

Public sector

National report

August 2005



Local quality of life indicators – supporting local communities to become sustainable

A guide to local monitoring to complement the indicators in the UK Government Sustainable Development Strategy

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Introduction

- 1 In 2002 the Audit Commission published its first report on quality of life (**Ref. 1**). The report answered the question ‘how can we measure the quality of life in a local area?’
- 2 The report was the result of a year-long project, which involved 90 local authorities and other bodies working alongside the Commission. These included MORI and government departments such as the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) and the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). Not only did the work help provide a definition of what comprises quality of life, but it produced a national set of core indicators that local authorities and their partners in local strategic partnerships (LSPs) could use to measure the quality of life in their local area.
- 3 Since the 2002 report, a number of new indicator sets and important initiatives, including the government’s new 2005 Sustainable Development Strategy (**Ref. 2**) and the development of local area agreements (LAAs) (**Ref. 3**), have changed the environment in which the original indicators were set.
- 4 As a result, for the last nine months, the Audit Commission, the ODPM and DEFRA, have been working together to review all these initiatives and to combine the various sustainable development and quality of life indicator sets. The purpose was to develop and recommend one consistent set of indicators for use at the local level that will embrace economic, social and environmental issues and will complement the new UK Government Sustainable Development Strategy (**Ref. 4**), its new national sustainable development indicators¹ and other work on sustainable communities.
- 5 Unlike the first quality of life indicators, the new set outlined in this document (see pull-out section and **Appendix 3**) relies on existing national indicators and the Commission will make data available for each local area. Local authorities will not therefore need to collect data independently.
- 6 The indicator set is recommended by government and the Audit Commission for use by local authorities and LSPs to help them monitor the effectiveness of their sustainable community strategies. They will also be useful for local authorities undergoing Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA), monitoring local development frameworks and for those areas piloting LAAs, joint area reviews (JARs) or area profiles (**Refs. 5, 6, 7 and 8**). The focus of local public services is increasingly shifting towards outcomes, multi-agency working and value for money in each locality. These local quality of life indicators can play an important role in consolidating that shift over the next few years.

¹ www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/performance/indicators-home.htm

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Why local quality of life indicators are important

What are local quality of life indicators?

- 7 The local quality of life indicator set outlined in this report includes 45 key measures to help ‘paint a picture’ of the quality of life in a local area. The indicator set covers a range of important sustainable development issues that influence our long-term well-being. It helps measure the key issues of importance that have been derived from national policy priorities, as well as research and public surveys¹. All the indicators in this set have national data sources, with information available at local authority/LSP area level. This makes it possible for the Audit Commission to bring together robust, accurate data for each area to enable local comparisons.
- 8 The Commission will use the quality of life indicator set within the Area Profiles project. Further references to the project are included in Section 3 and in Appendix 1.

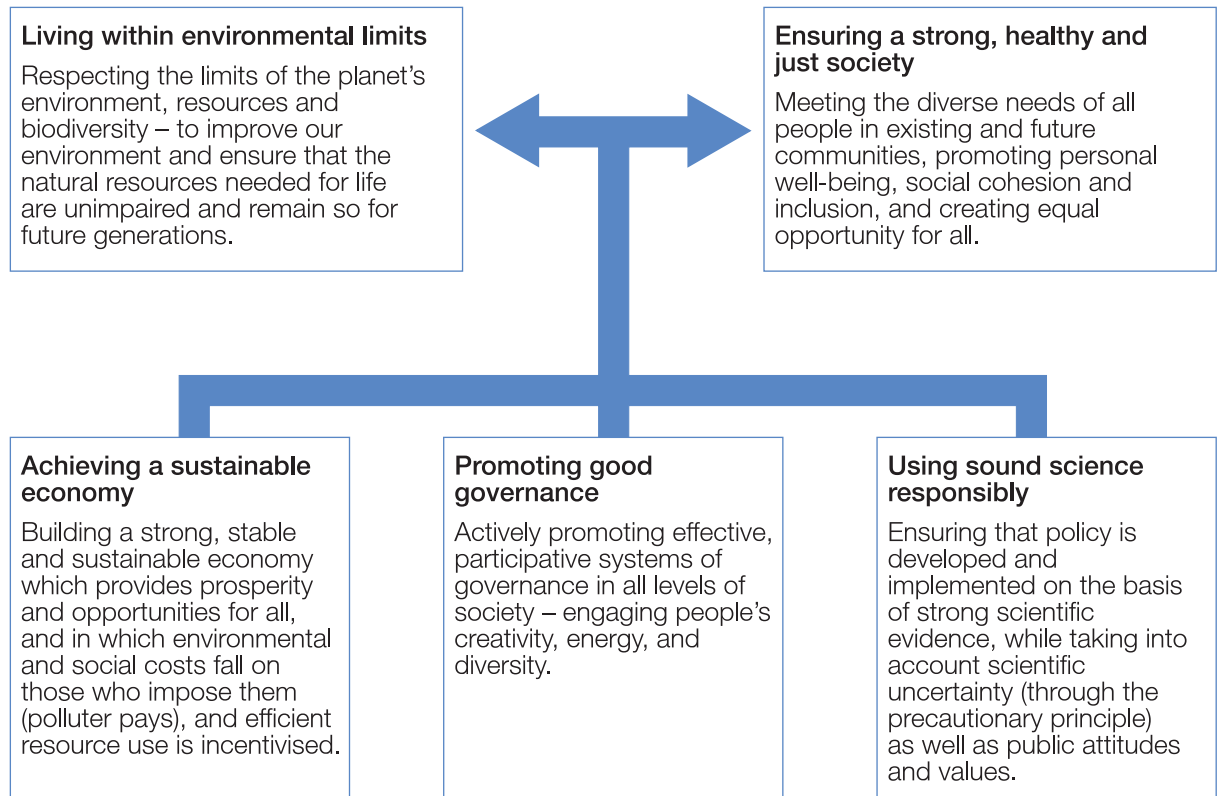
How the indicators fit with national policy developments

- 9 The quality of life indicator set complements a number of government policies, projects and initiatives that support the work of local authorities and their partners to deliver sustainable communities.
- 10 The government’s vision of sustainable communities in England is one that delivers sustainable development at the local level. Sustainable communities work to:
 - balance and integrate the social, economic and environmental components of their communities;
 - meet the needs of existing and future generations; and
 - respect the needs of other communities in the wider region or internationally to make their communities sustainable.

