through the negotiation process, and some have promoted events involving policy specialists from their GO and locality to provide specialist expertise and spot the gaps and linkages.

2.4.4 Culture

The maturity of LSPs and strength of their governance arrangements has a clear relationship with the amount of progress made in general (not just on sustainable development) (EIUA, 2006). However, the national evaluation of LSPs, published in 2006 (European Institute of Urban Affairs et al, 2006) found that practice is variable and that many LSPs do not have robust and fit for purpose governance arrangements, particularly in non-NRF LSPs, which have shown less progress in terms of improved services and meeting floor targets. Indeed, the introduction of LAAs, and additional accountability of partners for delivery has exposed fragile and underdeveloped LSPs, whose lack of appropriate governance structures have hampered progress.

LAAs are encouraging people to think more holistically, strategically and innovatively about ways of mainstreaming and delivering agendas such as neighbourhood renewal.

However, creativity has proved difficult through the process of negotiating the agreement, and the block structure made cross-cutting priorities, such as the environment, affordable housing, and accessibility more difficult to include. The new LAA arrangements have removed the 'block' structure but it is too early to tell whether this will help to improve integration, innovation and flexibility.

2.4.5 Skills/competencies

The existing evidence base provides a number of valuable insights into the skills and competencies that may help deliver sustainable development at a local level. Below we summarise the findings relating to the core competency themes of leadership, stakeholders and strategy, as identified by the World Business Council for Sustainable Development and the University of Cambridge Programme for Industry (2004).

Leadership

Leadership is challenging for LSPs and has been made all the more important by the roll out of LAAs (EIUA, 2006).

Democratic accountability was identified as an issue for LSPs in 2005 (EIUA, 2006). The relationship between, and involvement of, local Councillors in the LSP was identified as weak in many areas (many were seen as not closely connected to or in sympathy with the LSP). Where senior councillors were involved, the evaluation found that they often did not prioritise issues of democratic accountability. In NRF areas where performance management systems to promote accountability did exist, they promoted accountability to GOs and the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit more than to local partners.

Stakeholders

Engagement with partners and stakeholders continues to be variable. There is great variation in the extent to which LSPs have successfully engaged partners and stakeholders – both among LSPs and between different categories of partner. In particular, the involvement of the voluntary and community sector has been limited, because of the sector's fragmentation and lack of capacity and resources, which have been stretched further by the new remits of LSPs (LPSAs and LAAs) and have marginalised this sector (EIUA, 2006 and ODPM, 2005a).

The lack of engagement of districts has been identified as detrimental, with many county LSPs lagging behind other local authorities in terms of delivering improved services although links between two-tier authorities may have been improved by greater clarity provided by recent government guidance and the introduction of unitary authorities in some areas. Although some suggest that there may still be problems with formal linking where a unitary authority is surrounded by a two-tier authority (so called 'county holes') (CLG, 2006b).

Partnership working has been a strong priority for LSPs. In 2005 partnership working was identified as an area of concern for skills development (ODPM, 2005), but has continued to mature and develop. LAAs are providing a strong focus for commitment

and action by partners and have provided greater clarity for partnership working in recent years. This has often meant that partnership working has moved away from strategic decision-making (around the development of the Sustainable Community Strategy) and has become more operational focused.

Local authorities continue to provide the focal point for LSPs and often lead the community strategy process (ODPM, 2005). In other areas, the voluntary and community sector have taken a lead. A strong history and culture of partnership working in the local area has enabled the development of robust and sustainable governance structures.

There are questions about how far structures and processes make it possible for LSPs to take hard decisions and deal with conflicts between priorities (EIUA, 2006). This has particular resonance to decision making associated with sustainable development. There has been little progress made to make sense of partnership working and rationalise overlapping and confusing partnerships at a local level (envisaged as an early task for LSPs in early guidance) (ODPM, 2005). Although some progress has been made by LSPs in rationalising process (protocols, coordination and better ways of working) and plans and processes and reducing the planning burden on local authorities and partners (EIUA, 2006 and CLG, 2006b).

Negotiation skills have become increasingly important with the introduction of LAAs, and are fundamental to balancing priorities and the integration of sustainable development. However the piloting of LAAs has highlighted a lack of negotiation skills within GOs, particularly amongst junior staff (CLG, 2007e).

Strategy

The ability of GOs to challenge local areas on issues of underperformance remains a concern for many. Despite central government staff reporting growing levels of confidence in GOs as a result of learning from Round 1 LAAs, many still continue to express doubts over GOs skills in this area (CLG, 2007c).

A report by the London Sustainability Exchange et al (2006) identified a range of policy areas in LAAs which offer particularly fertile ground for the cross-cutting and integrated approaches which characterise sustainable development. These policy areas include fuel poverty, transport, sustainable design and construction, affordable housing, regeneration and sustainable economic development and climate change mitigation and adaptation. Specific skills in these areas, coupled with the more generic SD skills, may be particularly beneficial for promoting SD within LAAs.

2.4.6 Structures/tools

Lack of understanding of tools and enabling measures provided by policies and regulations, and frustration over the lack of explanation for the refusal of new ones seems to be an on-going frustration for the development of LAAs, but is being addressed through guidance and dry-run exercises (CLG, 2007c). Meanwhile recent

changes have been welcomed by LAAs, such as the growing number of 'single-pot' LAAs, the creation of the fourth block on economic development and environment, and the full integration of former LPSA reward funding.

Mainstreaming remains a challenge, with LSPs finding refocusing of programmes and funding onto shared priorities and targets difficult (EIUA, 2006). Many LSPs surveyed in 2005 felt that public sector partners are constrained by resources and by central government targets and demands. Realignment of programmes was not a priority for many, although recent changes to the LAA block system and strengthened accountability arrangements amongst partners have been introduced since. The 2005 research found that the involvement of the local authority, police and health organisations drove mainstreaming, which was also more likely where 'locality' planning (between the local authority/LSP level and neighbourhood level) takes place.

Some LSPs have found it difficult to demonstrate added value (leading to some suspicion amongst partners of re-badging), despite being able to identify the ways in which the LSP has enabled positive outcomes (EIUA, 2006). In the same way, an investigation by CLG into the efficiency savings made by LAAs found little evidence of savings (CLG, 2007d).

Performance management processes and tools are not yet well established in many non-NRF LSPs (EIUA, 2006). LAAs have stimulated the improvement of local performance management arrangements, and some localities are starting to collect and share data, although progress is slow (CLG, 2007e).

2.4.7 Resources

Developing and negotiating LAAs has proved time consuming and resource intensive for local authorities, GOs and government departments alike, with the pressure intensifying as the number of LAAs and changes in guidance increases. The 'short term pain' is expected to be outweighed by the benefits of streamlining and integration in the long term, although there is little evidence of efficiency gains to date.

Funding for priorities such as health, community safety, education and regeneration means that they are more fully reflected in Community Strategies with less support and advice available to the smaller non-NRF areas.

The evaluation of LSPs (EIUA, 2006) uncovered little good practice anywhere of LSPs mapping partners' spending plans.

2.5 The support currently provided to enhance capability

2.5.1 Support for local government

The research into support provided to local government on sustainable development (CAG Consultants, 2007a) sought to identify the work of the various stakeholder organisations in directly supporting the work of local government in relation to the following functions:

- a. capacity building: work aimed at developing skills and capacity for, and organisational understanding of, SD. For example training, mentoring or toolkits;
- b. watchdog: monitoring and reporting on the effectiveness of performance on SD;
- c. policy advice: providing guidance or recommendations on policy development in relation to SD;
- d. advocacy: promoting the benefits of SD to local government;

and in relation to the UK Government's priority areas for SD:

- a. sustainable consumption and production;
- b. climate change and energy;
- c. natural resource protection;
- d. sustainable communities;

as well as activity focussed more generally on embedding SD.

In relation to the provision of SD capacity building support for local government, the study found that:

- There is currently a strong focus on sustainable consumption & production, climate change & energy and sustainable communities.
- Amongst the stakeholder organisations included in the review, there appears to be less of a focus on capacity building for natural resource protection.
- Although there are a number of capacity building initiatives focused on embedding SD, much of this is relatively limited in scope.

In relation to the provision of a watchdog function for local government on SD, the study found that:

- The formal watchdog function is primarily provided by two organisations:
 - the Environment Agency, who monitor and report on key environmental indicators at the local level; and
 - the Audit Commission, who are responsible for assessing and reporting on the performance of local authorities.

- Very little other scrutiny of local government SD performance is currently carried out.

In relation to the provision of SD policy advice to local government:

- As with the capacity building function, there is currently a strong focus on sustainable consumption & production, climate change & energy and sustainable communities.
- Very little policy advice was identified in relation to embedding SD within local government.

In relation to advocacy work with local government on SD:

- Much of the work currently relates to climate change and energy issues and to embedding SD. Although there is considerable activity in relation to sustainable consumption & production, most of this is narrowly focused on waste.
- Amongst the agencies covered by this review, very little advocacy work appears to be being carried out in relation to natural resource protection and sustainable communities.

Generally, the study found that:

- There is a 'patchwork quilt' of different agencies and initiatives involved in delivering support on SD to local government.
- Because of the varying structures, approaches and priorities of the regional bodies, there are significant differences in the levels and types of support available to local authorities in different parts of the country.
- Support for embedding SD may be the biggest gap in terms of the direct support currently provided to local government.
- There would appear to be a stronger focus at present on climate change & energy and sustainable communities than on other SD topic areas.

The study identified specific needs within local authorities for support to:

- embed sustainable development, particularly focused on senior local authority officers, so as to achieve more effective strategic leadership on SD;
- strengthen scrutiny of SD and environmental management performance at the local level;
- strengthen scrutiny and policy advice around the relationship between SD and economic development;
- address the 'skills and knowledge gap' in relation to sustainable procurement;
- raise awareness and understanding of environmental limits and thresholds, including the cumulative impacts of development on natural areas and species; and

- deliver the behavioural change agenda.

2.5.2 Support for LSPs

There is some information, guidance and resources targeted at local authorities to help them with work with LSPs and in developing SCSs and LAAs, for example by:

- Government, such as Defra's guidance: *Sustainable Communities. A shared agenda, a share of the action: a guide for local authorities* (2006);
- regional sustainable development champion bodies, such as Sustainability South West which provides independent sustainability appraisals of regional and sub-regional strategies and interactive workshops with council officers and LSP members to refresh their understanding of SD and explore the linkages between themes and blocks; and
- organisations supporting local government, such as IDeA, whose website and activities provide a wealth of information, case studies and signposts to other resources on LSPs, and LAAs in particular; and the LGA, which has published a Futures Toolkit to help local authorities consider the changes that face their communities, covering all the issues on the sustainable communities agenda.

Research by CAG Consultants and Warwick Business School in 2005 to inform the development of a learning programme on sustainable communities found that:

- The main providers of external LSP capacity building on sustainable communities have been Regional Assemblies and the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (NRU) Skills and Knowledge programme.
- Capacity building on sustainable communities for LSPs is limited and usually focused on social issues that are mainstream to LSPs work (namely community safety, healthy lifestyles, social inclusion and community engagement in decision making), with environmental/resource related topics given much less attention.
- In addition, the resources and support available to LSPs on outputs are predominantly focused on social and economic issues that reflect floor targets and the four LAA blocks.
- The NRU Skills & Knowledge Programme and RCEs are promoting many aspects of the sustainable communities' agenda, but integration, global and future issues, and anything with a specific "sustainability" tag tend to be neglected.
- The research found that regional support to LSPs in relation to SD is very variable.

