



# Making Sustainable Decisions

Councillor Workbook

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# Welsh Local Government Association - The Voice of Welsh Councils

We are The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA); a politically led cross-party organisation that seeks to give local government a strong voice at a national level. We represent the interests of local government and promote local democracy in Wales.

The 22 councils in Wales are our members and the 3 fire and rescue authorities and 3 national park authorities are associate members.

**We believe that the ideas that change people's lives, happen locally.**

Communities are at their best when they feel connected to their council through local democracy. By championing, facilitating, and achieving these connections, we can build a vibrant local democracy that allows communities to thrive.

**Our ultimate goal** is to promote, protect, support and develop democratic local government and the interests of councils in Wales.

**We'll achieve our vision by**

- Promoting the role and prominence of councillors and council leaders
- Ensuring maximum local discretion in legislation or statutory guidance
- Championing and securing long-term and sustainable funding for councils
- Promoting sector-led improvement
- Encouraging a vibrant local democracy, promoting greater diversity
- Supporting councils to effectively manage their workforce

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# Foreword

“Extreme need and hardship is often the mother of innovation and opportunity”. This quote is particularly true of the circumstances that face Local Government in Wales today. With diminishing resources, increasing demand, greater expectation on services and intergenerational challenges such as recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic, climate change and an ageing population, the need to rethink our approach to how we meet the needs of our citizens has never been greater. As councillors we are in a privileged position, elected to represent our constituents both now and for future generations. Unlike many of those we represent, we are uniquely placed to help influence and shape their future by the decisions we take today. Making these decisions through a sustainable development lens, as set out in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 will help ensure that our decisions are “fit for the future” whilst still addressing the needs of citizens now. This members’ handbook will provide some context to sustainable development principles and gives practical case studies and questions that will support you as you consider future decisions and look for opportunities to put its suggestions into practice

## Introduction

As you work through the book you will find a number of features designed to help you think about community leadership and the councillor’s role. These features are represented by the symbols shown below:

	<b>Guidance</b> This is used to indicate guidance, research, quotations, explanations and definitions that you may find helpful.		<b>Hints and tips</b> These represent a selection of good practices which you may find useful.
	<b>Challenges</b> These are questions or queries raised in the text which ask you to reflect on your role or approach – in essence, they are designed to be thought-provokers.		<b>Useful links</b> These are signposts to sources of further information, outside of the workbook, which may help with principles, processes, methods and approaches. A full list of useful additional information is set out in the Appendix of the workbook.
	<b>Case studies</b> These are ‘pen pictures’ of approaches used by councils elsewhere.		

# **Sustainable development, it's not rocket science!**

## **What is sustainable development?**

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act put into place a 'sustainable development principle' which tells organisations how to go about meeting their duty under the act. There are many definitions of sustainable development from across the globe, but the most well recognised is that used by Bruntland: "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". The sustainable development principle put the Bruntland definition into Welsh law and is now a fundamental part of how public bodies and public services boards must now operate.

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act provides a general definition as follows:- "sustainable development" means the process of improving the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales by taking action, in accordance with the sustainable development principle, aimed at achieving the well-being goals of the Well-being of Future Generations Act

At it's core, sustainable development is about ensuring well-being and a better quality of life for future generations, thinking about the impacts of today's actions on the future, and protecting and enhancing the natural and built environment by learning to live within environmental limits.

Sustainable development is not a new concept, it continues to evolve and gain momentum both in understanding and how it can positively support longer term decision making. You are not alone if you feel slightly overwhelmed by the concept of sustainable development and exactly what it means. That said, the following statement "that's what Sustainable Development is, we are already doing much of that but haven't called it sustainable development!" is common after a little consideration and discussion around this subject. As members, representing your constituents longer term needs, advocating for the most vulnerable, and making choices to ensure that resources go as far as possible and deliver the best possible services, are all principles that you will feel strongly connected with. These are also at the heart of good sustainable decision making. Perhaps sustainable development is not such an overwhelming concept after all!

Traditional associations with sustainable development include carbon emissions, climate change, biodiversity, resource management, social responsibility, and community engagement. These are all correct, but an approach built on sustainable development will consider all of these aspects, how they relate to all services and how they will inter-relate in the long term. The key objective is that applying sustainable development is a route to better decision making and delivering services in local authorities.

## **Five Ways of Working**

There are 5 things that public bodies need to think about to show that they have applied the sustainable development principle. Following these ways of working will help us work together better, avoid repeating past mistakes and tackle some of the long-term challenges Wales is facing.

### **1. Long term**

The importance of balancing short-term needs with the need to safeguard the ability to also meet long-term needs.

### **2. Prevention**

How acting to prevent problems occurring or getting worse may help public bodies meet their objectives.

### **3. Integration**

Considering how the public body's well-being objectives may impact upon each of the well-being goals, on their other objectives, or on the objectives of other public bodies.

