

The Sustainability Challenge:

Implementing Change that Doesn't Cost the Earth



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Foreword



Stephen Bubb
Chief Executive, ACEVO

We are now a year on from our last Sustainability Challenge Publication. Despite a growing awareness that climate change has huge social justice and health implications for some of the most disadvantaged groups in society, the third sector is, for the most part, slow to act.

We should be clear that delivering on sustainability is increasingly what our key partners, funders and commissioners want. This publication features a number of illuminating case studies and interviews that show a clear directional shift towards sustainability among our closest allies. This is a shift that we need to follow.

In making and preferably leading the shift, there are huge opportunities for the sector. The sector has throughout its history excelled at leading behaviour change and developing vital services that are now mainstreamed. A prime example would be the way in which charities like the Terrence Higgins Trust pioneered awareness-raising and respite care for those suffering from HIV and AIDS. These are now part of mainstream health service delivery.

The sector has the opportunity to help transform our economy to a green one and provide the vital link which helps service users and beneficiaries adapt to a changing climate. Our core ethos of preventing problems before they happen will have a major role to play in planning a more resource-efficient future.

In order to realise these opportunities we must first consider our own performance. This document showcases the work a number of charities have already undertaken to consider and improve their environmental performance and how they are benefiting from it. These charities are not just drawn from the sustainability sector; we are pleased to include a number whose principle focus and motivation is clearly based in health and social care.

So now it is time for you to rise to the challenge. The need to act is clear, and the first steps are relatively simple to make.

Section I: Introduction

In early 2009 ACEVO published *The Sustainability Challenge: implications for chief executives in the third sector*¹. This document advocated strongly that sustainability needed to be taken seriously by the third sector, setting out nine reasons why and highlighting the role of the chief executive in leading the required change.

Since then third sector organisations (TSOs) have come under increasing financial pressure as the implications of the financial crisis have hit home. Threatened with a squeeze in public spending in 2010 and beyond, you could be forgiven for thinking that sustainability is 'nice to have', something for the good times as well as something that can be put on the back burner when times are hard.

The purpose of this second guide is to dispel this idea, showing through interviews and case studies with those involved that addressing sustainability can be a critical strategy in developing strong and effective TSOs and a vibrant sector.

Figure I: Nine good reasons to change – taken from 'The Sustainability Challenge: implications for chief executives in the third sector' ACEVO 2009

Sustainability involves the integration of social, environmental and economic concerns to meet society's needs now and in the future.

Nine good reasons to change:

- **The financial reason:** Cutting energy and waste will cut carbon emissions and save money.
- **The governance reason:** This is part of living up to our values and delivering our mission.
- **The beneficiaries reason:** There is a duty to those we represent or work with – board, volunteers, beneficiaries – to use resources efficiently, to ensure we have the biggest impact within our means.
- **The legal reason:** There is a growing range of environmental legislation (see section 3.3) and many voluntary organisations will have responsibilities arising from these laws and regulations.
- **The 'environmental justice' reason:** The poorest people in Britain usually suffer from the worst environments; this worsens inequalities and can affect their health and economic prospects.
- **The climate change reason:** Society needs to tackle climate change otherwise severe weather, floods, food shortages etc. will, in the long term, undermine all the positive changes that we are working towards.
- **The 'greener living' reason:** Creating greener neighbourhoods and workplaces makes them nicer places in which to live and work; people will feel better and work better.
- **The leadership reason:** Making the changes and promoting what's been done will help make an organisation look innovative and positive.
- **The expectation for reporting:** Private companies are under increasing pressure to report on their environmental impacts. It may soon become good practice for voluntary organisations to include an overview of their environmental progress in their annual report.

¹ Available from http://www.acevo.org.uk/index.cfm/display_page/publications

Section 2: 'May you live in interesting times'

The old Chinese curse seems very apt as we approach the second decade of the 21st century.

The financial crisis that has impacted upon all sectors has severe ramifications for TSOs. Public sector finance is being squeezed and all areas of government spending is under the spotlight. TSOs will be thinking more about survival than sustainability, so perhaps all this 'green' stuff should go on the back burner until the sector is back on track and we can afford to do something about it. This is certainly what happened in the last couple of recessions when the corporate sector set aside its social responsibility and environmental initiatives and got on with the business of making money. However, this has largely not happened this time as business increasingly sees sustainability as an 'opportunity' rather than just a risk that has to be managed.

At the heart of the idea of sustainability is 'efficiency'; the efficient use of resources to meet the needs of humankind. Resources, in most cases, cost money so it follows that using them more efficiently has financial benefits. There are many cost-effective actions that organisations can take to reduce resource use, such as energy efficiency, that have benefits for the bottom line.

One of the (many) unique things about the current financial crisis is that society has not put sustainability on the back burner, or to be more precise, it has not put climate change on the back burner. This document is being put together as we approach the Copenhagen Climate Change Conference in December 2009, where it is hoped that a deal to replace the Kyoto Protocol will be agreed. Whether a deal is reached or not, climate change and the need to reduce levels of carbon dioxide is going to impact upon the ways that all sectors in society are going to operate.

In the Climate Change Act, the UK Government has set legally binding carbon reduction targets that aim to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 80% in 40 years. They are developing a policy framework around the development of a 'Low Carbon Economy' and are launching the Carbon Reduction Commitment in 2010. This new emissions trading scheme aims to deliver carbon emissions reductions and cost savings in less energy-intensive industries, including the larger public service organisations such as Primary Care Trusts and Local Authorities. Section 3 of this document considers the procurement issue that climate change and other sustainability issues might present for TSOs.

Like business, the third sector should see issues around climate change and sustainability as opportunities as well as threats. The sector is about 'social change' and to decarbonise our economy by 80% could well represent the biggest change to our society since the industrial revolution. TSOs need to be at the forefront of this change, ensuring that issues such as social justice are centre stage and the most vulnerable in society do not become more so as society changes. A growing number of TSOs are taking up the challenge and section 5 of this document describes, through case studies, the resultant benefits and impact.