The report identified specific need for support for LSPs in:

- integrating, social, economic and environmental objectives;
- meeting the needs of future generations;
- addressing global issues in local decisions; and
- delivering the first three priorities in Securing the Future (sustainable consumption & production, climate change and energy, natural resources and the environment).

2.6 How capability for local sustainability might be strengthened

Many of the recommendations made following earlier evaluations of LSPs, SCSs and LAAs have been acted upon, with new guidance, clarity and measures from central government. The ASC Mind the Skills Gap report (Arup, 2007) states that since the Egan Review there has been notable progress made towards skills development by the ASC, the Regional Centres of Excellence (RCEs) and the Sector Skills Councils and professional institutes.

However, the extent to which these have strengthened capability (in terms of skills, culture, tools and resources etc) for local sustainability remains unclear. The CAG Consultants & Warwick Business School research (2005) found not only that there was limited learning by LSPs but also that there was limited capacity for more learning. Capacity was found to be particularly limited amongst those LSPs not in receipt of Neighbourhood Renewal Fund funding. The extent to which LSPs will have been able to benefit from these improvements is therefore questionable.

In addition, considerable uncertainty surrounds the future of a number of the key agencies currently providing support to local authorities and their partners. Regional Assemblies are to be abolished and the Academy for Sustainable Communities is to become part of the new housing and regeneration agency Communities England. The sub-national review, which set out the government's intention to abolish the regional assemblies, has also led to uncertainty around the future of the regional sustainable development champion bodies, as well as other relevant support structures such as the regional climate change partnerships and regional climate change coordinators (CAG Consultants, 2007b). Meanwhile the resources of Government Offices are increasingly stretched in their ability to support local areas, particularly in the scrutiny of LAAs.

Our review, particularly of the IDeA/SDC mapping project (CAG Consultants, 2007a), LSP Learning Programme report (CAG Consultants & Warwick Business School, 2005)

and the recent evaluation of Birmingham LSP (Warwick Business School & Bennett, 2007) suggests there is still a need for:

- a consistent definition of a sustainable community across government departments, which reflects the overarching principles and priorities of the national SD strategy;
- more consistency, coherence and integration of government policies and the SD offer to local government, which is being facilitated by Government Offices;
- guidance on LSPs, SCSs, LAAs and Multi Area Agreements which fully reflect the UK SD priorities and principles, particularly in relation to tackling climate change;
- further support for embedding, (horizontally) integrating and delivering SD within local authorities, for example, through the identification of opportunities for 'win win' solutions, particularly focused at senior local authority officers and Government Offices;
- support for sustainability appraisals of LAAs and greater scrutiny of local government (and LSP) performance on sustainable development; and
- greater awareness amongst local authorities of existing drivers and support for promoting sustainable development and collaborative working.

In addition, the evaluations of LSPs, SCSs and LAAs also highlighted a need to strengthen wider factors affecting capability to deliver local sustainable development, through:

- more effective engagement with wider partners, particularly districts and the voluntary and community sector;
- greater accountability between LSPs and their partners;
- greater leadership capacity for LSPs;
- development of generic skills (such as breakthrough thinking and brokerage, communication, conflict resolution, inclusive visioning, leadership and making it happen) through formal training, professional development, continuous development and wider training for elected members; and occupational skills (such as landscape architecture, built environment professionals, sustainable development specialists, regional and economic development specialists, planners and then to a lesser degree developers and engineers); and
- monitoring and performance assessment of sustainable communities' indicators.

3. What is good practice and how can it be strengthened?

This section draws out the key findings from the literature review, case studies, the findings from the local practitioners workshop and evidence put forward by the regional sustainable development champion bodies, starting with some general findings and recommendations. This is followed by key findings and recommendations relating to each of the capability factors. The final sub-section presents a framework for local capability to deliver sustainable development.

3.1 General

Although there are examples of good practice, the research demonstrates that there is a relatively poor understanding of sustainable development at the local level and a lack of corporate priority given to sustainable development. Significant efforts are needed to promote a clearer and more consistent understanding of what sustainable development means, particularly amongst senior and political management, something which can only be achieved if there is also consistency and clarity in government policy in relation to sustainable development.

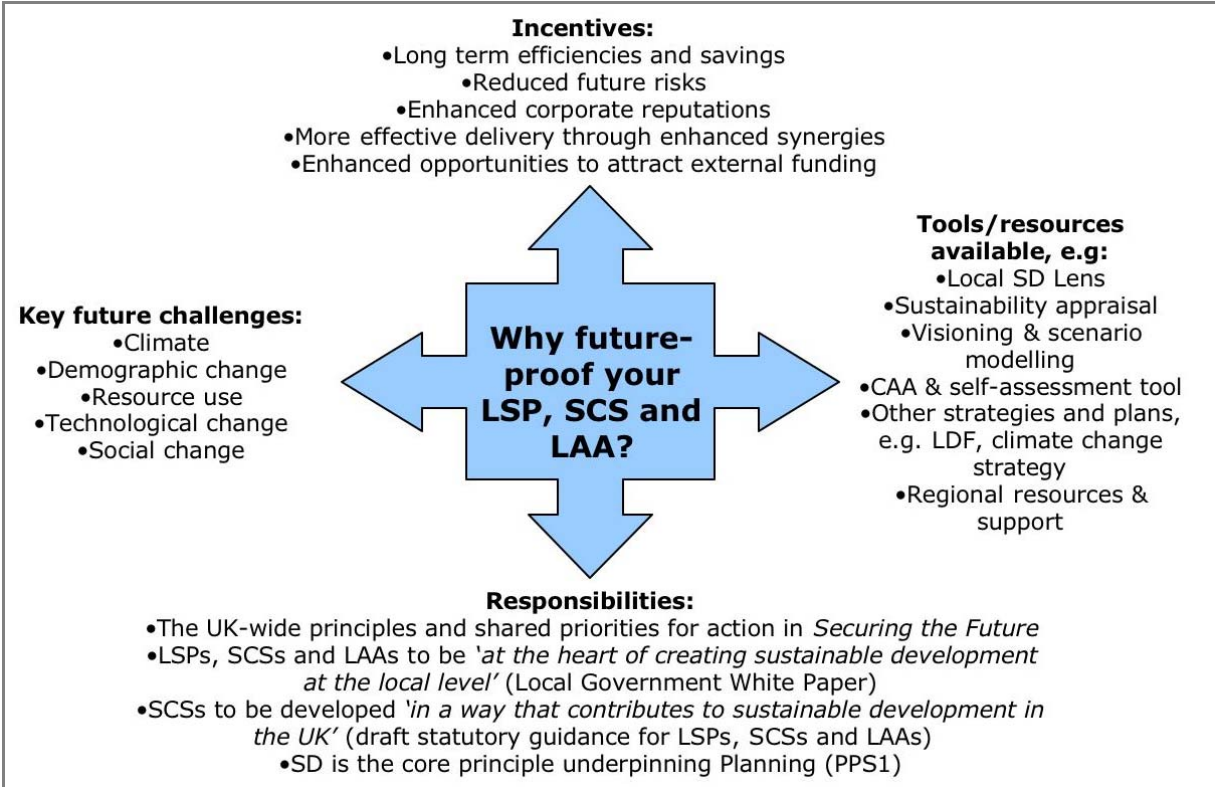
However, one of the key messages emerging from the research is that there is also a need to more effectively communicate the relevance of sustainable development at the local level, particularly through:

- making the links between sustainable development and other key terms and concepts, such as resilience, 'future-proofing' (related to risk management), improving quality of life etc;
- emphasising the benefits of a sustainable or 'future-proofed' approach, particularly in terms of efficiency savings, performance management and corporate reputation/CSR;
- national/regional bodies and SD professionals targeting mainstream priorities such as procurement and climate change as 'trojan horses' for sustainable development/'future-proofing'; and
- more clearly articulating the existing duties and 'proxy duties' to deliver sustainable development at the local level.

In addition, there is a need to promote greater awareness and understanding of the tools, guidance and other resources which already exist to support the delivery of

sustainable development at the local level. Figure 2 below summarises the key elements of the message which needs to be communicated to local actors about addressing sustainable development, possibly framing it in the language of ‘future-proofing’.

Figure 2: Promoting sustainable development at the local level



The following sections draw out further key findings from the research relating to each of the capability factors. In addition, the demands/needs for support to enhance the different aspects of capability for local sustainable development are identified, along with our recommendations for how that support could be supplied and the priority which should be attached to meeting the need/demand. The prioritisation is based on our assessment of the urgency of the demand/need and the extent of the benefits to be gained in meeting them.

3.2 Leadership

The importance of local authority leadership on SD within LSPs is clearly apparent in the case studies.

The particularly important aspects of leadership on SD within LSPs appear to be:

- encouraging strategic and long term thinking, beyond short term priorities;

- championing integration between strategies and policy areas;
- facilitating collaboration and building partnership; and
- leading by example, for example, local authorities committing funding for demonstration projects or taking sustainable approaches to capital spending.

Leadership, in most cases, is provided by sustainability officers within the local authority. The importance of engaging, and gaining support from LSP officers, particularly the LSP manager, is also apparent. In some cases, notably Birmingham and Leicester, the LSP have a dedicated officer for sustainability, who have been critical to providing leadership on SD. At officer level, some of the key roles appear to be lobbying, networking and providing the practical advice and information necessary for sustainable decision-making.

Gaining corporate level priority for sustainable development within the local authority has helped to promote sustainable approaches within the place-shaping mechanisms. In Sutton, for example, SD has been incorporated in the Council's Corporate Plan and clear links have been made between the Sustainable Community Strategy and this Plan, as well as other key Council policy documents such as the Local Development Framework. They have also developed a pilot project to demonstrate the delivery of SD in action.

Similarly, gaining the personal buy-in to sustainable development of the Council leader and chief executive is identified as being important in raising the profile and widening commitment from partners. However, gaining buy-in from members and senior managers within local authorities has proved problematic in many cases.

However, the evaluation of LSPs found that leadership for LSPs was challenging. If this is true of leadership generally, it certainly seems true for leadership on SD. Sustainability South West, in their response to the call for evidence in this research, suggest that *'leadership for the delivery of sustainability in practice is generally not fully understood, under prioritised and under supported'*.

Securing the involvement of the LSP board in addressing sustainable development is considered important by practitioners but has often also proved difficult, largely because of the time constraints faced by board members. As the research into London LSPs (Community Environment Associates, 2005) indicated, sustainability issues are often dealt with by a sub-group (normally environment-focused) of the Partnership. Many of those interviewed as part of this research noted that gaining board-level commitment to sustainable development was important for the development of truly sustainable approaches.

As well as local authority leadership on SD, a number of the case studies demonstrate the importance of having other partners actively championing sustainable development. For example, in Gloucestershire the voluntary sector (linked to previous Local Agenda 21 initiatives) are said to have long-championed sustainable development as a cross-

cutting theme for the LSP, as well as providing important skills and knowledge in this area. Private sector partners have played significant roles elsewhere.