### **4. Collaboration**

Acting in collaboration with any other person (or different parts of the body itself) that could help the body to meet its well-being objectives.

### **5. Involvement**

The importance of involving people with an interest in achieving the well-being goals, and ensuring that those people reflect the diversity of the area which the body serves.



# Sustainable development, it's not rocket science!

## What is sustainable development?

The World Bank Group have a simple exercise to bring the concept of sustainable development to life:



**Take a minute and jot down five to ten needs that you have in your own life.**

**Results** - Have you listed any needs that conflict with one another? For example, if you listed clean air to breathe, but also listed a car for transportation, your needs might conflict. Which would you choose, and how would you make your decision? If within ourselves, we have conflicting needs, how much is that multiplied when we look at a whole community, city, country, and world? For example, what happens when a company's need for cheap labour conflicts with workers' needs for liveable wages? Or when individual families' needs for firewood conflict with the need to prevent erosion and conserve topsoil? Or when one country's need for electricity results in acid rain that damages another country's lakes and rivers?

**Challenge** - How do we decide whose needs are met? Poor or rich people? Citizens or immigrants? People living in cities or in the countryside? People in one country or another? You or your neighbour? The environment or the corporation? This generation or the next generation? When there has to be a trade-off, whose needs should go first? How do you manage the dilemma of conflicting needs?

A sustainable development approach is the way in which we consider these impacts and challenges, conflicts and dilemmas with a view to future generations. As a Councillor you will have a very specific role in trying to address many of these conflicts and issues.

**Is the concept of sustainable development now easier to understand?**



## Sustainable development, it's not rocket science!

**Sustainable development is relevant to the communities and citizens you serve.**

Below are two examples of typical but very different families that you might find within your wards. Each of these families will be impacted by the inter-generational challenges facing us all such as, health inequality, climate change, demographic change, welfare reform, and pressure on services due to reduced council resources. Whilst some of these issues might feel remote they will have different direct and indirect impacts on each family.



### **Family 1 – Gwilym & Sioned Davies**

Mr and Mrs Jones are aged 73 and 68 respectively and are retired. They both receive state pensions. They have lived in a local authority owned 3 bedroom house in a very deprived local authority housing estate. Mr Jones has recently had a heart attack which has left him with permanent health and mobility problems. They are waiting to be assessed for a housing adaptation grant and neither Mr nor Mrs Jones drive. Mrs Jones enjoys going to Bingo in the evenings and Mr Jones used to enjoy working on his allotment but now finds his health problems limit these opportunities.

They provide care and support to their 3 grandchildren, who live in a neighbouring street and attend the local school. They regularly pick up their grandchildren from school whilst their daughter is at work and look after them during the school holidays. All their grandchildren regularly stay over with them whilst their parents work.



### **Family 2 - Gemma and Dave Jones**

Gemma and Dave, both aged 22, have two girls aged 5 and 3, and live in a three bedroom, privately rented pre-1910 house. Gemma works 20 hours a week and brings home £140 per week. They also receive working tax credit of £26.81 and child tax credit of £113.99 – which is paid 4 weekly. To be able to go to work she relies on her mother for help with the school run and during the school holidays.

Dave had a road traffic accident 11 months ago and whilst he is on the mend, he still has restricted and painful movements. He was awarded higher rate mobility and the lower rate care component of Disability Living Allowance (DLA). They have a Motability car. This award is due to expire at the end of the year. He was found 'fit for work' after a medical last week. His employers have kept his job open for him to return to work but at the moment their occupational health are stating that he isn't fit to return.

The house they rent has recently been assessed as failing the Decent Home Standard due to poor thermal comfort.

## Sustainable development, it's not rocket science!

Sustainable development is relevant to the communities and citizens you serve.

Examples of how intergenerational challenges might impact these two families

<b>Intergenerational Issues</b>	<b>Local Impacts on Davies' (Elderly Couple)</b>	<b>Local Impacts on Jones' (Young Family)</b>
<b>Global Financial Crisis</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pension funds diluted, greater dependency on LA care services and costs.</li> <li>• Low interest rates resulting in less income from savings = greater dependency on LA</li> <li>• Government austerity measures - Welfare Reform resulting in less income due to "Bedroom Tax".</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cost of short term/pay day borrowing escalating</li> <li>• Reduced number of company start-ups = no local employment</li> <li>• Company reorganisation due to cheaper labour markets = local unemployment</li> <li>• Cost of child care escalating resulting in cost trap meaning young mothers and fathers are unable to work.</li> </ul>
<b>Extreme Weather Events</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More health problems in the summer due to hot weather               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ hospitalisation</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Cold weather linked to high energy costs linked to inability to warm the home linked to increased health issues</li> <li>• Higher repair bills on houses, or increasing insurance costs. (Tendency to not repair due to costs therefore degrading housing stock)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased flooding impacts children going to school, impacting ability of parents to find work</li> <li>• Council is unable to respond quickly to help vulnerable groups (Heavy snow or flooding)</li> <li>• Higher repair bills on houses, or increasing insurance costs (Tendency to not repair due to costs, therefore degrading housing stock)</li> </ul>
<b>Migration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Younger families leaving the area to find work = less family support therefore greater dependency on LA</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family networks eroded impacting stability of family unit.</li> <li>• Less young people impacts local skill base and therefore negative impact on companies locating in the area.</li> </ul>

