

introduction

The County Council's Sustainability Strategy describes a range of actions to help deliver key priorities on the Council's corporate policy theme 'Protect and enhance the environment'.

This Strategy sets out how corporate priorities on sustainability will be taken forward within the community and within the Council itself.

Background

Cumbria County Council has for many years developed and put into practice plans and policies on land use planning, transport, minerals and waste which seek to protect and sustain the environment, while making provision for economic and social progress. In 1991, in response to popular concern about the environment, the Council produced an environmental strategy⁽¹⁾. This Strategy committed the Council to run its services in a way which fully respected the environment and encouraged individual and community action to protect the local environment and help tackle global issues.



In 1997 the Council produced a state of the environment report⁽²⁾ to help people and the business community face up to their environmental responsibilities. This was followed by a Local Agenda 21 Strategy⁽³⁾ that set out a number of actions that the Council would take to make Cumbria a more sustainable county. This strategy was taken forward by a combination of in-house activity, designed to change the way that the Council managed its operations, and a series of community initiatives to make people aware of environmental problems and demonstrate solutions that they could readily adopt.

In addition to this, the Council supports a number of environmental partnerships that work to create a well-managed and accessible countryside and coast, with enhanced biodiversity, effective practical conservation and interpretation.

the need for review

It is now 4 years since the Council last reviewed its Local Agenda 21 Strategy. Environmental policy has changed since then and local policies and procedures now need to be brought in-line to reflect global concerns on climate change and new national and regional sustainability aims and objectives. The advent of community strategies, with their focus on economic, social and environmental well-being of communities, adds another compelling reason for review.

The main external policy influences that need to be reflected in any new Sustainability Strategy are:

- the current National Sustainable Development Strategy⁽⁴⁾
- the EU's 6th Action Programme on the Environment⁽⁵⁾
- Action for Sustainability⁽⁶⁾, the regional framework for sustainability
- the 2002 United Nations World Summit on Environment and Development⁽⁷⁾
- the UK Climate Change Programme⁽⁸⁾
- the introduction of community strategies under the Local Government Act 2000 to promote the social, economic and environmental well-being of communities across the country.

scope of the strategy

This Sustainability Strategy is the outcome of a review of the existing Local Agenda 21 Strategy, other in-house environmental initiatives and partnership working arrangements. All of these have been brought together within the overall context of the Corporate Strategy⁽⁹⁾. The new Sustainability Strategy replaces the previous Local Agenda 21 Strategy. It underpins and informs the Corporate Strategy.

The Strategy provides a robust policy base on sustainability to guide officers in their day to day working, and sets out an action plan that shows how the Corporate Strategy key priorities on environment, quality of life and the local economy will be supported by this Strategy through practical action.

The Strategy is a corporate document and its policies apply across the authority without exception. Influencing other parts of the Council and demonstrating how they can support the Strategy's actions will take place through a new cross-departmental forum.

Practical actions will be guided by policy. Major policies will undergo sustainability appraisal, while simpler checklists will also help integrate sustainability into routine decision-making processes. Other actions on raising the energy efficiency of Council premises are to be carried out in support of the Council's Sustainability Strategy, which contains a specific policy response to climate change.



In time, this Strategy will influence other organisations which do business with the County Council and overall it will make a significant contribution to sustainability in Cumbria. The Strategy has clear boundaries and while it has a distinct contribution to make to developing sustainable communities in Cumbria, other plans and policy initiatives which focus on regeneration and social disadvantage will spearhead the Council's contribution to increasing the viability and vitality of communities (e.g. Next Steps: Rural Action Zone Strategy⁽¹⁰⁾), along with action taken with partners to improve well-being in communities.

relationship with the corporate strategy

There is a need to continue the existing approach to sustainability policy and practice, consolidating what has worked, improving it, revisiting those areas where progress has been slow and addressing new issues and implementing sustainable solutions.

In doing so, the Sustainability Strategy will need to fully reflect national, regional and local sustainability objectives. Although regional sustainability objectives are currently under review, meeting national and local sustainability objectives will for the most part deliver regional objectives.

In addition to meeting sustainability objectives, this Strategy concentrates on delivering corporate key priorities relating to the corporate policy theme 'Protect and enhance the environment'. In coming years, it is likely that the universal application of sustainability principles to other policy themes will result in this Strategy informing and shaping future Corporate Strategy priorities, not just on the environment but also on regeneration and quality of life.

In addition to Corporate Strategy priorities, the scope of the Strategy will extend to action on:

- education for sustainable development
- facilitating change in the community
- coping with climate change

Appendix 1 to the Strategy sets out an Action Plan that details actions, responsibility for implementation, costs, timescales and required outcomes.

