

**Securing the Regions' Futures:  
Government Office Challenge to Change Fund. Year two  
April 2008**

## Sustaining change

Embedding sustainable development principles into Government Offices.

The purpose of Defra's small Challenge to Change Fund has been to kick start activities in Government Offices that help them to meet their commitment to 'lead by example' in embedding sustainable development principles and practice across their work and operations. Under the Challenge to Change Fund, the Government made £12,000 available to each of the Government Offices in the English regions, £108,000 in total.

The commitment for the Government Offices to 'lead by example' was made in *Securing the Region's Futures* (2006), the Government strategy aimed at strengthening regional delivery of sustainable development. Since its publication, a lot of work has been done to improve staff skills and knowledge on sustainable development, to ensure that sustainable development underpins business planning, and in the sustainable management of operations.

This publication details a small selection of the projects and activities initiated by Government Offices under the Challenge to Change Fund. They are grouped under three headings: **business planning for sustainable development, improving skills, knowledge and decision-making, and greening operations.**

The aim of this publication is to enable the sharing of ideas and best practice. For more information on any of the case studies, please contact the relevant Government Office.

## Business planning for sustainable development

 **Sharing knowledge for better understanding** Sustainability South West (SSW), the region's sustainable development champions, with support from the Challenge to Change Fund, were commissioned by Government Office for the South West (GOSW) to undertake a range of work on the South West's Regional Sustainable Development Framework, the *Sustainability Shaper*.

First, SSW undertook a *Sustainability Shaper* proofing exercise of GOSW's new Corporate Plan (for 2008-11), reporting findings back to GOSW's Board.



The South West's Regional Sustainable Development Framework, the *Sustainability Shaper*: [www.shapersw.net](http://www.shapersw.net)

In addition, SSW has also developed the *Sustainability Shaper* to provide specific online resources for ‘*Shaper* proofing’ Local Area Agreements (LAA), based on SSW’s LAA and sustainable development work with seven local authorities in the region. These resources are for use by local authorities, Local Strategic Partnerships, and GOSW officials.

Finally, SSW provided an interactive presentation on the *Sustainability Shaper* to the new regional director of the Government Office. The presentation highlighted the regional sustainability priorities and how the *Shaper* is used by Sustainability South West and partners in the region.



### **Sustainability appraisals for Local Area Agreements**

To meet the commitment made in *Securing the Regions’ Futures* to embed sustainable development into working practices, Government Office for the East Midlands (GOEM) chose to focus the Challenge to Change budget on sustainability appraisals. A training programme was designed to provide Local Area Agreement (LAA) negotiators with the knowledge, examples and information they need to encourage and challenge local areas to undertake a sustainability appraisal of draft LAAs.

Consultants Global to Local were appointed to provide a half-day training session for GOEM staff to explain the process of a LAA sustainability appraisal and how it benefits a LAA. Although targeted at representatives from the LAA policy and support teams and Defra staff, colleagues from other policy teams, including resilience, were also invited.

The outcomes of the training were for LAA negotiators and colleagues to have: a ‘refresher’ on what sustainable development means and how the development of LAAs can be used to help deliver sustainable communities in line with the area’s Sustainable Community Strategy and to inform sustainable growth; awareness of the guidance given to external LAA partnerships on sustainability appraisals; understanding of what a sustainability / rural proofing / equality appraisal would entail; understanding of why it should be carried out and what the benefits are; and knowledge of what to do with the results – how to interpret them and how to use them to improve the LAA.

The workshop came quite late in the current LAA timetable, but attendees thought it would inform future work and suggested that an internal focus group be formed to influence the reviews of Sustainable Community Strategies. The Audit Commission is considering its approach to sustainability appraisals for Comprehensive Area Assessments and there is an opportunity to exchange views and build a more coherent understanding of the appraisal techniques to inform future internal Government Office training interventions.



## Improving skills, knowledge and decision-making

Creating truly sustainable communities requires a multitude of skills and different ways of working. Policy makers need an awareness of what it means for a community to be sustainable, economically, socially and environmentally; they need to be able to work collaboratively; and they need to understand that the many problems and solutions involved are often interconnected.

Government Offices across the regions have been training staff to deliver sustainability through their work using a number of different tools. One such learning tool is the *Planit-Sustainability* learning simulation, designed and developed by Pixelfountain. It involves participants in managing a 'virtual' city and asks them to make key decisions that will either help or hinder sustainable development.

The tool encourages participants to realise how the decisions they make in one area will have differing social, economic and environmental impacts. It also allows them to experience the problem, and so build their understanding and improve their analytical and decision-making skills, while promoting joined-up thinking. It is just one of a number of tools available to Government Offices to help meet the challenge of creating sustainable communities.