<b>Health Inequalities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to local services, delays in care could result in compounding health issues.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low income families making poor or constrained choices around diet = lower life expectancy and poorer health.</li> </ul>
<b>Reduction and costs around finite resources (Water, Energy, Fuel, Food)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increasing costs for renewables Energy = colder homes = increasing health issues.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local food staples increasing in cost - limited choice impacting long term health</li> </ul>

One of the key features of good sustainable decision making is to fully understand the respective impacts on various stakeholder groups.

## The importance of sustainable development

### Why is sustainable development important for your council?

Wales, having quickly acknowledged the need for change and having embedded a commitment to sustainable development has the opportunity to forge and market a distinct, innovative, economically advantageous approach to development. Local Government (and wider public services) lies at the heart of such a shift in mind-set. Our challenge is to demonstrate strong, creative leadership, to deliver policies and services so as to foster and promote sustainable ways of living and working in the wider community and through the markets in which we operate.



Under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act, local authorities have a duty to carry out sustainable development, and it requires all public services to work together through Public Services Boards to improve the well-being of each Local Authority area and contribute to the seven national well-being goals. The Act is designed to help make local communities better and public services more sustainable, and ensures public bodies think more about the long-term, work better with people and communities and each other, look to prevent problems and take a more joined-up approach.

Sustainable local policy should ensure that:

- a holistic view of planning and service delivery takes into account the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainability;
- future trends, for example climate change impacts, are taken into account and that planning is for the long-term;
- impacts beyond the local area are considered;
- local people and communities are engaged in the process of decision-making through participative systems of governance.

Having been adopted by Welsh Government as a central organizing principle, sustainable development is also required to become the central principle for local government and all public sector activity.

# The importance of sustainable development


## Turning challenges into opportunities

The case for placing sustainable development at the centre of decision making is made even more compelling by considering some of the challenges that local government is currently facing and those issues that will materialise over the coming decades. It is clear that sustainable development presents opportunities to deal with these challenges more effectively.

Challenges	Opportunities
<b>Pressure on resources and service delivery</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pressures on Welsh Government's finances could see the overall budget worth around £600m less over the next three years (22/23 – 24/25). Councils will feel the impact of this reduction and will be required to make significant savings.</li> <li>Services that have already been cut or scaled back in recent years will be asked again to operate with reduced budgets, while meeting increasing demand and expectations from local residents.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Using longer term financial evidence to make longer term financial decisions.</li> <li>Using a broader range of investment criteria (including social value) rather than the traditional Return on Investment (RoI) measure.</li> <li>An opportunity to embed efficiency measures.</li> </ul>
<b>Poverty and welfare reform</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The UK Government has implemented significant reforms to welfare benefits and tax credits through the Welfare Reform Act 2012 and the Welfare and Work Act 2016.</li> <li>Analysis showed around 36 per cent, or 370,000, more families in the UK lost some Child Benefit in 2019–20 compared with 2013–14.</li> <li>In August 2018, 25,890 (12 per cent) recipients of Housing Benefit in Wales had seen a reduction to their weekly award amount (the majority (81%) of affected recipients were deemed to be under occupying their property).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engaging with citizens to help shape the response and making communities more resilient</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Welfare reform continues to impact people across the UK and local authorities are called on to provide advice and support to struggling families and individuals.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Job creation and unemployment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In 2018, 20.0% of the Welsh workforce were employed in the public sector</li> <li>In Feb 2022 the employment rate in Wales was 74.5%, just below the UK average of 75.5%</li> <li>However in parts of Wales these figures are significantly worse than the Wales average.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Connecting social, environmental and economic issues to find unexpected solutions to problems.</li> <li>Unemployment can be tackled in a variety of ways including using community organisations to address the skill shortages in the population.</li> <li>Investing in the local green economy, such as renewable energy to bring sustainable private sector jobs to your council region.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Demographic change and health</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>An ageing population is a challenge that is affecting the whole of the UK and many other developed countries, not just Wales.</li> <li>In Wales, the central demographic projects that in 20 years (by 2038) 1 in 4 of the population will be over 65. The population aged over 75 in Wales is also projected to increase from 9.3% of the population in 2018 to 13.7% in 2038 (Office for National Statistics 2019)</li> <li>The working population is growing much slower than the elderly population they will be required to support.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Taking preventative steps to address this challenge now and acting upon them to alleviate financial and healthcare crises in communities in the future.</li> <li>Working across the public sector to come up with a truly collaborative response.</li> <li>Being clear about what these trends are in your communities – and using this long term evidence to inform decision making.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Climate change</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Climate Change is having a very direct impact on our communities resulting in:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>more flooding;</li> <li>new pests and diseases affecting agriculture, forestry and wildlife;</li> <li>more disruption to our energy,</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understand how future climate impacts might specifically affect your ward – these impacts may well be very different across a council region.</li> <li>Understand and plan to reduce the future impacts of climate change by ensuring these are built into corporate risk assessments and budget decisions.</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ transport and ICT infrastructure;</li> <li>○ greater pressure on water resources; and</li> <li>○ more health problems in the summer.</li> <li>● It is also indirectly impacting citizens and communities through, increases in food and energy prices.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ensure that the Council's future investments in its buildings take account of future demand and how climate change might impact them in the next 50 years.</li> <li>● Look for the opportunities to take advantage of climate change – such as the positive impacts on tourism due to a warmer climate and longer seasons.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Regional collaboration and public sector reform</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The principle of collaboration to deliver efficiencies and improve service quality is not a new one. However despite some good isolated examples where this has been effective it is likely that the requirement to undertake more strategic and whole scale collaboration is going to become unavoidable.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To embrace and deliver benefit from collaboration, rather than resisting and seeing it as a challenge.</li> <li>● Using Sustainable Development criteria in prioritising how best to collaborate and with which services and partners.</li> <li>● Putting citizens and communities at the centre of collaboration choices and priorities.</li> <li>● Using a long term lens and longer term evidence to shape future collaboration choices and activity.</li> </ul>

