



The Centre For Business Relationships,
Accountability, Sustainability and Society

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**Living Differently? An Assessment of
the First Four Years of the Welsh
Assembly Government's Sustainable
Development Duty**



Andrew Flynn



About the BRASS Centre

In 2001, Cardiff University won £3.1 million in research funds from the Economic and Social Research Council to develop a Research Centre for Business Relationships, Accountability, Sustainability and Society (BRASS). The Centre is a joint venture between the University's schools of Business, City and Regional Planning and Law. It brings together the three Schools' existing research expertise on issues of sustainability, business ethics, company law, corporate reporting and business communication.

The Centre started work in October 2001 under the leadership of Professor Ken Peattie of the Business School, Professor Terry Marsden of the Department of City and Regional Planning and Professor Bob Lee of the Law School. The funding of the Centre covers an initial five-year period, but this should just mark the beginning of BRASS' contribution to creating more sustainable and responsible businesses locally, nationally and globally.

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Living Differently?

**An assessment of the first four years of the
Welsh Assembly Government's sustainable development duty**

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June 2003

Executive Summary

Under section 121 of the Government of Wales Act, there is bestowed on the Assembly a responsibility for sustainable development that is unique for an elected body in Britain. This report provides a review of the experience of the Assembly in its first four years of implementing its sustainable development duty. The report explores the views of key actors involved in the sustainability agenda and Wales since it is their perceptions that will prove central to the framing of the of the sustainable development debate for the Assembly's second term.

The report is divided into eight sections. In Section 2 the challenge and novelty of the Assembly's responsibility for sustainable development is outlined. Section 3 reviews the Assembly's perspective on its duty. Sections 4 and 5 analyse the way in which Assembly Sponsored Public Bodies (ASPBs) and local government perceive the Assembly's sustainability development duty. These two sections form the core of the report since they are key delivery bodies for the implementation of sustainable development in Wales. Section 6 reviews NGO perceptions of the Assembly's activities. Section 7 discusses the Assembly's progress in two of the areas that it has identified in which it wishes to promote sustainability, namely an Integration Tool for decision making and procurement. Section 8 summarises the findings and sets out some of the issues that the Assembly and its partners will need to tackle in the second term.

Key findings are that:

1. people across all categories of interviewee are comfortable talking the language of sustainable development and supportive of the Assembly's agenda.
2. Mainstreaming of sustainability is taking place. The commitment of senior politicians in the Assembly to sustainability is applauded.
3. Amongst some organisations there is a desire for further and more rapid progression of sustainability. Expectations have been raised, not least by the Assembly itself, and people are keen to see the challenges of sustainability faced. This is a very positive message.
4. The Sustainable Development Scheme, Learning to Live Differently and its associated Action Plan do not provide an effective agenda for action for the Assembly and its partners.

5. Initiatives to promote sustainability have often been opportunistic rather than based on an evidence-based analysis of where the Assembly and its partners could best place their efforts.

1 Introduction

This report is to provide a review of the experience of the Assembly in its first four years of implementing its sustainable development duty (Section 121 of the Government of Wales Act). The report explores the views of key actors involved in the sustainability agenda and Wales since it is their perceptions that will prove central to the framing of the of the sustainable development debate for the Assembly's second term. The report does not review the numerous policy documents that have been produced by the Assembly or its partners. These documents are carefully crafted for public consumption and it is the thinking behind them and actors perceptions of key issues that are more important here. The report will contribute to debates on an agenda for the next four years of the Assembly's life. The report has been funded by WWF Cymru.

Within its first term the Assembly and its partners have been very active. A review of the impact of the Assembly's work on sustainable development must necessarily be selective. The results reported here cannot hope to be a comprehensive analysis of the Assembly's achievements and the challenges it faces in taking forward its responsibilities on sustainable development. Nevertheless, the results do provide clear messages of the areas where progress has been made and the blockages that have been encountered. It should also be remembered that the pace of change in relation to the sustainable development agenda has quickened during the first term of the Assembly and that much that has happened will only become observable in the second term.

