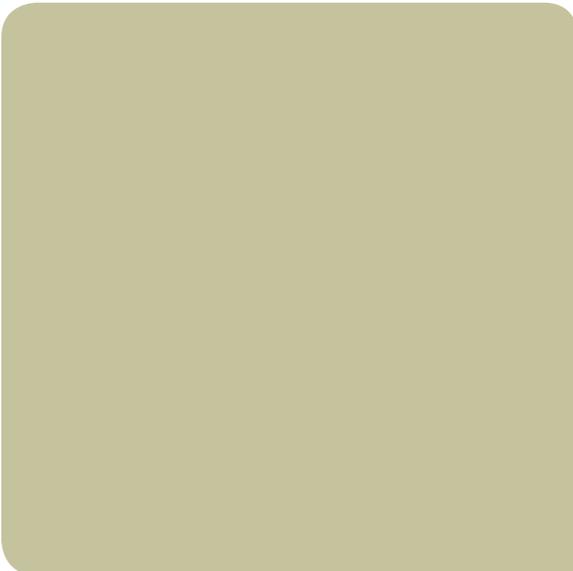


Independence, community and environment

Final report of the Sustainable Social Care Learning Network



Independence, community and environment: Final report of the Sustainable Social Care Learning Network

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The Sustainable Social Care Programme encourages commissioners of adult social care to promote sustainable development across the sector, particularly to reduce carbon emissions and adapt to climate change. For further information about the programme and related resources, please visit www.scie.org.uk/adults/sustainablesocialcare/index.asp

This report is available online
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Foreword



At the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) our mission is to identify and spread knowledge about good practice in order to support the delivery of transformed, personalised social care services. The experience and expertise of people who use services, their families and their carers are at the heart of everything we do. We are therefore proud and excited to be leading the way in bringing sustainable development thinking to social care.

Sustainable development requires us to consider social, economic and environmental outcomes simultaneously. It also means having regard for the needs of future as well as present generations. There is no doubt that such an approach has its challenges, particularly when faced with the immediate and pressing needs of a person in a vulnerable situation at a particular moment in time. However, this report from the Local Authority Learning Network, facilitated by the Local Government Information Unit, shows how a sustainable development mindset will strengthen our capacity to design and deliver services that are both responsive to individuals and resilient over the longer term. It offers fresh thinking and also very practical suggestions for commissioners, be they professionals or personal budget holders empowered to demand the best possible services for themselves.

Perhaps the most striking lesson from the Learning Network is that we need to relearn the importance of the natural environment, certainly for its intrinsic pleasures but also because it is inextricably bound up with our economic and social lives. The holistic nature of sustainable development means that the environment can and should be part of our thinking about people and services, particularly the twin imperatives of mitigating and adapting to climate change. 'The person using services as environmental leader' is a rallying cry we do well to heed, because it illustrates so well the fact that people who use services are agents of change in the wider world as well as the world of social care.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Julie Jones". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Julie Jones CBE, Chief Executive, Social Care Institute for Excellence

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Catherine Max for all her support and guidance

1 Introduction

The Department of Health commissioned the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) to lead a project to bring together adult social care and health with sustainable development. The programme aims were to:

- consider what we mean by sustainable development in this context
- analyse what the key challenges are of developing a sustainable social care model
- raise awareness across the sector and to disseminate good practice
- recommend how sustainable social care can be taken forward, in particular to face the challenges presented by climate change.

To date, the programme has been composed of two projects. The first project was the Sustainable Social Care System research project delivered by the Institute for Sustainability, Health and Environment (ISHE) at the University of the West of England, which analysed the conditions necessary for a sustainable social care system in a given community or setting. The second project was the Sustainable Social Care Learning Network delivered by the Local Government Information Unit (LGIU). The key objective was to strengthen the capacity of commissioners to embed sustainable development in the sector by contracting services according to sustainable development principles and supporting providers to meet the Communities and Local Government approach to sustainable development .

This report sets out the findings and ideas arising from the LGIU's Sustainable Social Care Learning Network.

1.1 About sustainable development

Sustainable development is about balancing social, economic and environmental priorities. A central part of this approach is recognising that people can have a better quality of life today without compromising the needs of future generations.

The government's document *Securing the future* (HM Government, 2005) sets out the UK's strategy for delivering the sustainable development agenda. It commits all government departments and executive agencies to produce an annual sustainable development action plan and to report on progress. It also established five guiding principles for sustainable development as 'the basis for policy in the UK':

- living within environmental limits
- ensuring a strong, healthy and just society
- achieving a sustainable economy
- promoting good governance
- using sound science responsibly.

The Department of Health's *Sustainable development action plan 2009-11* outlines how they intend to implement the commitments in the strategy. Each department should focus particularly on where it has the most potential to contribute to sustainable development. The Department of Health action plan outlines its contribution:

Perhaps where we have the most potential to contribute is on the sustainable community agenda, as health is an integral part of this. In developing policy and influencing other government departments, we can take into account the important determinants of health from our everyday surroundings. Sustainable communities will result in improved health and wellbeing and, as such, this is a key priority for DH [Department of Health].

The Department of Health highlights the need to make progress with adult social care; the work so far has been primarily concentrated on the NHS. The Sustainable Social Care Learning Network aimed to encourage local authorities, as commissioners of adult social care services, to understand and promote sustainable development, particularly the pressing challenge to reduce carbon emissions and to adapt to climate change. This report brings those messages to the wider social care community.

1.2 About the Learning Network

In September 2009 the LGiU established a Learning Network with members from 11 councils that were representative of the regions of England and of the types of authority that have social care responsibilities. Participants from relevant organisations, such as the Sustainable Development Commission and the UK Climate Impacts Programme (UKCIP) also contributed. A full list of participating councils and contributors can be found in the annexes to this report.

This report reflects the discussion and observations from the Learning Network. The idea of sustainable social care is a broad and emerging area; as such the Network approached the topic with a deliberately flexible structure. A series of four seminars considered sustainable social care from these different perspectives:

- sustainable commissioning and engagement
- resilience, adaptation and climate change
- creating the environment for care: a consideration of the physical environment and its role in sustainable social care
- personalisation.

The Network considered how the key tools needed to deliver a sustainable system – strategic commissioning, procurement, design and planning, joint working – could be refocused and adapted.

The conclusions from the Network and contained in this report are therefore the first step towards building a framework for sustainable social care. Some of the ideas will need to be further developed and tested to ensure they are effective. Nonetheless, it provides a strong foundation for taking the concept forward.

2 Context

2.1 Living with uncertainty

The UK's sustainable development goal is to enable all people throughout the world to satisfy their basic needs and enjoy a better quality of life, without compromising the quality of life of future generations. (HM Government, 2005)

Sustainable social care has to be seen in the context of the critical challenges that the UK faces – climate change, demographic change and an ageing population, as well as a global and national financial crisis. Our society is facing social, economic and environmental challenges, and so are social care services. The scale of the challenge is sometimes unclear, however. The House of Commons Health Committee recently published a report on social care that explored this uncertainty. The report noted that:

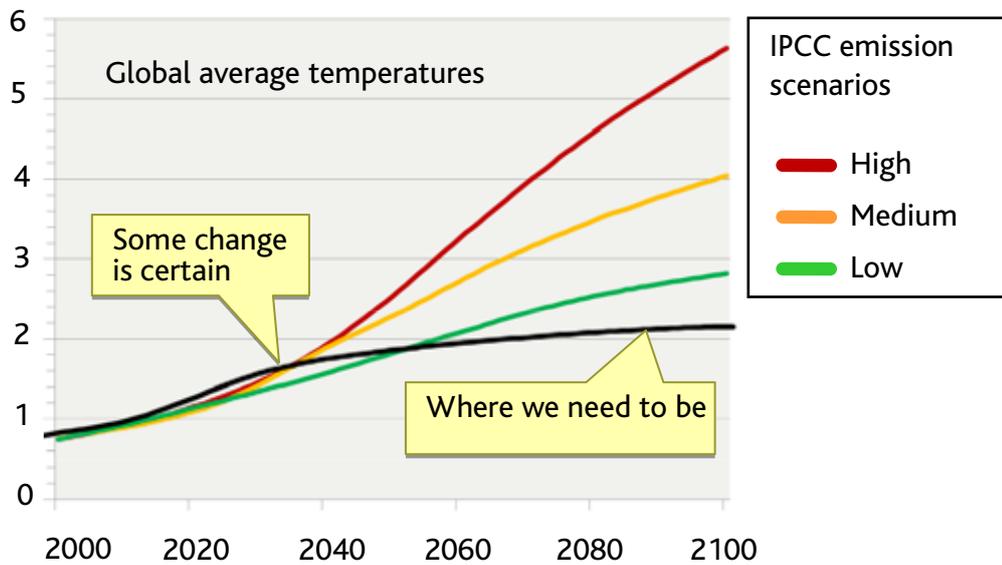
- Life expectancy at birth has increased 12 years since the creation of the welfare state, and life expectancy at age 65 has also increased, but by less than six years.
- Projections in numbers of older people reflect a temporary 'bulge' because of the greater numbers of baby boomers than other generations.
- There is an increasing 'dependency ratio' of older people to younger people, but we also need to recognise that 40 per cent of care spending is on people of working age and increasing numbers of people are working over the age of 65.
- There is inadequate evidence to enable us to say whether advances in life expectancy will translate in future to years of health or to disability.

Society is changing, and social care and health services are already under pressure. But our knowledge of level of risk in the future, and exactly what to plan for, is limited.

Similarly, we have seen over the lifetime of the recent economic crisis that predictions about economic activity are very uncertain. No one predicted the scale of the economic downturn, and no one is able to fully see the path of the recovery.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and UK Climate Impacts Programme (UKCIP) have detailed information about the changes to the UK climate due to climate change. The overall trend in the UK will be towards warmer and wetter winters and dryer and hotter summers. There will also be an increase in extreme weather events, such as heat waves or flooding. But as with all other challenges, the scale of the challenge we will have to contend with is predictable but uncertain.

Figure 1: IPCC assessment of future global average temperatures



Source: IPCC (2007)

Figure 1 shows different climate change scenarios, which are dependant on projected greenhouse gas emissions. It shows that whether we reduce our emissions or not, we are set to see global average temperatures rise up to 2030. This means we have to adapt to climate change, which means adapting the way we do things, in all areas of our lives, to respond to the changing circumstances. It means not only protecting against negative impacts, but also making us better able to take advantage of any benefits. If we can reduce our emissions, also known as climate change mitigation, we can avoid the worst temperature rises.

But the extent and impact of that change is unknown. And, as with the other challenges, it is unknown because we have the power to affect the outcome. We do not know the risk because we do not know how we, as a society, will act.

2.2 Recognising interdependence

Social care policy focuses heavily on the importance of independence. John Reid's introduction to the *Independence, wellbeing and choice* Green Paper (DH, 2005) noted:

Our society, quite rightly, values the independence that we all try to develop as adults: our own income, our own family and our own choices for leisure, meals and lifestyle. That is why, in future, social care should be about helping people maintain their independence, leaving them with control over their lives, and giving them real choice over those lives, including the services they use.

The independence of adults with choices, income and decision-making capacity is the basic unit of our economic system. Various philosophers have argued that our political and economic system is made up of actors making choices in order to increase their personal wealth – or at least their happiness.

[Political economy] is concerned with him solely as a being who desires to possess wealth, and who is capable of judging the comparative efficacy of means for obtaining that end. (John Stuart Mill)

This may be right for our economic system, but as human beings we are also social beings within an environment. While economic principles push us towards being as independent as possible, in our social lives we value dependence. Trust in relationships only exists where people know they can depend on each other. Family life can be about interdependence, but it is as often about dependence. This is not a failing of family or social life – social life is just different from economic life.

One way to understand this is to look at human beings and the extent to which they are self-reliant or reliant on external factors. The reality is that all human beings are reliant on external factors:

- we are reliant on the financial system to be able to use money
- we are reliant on the environment for air, water and food
- we are reliant on other human beings to be part of society.

What this shows is interdependence – we are part of an interconnected world that means no one can survive without relying on external factors. Some people may reject one or more of these interconnected spheres, choosing to live in isolation, or rejecting the use of money. But our reliance on the natural environment is the hardest to separate ourselves from.

Figure 2: Understanding people’s economic, social and environmental reliance

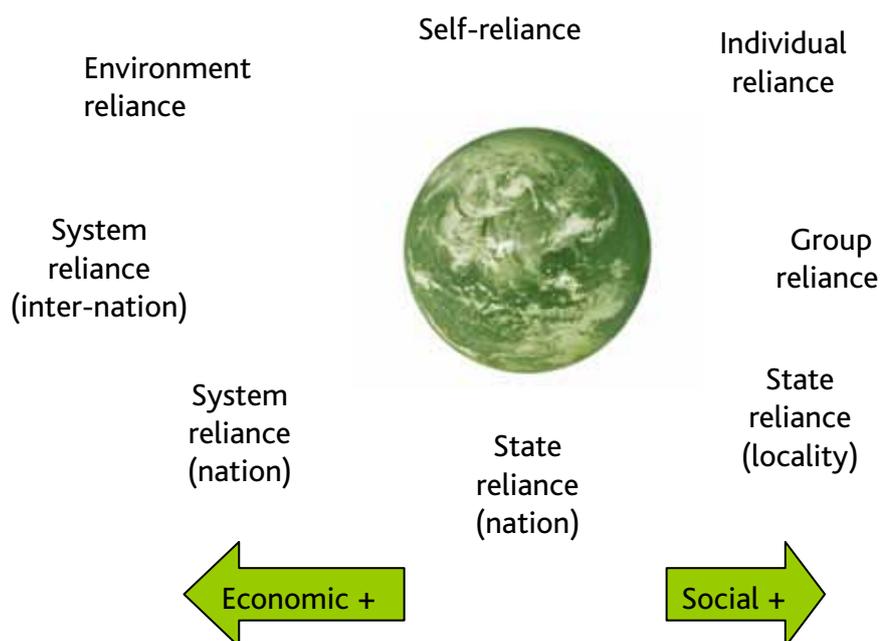


Figure 2 shows different spheres of reliance. The important thing to note is that there is no place on the map that is unconnected to other parts of the map.

Some of the most self-reliant people in England's history were the independently wealthy landowners of the aristocracy in the 18th century. But even their seemingly boundless independence relied on the income they derived from the land. Their wealth could be affected by natural disasters.

Equally, someone outside the international financial system and relying entirely on their own efforts to feed and house themselves is also highly dependent on their environment. A bad harvest will leave them hungry and struggling.

For people who use services, because they have greater support needs than the general population, they are even more at risk from environmental instability. In *Confident communities, brighter futures* (DH, 2010) it is recognised that building sustainable, connected communities is a vital part of interventions for mental health conditions. Our environment affects our mental health and wellbeing and as such we need to be promoting social and ecological engagement to develop connected, inclusive communities. This interdependence with the natural environment needs to be recognised and reclaimed by social care.

2.3 Overcoming tensions

One of the challenges in considering sustainable social care are the frequent tensions that arise between economic, environmental and social considerations. Take personal budgets as an example. They are economically empowering – they emulate self-funding by moving people away from local state reliance towards national system reliance. Rather than being dependent on decisions by the local council about what services are available for them, they are dependent on the economic system and the ability of markets to provide the services they want to contract.

From an economic point of view, personal budgets help more people behave as if they were spending their own money, and are therefore positive. But from a social point of view, we may still want caring relationships to be personal, not based on paying or charging, but taking care of people we love, because we love them. Our society commonly sees the most desirable relationship as the marriage relationship – highly dependent, with no financial transactions, caring and being taken care of.

There is a tension. As economic actors, we want to move up the scale, towards the ideal of the international financier, which is only at risk if the global monetary system collapses. But as social beings, we want to move down the scale, towards the intimacy of a one-to-one relationship, that allows us to relax and be dependent on someone we trust.

2.4 What does this mean for social care?

Social care must learn to live with uncertainty. And it must not be paralysed by lack of knowledge about the exact future we are facing together.

What we found in considering the issues and challenges is that social care as a service is a bit like a social care user. Social care is facing challenges and an uncertain future. Things may get worse before they get better. Social care as a whole, like a social care user, is more likely to survive and even flourish if it develops resilience. It is our contention that true resilience can benefit from a sustainable development approach. Specifically, economic, social and environmental issues are mutually supportive: get one right and it helps support the others. Get them all right, and you are in a better position to shape the future.

3 Addressing the challenges

Adopting a sustainable social care approach, as we describe it, is not a recipe for removing all the pressures on social care, although we believe it will equip social care better to rise to the challenges it faces. Rather, it recognises the pressures that social care faces and the imperative is to identify change that is achievable.

From the debates throughout the Learning Network we now advocate an evolutionary approach based on a sustainable development mindset. If social care services everywhere begin a subtle process of shifting their thinking in commissioning, more ground would be covered than by a large-scale reform programme. This is not to say that there will not be change, only that the actions we endorse are about small steps, not big leaps.

There are three specific ways we should think about social care that would give a different, sustainable perspective: viewing the user as leading the agenda; recognising the unexpected such as climate change; and improving the connection with the physical environment. Each of these themes is contextualised in the following chapters, culminating in a new perspective on commissioning.

The LGiU Learning Network was a journey. On the first stage of the journey, we saw many opportunities for social care to be more sustainable, but many challenges as well. It is important to reflect on these challenges.

3.1 Cost pressures

Social care seems to have cost pressures from many directions. Expectations are rising but calls for efficiency, in the sense of cost savings or cuts, are growing, even though past efficiency drives mean there is less to prune. Undertaking reform has its own costs, and new ways of working, such as personal budgets, do not always deliver the savings expected.

3.1.1 What are the opportunities and risks for sustainability?

Constant cost pressures means that services can be very short term in their mindset. Rather than looking at whole-life costs with a robust evaluation of costs and benefits over time, the need to release savings quickly can mean decisions are less informed. In a world where budgets are always tight, taking environmental and social issues into account can seem like a luxury, in fact, this approach can lead to significant savings and positive outcomes in the long term.

3.2 Place pressures

Social care operates in a context where the constraints of place mean that the ideal is not always possible. Social care in rural areas inevitably means that travel is unavoidable, and usually by a carbon-emitting car. This is even more the case in areas where housing costs are high and low-paid carers cannot afford to live where they work. In some areas, strong civil society and an active voluntary sector make things possible which other areas cannot replicate without the social infrastructure to build on.

3.2.1 What are the opportunities and risks for sustainability?

Social care priorities can be very focused on individual need, which means that community issues are harder to prioritise. A person-centred approach through personalisation can increase this focus. In many cases, it can be hard to see how community issues can be taken into account without putting individuals with care needs at risk, or receiving inadequate services. However, there are opportunities to take a wider view, even if social care can find it difficult to see their role in larger-scale place shaping.

3.3 Collaboration pressures

Social care often has a strong relationship with health, but the policy framework means that the best intentions can sometimes be undermined by the complex challenges of collaboration. Social care services make efforts to involve people who use services in service design, but in practice when tough decisions need to be made, consultation can be tokenistic, without a genuine effort to explore all the options.

3.3.1 What are the opportunities and risks for sustainability?

A sustainable approach would mean that everyone involved, particularly social care, health and users, were closely cooperating to prevent harm and to increase wellbeing. The challenges of working together mean that social care services can struggle to maintain investment in preventative activity and forget about the non-financial resources that users and the community can bring to the table. However, a sustainable development approach helps keep the focus on outcomes.

3.4 Capacity pressures

Social care services and councils can find their skills and capacity under pressure to adopt new approaches. Councils can find it difficult to demand high standards of suppliers when they do not always meet those standards themselves.

3.4.1 What are the opportunities and risks for sustainability?

Sustainability can appear to be an additional burden and professionals not already equipped can feel at a disadvantage when going to market. Equally, the market is not always ready to provide in a more sustainable way. Users may need significant support to be able to make an active contribution to their own care or to service design. However, personalisation and co-production approaches to commissioning present new opportunities to develop capacity that is rooted in communities.

4 Think about the user

The social care user is at the heart of social care. In beginning this journey towards understanding sustainable social care it seemed at first that thinking about sustainability led us down a road of seeing only the burdens the social care user creates. Every aspect of care seemed to be about using resources and that reducing use would inevitably mean a negative impact on a passive care user. But through the course of the Learning Network we saw that we were seeing things the wrong way around. At first it seemed the main challenge was the burden care had on resources, when in fact care users had a lot to offer.

4.1 Person using services as environmental leader

Social care professionals have embraced the need to reject the deficit model of disability and to see people with care needs from a perspective of their contribution and abilities. We suggest that seeing the social care user as environmental leader is an extension of this – a mindset, rather than a set of specific tasks. That said, social care services would benefit from taking action to think through the implications of people who use services leading on care for the environment, and should look for opportunities to facilitate users taking up this role.

No matter how wealthy someone is, or what resources they are given to provide for themselves, they are vulnerable to environmental degradation and crisis. For people who use services, because they have greater support needs than the general population, they are at even more risk. Therefore sustainable social care should be about recognising the importance of care for the environment, because allowing the environment to degrade will put everyone at risk, but people who use services most of all.

People who use services should be leaders in environmental care, not just because it helps others but also because it is part of helping themselves.

In the same way, caring for the environment provides an opportunity for people who use services to develop their sense of worth and personal value – an integral foundation for engaging in interpersonal relationships.

We have devised three principles, to reflect the economic, social and environmental dimensions of the social care user as leading their own care and future.

Economic principle

Increasing self-reliance means recognising the importance of the environment for maintaining the equilibrium that keeps the individual as a free acting agent.

What does this mean?

- people who use services should be enabled to shape their future as independent, economic agents

- but their independence depends on a stable, consistent environment (as does everyone's)
- in a damaged or crisis environment, vulnerability is magnified
- people who use services should be encouraged to be stakeholders in identifying environmental actions, not because they are having a negative impact, but because they have a greater stake in preservation.

Social principle

Increasing self-reliance means recognising the value of the environment as a tool to increase sense of worth and personal contribution to better enable the development of personal relationships.

What does this mean?

- people who use services should be enabled to have full, healthy and vibrant social lives
- being a friend, neighbour or family member depends on having self-confidence and self-worth
- dealing with human need can seem daunting – environmental need can be a more achievable challenge
- people who use services should be encouraged to see care for the environment as a gateway to demonstrating their care for others, and for their self-worth.

Environment principle

Our wellbeing is also enhanced by contact with the environment:

- being in the outdoors
- using it to encourage physical activity
- being in the presence of living things.

As part of the Learning Network, we heard how Equinox has used environmental work to help people who use services with mental health and drug and alcohol dependency issues. People who are struggling with the challenges of life can find relating to other people stressful. Relating to environmental issues is less personal but still enables care users to engage with something outside themselves. It can be a gateway to developing self-esteem and a sense of worth.

While it may sound positive to see people who use services as environmental leaders, some the view that any point in taking care of the environment if the worst environmental impact will not be seen in their lifetime.

Here are a few thoughts relating to this challenge:

- 1 Preventing future harm to oneself is not the only personal benefit environmental care offers, it can also improve people's feeling of self worth. Older people and older people's representative groups often campaign to show society they still have something of to value to offer (*Greener and wiser: An older people's manifesto on the environment*, 2009). Taking part in caring for the environment is a way to demonstrate your value to society, to yourself and to others.
- 2 While rising sea levels may be some way off, environmental crises happen today all around the country. Helping yourself and your community to prepare for environmental crises is not just about future challenges.
- 3 People in England recognise that the 'deal' they enter into when they pay their taxes is that money will go to fund universities and benefits even if they never use them. In the same way, contributing to environmental care as a member of society may help someone other than yourself, and it also creates a system which we all want to be part of. And it is an insurance policy – we may end up benefiting from something we did not expect to use.

4.2 Practical actions for people using services

While not all people who use services can do all things, everyone can do something. Even being an advocate of environmental care makes a contribution.

Influence: people who use services come into contact with others, and can act as advocates for environmental responsibility and action. Social groups can be heavily influenced by the behaviour of others in the group, and a single advocate can be very influential in driving behaviour change in others. Schools have seen the impact that children can have on their parents' behaviour. Even very vulnerable people with high care needs can use their voice and attitude to create impact. People who use services can add their voices to environmental campaigns; most communities have environmental forums of some kind already in place. Social care services should look at what exists and tap into those activities and networks to find ways for people who use services to become more sustainable. There may be forums that already include people who use services, or there may be opportunities for social care professionals and users to become more involved.

Alan Wheatley, Green Party spokesperson on disability and social care

At the age of 58 and a working lifelong volunteer and lifelong learner with an invisible disability, Alan Wheatley is the Green Party of England and Wales spokesperson on disability and social care. He brings to these roles the experience and insights of living as a single person in a social housing one-roomed flat, decades of poverty and yet also the understanding that the most important aspects of education are to do with 'giving people a voice', helping them make informed choices and to develop within the community throughout life.

Alan's voluntary work has included being group secretary for CND, serving on a community education centre's management committee, performer of his own

poems, close friend, community gardening team member, basic education learning support volunteer to disadvantaged adult learners and Green Party campaigner.

Maximising opportunities: there are opportunities for people who use services to benefit from the environment and the community that they can maximise for their own benefit and the benefit of others. Using public spaces and taking opportunities to be in the outdoors provides individual benefit and also creates environments where other people who use services feel they have a right to be and where they feel welcome.

Energy awareness: people who use services can map their energy use and carbon footprint and take time to think about ways to reduce energy consumption. Some will have resources they can invest in home improvements to increase energy efficiency; others can help create demand for more energy-efficient homes and services. Groups of people who use services could consider collaborating on micro-electricity and generating their own supply; this has the potential to reduce costs for all as well having wider environmental advantages.

Community leadership: some people who use services can take a more active leadership role. There are many examples of user-led activities that put the user in the driving seat. Experience from projects on walking has shown that walking groups have many benefits and are user led. There are also models of community self-help such as the 'community first responder' model, where volunteers in the community are dispatched to emergency calls in the locality – this may offer ideas for new ways that users can provide a leadership role in their community.

Active Bristol

Active Bristol is a five-year programme (2008-13) aiming to reverse the decline in physical activity of Bristol people and to bring about a significant and sustainable increase in activity. In order to meet these aims the programme focuses on everyday activities such as walking.

Active Bristol includes a range of initiatives such as the Active Travel Passbook. This social marketing initiative to promote active travel in areas of high health needs involved workshops with residents to identify barriers and opportunities; they were then asked to explore the area and worked on maps and resources to encourage sustainable travel. It is currently being evaluated to determine the impact on levels of physical activity.

An independent evaluation of the Bristol Walking for Health scheme by the University of Bristol found that the most significant benefits for participants included an increase in social contact and inclusion, particularly after bereavement, leading to an improved sense of wellbeing, confidence and energy, and mitigation of stress and depression.

Reduce consumption: people who use services can reduce their consumption by recycling and reusing. As well as playing a full role in waste recycling, local social care equipment services can offer equipment recycling facilities that users can support and can purchase from. For instance, Staffordshire Social Care and Health's County Equipment Centre refurbishes £1.5 million worth of social care and health equipment each year that is available for purchase by users.

Sustainable food: people who use services can also take part in sustainable food management. Growing vegetables and flowers rather than buying them reduces transport costs, saves money for the individual and has therapeutic benefits. Social care services should consider the opportunities available locally for people who use services without their own gardens to participate in growing food. Gardening provides healthy food as well as opportunities to dispose of food waste as compost to restart the cycle.

Contract responsibly: people who use services with direct payments who contract services can make contracting choices with environmental awareness. Contracting from locally based providers and encouraging providers to consider the environmental impact are examples of responsible contracting. Social care services should consider providing information about environmental contracting as part of support brokerage and support for decision making.

Carrickfergus Garden of Eden

Carrickfergus Borough Council, conservation volunteers and the local mental health charity, MindWise, along with a local drug and rehabilitation group have been working in partnership for over a year on the Garden of Eden project at Eden Allotment Garden. The allotments are operated by Carrickfergus Borough Council and are located within a five-hectare site near Carrickfergus, Northern Ireland.

The project won the BTCV's Project of the Year award for its success in involving tenants from MindWise's Carrickfergus housing service and participants of a local drug and alcohol rehabilitation group to get involved in a new physical activity that has positively benefited their mental health. The group have worked hard to create an allotment that is used to its full potential to produce organic homegrown fruit and vegetables.

The Garden of Eden project received its award at the BTCV's 2009 annual Green Heroes awards.

Croydon Caring Support

Caring Support in Croydon is a new model homecare service for older and disabled people. It is a cooperative of three groups: for people who need care in the community, personal carers and unpaid carers. It is based on collaboration between people who use services, families and carers, paid care staff and others within their communities. The person using services has direct, individual control of their care. The mutual organisation is the employer and provides training, quality standards, insurance and administration. Small clusters of people who use services and carers collaborate in self-managing provision in localities or to communities of interest. Groups of clusters then form a cooperative.

Similar approaches have been developed and tested through the establishment of pilot schemes, supported by the Department of Health, including South London, Life Choice Care in partnership with West Sussex Independent Living Association and Oadby and Wigston Direct Payments Support Group in partnership with Leicestershire County Council.

4.3 What can social care do differently?

Social care services can think through the implications of the concept of the social care user as environmental leader, identifying opportunities for users to grow into this leadership role and shaping support services to provide information and facilities with active environmental care in mind.

There are a range of actions that could be developed to encourage and support user-led activities in the environment and community, for instance:

- mapping resource consumption and finding opportunities to make changes, particularly in energy and waste
- volunteering or campaigning for local issues, such as growing your own food
- using direct payments to contract sustainable local services.

5 Expect the unexpected

Concepts arising in social care often relate to harm and risk. Providing care is about understanding what individuals need to stay safe and well and to minimise risk of harm. For some care users where harm may be unavoidable, care can be about harm reduction.

Because people who use services can be more vulnerable than others in the community, they can also be less resilient to change and at greater risk in an emergency. This means that the changing climate, which will lead to an increase in extreme weather events, and which will create a risk for the whole community, will create a greater risk to the health and wellbeing of people who use services. Adapting to climate change will mean services have to adjust the way they work.

Research shows that over the next 30 years we will see climate change due to the carbon that has already been emitted over the past 100 years. The UK already experiences hotter summers, with less rainfall and warmer winters, with heavier rainfall. There have also been more irregular and unpredictable events such as the heat wave in 2003, the floods in 2007 and the extreme cold and snowfall in the winter of 2009. (For more information about the UK climate projections for your area visit www.ukcip.org.uk.)

Increased flooding and heat waves are likely to have the biggest impact on social care, but the risk and harm from these events will not be evenly distributed. For instance some people will be less resilient physically, financially or emotionally to deal with a major event. The social care sector needs to be designed to reduce this risk by adapting their services and at the same time be prepared for reacting to and recovering from emergency situations.

Flooding facts

- 5.2 million properties in England, which is one in six properties, are at risk of flooding
- over five million people live and work in properties at risk of floods from the river or sea
- a further 2.8 million properties are at risk of surface water flooding. (Environment Agency, 2009)

Heat wave facts

- more than 2,000 deaths were attributed to the August 2003 heat wave in England and Wales
- excess mortality was 33 per cent in those aged 75 and over and 13.5 per cent in the under-75 age group during the 10-day heat wave
- among those aged 75 and over, deaths at home increased by 33 per cent and deaths in nursing homes increased by 42 per cent. (ONS, 2006)

Social care cannot afford to be complacent; if vulnerable people are to be kept from harm, and empowered to keep themselves from harm, social care needs to expect the unexpected.

5.1 Strategic risk assessment

Risk assessment comes naturally to the social care sector. However, the perspective and timescale of understanding risks needs to be able to take into account the long-term and sometimes unpredictable nature of climate change. This may also mean taking a broader view of the needs of people who have the potential to use services where local authorities are not the direct service providers or where people are receiving informal care.

There are existing processes that local government are undertaking that should support the assessment of risks and implementing new ways of working. For instance the joint strategic needs assessment (JSNA) should map the wider community needs and assess the scale of the challenge presented by climate change. Local authorities will also be undertaking plans as part of National Indicator 188 to ensure the council as a whole is resilient to climate change. This will involve measuring their progress in assessing and addressing the risks and opportunities of a changing climate and producing action plans for priority services to build resilience. The impact of climate change on social care services should be a major consideration in this process.

Hertfordshire County Council climate change and adult health and social care research study

Hertfordshire County Council has taken a strategic look at the potential impacts of climate change on the NHS and adult care services and how they will need to respond. They considered the impact of extreme weather on day-to-day service delivery and the prolonged stress on capacity this could cause. They also looked at the implications for staff, finance and reputation. The study made a series of recommendations to review the way services were delivered, such as climate risk appraisal in procurement and commissioning and emergency and major incident plans.

An important part of reducing risk is access to and analysis of information about service provision and climate impacts in an area. This will allow interventions to be implemented before they are put at risk, for example making care homes flood-resilient or making sure they are not built on flood risk areas in the first instance.

Neighbourhood flood response: Birmingham City Council

Birmingham has had flooding in several neighbourhoods over the last three years, often simultaneously. It had proved difficult to respond to all the floods as quickly as residents expected. Residents felt that they had not been in control of the situation.

The council decided that they needed to work much more closely with local communities to be able to deal more effectively with flooding in future. One of the key aims was to support local people in developing their own emergency response arrangements.

The Birmingham Resilience Team worked with three community groups/forums that had suffered from recent floods and were in high-risk areas. A neighbourhood flood response plan template was developed that can be used as a vehicle for citizens to develop their own arrangements.

These include having a known location available 24/7 where residents can self-evacuate for shelter and safety; having local arrangements in place to provide assistance to vulnerable residents; and having agreed procedures in place for direct communication prior, during and post flooding.

5.2 Reacting and recovering in an emergency

It is not possible to remove all likelihood of an extreme weather event affecting people directly, but the way in which services react in an emergency and the crucial recovery stage will affect the outcome for people who use services. If a local authority is particularly prone to heat waves or flooding they can make plans to prepare the response from social care.

Faced with an extreme weather event, individuals who use services will have particular needs, and there needs to be consideration of a range of factors:

- ability for people who use services to take action on their own, for instance being able to get out of the building if it floods or knowing what to do when it gets too hot
- emotional impact during and after the event
- potential relocation in the short, medium and long term and the impact this may have on recovery
- underlying health problems that may be exacerbated by the conditions (see heat wave facts (p 16)).

There will also be extra strain on the social care service to maintain access to treatment, medication and carers. Plans are needed to ensure the increase in service demand can be met. It is likely that those with low level needs will be pushed into the higher needs category due to their circumstances; additional people may need services because of the event; or people outside the formal social care system may become particularly isolated and need more support.

It is suggested that an emergency response is developed with all social care partners, which brings together actions before, during and after an emergency. The scope of the plans will depend on the climate impacts the areas are vulnerable to (see the following flooding example).

Preparing for an emergency: example of actions in the case of flooding

Social care services should be working with partners, such as emergency planning, the health sector and providers, to consider the likely impact of an event on their services and users. This five-stage approach provides a framework for planning and reacting before, during and after a flood.

1. Decision making

There are a number of areas that will need a cross-agency approach. Before an event there needs to be consideration of the practical arrangements for people who use services during a flood.

Areas to consider:

- Are there alternative premises suitable for the client?
- Are processes in place to react to changing situations that involve multiple agencies, for example a process for a flu pandemic response?
- Will users have access to all the services they might need, for example medication?
- Are there facilities whose users pose a security risk to the public and what are the plans for them?

2. Building adaptive capacity

Evidence needs to be collated to provide social care services with a full understanding of the risks and current processes in an emergency. There may also be a need to build capacity in other areas to recognise the potential vulnerabilities in the social care sector.

Areas to consider:

- monitoring weather-related events and learning from their effect on services
- other agencies recognising risks and taking action, for instance planning departments should be challenging planning proposals for new adult services facilities.

3. Implementation

Recognition of the impact of events such as flooding need to be integrated into plans in a range of service areas.

Areas to consider:

- adult services need long-term planning of the locations of properties
- emergency planning may have a reactive response built on past experience, but flooding is happening now in areas not previously affected. This means emergency planning needs to be thinking about new challenges and moving forward.

4. Emergency response

During an event services need to be able to react to the situation. There should be information to help the implementation of a response.

Areas to consider:

- identify where all known users (adult services) and vulnerable buildings are (emergency planning and adult services)
- identify where homes with no member of staff are on site and may need to get in touch with the person using the service (adult services).

5. Post-recovery response

After an emergency event recovery can be over a long period of time. There will need to be plans to get services back to normal and also to respond to the new circumstances the event may have caused.

Areas to consider:

- dealing with or recognising mental health issues because of the experience of flood (adult services)
- finding alternative temporary accommodation and fixing homes, for example repairs and insurance (service provider and adult services)
- re-assessment of package of support (service provider and adult services).

5.3 What can social care do differently?

Acting early can give people who use services control in situations where they may feel more vulnerable. Changes in the climate may be uncertain, but we can predict the likely risks and develop resilient services.

There will be local expertise and tools that will enable people who use services to prepare. Social care can seek out information about the potential impacts of climate change on their area. Mapping available now is so detailed that care services can see how their facilities individually map against flood and other risks. Social care can liaise with emergency planners to flag concerns and collaborate to put plans in place, with a focus on empowering communities to make their own emergency plans.

6 Look out of the window

The principal focus of social care is not buildings, public space or the aesthetics of design. It is people. But as we have argued throughout, people's independence and wellbeing cannot be separated from their connection to their physical environment.

A more sustainable social care would be a social care with a greater sense of the person rooted in a physical environment.

Good design of buildings, neighbourhoods and towns can help individuals to reach their full potential. Studies show, for example, that living close to a high-quality accessible natural environment can lengthen life irrespective of other factors affecting life expectancy (Coombs et al, 2009).

The provision of social care services can have a high environmental cost, through the waste, carbon and water use in transport and buildings. Good design and sustainable places can help individuals and organisations to live more sustainably and reduce waste of resources.

While this has been explored in terms of health and wellbeing more generally, it is not yet a primary consideration for social care. Here we introduce topics where social care could join the conversation to improve their users' experiences of the physical environment that surrounds and impacts on their quality of life.

6.1 Designing social care facilities

In the report *Future health* the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE, 2009) shows how the design of the built environment can help to deliver three key policy objectives:

- modernising healthcare
- addressing health inequalities through lifestyle changes
- creating healthy, sustainable communities.

There is not a clear sense of a shift to aspirational design of social care facilities or specialist housing. Yet there are good examples, particularly in health, of good design that clearly contributes to wellbeing of users, visitors and staff:

The important things, according to Foster partner Spencer de Grey, are 'the clarity of the basic diagram, generous space, easy orientation, natural light and natural materials' ... the impressive thing is that the building does exactly what its makers say it does. It provides obviously good things that somehow get missed out of other hospitals. If we want our surgeons to be wakeful and happy, which I think we do, it can only help if they can see clouds and sky and sunshine when they take a break. And it can only be beneficial if patients are calm rather than bewildered on arrival. (*The Observer*, 21 March 2009, *Circle hospital/Foster & Partners*)

New residential care buildings could be designed so that the rooms where people gather catch the light in winter and provide some shade in summer; gardens should be integral, not marginal; and public spaces should be human.

Good design need not cost more, and getting the brief right from the beginning saves money. Involving users and communities in design will improve the outcomes. There is an over-reliance on the private car for access and considerations are not made about the importance of green space for people's physical and mental wellbeing.

The Liverpool Primary Care Trust and Liverpool and Sefton LIFTCo have located a network of facilities according to pedestrian accessibility. They surveyed residents and pinpointed an optimum 15-minute maximum walking time to any health centre. This not only makes the centres more accessible, but also encourages walking, which is a good form of physical activity.

6.2 Lifetime homes and neighbourhoods

Specialist housing is only part of the story and even with an ageing population, many people will never need residential or specialist housing. Sustainable homes and communities should support more people living independently for longer.

The current system presents a number of challenges:

- There is a lack of mobility within and between tenures.
- There can be a mismatch between people's needs and wants. People often want to stay locally, even though there may be poor choice of care homes or adaptations to their home would be expensive.
- Care users with an interest in more sustainable options may find themselves unable to influence the private sector to provide those options. Existing housing can be physically unsuitable for people at different stages of their lives and difficult to adapt. New homes are not always built to lifetime homes standards.
- Multiple standards in the building industry and lifetime standards are competing for attention.
- There are few incentives for different lifestyles. The tax and benefit system does not encourage extended families.

There is an opportunity to reflect on models for housing provision, both private and public, that consider:

- the level of risk that people are prepared to live with, for example providing simple practical help like moving heavy objects or rearranging furniture so they can stay at home longer rather than moving to a care home
- enabling older people who do want to move away to do so
- providing care that is part of the wider community, for example providing very sheltered care that has pubs or restaurants that anyone can use
- providing services based on locality rather than communities of interest, for example using a community development approach to support vulnerable people in rural areas

- increasing housing options, such as releasing equity to make homes accessible and supporting new forms of provision, such as cooperative and shared housing for older people.

Older people, especially, need advice and information about what options exist and not just when a crisis happens – being able to navigate through a complex range of issues can mean people can plan ahead and make early decisions that could, sometimes, prevent or delay having to move into residential care.

Too often housing is ‘the missing link’, where health and social care work together. Yet we know what the links between all three are. Even low-level changes can have major impacts – falls cost the NHS £726 million a year and are a major cause of people having to move into care homes.

6.3 Community planning

The impact of housing and services should not be the only focus for social care. Rather they should take into account the wider impact of planning the green and physical infrastructure that makes up our communities.

Consider any neighbourhood in a local authority area. The design and location of roads, open spaces, housing, public services, shops and other facilities will affect the way residents view and act in their community. A busy main road may provide fast access to employment opportunities or a barrier to people walking and cycling. An area of parkland may give people an opportunity to enjoy the outdoors or cause them to be afraid for their safety.

Access is key. Councils need to promote physical and cultural access. We all experience our environment differently, and planning and design needs to take account of this diversity – social care has to represent and include different groups so that their voices are heard. Sometimes there will be conflicting voices, so there needs to be genuine dialogue between people who use services and communities to try and resolve the issues.

Being able to live well in my home environment is essential to my mental and physical wellbeing. Yet those of us most at risk of a breakdown in our mental health and wellbeing are much more likely to live in squalid housing amid constant noise and in an environment where we are subjected to harassment and abuse. Quiet, books, natural beauty, green, open space – these are all essential for me. It’s not just about the environments we build but also about how we inhabit them – with kindness, good manners and a real respect for each other. (Klein, 2008)

Older people may become isolated because they are afraid to go out at night or because public transport is poor. Facilities may need to be brought to people, or means of getting to them offered, such as promoting community transport or community car sharing schemes. There needs to be more flexible use of buildings and public space, for example luncheon clubs in schools promote inclusion and intergenerational activity and growing plants or vegetables in the spaces between public buildings brings people together.

The physical is mental

One thing to remember is that how people think has a major impact on whether or not they use public spaces. Your area might have excellent green or public spaces that local people do not use. For people who use services the reasons can be complex. In supporting people to get the benefit of being outdoors, consider the following:

- Who uses this space now? Are there conflicts between the way that different groups see or use the space?
- Does location or layout create psychological barriers that make people feel 'not for the likes of us'?
- Are people likely to see others that they identify with when they use the space?
- What is the travel route? Is public transport inadequate or the environment intimidating?
- Where is the 'neighbourhood'? Is something just far enough away to be too far?

The local development framework sets out the vision for how planning will be managed in a local area. All development control decisions must be made in accordance with the plans and policies in the framework unless material considerations indicate otherwise. It is also subject to a sustainability appraisal to ensure the economic, environmental and social effects of the plan are in line with sustainable development targets. Closely linked to this is the local transport plan which should be delivering the following goals: tackling climate change; supporting economic growth; promoting equality of opportunity; contributing to better safety, security and health; and improving quality of life.

Bringing a social care perspective to the challenge of designing and planning communities will shed a different light on shaping sustainable places.

6.4 What can social care do differently?

To shape places social care can take a more active role in linking the JSNA and the local development framework. People who use services could be actively engaged at looking at the places they live in and help to plan environments where they feel welcome and where they will be active.

To achieve better housing, social care services can build stronger strategic relationships with housing. Together they can have a conversation with the care users of tomorrow as well as the care users of today about what they really want from housing and how housing available in the local area needs to evolve to provide for the future. Social care can help care users make informed choices about housing that will help them be adaptive as they age.

7 Think about commissioning

A total of £16.1 billion was spent on adult social care in England in 2008-09 (The Information Centre for Health and Social Care, 2009). Getting commissioning right is an ongoing priority for social care. It is therefore right to see commissioning as a key area in which to embed sustainable development principles.

One of the challenges for commissioning continues to be the narrow focus on procurement rather than the whole cycle of commissioning. Different commissioning models have slightly different stages. For example, the NHS 'world class commissioning' model has nine stages under three themes:

- Strategic planning
- Procuring services
- Monitoring and evaluation

and NHS commissioners are expected to articulate their contribution to sustainable development across each of these. Truly sustainable commissioning will achieve a balanced consideration of social, environmental and economic concerns in all of these stages whatever the process adopted.

Like all public services under pressure, social care is likely to focus on unit costs in commissioning for goods and services. Sustainable commissioning takes account of direct and indirect social and environmental costs and benefits in service design, contracting and measuring performance and value, as well as the economic costs and benefits. There would be no future, however, for commissioning that took proper account of the environmental and social costs and benefits but ignored the economic. Social care needs to be smarter at bringing the three pillars together.

Smarter commissioning is demanding and complex, particularly now with the increasing constraint on public spending and the pressures to make short-term savings. This context, however, makes more intelligent commissioning, which considers the wider costs and benefits, even more critical.

7.1 Sustainable procurement

Sustainable procurement is a process whereby organisations meet their needs for goods, services, works and utilities in a way that achieves value for money on a whole life basis in terms of generating benefits not only to the organisation, but also to society and the economy, while minimising damage to the environment. (Sustainable Procurement Task Force, 2006)

Although environmental considerations may be taken into account at the procurement stage in tenders for social care, they are clearly not seen as one of the drivers of the process. There is a danger that providers of goods and services will see questions relating to the environment as tokenistic. Some commissioners, understandably perhaps given the pressures on social care, may not see these issues as priorities or may see them as taking up time and money the service cannot afford.

Whole-life costing models could be used in evaluating tenders. The challenge is to find workable models for this context, where the environmental impact is assessed at each stage from, for example, the acquisition of goods, through running costs to disposal.

Stipulating more sustainable sources of food for residential care homes, for example, would reduce food miles, help to sustain local economies, have a beneficial effect on health and wellbeing, increase resilience, could be cost-effective and could reduce waste. Including some provision for residents to grow some of their own food would strengthen the social and health benefits.

There will inevitably be tensions at times between different objectives – sourcing products and services locally and from smaller providers may meet key sustainability objectives, but could be more expensive than bulk contracts. It is important for a council to be clear about how it intends to evaluate the costs and what weighting is given to sometimes competing criteria and the timescales over which costs and benefits are assessed.

7.2 A model for sustainable commissioning

The most developed model for sustainable commissioning is probably that devised by the New Economics Foundation (nef). Although there are and will be different and equally valid ways to commission sustainably, nef's model is a helpful illustration of how strategic commissioning can be bent towards a more sustainable model. There is no blueprint; what is important are the principles that underpin a sustainable approach:

- assessing robust evidence and analysis of community and individual needs over the longer term
- achieving best outcomes for the community and individuals as well as outputs captures the value of outcomes created by commissioned services at both the service level and wider community level – economic, environmental and social outcomes, 'the triple bottom line'
- involving the community, people who use services and carers, frontline staff and partners in the planning, design, delivery and review of services – co-production
- recognising the critical importance of collaboration and interdependence, such as between social care and health, social care and housing, in order to put people at the centre of services
- understanding the longer-term economic, environmental and social impact of spending and how this aligns with and supports strategic priorities
- commissioning to stimulate innovation among diverse providers related to delivery of wider objectives.

The nef model has two key innovations:

- 1) The tender document is structured around outcomes rather than activities and outputs. This gives providers (and people who use services) the freedom to innovate and use their knowledge of the area to demonstrate how they can meet needs and draw on resources at the local level and the realisation of greater public benefit for wider community objectives.

- 2) Two different 'types' of outcomes are included. These are a set of service-level outcomes and a set of wider community outcomes that the provider should meet. This makes visible a far more comprehensive set of impacts that can then be taken into consideration when awarding the tender.

Together, these two components create an outcomes-focused performance management approach that is embedded throughout the commissioning and procurement process through to contract management. The framework enables providers to demonstrate in their bids how their service model would deliver the outcomes identified by the commissioners. These could reflect higher-level objectives from national policy priorities, the council's corporate plan and sustainable community strategy through to specific service plans and the needs of people who use services. The ability to deliver on these wider outcomes is judged in the scoring process.

7.3 Public benefit and value for money

A sustainable commissioning approach requires changes to how we measure costs:

Value for money is defined as the optimum combination of whole-of-life costs and quality of the good or service to meet the user's requirement. Value for money is not the choice of goods and services based on the lowest cost bid.

... wider social and environmental costs and benefits for which there is no market price also need to be brought into any assessment. They will often be more difficult to assess but are often important and should not be ignored simply because they cannot easily be costed. (HM Treasury Value for Money guidance)

Nef proposes a new 'public benefit' model of efficiency, using social return on investment (SROI) principles. This model assesses the effectiveness of outcomes in terms of their benefit to users and the wider community. The result would be a model that builds the 'triple bottom line' approach into public service contracts, incentivising providers to maximise their wider impacts wherever possible, rather than focusing on solely cutting costs in the short term. A model like this would, for example, recognise the value associated with prevention and build it into the value for money criteria, clarify how the value is generated and where the benefit goes.

- value for money is concerned not just with unit costs
- value for money is about the 'full value' or 'public benefit' that a provider brings to the service
- commissioners need to evaluate a provider against a range of outcomes over the longer term
- SROI translates short and long-term social and environmental outcomes into monetary values (see nef's *Measuring value: A guide to social return on investment, 2009*).

This model can be used as the basis for debating the allocation of resources to maximise social, environmental and economic outcomes.

Example of outcomes

Who benefits	Outcome	Financial benefit
Public sector	Improvement in mental health	Saving in government spending on mental health (£20,500 for each in-patient; source: NHS)

Where no direct financial value is available, financial proxies are used

Beneficiary	Outcome	Indicator	Proxy financial benefit
Local community	Improved access to local services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Increased take-up of local services – Reduced need to travel elsewhere for services 	Value of time saved and savings in travel costs
Individual	Improved physical health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Reduced visits to GP surgery – Participant reports an improvement in health 	Spending on health-related goods and services (for example household spending survey)

In the mental health arena it is likely that the police, housing and children's services will also see savings, which is why a focus on community/authority outcomes is important. Savings may happen over a variety of timescales and there will not always be an opportunity to claw back investment in services at an early stage.

Day care provision for people with a mental health condition, London Borough of Camden

Camden had high levels of mental health problems among the working-age population and above-average levels of alcohol addiction and suicide. Camden's adult social care department funded four day care centres run by specialist mental health charities.

The council decided to re-commission these services following a best value review that had concluded that the council's day care services should do more to promote the independence and recovery of people who use services, and involve them more directly in the design and delivery of services.

The council had been working with nef to develop a model for outcome-based commissioning. This model includes co-production as a means of better engaging with, and leveraging, existing social assets and networks to improve public service outcomes for people who use services, and to ensure that those outcomes are enduring and embedded in local communities. The commissioning team devised a tender specification that explicitly included the principles of co-production, and also stated that 'the service should be delivered in partnership with people who use services'. Beyond service outcomes, the team drew up a menu of wider social, economic and environmental outcomes and indicators, all of which drew on Camden's sustainable community strategy.

The winning tender consortium involved three locally based medium-sized charities, and won on the basis of being the 'most economically advantageous tender', that is, a combination of price and quality and qualitative, quantitative and monetary criteria.

The council has been able to measure and report tangible outcomes for people who use services. According to the Audit Commission (2009), evidence from new monitoring tools used by the council shows that the approach is delivering considerable social and local economic returns, through wider community participation, cohesion and civic engagement.

Camden has also used the sustainable commissioning model to contract for a £3 million homecare and dementia contract, and for Camden's *Supporting People* contracts – the total contractual value of services employing the outcome-based model is around £30 million.

7.4 What can social care do differently?

7.4.1 Joint strategic needs assessment (JSNA)

JSNA offers real potential to think strategically about the longer term. Some local areas have started approaching needs assessment on a local strategic partnership-wide basis. However, future challenges such as climate change are not being consistently integrated into the process. Seeing needs analysis as being about the area, rather than the sector, makes it easier to see how the social, economic and environmental sit together. Changing the approach so it is about the difference that can be made, rather than the needs that should be met, may help focus on a positive vision for the area, rather than a long and unaffordable 'to do' list.

As discussed above, the local development framework in particular is a significant place-shaping strategy that needs to reflect the needs of social care. Views from the Network were that although health and social care did feed into the local development framework, by connecting JSNA and the framework this could be a more dynamic process.

7.4.2 Skills for commissioning

People involved in commissioning need to develop skills that allow them to integrate sustainability into their processes. It is unrealistic to expect social care commissioners to become sustainability experts overnight. Rather, they need to open doors to others who have expertise in sustainability to have a dialogue about what commissioners, councillors and managers can do to integrate sustainability considerations into their day job.

In the previous section 'Expect the unexpected' about resilience, we describe the connections that could be made with emergency planners and climate change officers that are already tackling the impacts of extreme weather events. There will be a range of sectors across the council and its partners that can provide insight into sustainable social care.

7.4.3 Look from a different angle

As part of the Learning Network, participants undertook an activity to assess the opportunities for people who use services to access green spaces in their local area. We used a map to look at an area and tried to draw conclusions from what we could see. The activity opened our eyes to some of the reasons that people do not use the spaces that they have. Barriers such as major roads, access issues such as lack of transport routes or paths in parks are easier to see when looking at a map.

Using techniques like these when planning services can give commissioners a different perspective, and help them see what users might need in order to achieve better health and wellbeing. It will help to equip social care to contribute to consultation and place shaping.

7.4.4 Understand the opportunities

Social care commissioners first need to understand where their spending decisions have the greatest environmental impact, which could be relating to, for example, transport, food supplies, buildings, energy use and construction. An audit of spending from an environmental perspective would highlight where the council should prioritise its efforts. The comprehensive area assessment (CAA), local area agreements (LAAs) and the pilot local carbon frameworks for local authorities are key drivers, achieving the public benefits that are named in the key strategic documents.

7.4.5 Intelligent design

Being sustainable in design is more likely to relate to services, but social care occasionally plays a part in developing new buildings. Any re-design process creates an opportunity to think sustainably. That might mean reducing the carbon impact through means such as smarter telecare or co-location of facilities. Or it could mean rethinking doors, shades or fences so residents from residential homes can safely and comfortably use outdoor space. Being sustainable also means ensuring that people who use services are fully involved in the design, delivery and review of social care services.

8 Conclusion

The experience of the Learning Network taught us many things, but two things stand out. First, that social care is only beginning to think about sustainability. This report is an attempt to begin something, to encourage and to help social care to think about the future. Second, that social care and environmental care are not so far apart. Many of the principles used in social care, such as risk assessment, harm reduction, resilience and the importance of early intervention, are equally useful when we think about the environment.

We reflected that social care professionals are often by nature people who think about consequences, who understand responsibility and who want to see a better world. While they may feel that sustainability is unfamiliar and unrelated to their work, often in their private lives, or even in the workplace, they are already advocates for a more sustainable approach.

Social care can feel itself under pressure, and sustainable social care must not be an additional burden. Instead, we hope that social care professionals and people who use services will see this as an opportunity. By thinking differently, by taking a different perspective, more can be achieved and greater good can be done.

Social care organisations need to be configured and acting in a way supportive to the agenda to complement people who use services and environmental leaders. We identified three key strands where social care needs to adapt to deliver sustainable social care:

Long-term vision: being sustainable means thinking about the long-term impact of what we do. Too often social care can find itself driven by short-term goals or pressures and find it challenging to take account of the bigger picture, the longer time horizon. However, a focus on outcomes soon makes the case for a sustainable development approach.

Leadership and partnership: all public sector services should now recognise the importance of partnership. For local authorities there is a particular role that they play as the democratic lead in their area. Sustainable social care needs leadership and partnership too, among commissioners, providers and people who use services, i.e. across the whole system.

Sustainable development mindset: the biggest challenge for sustainable social care today is not action but mentality. Thinking about this area is at an early stage and more than anything would benefit from a mental shift from professionals and users to think about the small changes they can make as they do their work and daily living. There are many examples of good practice, sometimes only small steps, on which social care can build.

Now that we have started thinking about the connection between sustainability and social care, it is hard to think any other way. We will be taking these findings forward by testing them with commissioners, providers and users.

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Other resources

National indicators that directly relate to climate change:

NI 185: CO₂ reduction from local authority operations

NI 186: per capita CO₂ emissions in the local authority area

NI 188: adapting to climate change

The Climate Connection 2008: www.theclimateconnection.org/connections/commissioning

Further reading

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Appendix 1: Sustainable Social Care Learning Network

Participating local authorities

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Independence, community and environment: Final report of the Sustainable Social Care Learning Network

This report shows how sustainable development will strengthen our capacity to design and deliver social care services that are both responsive to individuals and resilient over the longer term. It offers practical suggestions for commissioners – both professional and personal budget holders.

This publication is available in an alternative format on request.

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