	Do you recognise these challenges within your council and are you already starting to address them?
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# The importance of sustainable development

## A new sustainable development duty on your council



“[Welsh Government] made it clear that sustainable development is about working differently – for Wales this means looking to the future; integrating the four dimensions of sustainable development; collaborating to find and deliver more sustainable solutions; preventing problems from occurring or getting worse; and finding new ways to involve people in the decisions that affect them so that they have ownership of the solution and ownership of the future.

Wales is different because sustainable development is the central organising principle that shapes what it does and how it works. [...]

But culture change takes time and the greatest benefits may not become apparent for some time to come. We recognise that we still have more to do to fully embed the Act within Welsh Government and across the public sector; working in partnership with civil society, we are committed to delivering on the aspirations in the Act.”

*First Minister, Foreword, Wales and the Sustainable Development Goals 2019<sup>1</sup>*

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act sets seven national well-being goals, which public authorities (including local authorities) must set objectives to contribute toward their achievement. *When setting and subsequently working towards meeting those objectives, they will be required to do so in a manner consistent with ‘the sustainable development principle’ (i.e. seeking to ensure the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs). It is intended that this will help embed effective sustainable development behaviours into strategic decision making. The seven national well-being goals are:*

Goal	Description of the goal
<b>A prosperous Wales</b>	An innovative and productive, low carbon emission, economy that makes more efficient and proportionate use of resources; and which generates wealth and provides employment opportunities for a skilled and well-educated population.
<b>A resilient Wales</b>	A biodiverse, natural environment with healthy functioning ecosystems that support social, economic and ecological resilience and the capacity to adapt to change.

<sup>1</sup> [Wales and the Sustainable Development Goals – Supplementary Report to the UK Voluntary National Review 2019](#)

<b>A healthier Wales</b>	A society in which people's physical and mental wellbeing is maximised and in which choices and behaviours that benefit future health are understood.
<b>A more equal Wales</b>	A society that enables people to fulfil their potential no matter what their background or circumstances.
<b>A Wales of cohesive communities</b>	Attractive, viable, safe and well connected communities.
<b>A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language</b>	A society that promotes and protects culture, heritage and the Welsh language, and encourages people to participate in the arts, and sports and recreation.
<b>A globally responsible Wales</b>	A nation which, when doing anything to improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural wellbeing of Wales, takes account of whether doing such a thing may make a positive contribution to global wellbeing and the capacity to adapt to change.

## The importance of sustainable development

### A new sustainable development duty on your council

It is intended that these goals explain the story of a Wales we want within a generation. They collectively represent what the long term economic, social and environmental well-being of Wales would look like. The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act set ambitious, long term goals to reflect the Wales we want to see in the future. By putting these goals into law, we have set a course for all public services in Wales to provide for the well-being of a sustainable Wales.

The Well-being of Future Generations Act places a duty named public service organisations in Wales to maximise the contribution they make to these goals. The Welsh Government also intends to use other mechanisms such as the Sustainable Development Charter and their approach to sustainable procurement to also engage businesses, the third sector and other organisations to help achieve these goals and also measure the progress organisations are collectively making to achieve these goals.

This is a radical agenda which has demanded a significant change in the way we manage the environment and act as a society if we are truly to focus on long-term wellbeing. As a key stakeholder, local government will play a pivotal role in delivering against these goals.