The table below summarises the key demands/needs relating to leadership, along with our suggestions for how they might be met.

Demand/need	Supply	Priority
More effective leadership for SD amongst local authorities and LSP partners	Training and advice in leadership for SD aimed at political & senior management within local authorities (particularly Council leaders and Chief Executives) and amongst LSP partners, which may best be integrated within other activities and material aimed at political and senior management. Further reinforcement of the need for the Sustainable Community Strategy to be the 'plan of plans'.	High
Improved knowledge of opportunities for sustainable development through LSPs	SD awareness-raising and training for LSP managers, which may best be integrated within other activities and material aimed at LSP managers. Clearer articulation of the duties and proxy duties to deliver sustainable development at the local level, which could be incorporated in the place-shaping guidance.	Medium
Continued and improved peer support for SD professionals	Need for LSP SD networks, not just LA ones Continuation of ESCCape (Environmental Sustainability and Climate Change Community of Practice), networking events, sharing of experience (rather than good practice) and mentoring. Ensure that regional SD peer support networks currently facilitated by Regional Assemblies or Regional SD Champion Bodies are not lost following the sub-national review and support new/enhanced regional and sub-regional networks where there are gaps.	High
Consistency of Government policies with sustainable development principles and <i>Securing the Future</i> .	Improved joint working between government departments to ensure greater consistency of policies and communications to local authorities and their partners. External scrutiny to ensure this happens.	High

3.3 Attitudes

Particularly within local authority partners, but as far as possible amongst other partners as well, an understanding and acceptance of SD as a cross-cutting issue, ideally *the* most important such issue, enables integrated approaches to be developed. Risk aversion, particularly amongst senior managers, who have yet to appreciate the value which SD could add to their service delivery, seems to be a significant block to such attitudes to SD.

Practitioners particularly highlighted the need to overcome negative perceptions often found amongst partners, such as:



- that SD is too big an issue to deal with, without immediate relevance to their priorities; and
- that SD is too 'worthy' an issue, without a clear business case⁵.

Positive attitudes towards sustainable development amongst the wider community were also highlighted as being significant in some of the case studies, such as in Sutton where this is said to have been aided by the local authority having a strong track record on SD and where sustainable development has been a focus for a number of years.

An openness to SD amongst LSP partners can take time to develop. In Cumbria, through the use of sustainability appraisal over many years, the partnership have increasingly understood the benefits to be gained from adopting a sustainable approach rather than seeing it as a 'hoop to jump through' or a potential barrier to economic growth. This is said to have been aided to a degree by the renaming of 'Community Strategies' as 'Sustainable Community Strategies', which is said to have re-emphasised to partners the importance of addressing sustainable development issues in their community planning work.

The table below summarises the key demands/needs relating to attitudes, along with our suggestions for how they might be met.

Demand/need	Supply	Priority
Positive attitudes towards sustainable development amongst LSPs	Use government communications on climate change and procurement to make the links with and promote the need for sustainable development.	High
Address the perception amongst senior managers that integrated approaches are too risky	Continue to develop and communicate the business case and (financial and outcome) benefits of sustainable development at the local level.	Medium

3.4 Knowledge

Feedback from the East Midlands LSPs suggested that an understanding of SD is still limited to a relatively small number of professionals and that a good knowledge and understanding of SD is not often found amongst political and senior management.

Confusion clearly still surrounds the definition of SD, with it often understood as being simply about the environment. This is said to persist not only amongst LSP partners but

⁵ By business cases we mean the full environmental, social and economic benefits of taking a sustainable development approach, both within the organisation itself and in the wider local and global community.

also amongst the regional bodies, including Government Offices, who engage with them.

This research points to the need for greater clarity in the messages provided by Government about sustainable development. In particular, there is demand for greater consistency in the use of the terms ‘sustainable development’ and ‘sustainable communities’, and in ensuring that all government policies promote, and do not conflict with, sustainable development.

The table below summarises the key demands/needs relating to knowledge, along with our suggestions for how they might be met.

Demand/need	Supply	Priority
Knowledge and expertise within Government Offices to promote sustainable development e.g. integrating SD within LAAs .	Provide guidance and support (including resources) for Government Offices to help identify opportunities to integrate sustainable development within LAAs	High
Clearer and more consistent understanding of what sustainable development means, particularly amongst political and senior management	Consistency and clarity across all Government departments and regional Government Offices about what sustainable development means. Clarifying the distinctions and relationship between ‘Sustainable Development’ & ‘Sustainable Communities’ is seen to be critical.	High

3.5 Culture

The research demonstrates that the delivery of local sustainable development is aided by a culture of partnership and joint working at the local level. This enables the development of integrated, collaborative solutions. This is important, both between partners, and within individual partner organisations, particularly the local authority.

Within individual partner organisations, particularly the local authority, a culture of joint working (formal and informal) can also be key, particularly between LSP officers, sustainability officers and those involved in other key policy documents such as the Local Development Framework.

The evidence presented by Sustainability South West highlighted the particular importance of a corporate culture amongst partners which supports new learning and some risk-taking, although few organisations were said to be demonstrating such a culture.



Having a history of joint working in the local area and the appropriate partnership structures in places to support it are clearly important. A culture of collaboration may also be engendered through the use of particular techniques. For example, in the development of the Sustainable Community Strategy and LAA in North Somerset, a workshop-based approach to analysing the issues is reported to have gone a long way towards developing a culture of joint working, shared understanding and integration thinking amongst partners in an area without a long history of partnership working and that this is now, in turn, influencing the structures and working practices of LSP.

The table below summarises the key demands/needs relating to culture, along with our suggestions for how they might be met.

Demand/need	Supply	Priority
Promoting a culture of joint working and partnership.	Peer-support to support learning across LSPs about how to create culture of joint working and partnership.	Medium
Promoting a corporate culture within partner organisations which supports new learning and appropriate risk-taking.	Promote involvement of business in LSPs through e.g. renewable energy and climate change projects.	Medium

3.6 Skills/competencies

Strategic thinking is identified as a key skill necessary for delivering local sustainable development. This includes seeing beyond short term priorities, something made difficult by short term policy and funding cycles, but aided, on the other hand, by the increasing prominence of the long term issue of climate change. It also includes being able to see the bigger picture and focus on the most important, as opposed to the easiest, issues. For example, practitioners felt that even amongst sustainable development professionals there is a tendency to focus on smaller, 'easy-win' issues rather than the most significant. They suggested that there was a need for SD professionals to 'up their game', as well as seeking to improve the capability of delivery agents, such as many of the LSP partners, and specialist officers, such as planners.

Skills for partnership working are crucial in generating sustainable solutions, as is demonstrated by a number of the case studies including Sutton, Gloucestershire and Cornwall. Partnership working skills highlighted as being of particular importance in this context were networking, engagement, collaboration and negotiation. Gloucestershire's work on sustainable development, in particular, has benefited from investment in their skills for and understanding of partnership working.



The research findings show that most recognised SD expertise lies within local authorities, as well as parts of the voluntary sector in some cases. However, the level of SD expertise clearly varies very significantly across the country. Most of the case studies of good practice involved a dedicated local authority sustainability officer or team with corporate-wide responsibilities but many authorities still have no such role. Dedicated sustainability staff within most partner organisations is even rarer.

In addition, maintaining expertise was identified as an issue due to the turnover of staff. This may be due to the fact that sustainable development as a profession is still relatively emergent and there are differing opinions as to the potential benefits of further professionalisation of the sector. Some practitioners felt that this may help to determine a set of recognized skills and lead to greater recognition and less marginalisation of SD professionals. However, others felt that this could work against the imperative for SD professionals to work across and integrate a range of sectors.

As well as the generic skills discussed above, a wide range of topic specific skills will also be necessary in delivering local sustainable development. However, because SD necessitates the integration of social, economic and environmental disciplines, the range of topic-specific skills potentially needed to deliver sustainable development in any locality is endless. Furthermore, the research indicates that what are most important for the development of sustainable approaches within LSPs are not technical skills in all policy areas, but people with a broad understanding of these policy areas and the ability to promote integrated approaches between them.

A number of the case studies also demonstrate that fundraising skills can significantly increase the capability to deliver local sustainable development. A good example of this is Sutton, where 15 of the 19 members of the Council's sustainability team, many of whom are engaged in work with the LSP, are externally funded.

The table below summarises the key demands/needs relating to skills/competencies, along with our suggestions for how they might be met.

Demand/need	Supply	Priority
Skills in integrating economic, social and environmental objectives in strategy	National guidance on the place shaping mechanisms to directly address the integration of sustainable development.	High
Long term, strategic thinking and planning	Government place shaping guidance to support LSPs in seeing beyond the short term priorities and three year funding cycles.	High
Embedding SD within partner organisations	Appropriate information resources and learning on SD for the wide range of LSP partners (much is currently seen to be only appropriate for local authorities).	Medium

Demand/need	Supply	Priority
Greater understanding of the core skills needed for SD and greater recognition of SD as a profession.	Investigate demand for professionalisation of SD skills.	Low
	Continue promotion of SD skills amongst key professions e.g. planners, built environment professionals, performance management and procurement staff.	Medium
Stakeholder engagement and inclusivity	Provide peer support for LSPs and SD professionals to help improve engagement of different stakeholders and sectors, such as the business and voluntary and community sectors.	Low

3.7 Structures/tools

3.7.1 Structures

As already discussed, effective partnership working is critical to delivering local sustainable development. Amongst LSPs, this necessitates the ongoing development of locally appropriate, robust & fit-for-purpose partnership structures & governance arrangements. Earlier evaluations of LSPs were critical of the progress made in establishing such structures and arrangements but some of the case studies demonstrate that significant progress has been made in recent years.

LSP partnership structures and governance arrangements can promote sustainable development in other ways. For example, establishing close relationships between the arrangements for developing the Sustainable Community Strategy and the arrangements for developing the LAA, such as in Cornwall where they are being developed in parallel, will increase the chances of sustainable development being translated into the LAA.

The Gloucestershire example highlights the particular importance of effective partnership structures in two-tier areas, where involvement at district and county levels can be both complex and burdensome. This is made all the more important by the need to make close links between district-level Local Development Frameworks and county-wide Sustainable Community Strategies. A number of participants in the research highlighted the potential for LDFs, because of their longer-term nature and their requirement to address sustainable development, to enhance the sustainability of Sustainable Community Strategies. For the County-wide strategies, these and other benefits can only accrue, however, where districts are effectively engaged in the County-wide partnerships.

With the assistance of the Tavistock Institute, Gloucestershire have developed a multi-level partnership structure which aims to increase the clarity of roles and responsibilities, increase effectiveness and reduce the burden of involvement. Similarly,

Birmingham's LSP has undergone several structural changes to improve partnership working, including the use of specialist consultants to undertake structural reviews.

A number of the case studies also highlight the benefits of having a theme group or sub-group within the LSP with a specific sustainable development remit, as opposed to it being dealt with by an environment sub-group or not at all, providing that such a group has high level support and the influence and resources necessary to work at a strategic level across the partnership.