Figure 2: Examples of some of the drivers relating to climate change that will impact upon TSOs in the future

1. Climate Change Act

The UK has passed legislation which introduces the world's first long-term, legally binding framework to tackle the dangers of climate change. The Climate Change Bill was introduced into Parliament in November 2007 and became law a year later. The Climate Change Act creates a new approach to managing and responding to climate change in the UK by:

- setting ambitious, legally binding targets
- taking powers to help meet those targets
- strengthening the institutional framework
- enhancing the UK's ability to adapt to the impact of climate change
- establishing clear and regular accountability to the UK Parliament and to the devolved legislatures.

2. The CRC (Carbon Reduction Commitment) Energy Efficiency Scheme

Starting in April 2010, the CRC Energy Efficiency Scheme is the UK's first mandatory carbon trading scheme. The initial phase of the Carbon Reduction Commitment will be compulsory for organisations that consumed over 6,000 MWh of half-hourly metered electricity during the period from January 2008 to December 2008. At today's prices, this is roughly equivalent to total half-hourly electricity bills of approximately £500,000 per year.

3. The UK Low Carbon Transition Plan (DECC)

This plots how the UK will meet a 34% cut in emissions on 1990 levels by 2020, transforming the country into a cleaner, greener and more prosperous place to live. This is at the heart of the economic plans for 'building Britain's future' and ensuring the UK is ready to take advantage of the opportunities ahead. The Transition Plan is the most systematic response to climate change of any major developed economy.

4. Local Authority Performance Indicators

The Single Set of 198 National Indicators (the National Indicator Set – NIS) was announced by the Communities & Local Government Department in October 2007 and became effective from 1 April 2008. The NIS is the only set of indicators on which central government will performance manage local government. It covers services delivered by local authorities alone and in partnership with other organisations like health services and the police. It contains three indicators that directly relate to climate change:

NI 185 - CO₂ reduction from Local Authority operations

NI 186 - Per capita CO₂ emissions in the LA area

NI 188 - Adapting to climate change

Section 3:

Procurement and funding – key drivers

Overview

For many TSOs, one of the big changes of the last few years has been in the way that they are funded. Public donations and grant aid remain important but for much of the sector competitive procurement to deliver services for the public and private sectors is the reality. Consequently, changes to the nature of that procurement process in favour of sustainability can be of critical importance to the sector. Likewise TSOs procure off others, and have their own supply chains. Consequently their impact, both positively and negatively, on the world through this route can be substantial. Understanding these dynamics is very important in understanding what sustainability means for any particular organisation.

To help illuminate that understanding we interviewed a number of people who are engaged in procurement issues, asking them about sustainability in the context of procurement and how the two might become more aligned in the future. The first two interviews – London Remade & AmicusHorizon – look at how TSOs procure from others, their impact on their supply chain and what good practice might look like in the future. There then follows three interviews with organisations that purchase or fund services provided by TSOs, considering what is driving them to a greater emphasis on sustainability. Finally we consider the findings of some research work undertaken in Wales with small organisations, including TSOs, which are often the ones struggling the most with the procurement process.

Influencing how the third sector procures

Graham Randles, Programme Manager,
Green Procurement Code – London Remade



LONDON REMADE
The business of recycling

London Remade was set up as a not-for-profit agency with support from WRAP and the London Development Agency to promote work on waste minimisation and 'closing the loop' in recycling. It is the agency responsible for delivering the Mayor of London's Green Procurement Code. This was originally launched in 2001 to help boost the market for recycled content in a range of products. The code was relaunched in 2007 with a wider remit on all aspects of green procurement. Much of its work is with the public sector (there are now over 600 organisations from all sectors signed up to the code) but it sees third sector bodies as potential partners and has links with many.

There is now a full accreditation process for the code, with bronze, silver and gold awards for levels of activity. This year 183 organisations have gone for an award. This was an increase of almost 50% on the 2008 figure of 126, showing the growing understanding of the need to engage with this issue.

There are shifts in approaches to procurement in two ways. One is the growing focus on carbon footprinting. This is likely to become more important for those seeking to tender for work as more initiatives like the Carbon Reduction Commitment develop. The second aspect is the growing focus on 'ethical and sustainable' procurement. Much of this has come from the private sector where companies that have been under fire for their record on child labour, for example, have done

² <http://www.londonremade.com/>

extensive work to tackle these problems.

This level of compliance is likely to be well beyond the means of most TSOs. The private sector is now leading on much of this work, driven by the need to protect and enhance their reputation as well as address CO2 targets. This leads to the interesting situation where private companies may be acting more ethically on procurement than many third sector bodies that have an overt focus on social justice issues. Some run the risk of being seen as organisations that say “do as we say, rather than do as we do”.

It is also the case that as footprinting work develops, so the full carbon costs are becoming clearer. The work done by the Health Procurement Agency in Birmingham shows how the purchase of pharmaceuticals has as big a carbon footprint as hospital buildings for local Primary Care Trusts, once the full carbon costs of developing those drugs are taken into account.

Graham Randles suggests that TSOs should therefore start with a focus on what they buy (a full listing / assessment) and develop from there, making changes within a plan and a framework but not trying to do it all at once. Procurement can be a first step to developing an Environmental Management System (rather than the result of one) and can show staff that change is happening even at the very basic level of the products they use.

Changing the way the organisation approaches procurement

Janey Bray, Research and Project Manager –
Environment and Sustainability – AmicusHorizon³



AmicusHorizon has developed out of five smaller housing associations; the merger was completed in 2009 which means that there are now sites in three counties in the South East. The decision to address sustainability was led by the increased body of regulation within this field and the need to have an informed and pro-active approach. Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) are increasingly closely regulated and it was clear that this was going to increase on environmental issues.

As a result, Janey Bray was employed as Research and Project Manager and was the first person working on environment and sustainability issues. She is based in the Procurement Department which demonstrates the need to link improved environmental performance with value for money and to the goods and services they procure. Central to all this has been the development of the Responsible Procurement Policy and an action plan to go with it. The London Code and supporting team at London Remade have been crucially helpful in this. Staff in the department were trained by Action Sustainability (and this was paid for by the Green Procurement Code funding programme) and this included the senior buyer.

The central focus in procurement has been ‘value for money’, while also linking to public service regulations. Meeting these priorities has been a key issue but she has been able to bring in ‘whole life’ issues and make a business case for more sustainable procurement. She is starting to engage with suppliers and is asking for firm evidence on ‘green credentials’ / footprints of goods and services. The aim is to use the environmental policy and procurement guidelines to build change down the supply chain.