**How do you think your council would be able to demonstrate how they are positively contributing towards the long term goals of Wales?**

# What does sustainable development look like in a council?

## Longer-term and strategic planning and decision making

Sustainable development has at its centre a number of key principles. These principles provide the fundamental building blocks to sustainable development decision making. We will explore these in more detail and provide examples/case studies of what this principle might look like in a local government context. These principles are shown in the diagram:



A key component of sustainable development is the consideration of the needs of future generations. This can only be achieved by considering the long-term future in current decision making, budgeting and risk management.

Examples of this type of thinking include:

- Considering potential future savings when deciding to invest – “spend to save”
- Considering whole-life costs and not just initial outlay, looking beyond the “easy wins”
- Considering whether future risks can be better mitigated by acting now
- Focussing on preventions rather than cures
- Understanding the organisation’s context on both a local and global level.

## How do I know if my council are taking the right steps?

- Your long term goals are based on good awareness of intergenerational trends such as climate change, changing demography and health.
- Ensuring that corporate strategies and plans are linked to all areas of sustainable development such as biodiversity and wellbeing.
- You will have a 20-30 year capital programme.
- You have longer term revenue financial planning, linked to long term service demands.
- There will be a move towards favouring investments that yield higher benefits over the longer term at the expense of shorter term measures with lower long term gains.
- Proactively explaining progress towards long term objectives and being open and honest when these are not being met.

## What does sustainable development look like in a council?

### Effective challenge and scrutiny based on sound evidence

Relying on long-held assumptions has the potential to limit the progress that can be made in service delivery. An approach that applies the principles of sustainable development would seek to challenge assumptions using sound evidence.

The role of overview and scrutiny is perhaps one specific function within local government where these principles could be seen to be best exercised. That said, the principle of challenge based on sound evidence is one that should be exercised by all when making decisions, including all officers and members irrespective of their formal role. Recent work undertaken by the National Welsh Scrutiny Officers Network highlighted some of the key attributes of effective scrutiny, these included:

- Democratic accountability that drives improvement in public services. - “Better outcomes”
- Democratic decision making that is accountable, inclusive and robust. - “Better decisions”
- The public is engaged in democratic debate about the current and future delivery of public services. - “Better engagement”

### How do I know if my council is taking the right steps?

- Your council will have a robust training programme for both members and officers which builds understanding of sustainable development principles in practice.
- You will have access to up-to-date information on the economic, environmental and social characteristics of the area in which your council provides services.
- Your scrutiny function will have proactively embraced the scrutiny attributes outlined above. Officers will be proactively providing you with longer term evidence such as trends on energy, climate, demography, water and employment which go beyond 10 years.
- Your scrutiny responsibilities will go beyond the boundary of your council into other bodies such as Public Services Boards and Regional Partnership Boards
- Scrutiny, oversight and challenge will be seen by both members and officers as adding value rather than an unnecessary burden.
- Citizens will be playing an increasingly important and pivotal role within the council's decision making process.

## **What does sustainable development look like in a council?**

### **Co-operation and integration**

Delivery of services can become more effective through co-operation between services within a council, between separate councils, and between councils and other stakeholder organisations. Public Service Boards have been established to encourage collaboration and integration in the delivery of public services. Under the Act, Public Services Boards have a duty to work collective to improve the cultural, economic, social and environmental well-being of their area by contributing to the achievement of the well-being goals.

Co-operation brings opportunities by opening up more ambitious projects by pooling resources, improving the quality of work by bringing together different backgrounds and perspectives, realising efficiency gains by reducing duplication and sharing outputs, and reducing the risk of services working against one another in pursuit of different goals.

### **How do I know if my council are taking the right steps?**

- Your local authority will have active participation and clear programmes of work delivered through the regions Public Services Board (and Regional Partnership Board)
- You will have identified the relationship between your organisation and other organisations that deliver a service in the same area.
- You will have evaluated the use of existing partnership arrangements and networks to help deliver your objectives.
- You will have started to use data from different statutory / non-statutory sources to provide an integrated approach to delivering your services.
- You will have started to consider how to change how your organisation reports on its performance to simplify and integrate these arrangements with others. In particular the annual reporting and financial statement.

## **What does sustainable development look like in a council?**

### **Engaging the community and citizens**

Engaging the community with regards to sustainable development is about encouraging local people to become involved in the decisions and activities that affect their lives, and the lives of generations to come.

By supporting people working and learning together at a community level, we can deliver the changes that will make sustainable development happen. It is crucial to ensure that local communities are prepared to manage and instigate change effectively. Local Government engaging with communities on sustainable development is significant because:

- In order to build a sustainable future, there needs to be change implemented in the places where we work and live, how we live our individual lives, and as communities within a wider society.
- Government regulation and policy alone cannot achieve the required change.
- Local government is strongly linked and connected to the community.