¹ Research study conducted for the Audit Commission by MORI, 2001.

- 11 Sustainable communities embody the principles of sustainable development at a local level. In March 2005, the government launched a shared framework for sustainable development, common to all parts of the UK, and the new UK Sustainable Development Strategy. The strategy sets out five new principles, including a more explicit focus on environmental limits (Figure 1).

Figure 1
UK Sustainable Development Strategy: Five New Principles



Source: UK Government Sustainable Development Strategy (Ref. 2)

12 The Strategy also sets out priority areas for immediate action:

- sustainable consumption and production;
- climate change and energy;
- natural resource protection and environmental enhancement; and
- creating sustainable communities and a fairer world.

13 The Strategy includes practical measures to support local authorities and LSPs in delivering genuinely sustainable communities. The local quality of life indicator set outlined in this publication represents an important tool to support the work of local authorities in delivering and reviewing their sustainable community strategies.

14 The government's Sustainable Development Strategy also introduced the new set of UK Framework Indicators¹ and a wider set of indicators that cover key impacts and outcomes that reflect the priority areas for England. The local quality of life indicators presented here have been developed alongside the national indicators and aligned where possible.

How local quality of life indicators can be used

15 Local authorities and their partners already report on an array of performance indicators. We have developed the local quality of life indicator set to provide an overarching 'snapshot' of the key issues that local authorities and their partners need to consider. We believe they can use the indicators to help them:

- paint a picture of quality of life issues locally;
- facilitate comparisons of performance between different areas;
- stimulate debate and raise public awareness;
- inform local sustainable community strategies and local area agreements;
- review, justify and set local objectives and priorities;
- monitor change and assess and evaluate progress over time; and
- enhance partnership working, shared ownership and joint action.

¹ www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/performance/indicators-home.htm

Case study 1

The Stevenage Partnership is an inclusive partnership of the public, private, voluntary and community sectors. It has been using quality of life indicators to help identify and understand what is happening in the local area. It sees the indicators as true outcome measures of progress in improving the environmental, social and economic well-being of the town. The community strategy was based on hard evidence and extensive consultation and the quality of life indicators were a key part of the hard evidence – they helped to establish the priorities for the implementation plan. The partners use the indicators as a measurement tool and an early warning system. They can be found in the data document on www.stevenagepartnership.org.uk and this will evolve into a trends document as progress is tracked over time.

Source: Audit Commission

- 16 As with the first quality of life indicator set developed in 2002, the new set takes account of evolving government policy and changing regulation, including LAAs, JARs, local development frameworks and sustainable community strategies. It will also support local authorities as they meet the requirements of the Commission's new approach to CPA.
- 17 The government launched its prospectus for LAAs in July 2004. It aimed to improve how effectively the government works with local authorities and their partners to improve local services. Some 21 pilot areas during 2005/06, and a further 66 in 2006/07, will test this approach prior to a nationwide roll-out for upper tier authorities in 2007/08. The LAA pilots will find the local quality of life indicators helpful in developing and implementing their agreements.
- 18 The local quality of life indicators should also prove helpful for those involved in the new joint area reviews of outcomes for children and young people in local areas. These reviews are being undertaken by Ofsted and other inspectorates as a result of the Children Act 2004 (**Ref. 9**).
- 19 Similarly, the 2004 Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act requires regional planning bodies and local planning authorities to work together to achieve sustainable development. Under the act, sustainable appraisal is an integral and mandatory part of the process of preparing regional spatial strategies and local development frameworks. The local quality of life indicators will be useful in collecting and presenting baseline information for these sustainability appraisals.

- 20 But most pertinently, the new UK Sustainable Development Strategy, outlined above, proposes the refinement of local community strategies into ‘sustainable community strategies’. We have developed the revised local quality of life indicators to help local authorities and LSPs monitor the effectiveness of these strategies and support them to develop genuinely sustainable communities.

Case study 2

Warwickshire County Council has produced an annual Quality of Life report for the past five years. The report provides a comprehensive source of information on economic, social and environmental performance across the County and helps gauge how successful the various local agencies and organisations are at meeting the aims detailed in community and strategic plans. The report continues to be used across a wide range of organisations and is now firmly embedded as a vital component of the local decision-making process.

Recently, the Authority has placed an increasing emphasis on its web pages and now updates the indicators on an ongoing basis, rather than just once per year.

The most recent report was also published in a poster format to help publicise the information in libraries, schools, GP surgeries and other community venues and encourage users to obtain further, and more current, details via the website.