Janey also manages the energy administrator who procures all the energy and gas. As a part of the merger work they have been centralising all their work and were able to put out a tender for all their energy needs as one contract for 12 months. In this they worked with an energy broker (InEnCo) and were supported by the ‘Procurement for Housing’ agency⁴. They got a price which represented very good value for money and Janey was able to negotiate successfully for a contract that was for 100% green energy at the same agreed price (this was based on ROCs around hydro and landfill).

³ <http://www.amicushorizon.org.uk>

⁴ <http://www.procurementforhousing.co.uk/>

The aim now is to embed sustainability as part of the work throughout the organisation. The new Green Strategy will increasingly link all the various green initiatives and act as the core guiding material for progressive improvements.



Volunteers start gardening as BTCV launch the Carbon Army

The local authority perspective

Helen Briggs, Rutland County Council⁵



Rutland County Council

Rutland County Council has a shared service approach as part of the Welland Procurement Unit. Main procurement from TSOs is in the social care arena through the Citizens Advice Bureau, Help the Aged and Voluntary Action Rutland. One project with Voluntary Action Rutland is concerned with rural transport provision, which Helen Briggs sees as a sustainability issue, dealing as it does with isolated rural communities. She is keen that the sector takes a broad definition of sustainability, embracing many of the social issues of concern to her residents.

Currently, the major trend in procurement is around the choice agenda and self-directed budgets. There is currently a big gap in the market around the provision of basic services – cleaning, gardening and shopping that people will want to purchase. This is a great opportunity for the development of social enterprises where organisations come together, work collectively and create economies of scale. Helen is concerned that the third sector is not rising to this challenge.

Localism is the key sustainability issue and will be more so in the future. What Rutland County Council is looking for when it procures is a quality service, delivered locally and demonstrating value for money. Linked to this is a growing interest in a 'whole life cycle' process that looks at future impact and not just current cost.

Helen believes that Rutland will increasingly favour a more 'sustainable' approach to service delivery. In her view a key procurement question in the future will be 'what contribution would you make to our sustainability targets?' This will be particularly pertinent to climate change targets that are already in Local Area Agreements.

The third sector, in her view, is well placed on the localism agenda, being in a position to offer customised solutions based on local knowledge. However, it has to up its game, needing to understand the market opportunity better by engaging with Local Authorities outside the procurement process. It needs to get better at collaborating to spread overheads and needs to focus on a whole life cycle approach demonstrating how it would reduce both cost and carbon emissions.

⁵ <http://www.rutland.gov.uk/>

Sustainable procurement in the healthcare sector

Sidney O'Brien, Sustainability Manager,
Healthcare Purchasing Consortium (HPC)⁶



HPC is the NHS collaborative procurement hub for the West Midlands, Luton and London. The organisation provides purchasing, supply chain, healthcare contracting and commercial services to over 40 NHS trusts, who together spend £2.4 billion a year on goods and services.

Over the past two and a half years sustainability has been a strategic issue and although this initially focused on procurement, it has now changed and encompasses the breadth of actions undertaken. The initial drivers to take forward the sustainability agenda were through the NHS Sustainable Procurement Task Force and HPC's Corporate Social Responsibility policy. This has now developed a momentum from within the organisation due to the enthusiasm and commitment of internal sustainability co-ordinators.

In May 2009 the HPC hosted a Sustainable Procurement conference in conjunction with NHS West Midlands, NHS PaSA and Xerox. The event itself brought together a number of current and topical presentations delivered by leading speakers from both the Department of Health and the field of sustainability.

The HPC website states:

"Sustainable procurement is a primary consideration for anyone involved in purchasing because it makes economic, social and environmental sense. With a little thought it is possible, for example, to maximise the opportunity for local suppliers to compete for NHS contracts and so reduce mileage, make greater use of electronic transfers to reduce the volume of paper transactions and purchase more finished products from renewable sources."

The company has to be customer-led but Sidney O'Brien's role provides the opportunity to drive the sustainability agenda through external meetings, offering more sustainable alternatives; however, the final weighting of price/social/environmental is up to the customer.

The Office of Government Commerce (OGC) Quick Wins⁷ list has been a useful way to demonstrate positive action; for example The 'Good Food for Your Plate' agenda. This has been used in the wording of tenders by incorporating 'Good Food for Your Plate' words into the documentation. Feedback from buyers has been very positive as they can see how the work done by the HPC is helping them to achieve their own goals and has improved rating as well.

⁶ <http://www.hpc.nhs.uk/>

⁷ Defra / OGC's Quick Wins is a list of minimum environmental performance specifications for a range of commonly purchased items. Departments must use these specifications when procuring any of the items listed. Therefore estate managers and procurers must be familiar with this list, from buying light bulbs to major refurbishments and new builds.
<http://www.defra.gov.uk/sustainable/government/what/priority/consumption-production/quickWins/index.htm>

The importance of sustainability for charitable trusts and foundations

Claire Thomas, Chief Grants Officer, The City Bridge Trust (CBT)⁸,
The City of London Corporation



Sustainability and climate-related issues are now much more on the agenda for The CBT and for many other large charitable funders. The Trust is actively involved as a funding body in the current discussions at the Ministerial Task Force on Climate Change and the Third Sector so it is one of the more engaged funding bodies. It has also made funding available for 13 large charities to do work on improving their internal environmental performance (their 'green housekeeping' work) and reducing their footprint.

There is a question as to 'how far we should be leading this work?' and 'should we simply encourage compliance?' Most funders will increasingly be expecting stronger compliance with environmental goals.

From a CBT viewpoint and, looking at good practice in grant-making, the aim is to meet its own priorities of which, environment is one, whilst looking for the 'best return on investment'. A programme on 'support for older people', for example, that also benefits its long-term environmental objectives will therefore be seen in a positive light.

The CBT is already asking potential recipients what they are doing to reduce their carbon footprint. The next step will be to ask how this is measured and what has been achieved, so that people will be obliged to provide evidence of this activity. The CBT looks to avoid the idea of the 'carrot and stick' approach, where funded bodies are expected to tick boxes; rather it is looking for projects that are making a real difference.