### **How do I know if my council are taking the right steps?**

- You will be engaging the community on issues that are of importance to them, to ensure that their views and priorities are best represented.
- There will be open planning and decision making processes with the community to gain new perspectives and ideas.
- Your council will have adopted the National Principles for Public Engagement<sup>4</sup>.
- Your strategic plans will be exclusively and demonstrably focused on the outcomes for people and communities.
- You will have a clear citizen communication strategy which will define the way in which the organisation engages with people and uses existing networks and structures for consultation to avoid duplication.
- Your Council will be preparing to publish a strategy for encouraging public participation in local democracy and decision-making (as required by the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021)
- Citizens from all sectors and age groups are involved in setting, co-creating and developing strategy and policy – not just the usual suspects.



## My role as a councillor - Am I asking the right questions?

### Community leader

As an elected member you have many roles within the Council, each of which presents different opportunities for improvement by embracing sustainable development. This section provides you with some tips on applying sustainable development principles and key questions you may wish to use to start challenging your thinking and those of your fellow councillors and officers to help support sustainable decision making.

For the individual councillor, acting as a community leader is a vital part of promoting and supporting sustainable development throughout your ward. Ways to include sustainable development would be:

- Leading by example with sustainable development.
- Ensuring all stakeholder groups are fully engaged.
- Managing resource distribution effectively for your ward and others.
- Planning for the long-term as well as the short-term

Here are a few questions you should consider to get you thinking about the significance of sustainable development in your role as a “community leader”:



Q: How might the best interests of my ward differ between the short-term and the long-term future?

Q: Do I have the sufficient robust evidence/information on which to base my short, medium and longer term decision making?

Q: What are some opportunities to become more fully engaged with stakeholder groups across my ward?

Q: What has changed as a result of my engagement with stakeholders?

Q: Which partner organisations could be influenced on sustainable development through leading by example?

Q: How could community organisations and local businesses be encouraged to develop sustainable solutions for themselves and in partnership with the council?

Q: In what areas could promoting the best interests of my ward be detrimental to other wards?

Q: Have I ever encountered any conflicts of interest with other wards arising from resource competition?

Q: Can I support a decision or initiative that will bring long term benefits for citizens, but may make me unpopular with local voters in the short term / at the next election?

## My role as a councillor - Am I asking the right questions?

### Overview & scrutiny

Members on overview and scrutiny committees can play a significant role in enhancing sustainable development in their local areas. You have an opportunity to review and analyse current policies to ensure that sustainable development is at the forefront of local government thinking; providing feedback and recommendations where appropriate, to help influence future strategy and drive forward improvement.

Here are a few questions you should consider to get you thinking about the significance of sustainable development in your role as a scrutiny member:



Q: What are the economic, social and environmental impacts: of the policies/projects/ issues under review?

Q: Does my scrutiny work programme include oversight of longer term policy decisions?

Q: To what extent are decisions being made assessing the needs of future generations?

Q: Have the policies and decisions under review considered both the short-term and long-term economic, social and environmental impacts?

Q: Are these decisions based on robust long term evidence?

Q: In what ways is performance around sustainable development identified, measured and measured in my scrutiny committee?

Q: Does my scrutiny committee include sustainable development experts, or am I consulting with appropriate sustainable experts outside the committee when reviewing policies and decisions?

Q: Is there evidence the Council is working in collaboration with other public sector partners, either through the PSB or initiatives led by individual bodies?



### The Future Generations Framework for Scrutiny

The framework is a series of prompts that could help anyone who is keen to ask questions about how a decision has been made – a member of the public, the media, a manager, elected officials and board members.

[The Future Generations Framework for Scrutiny](#)

## My role as a councillor - Am I asking the right questions?

### The Executive / Cabinet

Being a member of a Cabinet will mean you are in an excellent position to drive forward sustainable development when making collective strategic decisions on policy, budgets and future delivery structures.

Here are a few questions you should consider to get you thinking about the significance of sustainable development in your role as a councillor on or influencing the Executive:



Q: When developing policies, have I fully considered sustainable development and have the short and longer term economic, social and environmental impacts been taken into account?

Q: When reviewing capital investment proposals do I consider the “whole life” costs in reaching my decision?

Q: When deciding on policy do I consider both the long term and short term future of my local area?

Q: In what ways am I measuring my sustainable development performance?

Q: Do I consult with appropriate sustainable development experts (officer or external consultants) when discussing and deciding on future policy?

Q: When planning for my portfolio area, how do I consider the impacts on other portfolio areas?

Q: To what extent do I genuinely consider working with other stakeholders, (other public bodies, the third sector, and private sector) to achieve the council’s strategic objectives?

Q: Are we looking for opportunities to deliver projects or initiatives with other local authorities or public sector partners?

Q: Can this be better delivered through the PSB or led by another organisation (health / police / third sector)?