A further innovation to appear during the past twelve months is a reorganisation of the indicators. They now appear within one of four headings – economic, social, environmental and natural resources – to align with the Authority’s increased emphasis on sustainable development. The annual report offers a ‘snapshot’ of performance, but users are now in a position to see how indicators are changing on a much more frequent basis via the website www.warwickshire.gov.uk/qualityoflife

Source: Audit Commission

- 21 The indicators will support local authorities as they meet the challenge of CPA – *The Harder Test* by providing information on the broader context of the local authority. While the proposals place an increased emphasis on the role of local authorities in community leadership and developing sustainable communities, CPA remains a regulatory tool to evaluate the performance of local councils. The local quality of life indicators do not focus on any one local agency but on all the local partners working together to address the issues involved in improving quality of life and local services. Nevertheless, they can

provide useful data and context to inform the overall CPA assessment process and can result in a more rounded picture for CPA in terms of the national shared priorities (Ref. 10), which now form an integral part of the judgement. They will underpin the increased cross-cutting nature of the assessment process and the emphasis on outcomes, for example, the liveability agenda.

Case study 3

Devon's Strategic Partnership produced a Focus on Devon report in 2004 to support the Devon Community Strategy. The document is based on facts, trends and the views of citizens. Its purpose is to produce a comprehensive understanding of what life in Devon is like and identify the challenges that need to be tackled in order to make it better. A series of indicators have been included to measure the quality of life within the County. As well as encouraging the development of community leadership in order to tackle the many complex issues identified, the report will be a valuable source document for all those who have an interest in the future of Devon. It will help to broaden their understanding of where they live and how the area has developed. The full report can be viewed on the Devon Strategic Partnership website at: www.devonsp.org.uk

Source: Audit Commission

Ecological footprinting

- 22 While the local quality of life indicators aim to address the key issues associated with sustainable development, it is recognised that a set of indicators cannot always provide the 'big picture' or reflect cross-cutting issues adequately. Ecological Footprinting is an aggregate indicator that can help to provide this perspective.
- 23 The Ecological Footprinting Tool considers a range of indicators of natural resource consumption (energy, food and materials) in relation to production patterns, which helps to identify our 'footprint' on the global environment. It is an evolving framework which begins to encourage an understanding of the link between economic growth, environmental protection and sustainable resource use.
- 24 Although the Ecological Footprinting Tool is not part of the local quality of life indicator set, we recognise that there is increasing interest in this approach and so we have included more information about it in **Appendix 2**.

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The local quality of life indicator set

Background to the development of quality of life indicators

- 25 The development of the new local quality of life indicator set builds on a long process of developments and indicator sets in this area. The purpose has been to learn from this previous work and create one nationally agreed set of robust indicators that link to key current policy developments and help local communities to become more sustainable.
- 26 Notable developments in this area have included the following:
- after the World Sustainable Development Summit in Rio in 1992, many local authorities developed Local Agenda 21 (LA21) plans to address local sustainability issues;
 - in 1999 the government produced a national set of indicators (including a small 'headline' set) to measure progress nationally on sustainable development (**Ref. 11**) and in 2000, *Local Quality of Life Counts* (**Ref. 12**) indicators were issued for regional level and local use;
 - in November 2000, the Audit Commission first consulted local authorities on the idea of developing the quality of life indicators (**Ref. 13**) building on the work of the government's *Local Quality of Life Counts* set; and
 - from 2001/02 the Audit Commission conducted a pilot process with 90 local authorities and two LSPs to develop a proposed menu of indicators for voluntary use. These were published in September 2002 (**Ref. 14**).

Case study 4

Bristol City Council conducts an annual quality of life survey, which collects a range of information that is combined with quality of life indicators and census data. Much of the data is available at ward level so it can be mapped. Ward profiles are also produced. These consist of summary statistics and trends. The annual survey has also enabled work towards compiling an ecological 'footprint' rank for the wards in the city. Bristol has been publishing indicators of quality of life since 1996. It presents these, and the ward profiles, in annual reports used by politicians, council officers and the public. See: www.bristol-city.gov.uk/qualityoflife and www.bristol-city.gov.uk/wardfinder