This work sits within a wider context: The CBT is run by the City of London Corporation and is therefore linked to the overall core strategy of the Corporation. In work on sustainability it aims to work closely with the Corporation's sustainability team and to promote sustainability through grant-giving.

The CBT certainly expects these issues to increase in importance. The roll-out of the Carbon Reduction Commitment and other financial and legal mechanisms for limiting emissions are likely to impact directly and indirectly on funding mechanisms and on the charities which The CBT funds.

⁸ <http://www.citybridgetrust.org.uk>

Procurement and small organisations

Gary Clifford, Tenderwise⁹

Tenderwise is a 4½-year Interreg-funded project, between Trinity University College, Carmarthen and Bangor University, seeking to meet the needs of the small business sector in Wales, by helping small businesses equip themselves to win more public sector tender contracts for goods and services. The work raises important procurement lessons for small organisations and the third sector generally.

The findings show that current procurement practices, particularly from public sector bodies, tend to favour larger organisations and companies. Contract values are high; pre-qualification criteria negate smaller organisations; every local authority has a different system and procurement practices even vary within authorities.

Third sector bodies rely on a combination of grants and service provision and the trend to full cost recovery has increased this 'trading' element for many. Understanding the procurement process is fundamental. Gary Clifford observes that "third sector organisations have to behave in a business-like manner if they are to secure contracts and provide services. They can't just rely on the fact they are third sector; they have to demonstrate their added value and business performance."

There are trends in procurement guidance towards greater use of added value assessment methods such as Social Return On Investment and Local Multiplier 3. This has not yet had significant demonstrable changes in practice by procurers, though Gary believes this is only a matter of time.

Currently procurement assessments have a 'tick box' approach to sustainability. If you have a sustainability policy, you tick the box. However, this is changing and rather than blanket judgements, specific criteria for sustainability aspects are being developed. This includes 'cradle to grave' assessments, social additionality criteria, carbon impact assessments and so forth. Whilst still in the early stages, there appears to be a trend towards this more focused approach to assessing sustainability aspects relevant to the service or product being procured.

Tenderwise's work so far still suggests the importance of relationships. It is not just about satisfying criteria, it is about building business relationships so that you can demonstrate your added value outside the tender framework process. Pre-qualification questionnaires, tender score forms and so forth rarely assess additionality, innovation, regional knowledge and other aspects likely to be demonstrated by more sustainable organisations.

The other key aspect Tenderwise's work identifies is the need for greater collaborative tendering. An innovative project in Carmarthenshire, being hosted by the Carmarthenshire Association of Voluntary Services, is supporting joint third sector tendering and Gary believes this is a way forward. If third sector organisations are to survive in the current economic climate and achieve success in the future, they need to be able to demonstrate their added value, work more collaboratively and demonstrate real sustainability with specific, tangible proof. In the future it is unlikely that procurement processes will just accept a simple sustainability policy as adequate. The sector needs to prove its case.

⁹ <http://wefo.wales.gov.uk/applyingforfunding/submitting/projectideas/connections/090129tenderwise/>

Figure 3: Key ideas emerging from the procurement interviews

Key Findings

- Procurement is increasingly being influenced by external factors linked to sustainability such as the carbon reduction commitment. Increasingly, those bidding for contracts will have to demonstrate what contribution they would make to the procuring organisation's sustainability targets.
- At present largely a 'tick box' exercise, the assessment of sustainability is likely to become increasingly sophisticated, using measures such as Social Return on Investment to assess real added value.
- TSOs, with their focus on social justice and human welfare issues, have got to be careful that their approach to procurement is not letting them down.
- The ideas of 'localism' and 'whole life cycle' performance are beginning to influence the way procurement is undertaken, particularly in local government.
- Sustainable procurement probably has most impact when it is helping both the bidding and client organisations meet their targets in this area.

Section 4: Leading the sustainability journey

Sustainability is potentially a complex subject and therefore a daunting one for the leader of any organisation to start to address. Consideration of the following two frameworks could help navigation through the complexity.

Firstly, at a personal level, inspired by the work of Daniel Goleman¹⁰ on Ecological Intelligence, three rules for living more sustainably:



Understanding your impact, whether it be the amount of carbon you produce or the provenance of your food, is essential to doing something about it. There are many products on the market, mostly linked to the internet, that enable measurement of various aspects of your impact.

Favour improvements suggests that sustainability cannot be achieved overnight but will come about through millions of decisions and actions which have favoured improvements to an individual's or an organisation's impact.

Goleman recognises the complexity of the issues, considering them too big for any one person to understand, hence the need to share what you have learnt to build up a body of knowledge and experience.

Secondly, at an organisational level, it is helpful to think about three response levels:



The first response is to 'stop things getting worse'. This is the classic efficiency drive and is an essential first step. Engaging people in how they think that they can reduce waste, be it materials or energy, not only reduces the organisation's impact but also saves money. This response is about improving the way the organisation currently operates.

¹⁰ Ref Ecological Intelligence by Daniel Goleman, pub Broadway Business (April 21, 2009)

Figure 4. A few examples of quick wins

Area of influence	Impact	Source
Taking sustainability seriously is not exclusive to third sector.	60% of UK employees say it's important to work for a company that has an active policy to reduce its carbon emissions.	Carbon Trust.
	In many businesses, a 20% cut in energy costs represents the same bottom line benefit as a 5% increase in sales.	Carbon Trust.
It's not just about spending, it's also about saving.	Reducing room temperature by 1°C can cut heating bills by 10%.	Every Action Counts sustainable events guide.
	A dripping tap will waste enough water in a week to fill a bath.	Carbon Trust.
Energy-saving bulbs last 10 times longer than ordinary light bulbs.	Using one can save you around £40 over the lifetime of the bulb.	Carbon Trust.
Thinking about what we do.	How do we travel to work, within work, for conferences etc? Bassac did a travel survey for attendees at its 2008 conference. 74% of people came by public transport, cycled or walked. They used a community transport operation to take people between the conference venue and dinner.	Every Action Counts sustainable events guide.
	Double-sided printing halves paper use and reduces energy consumption by an estimated 25%.	Every Action Counts sustainable events guide.
	Heating costs can increase by 30% or more if the boiler is poorly operated or maintained.	Carbon Trust.
	Driving 65 miles with tyres at the correct pressure can save 1 kg of CO ₂ .	Every Action Counts sustainable events guide.