The report is divided into eight sections. In Section 2 the challenge and novelty of the Assembly's responsibility for sustainable development is outlined. Section 3 reviews the Assembly's perspective on its duty. Sections 4 and 5 analyse the way in which Assembly Sponsored Public Bodies (ASPBs) and local government perceive the Assembly's sustainability development duty. These two sections form the core of the report since they are key delivery bodies for the implementation of sustainable development in Wales. Section 6 reviews NGO perceptions of the Assembly's activities. Section 7 discusses the Assembly's progress in two of the areas that it has identified in which it wishes to promote sustainability, namely an Integration Tool for decision making and procurement. Section 8 summarises the findings and sets out some of the issues that the Assembly and its partners will need to

tackle in the second term. Finally, Annex A briefly explains the sources of data that have been used in the report.

2 Background

Under section 121 of the Government of Wales Act, there is bestowed on the Assembly a responsibility for sustainable development that is unique for an elected body in Britain. Section 121 requires the Assembly:

- to make a scheme setting out how it proposes, in the exercise of its functions, to promote sustainable development;
- to keep the scheme under review and in the year following each ordinary election (after the first) to consider whether it should be remade or revised;
- not to delegate the function of making, remaking or revising the scheme;
- to publish the scheme when first made and whenever subsequently remade and, if the scheme is revised without being remade, to publish the revisions or the scheme as revised (as it considers appropriate);
- to consult such persons or bodies as it considers appropriate before making, remaking or revising the scheme;
- to publish an annual report of how its proposals as set out in the scheme were implemented in that year; and
- in the year following each ordinary election, to publish a report containing an assessment of how effective its proposals (as set out in the scheme and implemented) have been in promoting sustainable development.

There are two key elements of Section 121. The first is the statutorily binding nature of the obligation and the fact that the Assembly cannot delegate this function (the scheme has to be approved by the Assembly in plenary session). The second is the inclusive and open nature of the process of producing and maintaining the scheme.

It is worthwhile briefly mentioning that the responsibility placed upon the Assembly by Section 121 places considerable demands upon its delivery capacity. The Assembly's forerunner, the Welsh Office, lacked a policy tradition and was much more focussed on the delivery of programmes and services. Senior officials and politicians have not only had to reorient themselves to a new political climate and they have had to cope with a reduced ability to draw on the policy expertise of Whitehall departments. Indeed under the Welsh Office it was a political and administrative system that relied heavily on a strategic input from Whitehall and Westminster. Matters are made still more challenging because Section 121 is so novel: the Assembly could not learn from experience elsewhere in Britain or Europe but had to develop its own capacity to think through how it should mainstream sustainability within its own operations and promote it within its partners. Moreover, the emphasis on an inclusive process of preparing and maintaining the sustainable development scheme is also a novel task. Thus, the process of preparing the Sustainable Development Scheme, *Learning to Live Differently*, was characterised by genuine collaboration between a small number of ASPBs, NGOs and Assembly staff. It is to the Assembly's credit that so far the administrative and political systems have coped reasonably well with the demands but as the internal and external expectations for delivery increase then so too will the pressures.

The Assembly, in plenary, formally adopted *Learning to Live Differently* in November 2000. A key theme of the Sustainable Development Scheme and the associated Action Plan is better decision making for sustainable development. The Assembly, wishes to both demonstrate its commitment to the pursuit of sustainable development and to act as an exemplar to others in Wales. Much of the rest of the report is taken up with assessing whether it has met its own challenge.