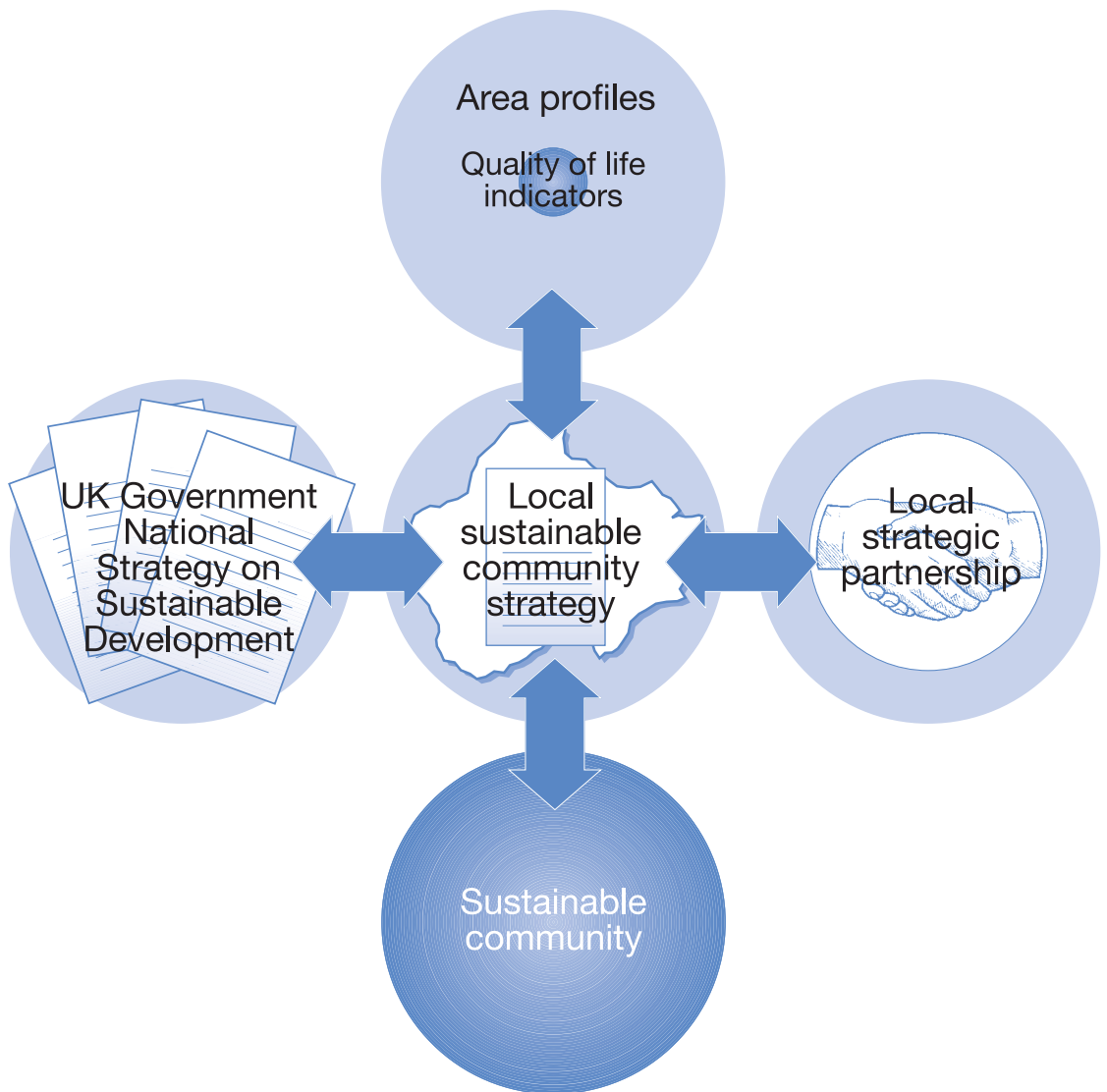
Source: Audit Commission

- 27 Research undertaken by the ODPM (**Ref. 15**) and the Audit Commission (**Ref. 16**) demonstrated that many local authorities and their LSPs were using some or all of the Audit Commission's quality of life indicators to monitor their community strategies. Nevertheless, since the publication of the indicators three years ago, there have been a number of new indicator sets that overlap with the Audit Commission's quality of life indicators. The Department of Health (DH) published a basket of indicators to measure health inequalities (**Ref. 17**), and the Egan Review proposed a set of 'sustainable communities' indicators (**Ref. 18**).

The review process

- 28 As part of the preparation for the launch of the government's new UK National Sustainable Development Strategy in March 2005, a Ministerial Sub-Group on Local Sustainable Development was established. This body commissioned a review of previous indicator sets on sustainable development and quality of life. An Advisory Group, with representatives from the Audit Commission, ODPM and DEFRA, oversaw the review process with a view to agreeing and recommending a new national set of indicators for use by local authorities and LSPs in monitoring the effectiveness of their local sustainable community strategies.
- 29 The original Audit Commission set of quality of life indicators was reviewed and redrafted using the findings and issues raised in the government's *Taking it On* consultation (**Ref. 19**) and previous pilot findings as a basis. Recent indicator initiatives, like the DH's basket of indicators to measure health inequalities and the Egan Review's proposed set of 'sustainable communities' indicators were also reviewed. A revised set of indicators was proposed and refined with the support of government departments. The proposals were then shared with previous quality of life pilot authorities and key stakeholders for feedback and comments.
- 30 Although the original indicator set has changed in light of the review, wherever possible the original indicators have been retained to maintain some consistency. The changes reflect research and the feedback received from the wider consultation, as well as the aim to improve the original indicators and reduce the data collection burden on local authorities. All the new local quality of life indicators have national data sources and data available for every local authority area. The Audit Commission will provide this through its area profiles website, which is due to be launched and publicised in autumn 2005. The website will pull together information from a wide range of sources; including other regulators (**Appendix 1**).

Figure 2
Where do local quality of life indicators fit?



Source: Audit Commission

Case study 5

Hertfordshire's Quality of Life Report 2004, published by its Environmental Forum, covers 16 separate subject areas, with a total of 49 indicators measuring social, economic and environmental progress and performance. The report, now in its 13th consecutive year, is given extra depth this year with the inclusion of a special report looking at the ecological footprint of Hertfordshire and its ten constituent districts. Individual district authorities use the report in different ways. Most report it to their politicians or key managers and use it to assess progress in key activity areas, for example the Home Energy Conservation Act (HECA) programmes. It is also used in schools for the local environment aspect of the geography curriculum and school classroom packs are provided to help with this. The County Council is also using the report for policy assessment purposes in that it provides a starting point for baseline data for strategic environmental assessment of plans and programmes. To access the report visit: www.hertsdirect.org/yrccouncil/hcc/env/you/raiseaware/quallife/

Source: Audit Commission

- 31 The consultation also identified a number of other indicators and measures that could potentially have been included. However, including these would have made the set too large and unfocused. Many of these suggested indicators will be included in the broader basket of indicators available within the area profiles website.
- 32 Some indicators have been removed from the original set where they were reliant on inconsistent local collection processes, which raised concerns about robustness and comparability. These indicators were investigated and where they could be resolved or replaced by similar more robust measures they have been. Some remain as indicators for voluntary use in the Library of Local Performance Indicators¹. The review also identified potential gaps in previous indicator sets. Where it was feasible new indicators have now been included.