Once the 'quick wins' have been achieved, further improvement, at the second response level, can come from considering the services and products the organisation produces and how these can be improved to make them more sustainable. Organisations that are addressing sustainability in this way report a range of benefits such as:

- Improved risk assessment
- Increased staff engagement
- Clearer organisational strategy
- Greater evidence of the organisation's value which enables it to prove its worth to others for funding and contracts
- Reduced wastage and increased efficiency
- Improved maintenance

The third response is about strategic change and how an organisation considers completely new, more sustainable ways of achieving its mission. Very few organisations, in any sector, are currently addressing the third response level. The case studies in Section 5 illustrate that TSOs are most commonly engaging with level 1 and the 'early adopters' are seeing increasing benefit from level 2-type activities.

Section 5: Stories from the front line

Overview

An increasing number of TSOs are taking up the sustainability challenge. The reasons for doing so are as diverse as the organisations themselves, as are the benefits that they are beginning to experience. Most importantly there is a lot of learning going on which needs to be brought to the surface and shared if the sector is going to avoid the unsustainable 'reinventing the wheel' syndrome. Set out in this section are seven case studies from a range of organisations that show the way forward. We have hopefully been able to provide an interesting cross-section of third sector activity: from traditional charities to social enterprises; from very large, national bodies to smaller, locally focused ones:

Social care – Equinox Care

Older people – Help the Aged

Young people – National Children's Bureau

Medical – Cancer Research

Volunteering – BTCV

Social enterprise – South Shropshire Furniture

Housing – Accord Housing Group

Equinox Care¹¹

Based on an interview with Catherine Max, a Trustee at Equinox

Equinox was set up in the 1980s, providing residential and community-based services across London and SE England. It seeks to ensure that vulnerable women and men with alcohol, drug and mental health problems are not excluded, can access appropriate services and receive the help they need, so they can lead full and rewarding lives in the community.

Over the years, Equinox has demonstrated a flexible approach to service delivery - a willingness to embrace new ideas and ways of working so long as these are consistent with their core values. It is in this context that in the last 18 months it has started to embrace sustainability as a strategic issue.

The initial thrust came from having identified that commissioners were becoming increasingly interested in the topic. A session at the annual Executive and Board Away Day on sustainability

Equinox



¹¹ www.equinoxcare.org.uk

provided a very productive discussion that helped those involved see how sustainability relates to the sector generally and Equinox in particular; that it was about people, their potential and their place in the community and as such it related well to Equinox's values.

Catherine Max identified a number of factors that have helped the organisation start to embrace sustainability. Firstly, the very positive response from service users who wanted to be involved, commit time and energy and in some instances expertise to the process. This has manifested itself at strategic level, through membership of the Corporate Plan Working Group and participation in the Baring Foundation Big Response initiative on adaptation to climate change, and also at service level. Local examples include growing seasonal food at Brook Drive, a residential drug and alcohol detoxification unit in Lambeth; and a recycling initiative at the Whittaker Centre, a drop-in centre for heavy drinkers in Islington. Service users will also be taking part in an upcoming Department of Health Sustainable Development Awareness Week.

Other examples include a staff cycle to work scheme, implementing plans for each service to reduce and recycle waste, exploring fair trade options and contingency planning for extreme weather events.

Secondly, Board involvement from an early stage has been important. It decided early on that sustainability was a strategic issue that needed to be integrated into the organisation's planning processes, specifically the Corporate Plan. At the same time, Equinox was developing its Service User Involvement Strategy and the work on sustainability provided an ideal opportunity to put into practice the principle of service user involvement at every level of the organisation. Thirdly, leadership from the top has been critical in empowering others to act. The chief executive took on the role of Sustainability Champion and in doing so set the signal to the rest of the organisation that this is important and encourages people's ideas and involvement.

Cost saving was not an overriding objective but a number of quick wins were identified that that would reduce expenditure and the process was incentivised further by the agreement that such savings would potentially be reinvested in service delivery. Future financial benefits might also come from the new opportunities for fundraising that are emerging, particularly around community projects.

Catherine considers that the real gain from addressing the sustainability agenda has been the impact on people; service users, staff and volunteers. It has been a great process for uncovering people's interests, developing a common cause and in bringing people together.

A key lesson to emerge is, in a people-based organisation, to avoid the temptation to start with environmental sustainability; this is often remote from people's day to day experience and often comes encumbered with a language that is difficult to relate to. Start with the issues that interest the people within the organisation.

As for the future, the Board would like to see sustainability performance measured in the same way as other business objectives and then used as a key decision-making tool in the organisation's development, ensuring a balance between social, environmental and economic considerations.

Help the Aged¹²

HELPTHEAGED WE WILL

Based on an interview with Mervyn Kohler

Help the Aged is an international charity fighting to free older people from poverty, isolation and neglect. Its mission is to work for disadvantaged older people; research their needs, campaign for their rights, and provide vital services.

Help the Aged's main approach to sustainability is rooted in what it does and what it advocates. There is ongoing concern about the rising costs of energy in the context of the lives of older people and their need to keep warm affordably. It is this rather than any desire to be green that has led the work in this area and the work to operate more sustainably has followed on from this.

In the context of advocacy, becoming aligned with the green movement has added an extra dimension to its work and expanded how the message is heard. It has enhanced the presentation of issues to the outside world, and perhaps increased the esteem in which the organisation is held. There are also bottom line cost improvements in how the office functions although cost saving has only been a limited issue; it has been more about the desire to do the right thing. The main changes in the office have been around cutting waste and energy saving. This has included 'the usual kind of things' like double-sided printing, air dryers and green housekeeping.

Many Help the Aged staff are young graduates in their first or second job, and many are keen and active on green issues. The ideas and calls for action from younger staff were embraced by the management team, and there was a recognition that these changes would help generate savings. There is an internal review committee that meets occasionally to review progress. This work on green issues is only a small part of the internal structure and is not necessarily a high priority.