3.7.2 Tools

Collaborative tools and approaches are useful in promoting integration between policy areas and developing more sustainable approaches. For example, North Somerset's use of an integration workshop to review the outcomes from community consultation on the Sustainable Community Strategy is reported to have been beneficial in enabling partners to think beyond their own areas of responsibility. Similarly, Gloucestershire used a multi-agency conference to test the sustainability proofing of their strategy and are currently using the Local Futures model to promote integration between their various priorities.

The way in which such appraisal tools are developed and applied is significant. Of particular significance:

- a. utilising appraisal in an iterative way throughout each stage of the development of the SCS or LAA, starting from the earliest stage of development, ensures that the process has the most impact;
- b. utilising appraisal tools in a collaborative fashion, normally involving a panel representing a range of social, economic and environmental interest, helps in identifying integrated policy solutions; and
- c. developing appraisal tools locally with the involvement of partners helps to build local ownership and greater enthusiasm for their use.

One Planet Living & ecological footprinting seem to be useful tools for demonstrating and promoting understanding of SD. For example, locally it is hoped that Sutton's pilot One Planet Living project *"will become a model for action across the borough where working in partnership with the community, business and voluntary organisations and other public agencies can bring about lifestyle and physical changes in one area that will define sustainability in practical terms for all that live and work in the area"*.

The use of sustainability appraisal-type tools has helped to facilitate the hard decision-making necessary for SD, promote integration between policy areas and overcome the LAA block structure, which in many cases hinders integration. Hounslow's sustainability standard toolkit, which has been piloted on their new LAA, has resulted in sustainability being a cross-cutting theme within the LAA and is said to have resulted in integrated action on air quality, health and economic development in particular.

In addition, the use of such tools has helped to build understanding of sustainable development and appreciation of the benefits of promoting a sustainable approach. Cumbria's use of sustainability appraisal in the development of their Sustainable Community Strategy and LAA is a good example of this, where, through the use of appraisals it is reported that members of the County-wide strategic partnership have grown in their understanding and appreciation of SD and have developed particular skills in developing integrated approaches.

The table below summarises the key demands/needs relating to structures/tools, along with our suggestions for how they might be met.

Demand/need	Supply	Priority
Awareness of existing SD requirements, mechanisms and tools for SD	Develop and promote directory of existing tools, mechanisms and levers. Promote tools to support the SD elements of the forthcoming statutory guidance in LSPs, SCSs and LAAs.	High
Improved scrutiny of local areas' performance on SD	Ensure CAA process and self-assessment tool are optimised for improving performance on sustainable development by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeking to communicate a 'better futures'/future proofing' approach, rather than brand as sustainable development; • Ensure a focus on living within environmental limits, alongside the existing social justice agenda to reflect national SD goals; • Include process as well as outcomes; • Ensure local priorities are cognisant of national objectives and targets; • Focus on seeking integrated solutions; • Ensure consistency with LAA and the Local SD Lens. 	High
Ability to benchmark performance on SD	Ensure that the Local SD Lens allows benchmarking of SD and comparisons with regional and national averages, plus some measurement of excellent to poor performance; includes appropriate local, regional and national targets, where available; and develops a mechanism to promote integrated solutions.	High
Greater co-ordination and coherence in the support for local areas on SD	Bring together key national and regional partners to identify areas of duplication, gaps and future areas for development, building on existing research commissioned by IDeA and SDC in 2007.	Medium

Demand/need	Supply	Priority
Ongoing development of locally appropriate, effective and robust partnership structures and governance arrangements, particularly within two-tier areas	Provide on-hand diagnostic support for LSPs on structural and governance arrangements.	Medium -Low
Clearer linkages between the structures for developing the SCS, LAA, LDF and MAA	Ensure Place-Shaping guidance and subsequent communications provide clear linkages between the structures for developing SCS, LAA, LDF and MAA and between those leading on them.	High

3.8 Resources

LSPs, SCSs and LAAs place significant pressure on staff resources, particularly within local authorities and resource-strapped partners, such as the voluntary and community sector. At the same time, sustainable development, can often be seen as an additional burden on resources, rather than a way of maximising benefits and reducing risks and costs in the long term. The practitioners involved in the workshop suggested that the Government underestimates the time and resources (people and financial) to develop LSPs, Sustainable Community Strategies and LAAs.

The biggest resource issue highlighted in the research is the pressure on staff resources. Some local authorities have (normally small) SD teams and their role in the place-shaping mechanisms are critical in many of the case studies. However, many authorities have either no SD team or a single SD officer. Where local authorities have a dedicated SD staff resource, LSPs appear to be heavily reliant on it for addressing sustainable development issues. In Islington, for example, the Council's Sustainability Team, have been instrumental in delivering the good practice.

To address these resource issues, in two of the case studies (Birmingham and Leicester) the LSPs themselves have a dedicated SD officer. In both cases, these are well-funded (through Neighbourhood Renewal Funding and other sources) partnerships and are not reflective of much of the country, particularly the smaller districts where resources are very limited.

Some authorities have been successful in attracting significant levels of funding for their sustainability staff team and other related initiatives, which can then benefit the LSP. Sutton's Sustainability Team, often in conjunction with the LSP, have drawn in funding from a wide range of sources, including Transport for London, European Life, Section 106 and Single Regeneration Budget grants, as well as accessing smaller grants

through voluntary sector partners. Hounslow attracted funding from Defra for the development of their sustainability standard toolkit, with additional support from the London Sustainability Exchange (a SD advocacy charity), London Sustainable Development Commission and the Government Office for London.

The advice and guidance provided by regional bodies is also important in supporting work on sustainable development in some regions. Government Offices are particularly important in the negotiation of LAAs, where they have the opportunity to promote sustainable development. In both the North Somerset and Gloucestershire case studies, the Government Office have been successful in doing that. The regional SD champion bodies and regional assemblies also play important roles, particularly in terms of providing SD training and peer support networks for SD officers, although this varies considerably from region to region. In London, an informal partnership between the Greater London Assembly, Government office for London, Association of London Government, the London Health Commission (LHC), the London Sustainable Development Commission (LSDC) and London Sustainability Exchange (LSX) have been seeking to promote the embedding of health and sustainable development into Local Area Agreements (LAAs). This has included seminars for local authority officers, CEOs and leaders to share good practice and help boroughs to bring an integrated approach to their LAA.

The research also highlighted resource issues for the statutory agencies, who are reported to have difficulty finding the resources to engage with LSP processes. The regional SD champion body in the South East suggest that this is particularly the case for district-level LSPs but is also true at the higher level. Consequently, they suggest, statutory agency involvement in LSPs is patchy at best.

The table below summarises the key demands/needs relating to resources, along with our suggestions for how they might be met.

Demand/need	Supply	Priority
Sufficient resources for LA SD team to effectively engage in place-shaping mechanisms and deliver SD	Identify and support resource-and staff poor LSPs (particularly in non-NRF-funded areas) to identify other local authority staff (e.g. performance managers, partnership managers) and partners who may be able to assist.	High
Need for greater SD expertise within Government Offices	A programme of support to build sustainable development expertise within GOs.	High
Income generation	Develop targeted training for SD professionals on income-generation opportunities and skills and on 'bending' of mainstream resources.	Medium

3.9 External factors

The practitioners' workshop highlighted a number of external factors which are assisting in the delivery of local sustainable development, including:

- competition between areas, which is said to be driving improved performance on SD, as well as breaking down barriers and encouraging people to look to other areas for ideas;
- Comprehensive Area Assessment, which is seen to have the potential to promote sustainable outcomes, particularly in relation to climate change; and
- increased media coverage of sustainable development and climate change.

To help drive sustainable development, particularly in poor performing areas, some practitioners saw a need for a new statutory duty for local areas and LSPs to deliver sustainable development. However, others, particularly those areas that are leading change, as well as national bodies point to the variety of 'proxies' for a duty, which can help drive change. These include:

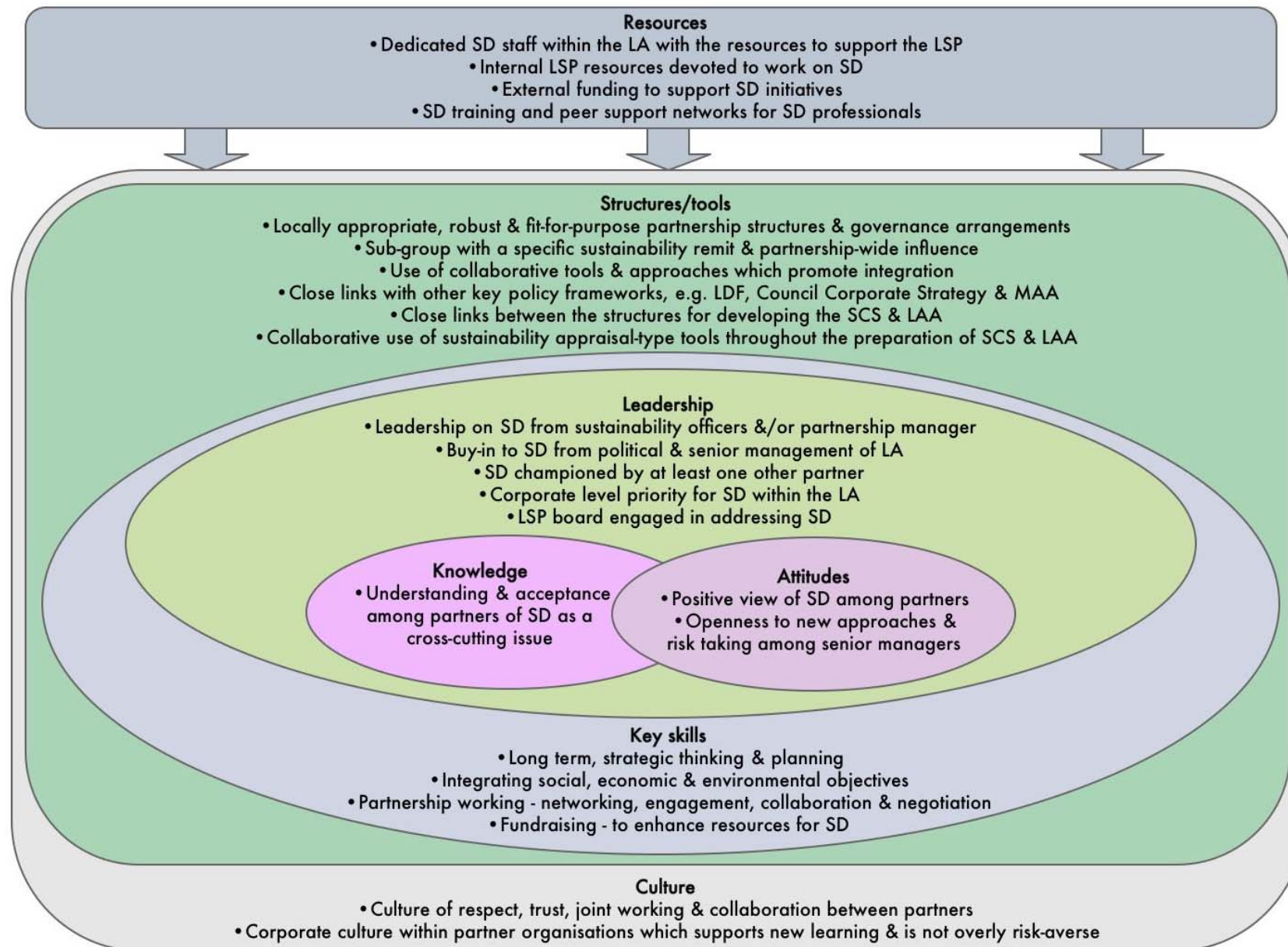
- the national SD strategy *Securing the Future* which sets out UK-wide principles and shared priorities for action;
- policy e.g. the Local Government White Paper, which suggests that LSPs, SCSs and LAAs will be '*at the heart of creating sustainable development at the local level*'.
- the draft statutory guidance for LSPs, SCSs and LAAs, which puts SD at the heart of these processes and suggests that SCSs should be developed '*in a way that contributes to sustainable development in the UK*';
- the duty to deliver sustainable development in Planning and the close relationships intended between Planning and place-shaping processes.