- 33 There are still recognised limitations in the proposed set, specifically around community involvement and cohesion, facilities for young people, childcare provision and biodiversity. At present there is an absence of reliable and valid indicators for these outcome areas owing to data constraints and other practicalities. These areas require further investigation and development at the national level, and the Audit Commission will support work in this area. It is clear that the local quality of life indicator set as a whole will need regular review as policy changes and data collection and reporting mechanisms develop over time.

The new local quality of life indicator set

- 34 The final good practice set of 45 local quality of life indicators for use by local authorities and their partners is set out in the central pull-out section and in **Appendix 3**. They reflect the key headline issues that sustainable communities should monitor.
- 35 The new local quality of life indicators:
- improve on previous indicator sets while retaining indicators, where appropriate, to maintain consistency;
 - include important new indicators on health inequalities and sustainable communities, filling gaps in the previous national set;
 - are more easily accessible than previous sets and reduce the data collection burden on local authorities and their partners as national data sources can provide the data for every local authority area;
 - are sufficient in number to provide a balanced view of the issues, yet concise enough to focus attention on the key issues; and
 - form a coherent set covering almost all the key quality of life and sustainability issues¹ and present a picture of a whole area, as opposed to the best value performance indicators (BVPIs), which are simply about local authority performance.

¹ The pull-out section also includes four other indicators where there is not yet any national data source for every local authority area. But in these four cases, we are confident that such a source is likely to be available within the foreseeable future.

- 36 The indicators vary tremendously in type and design, and rely on a range of different sources and collection methods for the data. Some are based on hard data and are relatively objective, whereas others rely on surveys and subjective opinion.
- 37 Some of the indicators are aligned with national performance indicators and collection processes (for example, best value performance indicators), but several do not currently form part of any national performance management process. It is this mix of indicator types with the wide coverage of issues that makes the quality of life indicators so unique.
- 38 The indicators have been developed for voluntary use and the data, as noted above, will be made available later this year on the Audit Commission's area profiles website. It will form part of the headline set of indicators for area profiles. Information will be available on the website to explain precisely what is meant by each indicator, identify sources of the data and provide some advice about application. Email helpline support will be available to support those using the website (see contacts at back of document).
- 39 Progress on outcome indicators is usually affected by many external factors; they are often long term and are more difficult to define. There is also insufficient information about trends and the likely impact of actions to be sure that targets are not arbitrary. LSPs may wish to consider developing local targets for those indicators where performance is poor, or for a small number of key priorities.

Case study 6

The London Sustainable Development Commission was set up in 2002 to help make London an exemplary sustainable world city. The Commission undertook a consultation with Londoners in 2003 and worked with the London School of Economics to identify a menu of 55 indicators to monitor progress in London (many of these are consistent with the new local quality of life indicator set). The first report on London's quality of life indicators was published in 2004 and is available at: www.london.gov.uk/londonissues/sustainability.jsp

Source: Audit Commission

4

The role of the Audit Commission, ODPM and DEFRA

- 40 The Audit Commission, DEFRA and the ODPM, in conjunction with other national organisations, will promote the quality of life indicators and encourage local authorities and their partners to use them.
- 41 The local quality of life indicator set is not set in stone. It will be reviewed again by the Audit Commission, the ODPM and DEFRA, in order to take account of new legislation and other developments. As the regulatory framework for local public services moves towards a more explicit locality basis, so the set may need to be developed to reflect that changed approach.
- 42 The Commission, with ODPM and DEFRA, is also committed to developing new improved indicators to fill gaps in the set. Work will also continue with the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (NRU) to help provide data at ward and neighbourhood levels.
- 43 While no organisation is statutorily obliged to use the indicators, local authorities and their partners are strongly encouraged to use the whole set of indicators and, where necessary, to supplement them with additions reflecting their local priorities and areas of concern.
- 44 The Audit Commission's area profiles website and the Library of Local Performance Indicators provide a wider source of robust 'off-the-shelf' indicators for a range of service areas. It is also useful to consider indicators to assist the performance management functions of the LSPs, which the local quality of life indicators do not address.
- 45 A large number of local authorities and LSPs are already using quality of life indicators and the Commission has previously published a good practice guide to communicating quality of life indicators, including case studies (**Ref. 20**).

5

Conclusion

- 46 This document presents a new good practice set of local quality of life indicators, which have been developed by the Audit Commission, DEFRA and the ODPM. It highlights the ways in which they can be used by local authorities and LSPs.
- 47 They provide key measures to help ‘paint a picture’ of the quality of life in an area covering a range of important environmental, social and economic issues.
- 48 The new revised set of local quality of life indicators – which link with national indicators – has been developed in partnership with local and central government as well as national agencies. Work will continue to review and develop the set further and to promote them widely for local use.
- 49 There is no statutory requirement to use the entire set of indicators, but the Audit Commission, DEFRA and the ODPM recommend that local authorities and LSPs use the indicators on a voluntary basis to help monitor the effectiveness of their sustainable community strategies. With the Commission making the relevant data available through its area profiles website, each local authority and its partners will be able to paint a comprehensive picture of quality of life in their areas.

Appendix 1 – Area profiles

Area profiles is a pioneering Audit Commission pilot project to test the feasibility of bringing together all the data, information and assessments about local quality of life and services¹. The area profiles approach has the advantage of going beyond the use of just indicators, or a focus on only one particular agency, to look at all the services and quality of life issues in a local area.

An area profile places strong emphasis on people and place and on issues that cut across traditional service boundaries – for example, a complete picture of the needs of specific sectors of the community, such as children or older people.