With regard to wider impacts for the organisation there have been two major areas where green issues have come to the fore. One was the legal challenge on the Government's fuel poverty strategy and related payments mounted by Help the Aged in cooperation with Friends of the Earth. Even though the legal review challenge failed, this work was applauded by all departments and was seen as a strong statement of commitment. Fundraising staff were able to use this work as part of their fundraising strategy. The second was the publication of 'Older, Greener, Wiser' – the report published with Green Alliance and a panel of older people assembled by Help the Aged. Staff are becoming comfortable with a more active line in this area and it is generating a 'feel-good factor'.

The key lessons that are emerging for Help the Aged is that this is a good issue to be aligned with, but that alignment needs to be developed in a proactive way. Like others, they are threatened with public expenditure cuts and need to prioritise work to deliver policies where spending can be justified. Investment in improving housing stock is one of these: up to one third of the population may be pensioners. Housing action will improve their quality of life and will also bring wider environmental benefits.

As far as the future is concerned there is continued staff pressure and this appears to play well with their supporters. There is recognition that there is a need to continue to move forward in this area and perhaps step up a gear and take a more structured approach across all the organisation's activities.

¹² <http://www.helptheaged.org.uk>

National Children's Bureau (NCB)¹³

Based on an interview with Jo Butcher – Assistant Director; Health, Wellbeing and Environment



Established in 1963, NCB is dedicated to advancing the health and wellbeing of all children and young people across every aspect of their lives and providing them with a powerful and authoritative voice. As a membership and infrastructure support agency, participation and partnership are at the heart of everything it does.

NCB has been building an advocacy platform around sustainability for a couple of years, arising out of work on wellbeing and a recognition that it was a growing issue for young people. This work has been shaped by young people and is focused around the idea of 'sustainable living', creating the lifestyle choices for young people that are both good for people and good for the environment. Young people's sustainability concerns relate to their place in society and the communities in which they live.

At the same time, within NCB itself, there was already in place an Environmental Group that was looking at the organisation's own 'green' performance. The organisation was able to bring these two threads together and take a more strategic approach when it secured funding from the Baring Foundation to take a leadership role in this area with other children's charities. A requirement of the funding was to review its own sustainability performance.

There has been little difficulty in getting the organisation aligned behind this new approach. The chief executive has supported the strategic development process, keen to see it linked to existing areas of work. He has also been willing to be the 'public face' on the issue, a very visible show of support and commitment. There is a strong moral dimension to sustainability in the context of a children's charity – it is about what sort of world children and young people are going to grow up in. As the chief executive, Paul Ennals said, "if we are not there (engaging with climate change as part of our mission) we are nowhere". NCB has benefited from being an 'early adopter' in terms of both profile and funding. An example of this would be the invitation to participate in the Joint Ministerial Third Sector Task Force on Climate Change, Sustainable Development and the Environment.

The advocacy platform has provided a voice for children and young people and has future plans to put children at the heart of policy development around climate change and sustainability. It has helped build capacity internally and people are starting to factor sustainability into organisational decision-making processes such as the refurbishment of buildings. New partnerships have developed, particularly in respect to children's charities, environmental organisations and those working in international development. These 'untraditional' partnerships are creating new opportunities.

The internal approach to sustainability has focused on the upgrading of facilities such as heating systems where the recent installation of a condensing boiler has improved the efficiency of the system by 38%. The next upgrade is a new roof and serious consideration is being given to a green roof design and solar panels. This work has been supported by a team of environmental champions who are encouraging changes in staff behaviours towards such things as recycling.

Looking ahead, NCB, working together with other third sector organisations, is investigating the opportunity to build upon the shared service arrangements that they have with a number of other charities to create a range of shared services that both save costs and carbon emissions – developing a whole new approach to the way that they work. A key lesson that has emerged through this work is the importance of language to either inspire or de-motivate. The language around many sustainability issues such as climate change is often negative and narrowly focused and does not necessarily relate to young people's lives in the way that they see it. However, it is also action orientated and designed to create a sense of urgency. The language that NCB has created around 'sustainable living' tries to create a balance between the need for a positive message and the need for urgent action.

¹³ <http://www.ncb.org.uk/>

Cancer Research¹⁴

Based on an interview with Belinda Prince, Procurement Manager

CANCER RESEARCH UK



Cancer Research UK is the world's leading independent organisation dedicated to cancer research. It supports research into all aspects of cancer through the work of more than 4,500 scientists, doctors and nurses. It is a very large TSO, with a turnover of over £300 million a year, and runs two major research institutions.

Cancer Research's interest in sustainability goes back to 2006 when it appointed an Environmental Specialist into the Property Services team. Initially, activity was based on 'small steps' such as the use of recycled paper, and internal promotion of greener products. Its work was helped significantly by its engagement with the Mayor of London's Green procurement code - it currently has Gold Award status. The culmination of this initial work took place in early 2009 when the Executive Board signed up to a Sustainable Development policy.

There are two major areas of focus. One is printing, where all print buying is outsourced to a specialist agency. For this the environmental criteria and issues were set out and the buyers have negotiated contracts on this basis.

The second is energy supply. Cancer Research is one of two or three charities to be covered by the new Carbon Reduction Commitment (CRC) as its overall energy bill is over £500,000. This has been a very big driver where 'we have no choice'. Cancer Research has a big utilities contract and has worked on contracts with suppliers. So far it has been unable to develop a contract for a supply based on entirely green energy. It has set a target of 5% reduction a year in emissions for each of the next three years. To help deliver this it is adopting other energy-saving measures. These include work on 'basic behaviour changes' which is seen as having an important role in reducing its footprint. This work has included having material on the staff intranet, simple in-house competitions, a bike-to-work week and similar events. A Green Travel Code has also been introduced as a major new institute in Cambridge has been opened, where the code is being applied from the start.

These changes, especially in relation to the CRC, have had wider impacts. There has been little scepticism but some reservation from staff in departments such as fundraising where some of this was seen as peripheral to the main mission, while some scientists are lobbying for more energy-intensive equipment which cuts across moves to reduce overall emissions. One reason why there has been widespread support was the advance work. All trustees were engaged with well in advance of new measures, and while there was broad recognition of the need for change, there was also recognition of a range of feelings.