3 The Assembly

The initial response of the civil service to the requirements of Section 121 was to establish a 'Sustainable Development Unit'. This mirrored the Whitehall model where a Sustainable Development Unit, with a government-wide remit to promote sustainable development, was established within the then Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR, 1998). The Sustainable Development Unit (SDU) was located within the Assembly's Environment Division of the Transport,

Planning and Environment Group. Both the Units faced common challenges. First, based within a 'vertical' policy division it was not clear how they could promote the horizontal integration necessary for sustainable development across other policy divisions. Second, their location within environment departments helped perpetuate a belief amongst some policy-makers that sustainable development is an environmental issue. So, by following a London model the Assembly missed an early opportunity to adopt a cross-cutting approach to policy as demanded by sustainable development. A more innovative model would have been to establish the Sustainable Development Unit as a horizontal unit to formulate and drive forward policy. This structural issue was 'corrected' following a debate in the Assembly chamber on the draft Sustainable Development Scheme with the Members agreeing an amendment that required the SDU to be moved to the Policy Unit. This caused some controversy, as there were questions as to whether Assembly politicians could or should dictate the internal structure of the civil service. But has the shift in the location of the SDU made much difference? The answer must be yes. First, it indicated that there was a group of politicians who had grasped more quickly than senior civil servants the organisational implications of the cross-cutting nature of sustainability. Second, the Policy Unit was strategically located and gave the SDU much better access to senior ministers than they would otherwise have experienced. Third, SDU staff were able to spend much time and effort looking outside the Assembly. As one official explained: "We spent a lot of time working externally" and this has undoubtedly helped to foster the generally positive views that NGOs and local government officials have of the Assembly's efforts though this is now increasingly subject to more critical comment (see the section on NGOs and the Assembly). Subsequent reforms to the SDU have ensured that its strategic and cross-cutting approach remains.

Nevertheless the process of learning about the implementation of sustainability has not always been easy. Key staff within the Assembly recognise that it may not always present a consistent message to the inside or outside worlds or make progress on sustainability as quickly as they should. In part, this simply reflects the limited resourcing for staff dedicated to sustainability issues. Inevitably not all topics can be covered and there has to be some cherry picking in which staff identify areas where they hope that progress can be made.

Elsewhere within the Assembly there is a belief that sustainable development is being mainstreamed and that there is senior management commitment. Here two arguments are advanced. One is that many of those who are now in senior posts in the Assembly had been involved in the thinking and the debates on the Government of Wales Act. For example, John Shortridge, who is now the Permanent Secretary, had been leading the team on the Act. “So at a senior official level they were well aware from the outset of the clause on sustainable development and thinking through its implications.” There is a suggestion that apart from a few well informed politicians the clause on sustainable development was more of a shock to the system at a political level than an official level. The second point that is made is that staff do not get appointed to senior positions unless they share the Assembly’s values. Senior staff therefore argue that therefore “SD is more embedded than you think. ...There is strategic buy-in at the highest levels to the Assembly agenda (e.g. equality).” It is claimed that if the commitment and understanding of sustainable development were not there at senior management levels it would be spotted by the politicians.

It is important to distinguish between the formal expression of the Assembly’s commitment to sustainable development in its Sustainable Development Scheme and its practices. One official argued that “The impact of the Sustainable Development Scheme has been zero. It fulfils the legal duty and that is all.” At a senior level officials did not want a sustainable development strategy and killed it off. Instead, it is claimed, sustainable development needs to be woven into the fabric, into all the things that the Assembly does. The discussion of the Integration Tool in Section 7 below illustrates one way in which sustainability can be integrated into policies.

The degree of buy-in to sustainability will vary both horizontally and vertically within the Assembly (as it does within local government and the ASPBs). As one official from outside of the Assembly commented of both his own organisation and the Assembly: “You cannot ignore environmental issues but for some staff it will be a side issue. But politically you cannot ignore it.”

At a political level, there has been glowing tribute paid by many interviewees to the commitment to the Assembly’s duty of Sue Essex, the former Minister with responsibility for sustainable development. The First Minister’s attendance at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in

August 2002 was also warmly welcomed as a mark of the commitment of a senior political figure to sustainable development. One practical outcome of the Summit was the central role played by the Assembly in the Guateng Declaration that established a global network of regional governments committed to sustainable development. According to the Sustainable Development 2003 Annual Report and Action Plan (p9) “We [the Assembly] now find ourselves in a leadership position internationally in sustainable development, which we never expected when making our Scheme. It doesn’t mean that we have all the answers. It does mean that we are firmly at the forefront in posing the key questions. We have placed ourselves in a wonderful position to access new best practice world-wide, and thus keep ourselves at the cutting edge of new thinking about sustainable development.” Whilst welcoming such confidence a wide range of NGOs caution that substance may not always match the rhetoric (see section on NGOs and the Assembly).