## My role as a councillor - Am I asking the right questions?

### Planning

The planning system is in many ways aimed at enabling sustainable development. Through both development plans and the development management process, planning must provide for homes, infrastructure, investment and jobs in a way which are consistent with sustainability principles. It assesses sustainability through applying a series of assessment criteria used in determining planning applications, such as:

Proximity of new building development to public transport	Housing density	Brownfield before Greenfield	Proximity to support services – shops, health, education, employment
Potential for reducing car journey lengths	Opportunities for walking and cycling	Green Travel Plan	Detailed design and site orientation
Energy efficiency in completed buildings and during construction	Renewable energy generation on site	Waste reduction	Sustainable drainage



When considering proposals and making decisions planning members should assess sustainability by:

- being aware of the advice in Planning Policy Wales and Technical Advice Notes [Technical advice notes | GOV.WALES](#)
- considering LDP policies;
- thinking how the development relates to other uses;
- considering if the development is accessible by different modes of transport; and
- considering whether it is an efficient use of land.

In doing so members will need to have regard to other considerations such as:

- employment generation;
- whether alternative locations exist for the development
- issues relevant to rural communities

## My role as a councillor - Am I asking the right questions?

### Planning



For further information see the WLGA's Members' Planning handbook:  
Planning Handbook - A Guide for Local Authority Members

There will often be a considerable amount of information and detail that members need to take into account. Sometimes some of the elements may compete against each other to varying degrees and careful consideration needs to be given to the weight to be attached to the different aspects.

However, in conjunction with the detailed planning hand book here are a few questions you should consider to get you thinking about the significance of sustainable development in your role as a councillor involved in development of the LDP or development management.



Q: When considering local planning applications am I taking into account the economic, social and environmental impacts before making a decision?

Q: Does the proposed new development provide an opportunity for new local jobs and to what extent am I clear about managing potential conflicts such as, environment V development, in my decision making?

Q: Where relevant, do I know the BREEAM5 rating of a proposed development and is there an opportunity to improve it?

Q: Before making a decision regarding planning applications, are all of the appropriate stakeholders being properly consulted?

Q: Has the overall planning framework/policy been challenged to ensure it looks to support the Council's long term sustainable development objectives over the next 50 years?

Q: Am I confident that I have taken the necessary expert advice from offices and others before making my decision?

## **My role as a councillor - Am I asking the right questions?**

### **Licensing**

The granting and approving of licenses can have an impact on sustainable development. For example, the granting of licenses for establishments serving alcohol can impact on the health service, law enforcement and tourism. The number of taxi licenses issued will impact on carbon emissions and the local public transport strategy. However, as licensing committees are quasi-judicial, committee members need to take account of the legal constraints on what can be taken into consideration when making decisions. This means that you will need to have regard to the facts made in the application for a licence (or when varying or revoking licences on the evidence provided by for example council officers or the police) rather than issues of sustainability.

## My role as a councillor - Am I asking the right questions?

### The Employer

Being a member of the Council will also involve acting as an employer. Your employee base is one of your key resources and often the council is one of the largest local employers, therefore any decision you make around your employees will have an important part to play in implementing a sustainable development approach.

In 2012 the UK's first national subjective wellbeing report published by the ONS highlighted that having a job has a positive impact on people's "happiness/wellbeing". "Research shows how employee engagement in public services delivers trust and public confidence as an end result, in the same way it as it does profit in the private sector. Councils with good employee engagement have higher resident satisfaction and an IDeA study showed that engagement and leadership are stronger influences on performance than levels of pay. Research also shows that staff are more engaged when they are consulted, valued and see the value that their organisation is creating. Much of which is core to SD thinking.

Here are a few questions you should consider to get you thinking about the significance of sustainable development in your role as a councillor and as an employer of a significant number of employees:



Q: Am I clear about our current and future human capital requirements – and have these requirements been considered through a sustainable development lens?

Q: Are the Council employees fully aware of the opportunities and risks that exist around sustainable development and how they can support members in delivering our SD objectives?

Q: What mechanisms do we use to consult our workforce?

Q: To what extent do I value, reward or incentivise staff to be innovative in their work?

Q: What is our staff turnover and sickness rates, how could I support our staff to help reduce these?

Q: How could I engage staff in shaping decisions on future strategy and what benefits would this bring?

Q: Are there opportunities to better consult staff on issues that affect them?

Q: How could I encourage a stronger health & safety culture in our organisation, and what impacts would this have on productivity?

Q: How could I encourage and support employees' personal development?