Cancer Research has commitments to develop this work further in the future. There is always a cost angle in terms of procurement and some concerns about where green actions might be seen to cost more, but Belinda Price has been able to demonstrate that sustainable procurement should be integral to a good economy. The charity is now looking to work across its supply chain and, as a large organisation, it has a real impact. A 'supplier day' was held to which its top 50 suppliers were all invited to come and hear about Cancer Research's sustainability policy and what would be expected of them as suppliers. This is one way (along with the footprinting and energy work for the CRC) in which this work is becoming embedded.

¹⁴ <http://www.cancerresearchuk.org/aboutus/>



This charity was set up in 1959 and has a successful history of environmental conservation volunteering throughout the UK and around the world. Its mission is to create a more sustainable future by inspiring people to improve places.

Environmental sustainability has long been a focus but is now seen within a wider social and economic context. This was originally a staff-driven initiative as they recognised the need to 'walk the talk' but it has now become a strategic priority. It is increasingly seen to help deliver the mission and help position BTCV as a people-based organisation working in the environment.

The key driver has been the coming together of 'front-line' staff interest and a commitment from the senior staff, in particular from the chief executive. Engagement of the Board has been critical and they now receive performance reports covering issues such as carbon reduction along with the normal financial and operational reporting. Other important drivers have been signing of the Third Sector Declaration on Climate Change, the development of a Sustainable Development Action Plan and the creation of a range of implementation structures such as local environmental champions in each office. This has helped create a critical mass within the organisation of people with the energy and enthusiasm to engage others.

BTCV has benefited in a number of ways. The decision to go for green design of the new HQ in Doncaster was primarily about reflecting the organisation's values in a key facet of its public image but there have been a couple of beneficial financial outcomes. Firstly, it was found to be easier to attract external funding to something that was innovative and, secondly, a small income is now being generated from the growing demand from other organisations to hire out 'green' meeting space. This has led the organisation to commit to refurbishing its key offices to high environmental standards (BS8885). This has recently happened in London and first quarter fuel bills are already down considerably on the same time the previous year.

Not all sustainability actions are as grand or required such a high level of investment as a new HQ. A simple audit, for example, of staff travel arrangements has produced savings both in terms of money and CO₂ emissions and senior management has responded positively to the idea of flexible working to enable more sustainable travel to work arrangements. The impact on BTCV's people has perhaps been even more profound. Their volunteers have responded very positively, happy that the organisation is 'practising what it preaches' and improvements in staff morale and pride in the organisation have been attributed to the way that the organisation is addressing sustainability. An online pledge system has produced a significant number of commitments from staff regarding their own personal environmental impact.

At the outset there was a lot of anxiety around the outcome, but now there is growing confidence in the organisation that once you say 'yes' to this stuff, things turn out well. The utility of the action plan, putting in place auditing, monitoring and supporting activities has helped drive the process. Now the challenge is to ensure that this approach to sustainability remains embedded across the organisation – not least because the likelihood is that sustainability tests will be part of public service commissioning and procurement processes in the future.

¹⁵ <http://www2.btcv.org.uk/>

South Shropshire Furniture Scheme¹⁶

Based on an interview with Jean Jarvis, Chief Executive

South Shropshire Furniture Scheme, a registered charity - and social enterprise – was started in 1994 in response to a need expressed by the community. It collects donated furniture and household items to deliver to people on low incomes living in South Shropshire. To assist its sustainability it has diversified into a vibrant and dynamic organisation, providing a range of services and training through different social enterprise activities which include:

- restoration and sale of low cost furniture
- computer refurbishment
- a craft workshop
- a tearoom and bookshop
- a retail outlets for restored products



It also offers extensive training and volunteering opportunities in a range of technical and interpersonal skills. In recent years it has increasingly become a showcase and example of good practice for emerging social enterprises.

In addition to the local service, the organisation has also secured a contract with Veolia to help deliver waste collection services under contract to Shropshire Unitary Authority. This contract involved significant relationship-building between the three organisations and a negotiation process over several years to ensure the contract would work for all three.

The initial driver for SSFS was that the organisation must be economically sustainable in order to be able to deliver on its social values. The whole process was driven by the CEO, Jean Jarvis, the motivational and catalytic force behind much of the organisation's work.

As Jean says, "whilst we started out with a social focus we rapidly realised the need to be economically and environmentally sustainable. Now we consider all three as fundamentally part and parcel of the process". She believes that without all three aspects the viability of the organisation would suffer. By expanding its activities SSFS has been able to access a range of commercial contracts including those for training and the collection of bulky waste. Although SSFS is providing an environmental service, saving tonnes of waste from landfill, it has not stopped there. For example, its newly converted training building is built to high environmental standards, re-using recycled materials where possible and retaining the original building fabric.

SSFS is now looking at how it can more formally measure the three different elements of its activities by assessing the real value of the approach through triple bottom line accounting.

It has not always been an easy process. Encouraging the staff and volunteers to understand and accept the need to charge for their products was a challenge. Similarly, it has sometimes been difficult for the Board to look beyond the immediate financial issues especially when money is tight. All of this has required firm leadership and commitment to the mission. However it has all been worth it and the profile that Jean and the organisation have had for their work has greatly helped their cause. They are well respected in the county, and often asked by local government to participate in strategic partnerships. For example, during the floods of 2007 they were asked to join the crisis committee and were able to provide a valuable service to people who had lost the contents of their house in the floods.

¹⁶ <http://www.furnitureScheme.co.uk/>

ACCORD Housing Group¹⁷

Based on an interview with Alan Yates, Regeneration Director



Managing around 5,600 homes and providing services to around 35,000 people across the West Midlands, ACCORD is a large third sector organisation. It is the first housing association to achieve EMAS, building on its ISO 1401 achievement.

Until five years ago, the organisation had a small internal 'green team' working to try and improve the organisation's environmental performance. At this time the organisation decided to make a significant move forwards on its sustainability performance and declared it would strive to be the greenest housing association in the UK, a major challenge. This commitment was embedded in the organisation's mission.

Alan Yates, the Regeneration Director, (who recently won the 'Inside Housing Green Champion Award' for his work) was the catalyst for this change, but it was the engagement and commitment of the Board and senior staff, followed by engagement right across the organisation that really helped ensure the change happened and that the practices were embedded into the organisation.

The green team had been well intentioned and worked hard to improve performance, but it was the move to consider social and economic as well as environmental aspects that helped engage others in the sustainability challenge. The 'green team' was disbanded and replaced by an 'environmental management team'. This now boasts 20 members from across the organisation.