Organisationally the Cabinet established a Sub-Committee on sustainable development in May 2001. The First Minister chairs the sub-committee. It is designed to encourage integrated thinking on sustainability at a political level and to drive the Assembly agenda forward. Further indications of the desire of politicians to move towards a more sophisticated level of debate on sustainability was the creation of an Assembly Co-ordinating Group on Sustainable Development. This consists of the Chairs of Assembly Subject Committees and the sustainable development spokespeople from all four parties.

In its annual Sustainable Development Report and Action Plan the Assembly Government documents annual progress in terms of policies and strategies, Action Plan commitments and sustainability indicators. Although a ‘political’ rather than a self-critical document – always keen to indicate achievements rather than challenges - the Annual Reports vividly illustrate the breadth of activity that the Assembly is engaged in. The Reports also show an ever greater confidence in the achievements of the Assembly Government such that the most recent for 2003 claims that the actions it describes “show an unprecedented commitment to mainstreaming sustainable development principles as the way Wales does business. This isn’t a one-off event, but a cultural change, and as such takes time. Though there is still more to do during the 2½ years since the making of the Assembly’s Sustainable Development Scheme we have made considerable progress within the Assembly and with its partners and agencies” (Sustainable Development 2003 Annual Report and Action Plan, p22).

Assessment

The first term of the Assembly has been marked by considerable activity and some highly visible signs of commitment to sustainable development. Within the Assembly there is a belief that sustainability is being mainstreamed. However, as is to be expected, there is variability to be found in: the interpretation of sustainability by different parts of the Assembly; levels of commitment; and activities. Efforts to mainstream sustainability (see also the sub-section on the Integration Tool) within the Assembly have also meant that staff have appeared to those outside to be more inward looking than before. Amongst some in the NGOs, ASPBs and local government there is a feeling that the levels of activity and leadership of the first two years of the Assembly have not been matched by the last two years.

4 Assembly Sponsored Public Bodies

There are a small number of Assembly Sponsored Public Bodies (ASPBs) who have an obvious contribution to make to the Assembly's sustainability strategy. Most notable amongst these are the well-known environmental bodies, the Environment Agency and Countryside Council for Wales. Equally important though will be those ASPBs with an economic remit (like the Welsh Development Agency and Wales Tourist Board) and those with social or cultural responsibilities (such as the National Museums and Galleries of Wales).

For all of the ASPBs devolution has changed their relationship with government, with each other, and to a lesser extent with the NGO community. There is a strong belief amongst the ASPBs that they are less insular than they used to be. The drive towards partnership working means that organisations are more consensual and that there is much more dialogue between them and the Assembly. ASPBs also appear to be more accommodating towards NGOs. Partly this is a recognition by ASPBs that their credibility on sustainability matters requires legitimisation from the NGO community and also partly from a genuine desire to engage with partners in progressing sustainability.

Those within the NGO community who seek links with ASPBs may have quite different relationships but are supportive of their contacts. Amongst the variety of relationships between NGOs and ASPBs there will be those NGOs who often appear to be caught in clientelistic relationship in which they rely on an ASPB for funding (e.g. grant aid) and must keep the funder happy to continue with the work. Other NGOs will seek to lobby an ASPB especially when the latter is charged with a policy implementation task. A third type of relationship is where an NGO and an ASPB are working as equals in the common delivery of a project. Naturally the type of relationship that an NGO has with an ASPB (or a number of them) will colour its interpretation of how that ASPB is engaging with sustainability and also of the efforts of those ASPBs with which it has only passing knowledge. So amongst environment NGOs, for instance, there are good links with the Environment Agency and Countryside Council for Wales and a positive view of the commitment of these two organisations to sustainability. Relations are less well developed with the WDA and WTB and the views on the commitment of these organisations to sustainability more negative (e.g. questioning senior management values, or highlighting how individual initiatives on the environment or sustainability illustrated a lack of mainstreaming). NGOs with a development interest were much more sympathetic to the key economic ASPBs. For example, one interviewee noted how the challenge of sustainability is bringing together environment and development agencies, and that the agenda has driven them to work co-operatively. There was also a recognition from such NGOs that the poor performance of the Welsh economy and the relatively high levels of poverty had to be addressed as part of a move towards making Wales more sustainable.