More clearly articulating and communicating these duties, along with the potential benefits to be gained from pursuing sustainable development and the tools and resources which are available to assist this pursuit, will help to drive sustainable development upwards on local agendas (see figure 2).

3.10 Towards a framework for local capability

Figure 3 on the following page presents a framework for local capability to deliver sustainable development as it relates to the place-shaping mechanisms. The diagram seeks to highlight the main capability elements that are needed within the place-shaping mechanisms and the wider local authority and community context in order to generate more sustainable outcomes, as well as providing an indication of the relationships between these elements. It might be used by LSP managers or sustainability officers in order to identify ways of achieving a more sustainable approach to place-shaping.

Figure 3: Towards a framework for local capability to deliver sustainable development



Part B: A local SD benchmarking tool?

4. What are the success criteria for an effective tool?

This section discusses the issues around benchmarking local performance on sustainable development, and sets out the key success criteria which would need to be met by a new tool, or existing tools and mechanisms which can be used to benchmark the delivery of sustainable development by local areas. We set out a range of options for meeting local areas' needs for benchmarking performance on sustainable development.

Improving, measuring and comparing the performance of local areas in delivering sustainable development is clearly a concern. Through this project, the SDC was keen to test the assumption that a sustainable development benchmarking tool would help support the capability of local areas.

This section provides an initial assessment of the potential roles which a SD benchmarking tool might play to strengthen local capability to deliver sustainable development (covering LSPs, SCSs and LAAs). The assessment is largely based on the findings from the interviews conducted with key stakeholders and the practitioners' workshop.

4.1 Support for a local SD benchmarking tool

Stakeholders and practitioners involved in this research had mixed views as to whether the development of a local SD benchmarking tool would be useful. Some practitioners suggested that such a tool would need to be mandatory for it to be used at all. However this view conflicted with concerns expressed by some that it would add extra performance measurement requirements when resources are already stretched (particularly in two-tier areas) and at a time when the emphasis is on local areas measuring less. It was also felt that the introduction of a further tool for LSPs would add further complexity to the landscape of existing tools and guidance.

Others suggested that a local SD benchmark tool is needed. They felt it would play a useful role in enabling and encouraging LSPs to address sustainable development, by enhancing local understanding of what sustainable development means in practice, and how it can be achieved through LSPs, Sustainable Community Strategies and LAAs. In

particular, it was felt that any tool should be focused on, and support 'poor performers', rather than those areas already leading change and within considerable capability. However, there were concerns that those areas that most need a benchmark tool may not be able to self-diagnose their need, or have the capacity to use additional tools.

4.2 Key success factors

Even where there was support for a local SD benchmarking tool, this support was expressed with caveats attached. For a new SD benchmarking tool to be successful, stakeholders suggested that such a tool should:

- a. avoid duplication of, and integrate with other existing or planned tools and guidance; and, in particular
- b. be clearly linked and complimentary to Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) and the CAA self-assessment tool, without distracting from these or undermining them;
- c. support the development of an action plan for achieving sustainable development, and not just focus on the measurement of performance;
- d. clearly demonstrate how integration between social, economic and environmental objectives can be achieved;
- e. be very practical, accessible and easy to use, and include real examples;
- f. be flexible enough to accommodate the wide local variations in sustainable development issues, as well as the variations in structures and governance – a 'gold standard' approach may alienate users;
- g. be focused on LSP priorities and outcomes and in their own language;
- h. avoid being too directive but, rather, provide guidance and help;
- i. involve LSPs in developing, testing and piloting the tool to help refine it and demonstrate its value; and
- j. be regularly reviewed and updated based on experiences with implementing it and changing circumstances.

4.3 Relationship with existing or planned tools, mechanisms and guidance

Avoiding duplication with existing tools is clearly critical. One of the key findings of previous research in to the activity of key national and regional stakeholder organisations on SD at the local government level (CAG Consultants, 2007b) was that there is a need to improve the coordination and coherence of the support offered and this is reinforced by the findings of this research.

In particular, any such tool would need to be clearly linked and complimentary to the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) process, the proposed 'basket of SD indicators' or 'Local Sustainable Development Lens'⁶ and the CAA self-assessment tool. It was suggested that links to the CAA process were critical in terms of any tool being used at the local level. Such a tool would need to clearly demonstrate how it can help LSPs to prepare for CAA.

On the other side of the inspection fence, the Audit Commission suggest that the use of a benchmarking tool by local areas could assist them, along with the other inspectorates, to 'get behind' the headline indicators and other performance reporting and help them to 'diagnose the levers to affect change'.

Those involved in the development of the CAA self-assessment tool suggested that there may be scope for further inclusion of sustainable development within this tool itself, with further links to a benchmarking tool, but that the timescales for achieving this are very tight.

Other tools and guidance which it was suggested a local SD benchmarking tool should link with include:

- the Academy for Sustainable Communities' (ASC) proposed benchmarking tool. A specification for this tool has been developed but further development of it has been put on hold, in order to await the outcomes of SDC's work. The ASC have suggested that they would be interested in collaborating with the SDC to develop such a tool;
- the Sustainability at Work tool, developed by the Prince of Wales Accounting for Sustainability project in partnership with the National Audit Office, the Sustainable Development Commission and Defra, which provides on-line guidance, tools, links and case studies to help organisations to integrate sustainable development into their decision making and provide a framework to enable organisations to report on their performance in a more consistent manner;
- the final version of CLG's place-shaping guidance which is due to be released in summer 2008, which would need to explain the value and significance of the tool and explain its relationship with other tools and assessment processes;

- The NHS Good Corporate Citizen approach;
- Forum for the Future's sustainability standard for local authorities. This is currently process-focused but an outcomes layer is in development; and
- Forum for the Future's Low Carbon Tool for LSPs, which is currently in development. This is outcome-focused and covers adaptation and mitigation issues but doesn't include the wider SD issues which would be incorporated within a local SD benchmarking tool.

In addition, it was suggested by some stakeholders that sustainable procurement already acts as a 'trojan horse' for sustainable development and this topic warranted further study alongside any proposals for a new SD tool. Tools and mechanisms exist for sustainable procurement and LSPs should be the driving force for this agenda in their areas.

4.4 Audience for a local SD benchmarking tool

It was suggested that the tool would need to be in a language and format which all local partners could access, understand and appreciate and which all could benefit from using. It was felt that a benchmarking tool is likely to be used primarily by the LSP manager, with assistance from local authority sustainability officers (where they exist), but that it was crucial for it to be owned by the LSP board and chair and not simply sidelined in to an environment theme group or similar sub-group.

In order for it to be owned by the partnership as a whole and to have buy-in from a senior level it was suggested that the message about *using* the tool would need to come from various government departments and not just CLG. However, a bottom-up approach to the *development* of a tool was also seen as beneficial in terms of securing ownership.

4.5 Scope/content

Most of those interviewed suggested that a local SD benchmarking tool should primarily be outcomes-focused. This was seen to be critical to it achieving change on the ground. It was also suggested that LSPs have been caught up with process issues and governance arrangements over recent months and, by the time any tool is produced, would be more concerned about delivering the commitments in their LAA.

However, one interviewee suggested that most outcomes should be adequately covered in the basket of SD indicators, as well as in the principles for Sustainable Development and the criteria for Sustainable Communities so the tool ought to focus primarily on the practicalities, the process and mechanisms for achieving sustainable development.

Some interviewees and practitioners suggested that it should cover both outcome and process elements. In the words of one interviewee, *'it should define what a sustainable place looks like but also how to achieve that'*.

In terms of potential frameworks for the tool, it was suggested that it should incorporate the elements of the *Securing the Future* definition of SD as well as demonstrating the links with the Sustainable Communities criteria. One interviewee suggested that it could use the two headline principles from *Securing the Future* (Living within Environmental Limits and Ensuring a Strong, Healthy and Just Society) as the basis for the outcome elements, with the three supporting principles (achieving a sustainable economy, using sound science responsibly and promoting good governance) as the basis for the process elements.

Alternatively the tool could be based around the Aalborg commitments. Southampton has been using these commitments to shape their Sustainable Community Strategy and others who have utilised them (e.g. Hampshire and Leicester) have also suggested that they could be applied to the place-shaping mechanisms.

There was little appetite for a comparative function, i.e. allowing areas to compare their performance against others. It was suggested that each LSP is different and working in different contexts, meaning comparison would be of little use.

4.6 Format

The importance of user-friendliness was emphasised by a number of interviewees, with suggestions for achieving this including:

- keeping it short, colourful and attractive;
- having the tool in a number of different formats, including web-based and paper-based, in order to accommodate the different working styles and preferences of the wide range of potential users; and
- providing headline messages for use at the partnership level, as well as further detail for use by relevant officers.

4.7 Additional resources/support

It was suggested that a benchmark would need to be accompanied by illustrative case studies, ideas for action and signposts for further support, guidance and information.

A number of interviewees suggested a possible role for Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships in promoting and supporting the implementation of the tool, including possibly encouraging cross-border working on sustainable development issues

4.8 Ownership

A number of interviewees suggested that a benchmarking tool would be best owned and promoted by the IDeA and/or the LGA. The IDeA is currently setting up a library of LSP and LAA best practice and it is intended that this will also include a directory of tools, guidance and resources. The benchmarking tool could form part of this resource and utilise the other resources within it. Practitioners considered that the production of a 'neutral guide' to existing tools would be useful and noted that some regions are already producing information on available tools, e.g. South East Excellence 'toolshed'.

However, it was also emphasised that it should have recognition and support from the Audit Commission, so that *"its use is voluntary but highly advisable"*. It was also suggested that representation from other regulators, government departments, local government bodies, voluntary sector bodies and LSPs themselves should be involved in overseeing the development of the tool in order to encourage a wider sense of ownership.

5. Recommendations for a local SD benchmarking tool

5.1 Conclusions

The discussion around the SD benchmarking tool highlights some of the challenges that often characterise the sustainable development agenda. It may be more straightforward to identify a range of indicators to act as a barometer for a sustainable community or city and to assess broadly if we are moving in the right direction. However, it is much harder to look at issues of integration across outcomes, or to set targets to define what a composite, 'gold standard' sustainable community may look like. Given the degree of scepticism about a new tool and apparent reluctance by local bodies to be compared to each other, a new SD benchmarking tool starts to look ambitious.

From our analysis, the key issues are:

- What SD means in practice for local authorities and their partners and how can it be achieved – e.g. what does poor, good and excellent look like for SD?
- How do we tackle or help poor performers?
- How do we drive the integrated solutions we are looking for?
- And how do we make the best of what's already out there, or already in development?