Area profiles are created using a variety of tools. Each tool helps the user explore and understand the quality of life and local services with regard to an aspect of the local community. A good area profile involves analysis of the following aspects:

- indicators of local quality of life and context statistics;
- public funding into and spending patterns within a local area;
- local residents' and service users' views on quality of life;
- the LSP partners' views on quality of life and services;
- inspectorate judgements about local services;
- the community and voluntary sector's capacity and contribution to local quality of life and services; and
- the business and private sectors' capacity and contributions to local quality of life and services.

The profiles produced by each of these seven components are then used in the final process:

- bringing it all together – a synthesis of the findings.

¹ The Audit Commission began piloting area profiles in 2003 and now has 27 local areas and a range of national stakeholders working together to test all the tools and the website model outlined above. The pilot is due to finish at the end of December 2005.

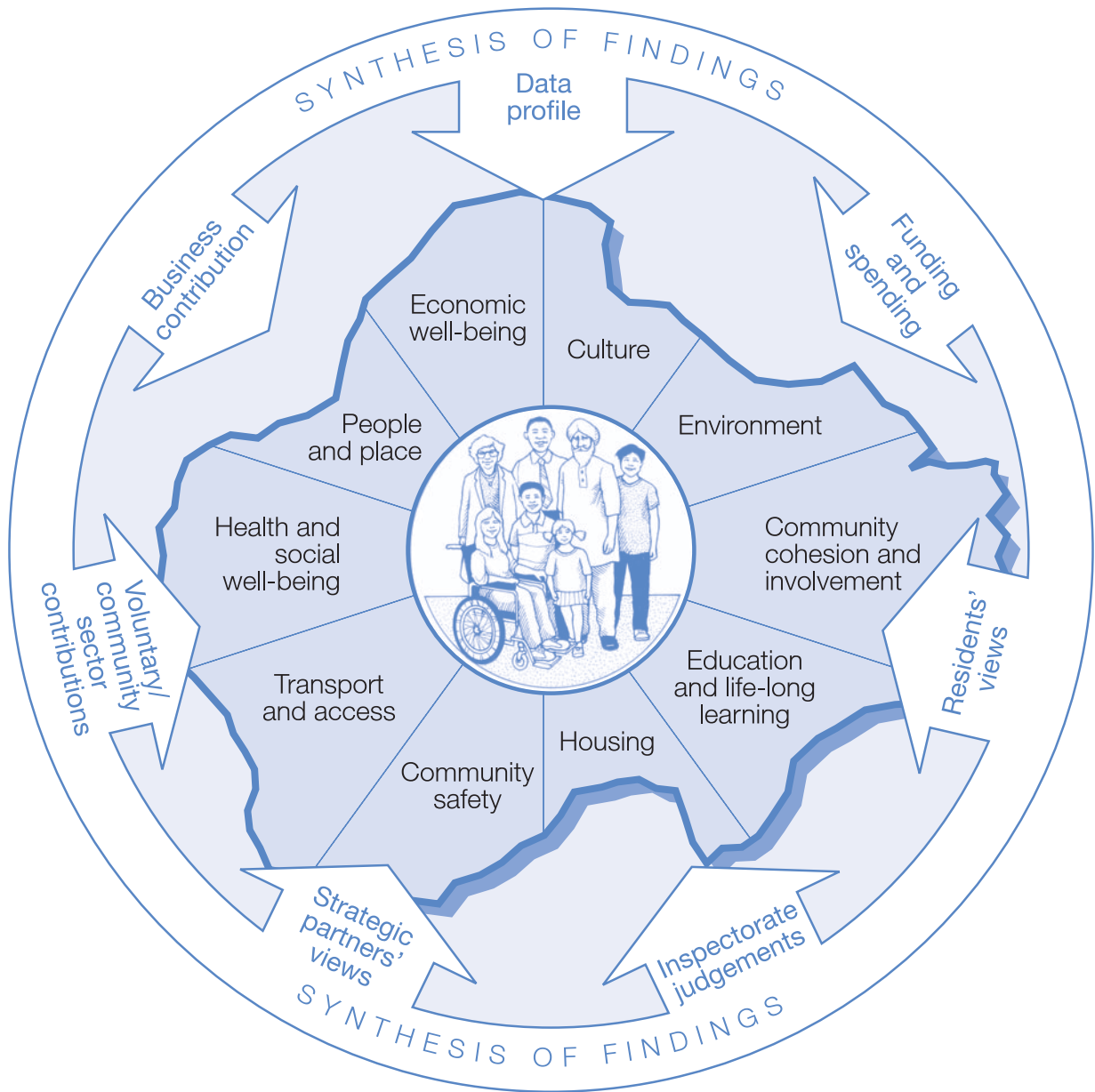
The result of this synthesis is an area profile that can be used in different ways:

- 1) To provide a summary for the public of all the data and assessments for the local area. For example, key findings could be published online, in a leaflet, or in a local newspaper article. This will help local people to hold public services to account and empower them to take decisions about priorities and services in their local area.
- 2) LSP partners (council, police, health, voluntary and private sectors) could apply the information to highlight problem areas where improvement is most needed.
- 3) The government, national agencies, and regulators could draw on area profiles to identify strengths, weaknesses and trends in local areas. This will help them to agree on how best to target their support and regulatory activities.

To support users in area profiling the Audit Commission is developing a web-based 'one-stop shop', comprising data and information about local public services, including the views of residents and service users and the assessments of regulators. This will mean the end of searching numerous websites, published reports, performance information databases and manuals to find out important information about a local area. For the first time, data and information about a local area will be brought together in one place in an easily accessible format that is available to the public, regulators and service providers.