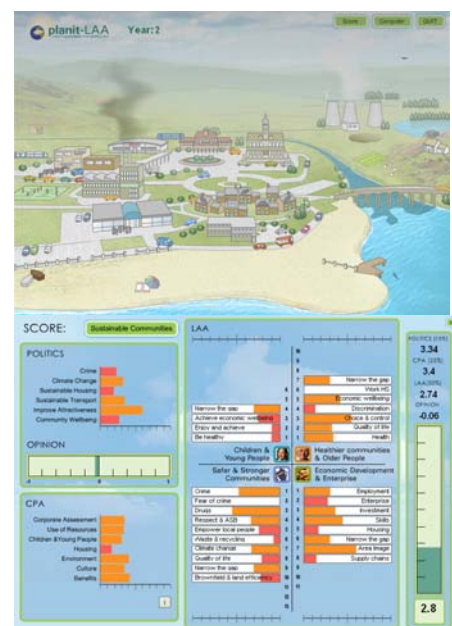


Government Office for the North East used the Challenge to Change Fund in 2007/08 to target colleagues across the office, representing all teams, to take part in two interactive training events using the learning tool. The training aimed to help increase their knowledge and understanding of sustainable development and how their work can impact upon sustainable development outcomes in the region.

A version of the learning tool has also been developed to help embed sustainability into new Local Area Agreements (LAA). The aim of the game is to create a sustainable community and implement a Local Area Agreement, again exploring the interrelationships between different parts of a local community, and improve analytical and decision-making skills.



The LAA learning tool has been used by the Government Office for Yorkshire and Humber (GOYH) with support from the Challenge to Change Fund. The training sessions helped participants secure a greater understanding of the issues facing the local area or region and the impacts of local decision-making. It has also ensured that sustainable development principles are a key component of their work and that collaborative working is enhanced both across directorates and with external local and regional partners.



Images from the *Planit-LAA* learning simulation tool

The two members of staff at GOYH who have taken part in the 'train the trainer' programme based on the *Planit-Sustainability* learning tool, have used this training to good effect in facilitating recent workshops and will continue to do so with future workshops that are being planned with key external partners at a regional and local level.



Government Office for the South East also chose to use some of the Challenge to Change Fund to work on embedding sustainable development in LAAs. The workshops were attended by the Government Office's place directorate, theme lead colleagues and local authority LAA leads.

Delegates were divided into eight groups with each taking responsibility for part of the virtual community; housing and regeneration, education, health, sports and community, town hall, utilities, development partnership and transport. The workshops highlighted and stressed the importance of the cross-cutting nature of sustainable development when developing LAAs. It also strengthened partnership working by working with place, functional and local authority colleagues to make them aware of the interdependencies of cross-cutting decisions and implications.

Delegates attending the workshops said they would now take a more strategic view focusing more on cause and effect, and that they would have to be more mindful of environmental issues within the LAA process.



Government Office for the East of England (GO-East), working with Sustainability East, the East of England champions for sustainable development, ran similar workshops on local sustainability. Invitations to the workshops were sent to all county and unitary authorities in the region.

Richard Inman, GO-East co-ordinator explained the benefits: "Delegates learnt they had to negotiate with other departments in their authority to make best use of the total budget available to them. It demonstrated the Local Area Agreement contribution to sustainability is about partnership working, helping local government address local priorities by using a common set of resources. These lessons will be as relevant in ten years time as they are today."



Delegates at the GO-East training workshop



## Greening operations



### **Raising staff awareness of sustainable development**

Government Office for the South East used money from the Challenge to Change Fund to finance a staff awareness week around sustainable development issues. It highlighted the fact that Government Offices are required to lead by example, promote and embed sustainable development principles in what they do, and it took the decision to get 'its own house in order' before spreading the message across the region.

The week's activities helped staff understand how to incorporate sustainable development in the workplace and at home. It included a range of activities for staff to participate in, from training in the environmentally-friendly hybrid pool car to attending consultation seminars on the draft South East Regional Sustainability Framework.

Staff were also encouraged to get involved through quizzes, competitions and drop in policy sessions. The week's events were very well received and highlights included the video conferencing training and a Swap Shop, which promoted reuse.



### **Creating a culture of change**

This year the focus of the work on sustainability at Government Office for the West Midlands has been around raising staff awareness. The key event was the 'GOing Green Christmas Fair', which comprised of a number of stalls of sustainable goods, including local produce, ethically sourced gifts, and goods made of recycled materials. As well as this opportunity to buy ethical goods, staff were asked to complete a carbon

footprint questionnaire to help identify where they could do more to combat climate change at work and at home. Energy saving light bulbs were given to all staff that completed the questionnaire.

The event acted as a turning point for the office Environmental Management System group, which was re-branded the GOing Green Group, and it gained new members. Group members are currently involved in speaking to each directorate within the Government Office to let as many staff as possible know about its work and encourage a wider membership. The group has also commissioned a report from consultants the Carbon Trust to follow up on a survey of the office carried out in 2004. This will identify areas where the office can improve energy efficiency.

Alongside these developments, three 'out of hours' surveys have been carried out in the office. These looked at the numbers of monitors, PC's and printers left switched on overnight. The results have been put on the office intranet and on posters around the office. These show how each directorate in the building is performing, and include facts and figures on both the environmental and financial consequences of leaving electrical equipment switched on. This appears to be having an impact, although there is still more to be done and regular 'out of hours' surveys are to be continued.

Plans for 2008 include a programme of staff training to be delivered by the Marches Energy Agency, a local sustainable energy and climate change social enterprise. This bespoke training for the Government Office aims to create staff 'champions' within every team as well as wider awareness raising in the form of an all-staff quiz.

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