Intrinsic to this debate is the relative poor understanding of sustainable development and lack of corporate priority for SD as an issue or theme. This could be addressed as much by communication methods as benchmarking: moving towards concepts of 'better futures' and 'future proofing' (risk management) may help to refocus the agenda away from 'what is sustainable development' towards a more positive community vision built around LSP priorities and couched in their own language. This approach is close to that characterised by CAA, however is as much about process as outcomes. Current tools such as Forum's SD Standard, the Nottingham Declaration Action Pack and the NHS Good Corporate Citizen seek to define SD excellence mostly in terms of process. Concepts such as 'top 10% performers' could usefully extend this into outcome performance targets.

In terms of tackling poor performers, a more thorough assessment of uptake and effectiveness of existing tools and processes would be helpful in gauging what changes were needed. Whilst the perception is that local authorities have an array of

mechanisms to help achieve sustainable development, some stakeholders saw many of these as 'rubber levers', in reality incapable of driving positive change.

The challenge of driving *integrated* sustainable development solutions still remains. Whilst we are getting better at measuring a range of indicators to represent sustainable development, we find it harder to translate our desire to link policies in a way that delivers across a range of objectives in a self-reinforcing manner over time. Tools such as Forum's 'SD Standard' promote the use of an integration framework by local authorities. The London Sustainable Development Commission promotes 'virtuous cycle thinking' (see <http://www.londonsdc.org/>). This is an area where continued development and new thinking would be useful.

However, the research identified a degree of scepticism about a new SD benchmarking tool. Various tools or mechanisms already exist and it is not clear that a market exists for a new tool, or what the 'unique selling point' of a new SD tool would be. In addition, it was considered that any new tool would add to the burden of measurement placed on local authorities. The potential benefits of a local sustainable development benchmarking tool may, therefore, be better achieved through existing and planned tools, particularly the CAA self assessment tool and Local SD Lens.

The collation of existing SD tools and mechanisms into a useful guide would be welcomed by practitioners: this is already being undertaken by the IDeA and in some regions. For example, Government Office West Midlands have developed a crib sheet for LSPs which highlights the existing mechanisms and tools for promoting sustainable development.

Two initiatives which will strongly influence the development of any new tool are the CAA (and its self assessment tool) and the proposed local SD lens.

CAA has the potential to be the mainstreaming mechanism for sustainable development, given its emphasis on tackling the challenges facing communities and its risk assessment looking at the prospects for the local area and people's quality of life. However, to play a fully effective role in delivering SD, it would need improvements in key areas. Currently, it could be argued that it has more of an emphasis on the 'social justice' national SD goal rather than the 'environmental limits' goal. It also focuses on outcomes, rather than process. Finally, the CAA would need to be effective and honest in understanding the links between local priorities and national targets.

The 'local sustainable development lens' of indicators, currently under development by the SDC aims to 'guide and track progress towards sustainable development at the local level'. The lens is proposed to have different purposes for different users, whether local authorities and their partners, the Audit Commission or UK government and government offices. It should provide a useful means of assessing local progress against national objectives (complementing the CAA above). It will also be useful in assisting in government office negotiations over LAAs. In terms of assisting local authorities and their partners, the SDC sees the lens as being able to:

- help determine the integration of local priorities;
- assist in championing issues around sustainable development at the local level;
- help inform the development of SCSs, LAAs and local improvement plans; and
- provide a means of self-assessment and monitoring of their contribution to the achievement of sustainable development.

The use of sustainable development indicators akin to the SD lens is relatively widespread. However their effectiveness is increased if they are matched against an objective ideal or long-term target – effectively developing a benchmarking tool. Benchmarking has a number of additional benefits over an indicator/barometer approach. Clearly it permits comparisons with similar organisations, but by looking at average and best practice it creates a spectrum of possible performance which can motivate organisations way beyond business as usual.

The reluctance of stakeholders interviewed for this research to be compared against similar organisations is a barrier to the development of a benchmarking tool, unless it becomes mandatory. Nevertheless, the SD lens could provide a degree of benchmarking by using comparisons with the average regional and national data. A somewhat restricted ‘spectrum’ of practice would be created, allowing bodies to judge where they are in their journeys to excellence. This could be developed, for example, highlighting the zones of the top 10% ‘best’ and ‘worst’. Such an approach would aid the performance improvement plans of local authorities and their partners to aspire to be in the top 10% for a particular indicator e.g. waste recycling.

This approach already exists in tools such as Forum’s ‘SD Standard’ and the NHS Good Corporate Citizen approach. Whilst both are mostly process based, they characterise ‘an excellence SD local authority’ or ‘good corporate citizenship’ in a range (e.g. from poor to excellent (Forum), or basic/ getting there/ excellent (NHS)).

Given that both the CAA and SD lens are still in development phase, it should be possible to influence their scope and content to deliver much of the benefits of SD benchmarking. Such development should strive to link the two into complimentary processes, for example, the SD lens becoming useful in helping to prepare for CAA.

5.2 Recommendations

The approach set out below aims to build on current activity and influence the key mechanisms of CAA and the SD lens. It also sets out a series of criteria or success factors that could be applied to any existing or proposed SD benchmarking tool.

5.2.1 Existing tools and mechanisms

1. Existing tools, mechanisms and levers for sustainable development should be better coordinated and their availability and use promoted.

5.2.2 Tools under development

2. Ensure that the CAA process and self-assessment tool are optimised in terms of mainstreaming sustainable development. Key to this process would be:
 - seeking to communicate the relevance and importance of sustainable development, particularly through making links with other priorities such as climate change, procurement and quality of life;
 - ensuring a focus on living within environmental limits alongside the existing social justice agenda to reflect national SD goals;
 - including process as well as outcomes;
 - ensuring local priorities are cognisant of national objectives and targets;
 - focusing on seeking integrated solutions; and
 - ensuring consistency with the Local SD Lens.
3. Ensure that the Local SD Lens proposal includes an element of benchmarking, e.g. by:
 - including comparisons with regional and national averages and/or some measure of excellent to poor performance (e.g. top 10% and bottom 10%);
 - including appropriate local, regional and national targets, where available;
 - developing a mechanism to promote integrated solutions.

5.2.3 New tools

4. If a stakeholder organisation feel that a local SD benchmarking tool is required in addition to the CAA self assessment tool, Local SD Lens and other tools, such a tool must meet the following key success factors identified in the research. The tool should:
 - a. avoid duplication of, and integrate with other existing or planned tools and guidance; and, in particular

- b. be clearly linked and complimentary to Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) and the CAA self-assessment tool, without distracting from these or undermining them;
- c. support the development of an action plan for achieving sustainable development, and not just focus on the measurement of performance;
- d. clearly demonstrate how integration between social, economic and environmental objectives can be achieved;
- e. be very practical, accessible and easy to use, and include real examples;
- f. be flexible enough to accommodate the wide local variations in sustainable development issues, as well as the variations in structures and governance – a 'gold standard' approach may alienate users;
- g. be focused on LSP priorities and outcomes and in their own language;
- h. avoid being too directive but, rather, provide guidance and help;
- i. involve LSPs in developing, testing and piloting the tool to help refine it and demonstrate its value; and
- j. be regularly reviewed and updated based on experiences with implementing it and changing circumstances.

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Appendix A: Part A research methodology

This section describes the methodology utilised for part A of the research.

Stage 1: Consolidate the existing research and knowledge base on capability for local sustainability

This involved reviewing and summarising the existing evidence base on:

- (a) the capability of local areas (LSPs, SCSs and LAAs) to deliver sustainable development;
- (b) the support currently provided to enhance that capability; and
- (c) how capability for local sustainability might be strengthened.

The documents reviewed are listed in the bibliography.

In addition, alongside the review of the evidence base we have also reviewed and summarised the current policy context as it relates to the research.

Stage 2: Identify current good practice in delivering SD through LSPs, SCSs and LAAs

We utilised the five guiding principles for SD set out in *Securing the Future* as the criteria for identifying good practice, i.e. delivering the goals of:

- living within environmental limits; and
- ensuring a strong, healthy and just society;

through:

- achieving a sustainable economy;
- using sound science responsibly; and
- promoting good governance.

We then sought to identify policies, initiatives and processes which address the five principles through genuine integration, whilst recognising, as *Securing the Future* highlights, that some examples, while underpinned by all five, will place more emphasis

on certain principles than others. Where this is the case, we have looked for examples where the trade-offs have been made in an explicit and transparent way.

We have also sought good practice which is compliant with draft guidance on LSPs, SCSs and LAAs. In relation to Sustainable Community Strategies this states:

'The shift to Sustainable Community Strategies emphasises, to a greater extent than previously, that sustainability should be at the heart of decisions taken on the content of the strategy. Sustainable Community Strategy's economic, social and environmental priorities should therefore demonstrate how they support each other in an integrated way. The strategy should also address the area's longer-term needs and those issues which affect the area that can only be addressed by looking across boundaries' (CLG, 2007a).

In relation to LAAs, the same guidance states that the LAA should be the *'delivery mechanism for the LSP's Sustainable Community Strategy'*.

In selecting the case studies we sought to include coverage of:

- Local Strategic Partnerships (both those with Neighbourhood Renewal Funding and those less well-resourced);
- Sustainable Community Strategies; and
- Local Area Agreements.

In addition, the case studies also describe good practice in a range of contexts, including:

- both urban and rural areas;
- both unitary and two-tier authority areas; and
- different geographical parts of the country.

Stage 3: Identify the key (replicable) factors that enabled the good practice to happen.

Through desk-based analysis of documentation on the case studies and telephone discussions with key players involved, the 12 case studies seek to explore the 'capability' factors which enabled good practice, as well as any support provided which built that capability. This informed analysis of the key replicable factors that enabled the good practice to take place.

Stage 4: Identify what support would be needed to strengthen the capability of all local areas to replicate good practice in delivering SD through LSPs, SCSs and LAAs

We have identified the additional support that is needed to strengthen the capacity of local areas. Our conclusions take account of the existing support available to local practitioners; existing research which demonstrates how local capability might be strengthened; and the factors which enabled good practice in the 12 case study areas.

Based on this analysis, we present a range of recommendations for enhancing the support available, the key priorities, as well as considering who might be best placed to provide this support.

Stage 5: Test emerging findings with local practitioners

The emerging findings from the research have been tested with local practitioners so as to seek to ensure that they are 'grounded in reality'. A workshop with local practitioners was held to discuss and explore the emerging findings. Local practitioners were recruited from amongst those involved in the case studies and other local practitioners and experts known to ourselves or the client. A note describing the outcomes of the workshop is included in Appendix C. This includes a list of the local practitioners involved in the workshop.

Appendix B: Part B research methodology

This section describes the methodology utilised for part B of the research.