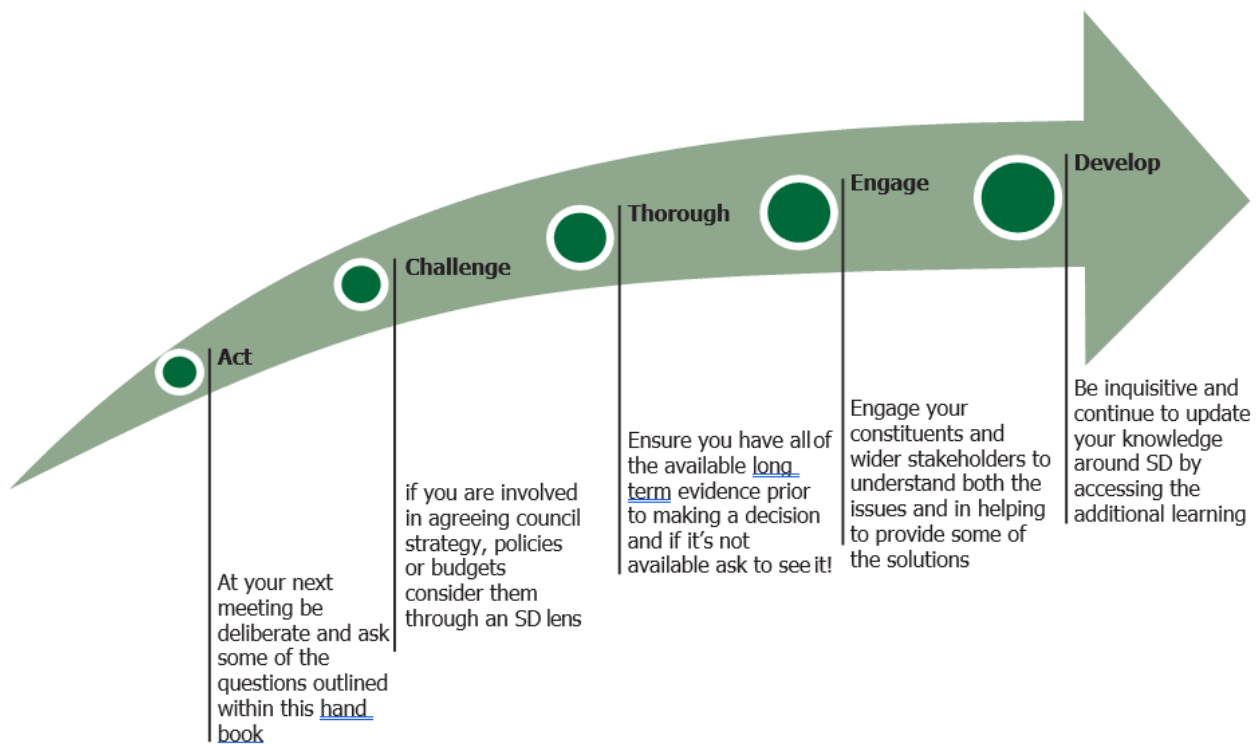
Q: Are staff encouraged to volunteer both time and their skill set to help support the local community?



## What can I do next?


The role of the councillor has never been more challenging. Representing local constituents in an environment with diminishing resources and competing priorities can be complex. However there are significant benefits that the right decisions can afford to both current and future generations.

This Member hand book has sought to provide you with some of the context and tools to better equip you in discharging this responsibility effectively. However without practice, knowledge and tools become obsolete. Therefore we would encourage you to take the following steps in embedding and improving your understanding and application of sustainable decision making by following the **A.C.T.E.D** principles:



## Where can I go for more information?

The first natural source for additional information will probably be your Member support officers who will be able to best connect you to the officers within the Council or within other organisation who will be able to help you with any specific questions. However, there is also plenty of other resource material available on line. Below is a list of additional material which will help you explore the issues of Sustainability further and provide examples of where others are engaged in meeting the challenges.

 <b>Resources</b>	
WLGA - Local Authorities and the Future Generations Act	<a href="https://www.wlga.wales/local-authorities-and-the-future-generations-act">https://www.wlga.wales/local-authorities-and-the-future-generations-act</a>
Future Generations Commissioner for Wales	<a href="#">The Future Generations Commissioner for Wales – Acting today for a better tomorrow</a>
PwC – Sustainable Development Webpages	<a href="#">The Sustainable Development Goals - PwC UK</a>
Forum for the Future SD webpages	<a href="http://www.forumforthefuture.org/">http://www.forumforthefuture.org/</a>
LGA – Sustainable Development Guide	<a href="#">UN Sustainable Development Goals: A Guide for Councils   Local Government Association</a>
Sustainable Development Commission – Now decommissioned, however learning material is still available	<a href="http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/pages/what-is-sustainable-development.html">http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/pages/what-is-sustainable-development.html</a>
Cynnal Cymru (Sustain Wales)	<a href="http://www.cynnalcymru.com/">http://www.cynnalcymru.com/</a>
DEFRA – Sustainable Development policy Impact test	<a href="https://www.gov.uk/sustainable-development-impact-test">https://www.gov.uk/sustainable-development-impact-test</a>
European Commission – Sustainable development	<a href="https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/international-strategies/sustainable-development-goals_en">https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/international-strategies/sustainable-development-goals_en</a>