The data and information will be structured around the ten quality of life themes **(Figure 3, overleaf)** used within the local quality of life indicator set. The Audit Commission sees the local quality of life indicators playing an important role in providing a 'headline' set of indicators to provide a snapshot overview of the quality of life and services in a local area.

Figure 3
Area Profiles and quality of life themes



Source: Audit Commission

Appendix 2 – Ecological footprinting

Ecological footprinting is another tool that local authorities and LSPs may wish to consider to help monitor local sustainable communities. It can help to explore and understand our local impact on the environment and the planet, and identify ways to reduce it.

It is already being used successfully by local authorities and strategic partnerships – from promoting the environmental credentials of London’s Olympic bid to being adopted as the national indicator in Wales (**Ref. 21**).

Essex has recognised the value of footprinting for both education and awareness-raising about sustainable development and policy development. It has undertaken a baseline footprint of its local authority area, developed the ‘Greener Essex’ campaign focused around the footprint, provided an online calculator for residents to measure their own footprint, and is now using the footprint to explore the impact of future policy decisions. It is likely to be the first local authority to integrate the footprint into its Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets.

www.agreeneressex.net

What is ecological footprinting?

The recent UK Sustainable Development Strategy explains that the government has commissioned some research into ecological footprints for the UK.

Ecological footprinting measures the impact of human activity upon nature, by looking at our basic human consumption needs: food, materials and energy (demand) converted into areas of biologically active land required to produce them and absorb wastes (supply).

It helps to illustrate how sustainable current consumption and production patterns are and creates a tangible link between local actions and global environmental impacts. This is an essential component of sustainable development that the quality of life indicator set does not currently address adequately.

London has produced the City Limits report that sets out the consumption and waste patterns of Londoners that contribute to their footprint and suggests practical scenarios for reducing impact in the future. Launched to coincide with the Johannesburg Summit, the study has done much to raise the profile of sustainable development and galvanise action in both the public and private sector. Most recently, footprinting has been used to promote the environmental credentials of London's Olympic Bid and City Limits was shortlisted for a Biffaward prize in 2003.

www.citylimitslondon.com

Ecological footprinting is recommended for use at the regional level by the European Parliament research body, the Scientific Technology Options Assessment (STOA).

www.europarl.eu.int/stoa

How can ecological footprinting be used?

There are several models and methodologies available to calculate an area's ecological footprint. This tool is still in its infancy – but is evolving fast – and has both advantages and some important limitations to consider.

Peter Wearmouth, NHS Estates Chief Executive, speaking about Material Health – a footprint study on the NHS: 'This study provides the first complete overview of the impact of NHS activities in England and Wales on the environment and will be a valuable tool in the debate on the future direction of the NHS' economic, social and environmental policies.'

www.materialhealth.com

For example, it can be used to raise awareness of environmental programmes, examine the impact of policies on waste or identify unsustainable trends.

Advantages and limitations

Advantages

- Awareness raising – ecological footprinting is a powerful awareness-raising tool and has been found to have resonance for the public, policymakers and businesses. It is widely used for educational purposes – to support Local Agenda 21, environmental awareness programmes and other curriculum activities.

A complete set of all local authority area ecological footprint results will be made publicly available from December 2005. Any local authority can download these results along with a summary report at no cost from the Ecological Budget UK website. The local authority results will be compatible with the Ecological Budget UK project, which forms part of the wider Biffaward Programme on Sustainable Resource Use to map the environmental impacts of resource consumption and resource flows throughout the UK.

It will deliver a detailed mass balance, resource flow analysis and ecological footprint of the UK by devolved country and English region, calibrated to a standard baseline year (2001) and presented in a transparent way. All the data and results will be included in a web-based resource accounting software tool REAP (Resource and Energy Analysis Program).

www.ecologicalbudget.org.uk

Other examples of ecological footprint studies can be found at

www.bestfootforward.com

- Appraisal and scenario planning for policies and services – the data sets used in footprinting can be used to model different scenarios. They can inform strategic planning by examining the impact of policies and actions in areas such as waste, environment, economic and transport planning.
- Trends – the tool, used in conjunction with sustainability appraisal, can help identify unsustainable trends, opportunities for more sustainable management of resources and the challenges we face in the future.

The ecological footprinting tool has the potential to feed into the sustainability process. The ODPM's guidance on monitoring local development frameworks, published in March 2005, is also relevant, as it shows how longer-term monitoring of outcomes links with monitoring of shorter-term plan outputs.

Limitations

- Methodological constraints – existing ecological footprints consider land required to absorb carbon dioxide emissions and provide all renewable resources. This includes the embodied energy of renewable and non-renewable resources. A wide range of emissions are excluded, such as acid rain precursors and health-related emissions.

York has used footprinting and other information to help to set targets for more sustainable development. York has concentrated on implementing wide-ranging energy efficiency measures to reduce energy consumption across the city by 21 per cent. The study has also informed its work on the relative impacts of kerb-side waste collection, composting and pay for waste schemes. It has also used the tool widely as an educational resource to demonstrate the impacts of different types of lifestyles – linking resource use to everyone’s daily life. York City Council has established a target to reduce the ecological footprint of the city in its community strategy.

www.york.ac.uk/inst/sei/ecofootprint/york-footprint.html

Footprinting does not include the effects of pollution, loss of biodiversity, or use of water, not does it make a distinction between the use of sustainably or unsustainably-managed resources.