Stage 1: Assess the role a benchmarking tool could play to strengthen local capability to deliver SD

This aspect of the research has sought to assess the likely demand and what role such a tool might fulfil through addressing the following questions:

- What is the current market i.e. what related tools already exist? What related tools are under development?
- Where might a sustainable development benchmark tool fit in with, add to and/or compliment this market? Would it need to be a stand-alone tool or could it be incorporated with another tool?
- How can we ensure that any benchmark tool is consistent with, and reinforced by, the related work of key stakeholders such as the Audit Commission, the Academy for Sustainable Communities, and the IDeA. In particular, how might a potential tool relate to:
 - the proposed Audit Commission/IDeA Comprehensive Area Assessment self-assessment tool;
 - the Academy for Sustainable Communities diagnostic tool and related work;
 - CLG's draft place-shaping guidance (CLG, 2007a);
 - the Defra/Audit Commission/SDC basket of local sustainable development indicators (under development); and
 - the National Improvement and Efficiency Strategy (CLG & LGA, 2008).
- What needs could a benchmarking tool fulfil, drawing particularly on the findings from Part A?

We have explored the above questions through conducting telephone interviews with key stakeholders. Interviews have been conducted with:

- Oliver Goode, Adviser to LSP Futures, Links Consulting
- Andy Walford, Head of Environment, Audit Commission
- David Cooper, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)

- Mike Bridgeman, Sustainability Team Leader, Hampshire County Council
- Vicky Burvill, Senior Sustainability Adviser, Public Sector Programme, Forum for the Future
- Trudy Birtwell, Director of Learning & Skills, Academy of Sustainable Communities
- Mandy James, CAA Programme Development Manager, Improvement & Development Agency (IDeA)
- Catherine Doherty, Communities & Local Government
- Rachel Thompson, National Adviser (LAAs/LSPs), IDeA

We were unable to interview a representative from the Local Government Association (LGA) or a Regional Improvement & Efficiency Partnership.

The emerging findings from these interviews were also discussed in the workshop with local practitioners.

Stage 2: Put forward a set of proposals for how a benchmark tool might work in practice

To explore the potential for, and practicality of, a benchmark tool, a workshop with the project's national partners and key stakeholders was convened on 27 February 2008. During the workshop we explored:

- The demand, and need for, a benchmark tool;
- Existing tools and mechanisms which meet local areas' needs;
- The conditions that would make a benchmark tool successful;
- The audience and users of the tool; and
- The focus for a benchmark tool; and
- The organisations that are best placed to champion/own the tool.

A note summarising the key points made at this meeting are presented in Appendix D.

Unfortunately, only one local practitioner invited (from Hampshire County Council) was able to attend. Therefore discussion with wider local practitioners, whilst outside the scope of this project, would be beneficial.

Appendix C: Note of local practitioners workshop

Background to the workshop

CAG Consultants are carrying out a research project for the Sustainable Development Commission called 'Capability for Local Sustainability' (CLS). The project brings together key Government Departments and national stakeholders to explore ways to improve the capability of local government and its partners to deliver sustainable development. In particular, the CLS project will focus on the support that is needed to ensure that local areas are equipped to place the key 'place-shaping' mechanisms of Local Strategic Partnerships, Sustainable Community Strategies and Local Area Agreements "at the heart of creating sustainable development at the local level" (Local Government White Paper 2006).

Part A of the project will:

1. develop a clearer understanding of the capability of local authorities and their partners to deliver sustainable development; and
2. identify how national partners and other organisations can help to develop this capability in order to strengthen and quicken local progress towards sustainable development in the future.

Part B of the project will explore the role that a sustainable development benchmarking tool could play to strengthen local capability to deliver sustainable development (covering LSPs, SCSs and LAAs).

As part of this project, two workshops are being held to test the interim findings – the first with local practitioners (including local authority officers and representatives from a Government Office and Regional Assembly), and the second with national partners (including government departments and national organisations such as the Audit Commission, Improvement & Development Agency and Local Government Association).

This report summarises the findings from the first workshop with local practitioners, which, following presentations from CAG Consultants on their interim findings, focused on the following key questions:

- Do these capability factors resonate with you?
- What other elements of capability are needed to deliver SD locally?
- Are some factors more important than others, and if so, which factors are most important?
- Are there any other key gaps in capability at the local level?

- What other support is needed to enhance local capability to deliver SD?
- What role might a local sustainable development benchmarking tool play?

Capability factors

Capability theme	Core capability elements
Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High level buy in from senior management, leaders and LSP Board members, but also ... • Leadership on SD within other layers of governance. • There was some agreement that those areas which had done well in terms of SD had done so because there had been a committed sense of political leadership – sometimes linked to national politics, but often linked to the personal convictions of local politicians. • Influence of partners – often the drivers and ideas come from outside the authority itself. • Business as a driver. Useful both as exemplars (i.e. through their own business practice e.g. carbon neutrality, carbon methodologies) and through their role as partners / decision makers. • Working with the Chamber of Commerce – e.g. driving sustainable procurement in Birmingham. Carry weight because they are a board member.
Attitudes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding that SD is not a new issue, but part of the day job. • Overcoming the perception that SD is too big, and that people don't need to be experts in the whole, but understand the relevance to their work. • Need to get away from worthy arguments and to arguments which resonate with key leaders, and to make a business-like case. The importance of not badging as environment but rather, for example, influencing the mainstream commissioning framework. • Several participants felt that the attitudes of senior managers were a barrier to integration of SD, that they were risk averse and conscious of spending tax payers money. The key for senior managers was demonstrating what value will SD add to my service. Demonstration of the value of SD in these terms was seen to be key. • Non-strategic thinking especially amongst some SD professionals was seen to be a barrier in many areas (e.g. the focus on how many people come to a fair trade coffee morning rather than strategic focus of climate change etc was recognised as a common problem). • The structural problem of LAAs engendering a short term focus and attitude was also identified as a barrier.
Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The importance of luck and serendipity – who is in the right place at the right time...
Generic skills/ knowledge/ competencies e.g. engagement, partnership, strategy,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SD practitioners need to 'up their game' and focus on improving the capability of delivery agents and specialists e.g. planners, as well as maintaining the overview. • Interaction between people developing the SCS, LAA and LDF. • Building networks – networking doesn't cost much money. • Turnover of staff means there is a need for updating skills and competencies, learning from more experienced LAs/officers, and maintaining momentum.

- creating change
- Definition of SD: LAs and GOs receiving mixed messages from government departments.
- Topic-specific skills/ knowledge competencies e.g. climate change, social inclusion
- **Understanding of what SD means in practice.** Such a big thing and nothing – what does it actually mean to decision makers? Need to link to CPD training.
 - There was some debate about the potential benefits of **professionalizing the SD sector** so that SD professionals had a generic set of recognised skills. This was suggested as a way of addressing marginalisation of SD professionals within the process. However there was also debate about whether this in itself was marginalised thinking and whether professionalization would lead to any greater integration at a local level.
- Tools
- **Sustainability Appraisals** – can be useful, but also a turnoff. It depends on how SAs have/are being used locally.
 - **Regional organisations** can add value to the SA process e.g. use of Plan It (costs £3K).
 - Useful **implementation tools** were something that participants seemed hungry for. There was significant interest in the Birmingham Procurement Compact approach. People were interested in the replicability of such an approach.
 - The value of **opinion surveys** to help demonstrate to political leaders and / or partners, that sustainability issues are of importance to local people.
 - Note: does the model used for this research equate to **general change management** and what can be learnt from this?
- Other resources e.g. finance, guidance
- The Stern equation: What resources are invested (and need to be invested) in SD and developing LSPs, LAAs and SCSs?
 - **Government underestimate the (people and financial) resources** available to develop LSPs. SCSs and LAAs.
 - Time: its about **'drip drip'**, rather than overnight change.
 - The **timetable is tight** – but if it wasn't, then local areas would take longer to do it.
 - Government guidance assumes that developing/refreshing SCSs and LAAs is a **streamlined process**, when in fact it is more messy and iterative.
 - Very small **capacity of SD teams** and indeed a general REDUCTION in SD teams. Sometimes but not always this is because the personnel have been incorporated or integrated into other areas, sometime increasing integration opportunities and sometimes not. Generally, if you have two people in an SD team then you're doing well!
- External factors e.g. incentives, statutory drivers
- **External champions**
 - **Networks for moral support**
 - **Competition between areas** is driving improved performance on SD, and also breaking down barriers and encouraging people to look to other areas for ideas.
 - **Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA)** is making people think differently and more widely (e.g. with single pot of funding), and can be used to focus attention on particular outcomes e.g. climate change mitigation/adaptation. However, it is unclear how CAA will measure partnership working.
 - **Enforcement of sustainability** just doesn't happen – the need for a strong duty to deliver sustainability.
 - Use of **the media** which is focusing especially on climate change, to raise the profile of these issues.
- Other
- Accountability: we need to close the loop and measure progress on SD.

- **Scrutiny.** If it is intended to be a *sustainable* community strategy, who tells us if it is not sustainable? The role of CAA.
Exploring the potential of partnership-based scrutiny. The challenge of challenging each other. Does this mean different partnership working structures etc? What mechanism would enable partners to scrutinise the local process and their partners?
- **Relationship with surrounding areas.** Many sustainability issues require joint working across boundaries e.g. on food or energy issues.

Important factors/gaps

- **Skills:** awareness of what sustainable development means to the day job. Mainstreaming SD skills within the workplace, particularly amongst delivery agents, such as partners, and specialists such as planners.
- **Tools:** rationalisation and signposting of tools for integrating sustainable development. Sustainability Appraisals were found to be useful, but can be onerous. New and innovative tools and concepts, such as Birmingham's Procurement Compact were thought to be useful in generating interest and building ownership amongst senior management, members and partners.
- **Scrutiny:** clarity on who and what will hold local authorities and partnerships to account e.g. the CAA.
- **Leadership and attitudes:** at a senior level.
- **Sticks (and carrots):** such as climate change, to drive long term thinking about future impacts and risks of not delivering sustainable development.
- **Clarity on SD:** how to define it and how to deliver it.
- **Resources.**

What support is needed?

'SD savvy people'

- New graduates with sustainable development knowledge and understanding are coming through universities, but not necessarily with the experience of applying it within different sectors.
- There are 'SD blocks' within particular sectors, but it varies regionally and locally.

- Political/members often lack understanding of SD, and need a variety of ways to engage them – not necessarily through training courses, but by involving them in identifying the SD aspects of their LAA within a local context. ‘Carrots and sticks’ are also important to highlight risks of not doing SD, and encourage competition between LAs.
- Local specificity is important – ‘place shaping’ (although not a helpful phrase) is a useful concept to encourage discussion about the future sustainability of a local area.

The need for stability and realism of timetables is required.

- In order to ensure implementation, participants were clear that a period of stability and a commitment to seeing this process through was required. They needed to feel that the ground was not going to shift again. This would need to lead to and be linked to a growing understanding that SD processes to not materialise ‘overnight’ and to lead in times.

Tools

- There are a lot of tools available, which need rationalising and signposting to what is useful in different contexts.
- Case studies are useful for ideas, but need to include the ‘warts and all’ – not just the ‘good practice’. Decision-making trees, timelines, open discussion of the risks and benefits of approaches taken would be useful, as well as short ‘light touch’ case studies, and more detail for those that want more information.

Comprehensive Area Assessment

- People were unclear about what is involved and how it will help drive sustainable development.
- A smaller ‘basket of indicators’ is welcome, but would need to complement the National Indicators, CAA and other requirements on LAs.
- LAs will choose their own indicators, in addition to their 35, on which to measure performance.
- There may be a need to undertake a cumulative assessment of whether sustainable development was being delivered through LAAs and LSPs nationally, rather than penalise individual authorities.
- The key role of CAA in driving change.