It is always hard to know where to start. Alan says, "carbon foot printing was a vital tool for us to understand where to spend our resources and time on improvements. None of the off-the-shelf approaches really fitted us, so we developed our own tool. I would recommend this as a vital first step for any organisation considering its sustainability." The other key factor has been innovation. It is not just about trying to find more money, but rather about finding innovative ways to fund or support changes, either through grants, stock transfers, financial packages or direct savings. It is not all about cost; over the last five years, ACCORD has been building Norwegian timber framed eco-homes. Over this time it has managed year-on-year to reduce the costs of construction whilst improving the environmental performance. This has been due to developing close partnerships and working relationships. The carbon footprint of these imports is assessed but savings are more than achieved in reduced transport, stored carbon and other factors.

Whilst it was originally driven by an environmental concern, the organisation has embraced all aspects of sustainability. A good example is a ¼ million pound project being run by Ashram housing (part of the group focused on housing for ethnic minorities), to support unemployed tenants into work, retro-fitting green technologies into their housing stock.

So what next? Among some of the plans, the group is working to develop more innovative financial solutions to sustainability; retro-fitting existing housing stock; assessing its asset management plans; and investigating sustainability and employment links.

¹⁷ <http://www.accordha.org.uk/>

Figure 5: Key ideas emerging from the case studies

Key Findings

- Traditionally the idea of sustainability has been linked to environmental and green issues; however, many of the case studies have shown that you need to start with what people are interested in, and for many this is about social sustainability.
- Linked to this are issues of language. The language of sustainability can be new and off-putting, but need it be? Developing an appropriate language that works for the staff and client group is an important early step.
- In most cases the client group has expectations of the organisation with regard to its sustainability performance which are not always expressed until there is an opportunity to participate.
- Sustainability is not just an operational issue, it is providing an increasing number of organisations with an advocacy platform, helping them to address old issues in new ways.
- Partnership is a recurring theme, particularly partnerships between previously unlikely collaborators from the social and environmental sectors. Working together is creating new opportunities.
- For many interviewed the initial driver came from the staff and where the response from the organisation has been positive considerable benefits have occurred in terms of staff morale and motivation. Virtuous circles are developed where staff influence the behaviour of the organisation and in responding the organisation influences the sustainability behaviour of staff outside of work.
- The use of ‘champions’ in an organisation would appear to enhance the engagement of staff and the take-up of new initiatives. Creating a sense of momentum through this mechanism is important in maximising the benefits.
- Not surprisingly the role of the CEO was cited in most of the case studies as very important. Not however, in a ‘leading from the front’ role, but in creating the space for things to happen, endorsing progress and being the public face of the organisation’s approach to sustainability.
- It was apparent that organisations ‘up their game’ when sustainability becomes a strategic issue, discussed at Board level and integrated into planning, monitoring and reporting processes. This ensures that sustainability is embedded into the organisation.

Section 6:

Every great journey starts with a single step

January 2010 will be the start of the second decade of the 21st century. If every new year, let alone a new decade, should start with a resolution, the interviews and case studies in this document surely suggest that for chief executives of TSOs that resolution should be to engage fully with the ideas and opportunities of sustainability and to bring about the changes in their organisations that will ensure that the third sector contributes fully to making a more sustainable world. One clear way to bring the resolution to life would be to sign up to a publicly recognised initiative and to challenge your organisation to meet its requirements.

Figure 6. Examples of public initiatives that could be used to galvanise action in your organisation

10:10: An ambitious project to unite every sector of British society behind one simple idea: that by working together we can achieve a 10% cut in the UK's carbon emissions in 2010. By signing up to a 10% target you will not just be supporting 10:10, but making it happen, to take the first steps on the road to becoming a zero-carbon society. Although it is easy to feel powerless in the face of a huge problem like climate change, the idea is to unite everyone behind immediate, effective and achievable action. More information at <http://www.1010uk.org/>

The Third Sector Declaration on Climate Change: The Declaration is intended as a statement of intent from third sector organisations to tackle the issue of climate change by taking action in our organisations and in our communities. More information at <http://www.everyactioncounts.org.uk/declaration/>

The Carbon Army: A volunteering initiative launched by BTCV to coincide with the Climate Change summit in Copenhagen, enabling ordinary people to get involved in a range of projects designed to have a direct and tangible impact on reducing the UK's emissions. More information at <http://www2.btcv.org.uk/display/carbonarmy>

In autumn 2008 Jonathan Porrit, then Chairman of the Sustainable Development Commission, at a workshop for the Office of the Third Sector, stated that we need to see sustainability as the **central organising principle** for everything we do. He described it not only as a big idea, but also as an integrating framework and a tool kit for change. He went on to describe its importance to the third sector as the framework that provides "any kind of intellectual credibility, any kind of joined-up policy and delivery, and any chance of a better world".

Creating a 'better world' is surely what the third sector is all about, so sustainability should no longer be a side issue, a 'nice to have'. It should be a key component, if not the key component of a 'modern enterprising third sector'. The interviews and case studies in this publication show that an interest in sustainability is not just about stopping things getting worse, it is about creating a whole new way of doing things, of running our organisations, in delivering services to others and in living our lives. Sustainability is a huge opportunity for the sector; the challenge now for third sector leaders is to embrace it.

Further Support

If you would like any advice and peer support related to tackling the themes raised by this publication, then the following members of the ACEVO Sustainability Special Interest Group would be happy for you to contact them.

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To join the Sustainability SIG and also to access further support and advice contact the staff champion:
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Improving Support is an initiative led by Capacitybuilders that brings together practical resources and learning to strengthen support services for third sector organisations.

ACEVO is the professional body for third sector chief executives. We connect, develop, support and represent our members, to increase the sector's impact and efficiency.

We promote a modern, enterprising third sector, and call upon organisations to be:

- **Professional and passionate** in achieving change and delivering results
- **Well-led**, with a commitment to professional development, training and diversity
- **Well-governed and accountable**, with robust and fit-for purpose systems to protect independence and enable effective decision-making
- **Enterprising and innovative**, taking a businesslike approach to funding issues and striving for continuous improvement and sustainable development.

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