- Transparency – there are some concerns around the robustness and transparency of data with the ecological footprinting tool. It is an aggregated indicator and this needs to be considered in its application. Users of footprinting need to be aware that it should not be assumed that actions to reduce the calculated footprint always have a beneficial net impact on the environment.
- Sensitivity to local factors and comparison issues – the ecological footprinting tool needs to be verified and supported with local data and should also consider economic and social indicators in order to give the whole picture of sustainable development. Different models and techniques are being used to calculate ecological footprints. These use different methodologies and produce different results, which restricts comparability.

Appendix 3 – List of local quality of life indicators

People and place

- 1 Priorities for improvement in the local area, as defined by local residents.

Community cohesion and involvement

- 2 The percentage of residents who think that people being attacked because of their skin colour, ethnic origin or religion is a very big or fairly big problem in their local area.
- 3 The percentage of residents who think that for their local area, over the past three years, community activities have got better or stayed the same.
- 4 Election turnout.

Community safety

- 5 The percentage of residents surveyed who said they feel ‘fairly safe’ or ‘very safe’ outside a) during the day; b) after dark.
- 6 a) Domestic burglaries per 1,000 households.
b) Violent offences committed per 1,000 population.
c) Theft of a vehicle per 1,000 population.
d) Sexual offences per 1,000 population.
- 7 The percentage of residents who think that a) vandalism, graffiti and other deliberate damage to property or vehicles; b) people using or dealing drugs; and c) people being rowdy or drunk in public places is a very big or fairly big problem in their local area.
- 8 The number of a) pedestrian and; b) cyclist road accident casualties per 100,000 population.

Culture and leisure

- 9 The percentage of the population within 20 minutes travel time (urban – walking, rural – by car) of different sports facility types.

10 The percentage of residents who think that for their local area, over the past three years the following have got better or stayed the same a) activities for teenagers; b) cultural facilities (for example, cinemas, museums); c) facilities for young children; d) sport and leisure facilities; and e) parks and open spaces.

Economic well-being

- 11 The percentage of the working-age population that is in employment.
- 12 a) The number of Job Seekers Allowance claimants as a percentage of the resident working age population and; b) percentage of these who have been out of work for more than a year.
- 13 a) The total number of VAT registered businesses in the area at the end of the year.
b) The percentage change in the number of VAT registered businesses.
- 14 Job density (number of jobs filled to working age population).
- 15 The proportion of the population living in the most deprived super output areas in the country.
- 16 The percentage of the population of working age that is claiming key benefits.
- 17 The percentage of a) children and; b) population over 60 that live in households that are income deprived.

Education and life-long learning

- 18 The percentage of half days missed due to total absence in a) primary and; b) secondary schools maintained by the local education authority.
- 19 The proportion of young people (16-24 year olds) in full-time education or employment.
- 20 The proportion of working-age population qualified to a) NVQ2 or equivalent and; b) NVQ4 or equivalent.
- 21 The percentage of 15-year-old pupils in schools maintained by the local authority achieving five or more GCSEs at grades A*-C or equivalent.

Environment

- 22 The proportion of developed land that is derelict.
- 23 The proportion of relevant land and highways that is assessed as having combined deposits of litter and detritus.
- 24 Levels of key air pollutants.
- 25 Carbon dioxide emissions by sector and per capita emissions.

- 26 Average annual domestic consumption of gas and electricity (kwh).
- 27 Daily domestic water use (per capita consumption).
- 28 The percentage of river length assessed as (a) good biological quality; and (b) good chemical quality.
- 29 The volume of household waste collected and the proportion recycled.
- 30 a) The percentage area of land designated as sites of special scientific interest (SSSI) within the local authority area in favourable condition; and b) the area of land designated as a local nature reserve per 1,000 population.

Health and social well-being

- 31 Age standardised mortality rates for a) all cancers; b) circulatory diseases; and c) respiratory diseases.
- 32 Infant mortality.
- 33 Life expectancy at birth (male and female).
- 34 The percentage of households with one or more person with a limiting long-term illness.
- 35 Teenage pregnancy, conceptions under 18 years, per 1,000 females aged 15-17.

Housing

- 36 The total number of new housing completions.
- 37 Affordable dwellings completed as a percentage of all new housing completions.
- 38 Household accommodation without central heating.
- 39 The percentage of residents who think that people sleeping rough on the streets or in other public places is a very big or fairly big problem in their local area.
- 40 The percentage of all housing that is unfit.
- 41 House price to income ratio.

Transport and access

- 42 The percentage of the resident population who travel to work a) by private motor vehicle; b) by public transport; c) on foot or cycle.
- 43 The percentage of the resident population travelling over 20 km to work.
- 44 The percentage of residents who think that for their local area, over the past three years, that a) public transport has got better or stayed the same; b) the level of traffic congestion has got better or stayed the same.

45 Estimated traffic flows for all vehicle types (million vehicle km).

Other indicators

The indicators below cover important quality of life areas. Unfortunately, there are no guaranteed national data sources at present to provide comparable data for every local authority area. Nevertheless, we have listed them below as we are confident that the indicators themselves are robust and that a national source is likely to become available in the next few years:

- The percentage of people surveyed who feel that their local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together.
- The percentage of people surveyed who feel they can influence decisions affecting their local area.
- Percentage of people surveyed finding it easy to access key local services.
- The number of childcare places.

Acknowledgements and contacts

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If you want to find out more about the local quality of life indicators please contact the following:

Email: area-profiles@audit-commission.gov.uk

Visit the Audit Commission website at: www.audit-commission.gov.uk/areaprofiles

In addition, the following links to relevant ODPM and DEFRA websites will be useful:

www.odpm.gov.uk

www.sustainable-development.gov.uk

www.defra.gov.uk

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