- The thing that everyone will want to know is how can we do well on CAA and how can SD help us do that?
- Without a clear understanding of what CAA will look like, many were reluctant to pre-empt which model to use in case the Audit Commission chose a different model. However some (e.g. Swindon) were interested in pre-empting.
- A tool or set of measures which “enable us to define how sustainable we are as a place now, and how sustainable we could be” would be useful. (i.e. a benchmark in a future planning sense, and an improvement plan).
- The identification of local indicators to define ‘what is our sustainable place – what will it look like and what of that is in place now’ was seen to be key here. The national indicators (and SD basket) was seen to have the potential to drive sustainability locally, and to help an areas ‘CAA proof’ what they are planning to do. However there was also interest in the potential of ‘CAA Plus’ – i.e. choosing locally to go beyond CAA and to choose an indicator(s) to help define a sustainable place e.g. ecological footprint taken to both an area and neighbourhood level.
- These indicators were seen to be of particular value if the data was already available.
- *The group did not have time to explore whether this outcome measures approach, with local flexibility and the CAA scrutiny role, was enough to embed SD into local processes and delivery, or whether some form of tool to support PROCESS would be required in addition.*

Benchmarking tool

- uncertainty and scepticism about the need for, and role of a potential benchmarking tool.
- It would have to be mandatory for people to do it, otherwise it would add to the range of tools that already exist. In which case, it needs to be integrated within current systems i.e. CAA, and receive the Audit Commission’s stamp of approval.
- How should it define SD if SD is defined locally?
- It should demonstrate how it maps to the 198 national indicators.
- It should also measure *process* and not just outcomes, as partnership working is key.

- Risks of choosing a basket of mandatory national indicators, as there are reputational risks involved if LAs cannot perform against them.

National clarity about SD definition and skills.

One stop shop vs. tailored messages through a variety of means.

- Some felt that there was a need for a one stop shop for all sustainable development learning and sharing of information. It was felt that this would be of particular use for SD practitioners. The IDeA SD Communities of Practice was seen as 'OK for LAs but not for wider LSP audience'.
- There was some discussion about how feasible it would be to develop any one 'portal' for all audiences and needs and whether there should instead be a move to influence the **variety of 'portals' and also networks** used by different partners and by different actors (SD practitioners, LSP Managers etc) and professions (planners, finance professionals, lawyers etc). This could include an influence of **training / skills development** for key professions, so as to develop a common SD understanding. This later approach was felt to be more practical / more likely to reach the audience, however comes with the obvious difficulties of achieving joined up messages across such a range of processes.
- Note: influencing finance professions and lawyers was thought to be of high priority (Birmingham).
- Note also that this approach links to the ASC agenda. There was some dismissive about the ASC role. They were felt by the participants to be an 'invisible organisation' tinkering at the margins. The sustainable communities and building agenda was seen to be one part of the whole but there was a suggestion that an **Academy for Sustainable Development / Academy for the Public Sector** was required at a national level to support skill development, knowledge and understanding of SD across professions, and to promote sharing of good practice. This would need to carry weight across the public sector (*other sectors?*), with SDC having the cross cutting scrutiny role.
- Note that this led to a discussion about where the promotion of SD at a local level best sat within Government and a feeling that because it sat with Defra it became both marginalised and under resourced, and that CLG would provide a more mainstream and better resourced champion.

Joining up national standards for all partners.

- Joining up messages to partners from government about minimum standards and encouraging greater flexibility amongst partners.

- *Note: will CAA provide this joined up approach or are wider changes required?*

Peer support.

- Participants looked to a variety of 'peer' groupings or networks. Informal networking was often key (email / phone conversations) due to lack of time for networking. The London Climate Change group was seen to be useful, as was the Sustainable Development Officers network in the West Midlands (supported by Government Office) and Sustainability West Midlands. The Core Cities Network is useful for Birmingham, as is Eurocities. Swindon found the Regional SD Network useful, together with support for Forum for the Future.

Participants

Name	Position	Organisation
Matthew Booth	Head of Strategic Partnerships	Ealing LSP
Maggie Bosanquet	Sustainability Manager	Durham County Council
Keith Budden	Head of Sustainability	Be Birmingham (LSP)
Nicola Builder	Sustainable Communities Coordinator	North Somerset Council
Patrick Feehily	SD Manager	South East Regional Assembly
Rob Gibson	Head of Environmental Strategy	Hounslow Council
James Griffin	Head of Policy	Swindon Borough Council
Adam Hackett	Partnership Coordinator	Oldham MBC
Peter Johnson	Programme Manager	Progress through Partnership
Ajit Matharu	Environmental Support Officer	Hounslow Council
Vanessa Tilling	Team Leader for Strategy Unit	GO-East

Appendix D: Note of National Partners meeting

27th February 2008

Session 1 – Feedback on CAG’s initial findings

Key messages

- Initial CAG findings resonate very well with regional partners’ experience.
- Agree on crucial aspect of ‘leadership’ – often good SD practice occurs ‘in spite of government’ activity.
- Get a sense of degree of understanding of new mechanisms (LSPs, SCSs, LAAs) – do people understand the relationships and entry points? Is the request for an SD duty an indication of failure in this respect? GO West Mids experience of 14 LSPs was that they are very aware of links to SCSs.
- Look in more detail at proxies for SD duty and existing SD embedding mechanisms – better use of existing mechanisms.

Detailed comments

Capability factors diagram

- How do LDFs fit in? Helpful to see LDF as spatial expression of SCS – and gives access to planners. Are good examples of good joined-up LDF/SCS approach e.g. Sevenoaks (virtually the same document).
- Is there a way of bringing together LAAs and SCSs – currently appear far apart on diagram. What about MAAs?
- Not just about *skills* of SD staff – but equally importantly SD skills for non-specialists (e.g. Heads of Finance, Members etc).

Case studies

- Request to see case studies sooner to disseminate via networks – also to ensure synergies with work on Defra’s Environmental Prospectus.
- Case studies will be useful for IDeA LAA library and need formatting to ensure compatibility.

Issue of SD duty for LAs:

- Duty for whom – LAs or LSPs?
- Look more at rationale for this - which LAs are asking for this – those struggling with SD? Does it reflect new SD staff? Or is it in response to threats to SD jobs? High degree of SD staff ‘churn’ referred to – often due to frequent managerial reorganisations.

- Various proxies for SD duty or key SD embedding mechanisms already exist – are we making the most of these? Need relevant hooks in CAG report for these mechanisms. Examples referred to: Audit Commission, indicators, Sustainable Communities, Aalborg, LDFs, place shaping duty.
- Progress on SD often relies on ‘wilful individuals’ – we need to question whether it would get done regardless of their influence.

Networking

- The SD practitioners conference (Positive Futures) in May 2007 (Aston Uni) looked at networking – can we look further at regional networks to support good practice?
- Various networks out there (e.g. Climate Change networks) but each region has different approach.

LAAs

- Differential messages on LAA indicators – between the centre’s understanding of priorities and local variations e.g. whether teenage pregnancy in Birmingham is a priority.
- SD lens/ basket of indicators would have been very useful e.g. may have prevented LAs from treating SD as ‘just climate change’. Hopefully will be ready for next round of sign-off.

Session 2 - Local partners’ workshop on an SD benchmarking tool

Key messages

- Degree of scepticism about a new tool. There are various tools in existence – is there a market for this new one?
- Various SD mechanisms exist (as noted in session 1 above) – but many prove to be ‘rubber levers’.
- Various ‘extra’ conditions were highlighted should a new tool be developed, which included:
 - Should be aimed at poor performers;
 - Need flexibility in any ‘gold standard LA’ approach to avoid alienating LAs;
 - Needs bottom-up ownership;
 - Aim of tool – could be ‘supporting improvement’ or more formal performance management;
 - Key issue of Audit Commission ‘endorsement’ – should not be seen as a way of getting round the National Indicators;
 - Need for road testing (‘demonstration projects’ e.g. GO West Midlands interested).
- Sustainable procurement suggested as a ‘proxy’ or alternative for a new tool. Advantages of influencing non SD specialists and supply chains.

Detailed comments

- The market place is crowded.
- Is there a market for a new tool?
- What would be its USP?
- No one size fits all for SD leadership – any tool must respect this flexibility.
- Potential for real confusion with SDC 'SD lens' indicator approach.
- Would be useful to table existing tools (neutral guide to?) describing what they do. (cf South East Excellence 'toolshed'). Tools mentioned included Forum's Low Carbon tool, Prince of Wales Accounting for SD, NHS Good Corporate Citizen.
- LAs need support to use any tool.

Key role of Audit Commission

- AC endorsement would be key if tool to be used in performance management...
- ... but AC unlikely to endorse particular tools.
- CAA self-assessment tool being developed (AC, IDeA, LGA). Need for further *guidance* on SD benchmarking – possibly in form of looking at a gold standard composite LA.
- AC's views expressed in CAA consultation – any tool developed should fit with these.

Audience

- Better to target the 350 or so poorer performers, rather than those who get SD...
- ...but how to we identify these - lack of self-diagnosis is a problem – AC self assessment one way?

Aim of tool

- Way of officers assessing LA performance internally?
- Way of LAs comparing each other?
- Helpful support mechanism (in which case potential overlap with 198 LAA indicators and proposed SD lens) – or formal performance management (when AC endorsement would be key)?
- To support improvement. Need CAA link.
- 'Gold standard' approach – could turn off some LAs – "ok for them, but its not us"...
- ...but standards are used to frame/shape improvement plans.
- Show how integration can be achieved – not just environment/ social and economic, but also LSP/ LDF/ LAA/ SCS.
- Look at success factors for LSPs – those that are NRF funded/ meet NRU targets are the better ones?

Language and definitions

- Degree of confusion – even amongst national partners – SD/ sustainable communities, place making/shaping etc.

- What does excellent/good/standard/weak look like for SD?

Procurement

- Seen as key driver of SD.
- Some good examples in place – Mayor’s Green Procurement Code (London).
- LSPs should be the driving force for sustainable procurement in their area.
- Procurement could provide the ‘trojan horse’ for SD.

Others

- CPD – incorporate SD into LA training.
- Fit with National Improvement and Efficiency Strategy.

Hampshire County Council’s approach

- Based on Aalborg commitments – but interpreted for Hampshire.
- Benchmarking, baselined evidence against commitments.
- Developed a CPA-like scoring system.
- Local priorities and community engagement fundamental.
- Prioritises areas for improvement in Corporate Business Plan.
- Used early on to assess impact of key decisions – more effective than end of pipe SAs.
- This framework used in procurement – helps stipulate weighting criteria for contracts and apply KPIs.

Participants

Name	Organisation
Trudy Birtwell	Academy for Sustainable Communities
Mike Bridgeman	Hampshire County Council
Ian Christie	Independent Consultant
David Cooper	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Jayne Cross	Academy for Sustainable Communities
Mark Davis	Communities and Local Government
Rebecca Gill	Government Office West Midlands
Denny Gray	Sustainable Development Commission
Lee Heley	Audit Commission
Craig Myers	Sustainable Development Commission
Helen Walker	Improvement & Development Agency
Claire Merritt	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs