

Sustainability roles

Young People's Representative

You are in the sixth form of a local school, and are on the school council. As part of your studies, you looked at sustainability and wrote to the local council to ask what they are doing to promote sustainability. As a result of this you were asked to attend a group to consider a local strategy.

You are very keen to have something happen locally, but do not have time to contribute much yourself because of exam pressures.

From your studies, you have found the following information on some possible impacts of climate change in the UK.

How our climate may change in the UK:

- The urban heat island effect already warms central London by more than 10°C on some nights. This would increase still further, on top of the effects of global warming.
- Droughts will be more likely, particularly in the South East; and more intense downpours of summer rainfall. This could lead to flash flooding
- The extreme heatwave of 2003 (in which average summer temps were 2°C higher than normal) led to over 2,000 additional deaths in UK. Such hot summers could happen every other year by the 2040's.
- Heavier winter precipitation, again leading to potentially more flooding.
- Sea-level across the UK projected to rise by up to 76cm by the end of the century. In worst cases, rises of up to 1.9m are possible but highly unlikely.

Reference: 'Warming. Climate Change – the facts.' Met Office, 2009. Available from: <http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/climatechange/guide/quick/> (Last accessed 26 January, 2010)

Business

You run a small independent building company, and are a member of the local Chamber of Commerce. You are aware of targets to be met for carbon footprint, and for emissions from motor vehicles. You feel increasingly pressured by legislation in many different areas of the buildings trade, all of which are affecting your profits. You do not want to make any changes which could increase your costs.

You are aware that land you have recently acquired is in a flood plain, and are particularly interested in flooding prevention. You want the Local Authority to improve water drainage and flood prevention.

Local councillor 1

You are an independent local councillor. You stood for the local council from a desire to improve services and lives for local people.

You are very concerned about improving life for those who are worst off and least able to help themselves. You see sustainability as an important problem to tackle and are keen to ensure that the Local Authority are doing all they can to support this work.

You are concerned that many of your poorest constituents live close to a major road, and may suffer poor health because of air pollution from the road.

You also think sustainability makes good business sense. Although energy prices are highly unpredictable they are much more likely to increase than decrease. All business plans need to be as resilient as possible to price and availability fluctuations by sourcing and using energy wisely.

There are legally binding UK Government targets in the Climate Change Act (November 2008) to achieve an 80% cut in greenhouse gas emissions (from 1990 levels) by 2050. All organisations will need to demonstrate how this is being measured, monitored, and managed. You think immediate action is needed in order to be able to meet this target.

Local councillor 2

You are an independent local councillor. You stood for the local council from a desire to improve services and lives for local people.

You are keen to improve profits for local businesses, which in turn will improve tax revenues and local amenities. You are also worried about the lack of responsibility taken by people for their own lives.

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You do not see sustainability as a major problem for the Local Authority now. There are more immediate problems facing the local area, and you would prefer the Local Authority to deal with these, before tackling targets which are set for 40 years away.

Public Health

You work in the local public health department. You have been named as the PCT lead for carbon reduction. There are legally binding UK Government targets in the Climate Change Act (November 2008) to achieve an 80% cut in greenhouse gas emissions (from 1990 levels) by 2050. All organisations will need to demonstrate how this is being measured, monitored, and managed. You think immediate action is needed in order to be able to meet this target.

You have also been asked to develop a sustainability policy for the PCT and to lead on a borough-wide sustainability policy to improve health locally.

The UK carbon footprint is 9 tonnes per head, second only to USA (20 tonnes). This needs to reduce to 1.85 tonnes per head for sustainability. As the biggest public service organisation, you feel the NHS should be in the forefront of leading actions against climate change.

Due to its size, the NHS can have a real impact in protecting the environment and therefore improving the health of the population. 5% of all journeys are estimated to be on NHS business.

You also see major opportunities to improve health if people can be persuaded to adopt a more sustainable lifestyle.