In addition to the interviews with staff in the ASPBs, NGOs and Assembly a review was undertaken of the Remit Letters for 2003/4 issued by the Assembly to its executive ASPBs. The Letters are an annual event and are sent by Ministers but are drafted in consultation with the ASPBs. They set targets and deliverables for the forthcoming year. The Letters thus provide an important window into the agenda of government. Letters are posted on the WAG website and those available were reviewed for their content in relation to sustainable development. In this case the Letter had to make specific reference to sustainable development rather than its constituent elements (i.e. economic, social and environmental factors). The narrower interpretation certainly underplays the extent of the Assembly's commitment to

promoting sustainability through its ASPBs since, for example, it ignores the standard commitment to the social inclusion strategy of Communities First.

Within the Letters there are two different approaches to registering an ASPBs work on sustainability.

They are:

1. A commitment to sustainable development to be found in the body of a Remit Letter or an Annex and which reads: “The Assembly Government would like the [name of ASPB] to abide by sustainable development principles over the Corporate Plan period by:
 - Using SD principles in its procurement processes, including the encouragement of energy efficiency;
 - Working with the Assembly Government and other ASPBs, to develop sustainability appraisal tools, using this methodology in the [name of ASPB] Corporate Plan process and the appraisal of programmes and projects.

Progress in taking forward this agenda is to be reported annually.”

2. Mention of sustainable development in the Annex or body of letter along the following lines: “The priorities that we propose are designed to move Wales towards becoming the inclusive, *sustainable* and more equal country that we have set as our goal” (emphasis added).

The former is a much firmer and clearer commitment than the latter. Since ASPBs are also regularly held to account by their relevant Minister and subject committee then a commitment to promoting sustainable development in some of its working practices can be expected to impact across an organisation. Moreover, as progress now has to be reported annually ASPBs subject to this firmer commitment on sustainability will find their actions and practices subject to more thorough and wide-ranging scrutiny. A classification of Remit Letters is shown in the table below.

2003/4 ASPB Remit Letters and sustainable development

			Reference to sustainable development			
ASPB	Responsible Minister	Strategic policy documents	Commitment in body of letter	Mention in body of letter	Commitment in Annex of letter	Mention in Annex of letter
EA	SE	PfW	✓			
CCW	SE	PfW		✓	✓	
SCW	JR	PfW, AWW				✓
RCAHM	JR	PfW, AWW				✓
NLW	JR	PfW, AWW				✓
NMGW	JR	PfW, AWW				✓
WLB	JR	PfW, AWW				✓
ACW		PfW, AWW				✓
WDA	AD	PfW		✓	✓	
WTB	AD	PfW, AWW		✓	✓	
CAAW	JD	PfW, AWW, Better Wales		✓		
NCETW	JD				✓	

Key for ASPBs

EA – Environment Agency

CCW – Countryside Council for Wales

SCW - Sports Council for Wales

RCAHM – Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales

NLW – National Library of Wales

NMGW – National Museum and

WLB – Welsh Language Board

ACW – Arts Council of Wales

WTB – Welsh Tourist Board

WDA – Welsh Development Agency

CAAW – Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales

NCETW – National Council for Education and Training for Wales

Key for Ministers who signed the Remit Letters and were in post in early 2003

SE – Sue Essex

JR – Jenny Randerson

AD – Andrew Davies

JD – Jane Davidson

Key for strategic policy documents

PfW – Plan for Wales

AWW – A Winning Wales

BW – Better Wales

The results from the table show clear patterns of formal engagement with sustainable development for the ASPBs. Not surprisingly the two key environment ASPBs (the EA and CCW) are given a strong steer to promote sustainable development in their work, and so too are the two key economic ASPBs (WTB and WDA). The fifth ASPB to have a strong commitment to promoting sustainability in its remit is NCETW. Behind this lead group of ASPBs are a second tier who have a very brief mention of sustainable development within the body of their remit letters or much more commonly in an annex. So, at the very least the Remit Letters for 2003/4 establish a baseline in which ASPBs need to be able to show how they can contribute to the Assembly's sustainability agenda. The belief that there is at least an undercurrent of change taking place across all ASPBs is reinforced by the demand of the Letters that ASPBs must work to realise the goals of strategic Assembly policy documents, most notably and consistently the sustainability tinged Plan for Wales.

Further investigation of the Remit Letters and of the expectations of participants also reveals important nuances in the way in which sustainable development is being progressed. According to interviewees in the ASPBs the formulation of Remit Letters "is a joint exercise and 90% of it is." There is though usually a surprise when the final version of the Letter arrives. Presumably those working in the Assembly and the EA who have jointly drafted its Remit Letters are giving a clearer signal to that ASPB by putting the engagement with sustainability in the body of the letter rather than in an annex. At the very least the EAs Remit Letter gives the appearance of discussions between the two sides on the commitment to sustainable development. For those ASPBs who found that they had the same words on sustainable development as the EA but in Annex it may well have been the 10% surprise in a Remit Letter. Indeed, that the text on sustainable development is to be found in an Annex gives the appearance of being an afterthought by the Assembly and as one interviewee claimed "almost bolted on."

Variability in the formal commitments of ASPBs to pursuing sustainable development in their work is, of course, to be expected since it may well reflect the individual contributions that they can make to promote sustainability in Wales. What such variability may also reflect, however, is two factors. First, the differing enthusiasms and commitment to sustainability of different parts of the Assembly and the ASPBs for which they are responsible. Second, that sustainability advocates within the Assembly are able to push their message beyond the more receptive environment divisions within the Assembly and their ASPBs to the potentially more challenging economic and social agendas of other departments and ASPBs. The commitment to sustainable development in the annexes of the letters of the WDA, WTB and NCETW are therefore potentially a very important indication of the mainstreaming of sustainability within the Assembly.

For ASPBs, Section 121 of the Government of Wales Act has been received in rather different ways and it is possible to detect at least three positions. For some the Assembly's commitment to sustainable development has been enthusiastically embraced and acted in a very positive manner in progressing their own internal sustainability agenda. There is a strong belief that Section 121 has reinforced and quickened the pace of progress in mainstreaming sustainability. One interviewee claimed that their thinking had been moving faster than the Assembly's and that the Remit Letter now legitimated what had been happening within the organisation.

A second response from ASPBs is that the Assembly has made little difference to their work. One interviewee argued that "things [on sustainability] were happening anyway. Commitments [on sustainable development] had been entered into before the creation of the Assembly." ASPBs who believe themselves to be outside the mainstream of sustainability debates are also likely to feel that they have been untouched by the Assembly.

A third position is where there are staff keen to promote sustainable development within their organisation but who face indifference or hostility in doing so. As one interviewee explained: "Virtually all we have been able to achieve has been because of the Scheme. The sheer existence of the Scheme gave tremendous power to us all. It gave a clear and obvious reason for doing it [promoting sustainability]." The clear steer given in some of the Remit Letters to advocates of

sustainability within ASPBs helps them drive their agenda and crucially provides them with the belief that they now have the authority to do so. For one interviewee it meant that they could now show the letter to recalcitrant colleagues and say ‘Look this is what the Assembly wants us to do.’

A Remit Letter can thus provide a source of authority that those who are keen to advocate more sustainable approaches within their organisations can use as a lever to persuade less committed colleagues. The belief that the Remit Letter provides authority is a strong one. Those who are charged with promoting sustainability within ASPBs like their colleagues in other organisations, such as local government, may at times find themselves operating on the margins, so a Remit Letter can provide a resource that brings them and their ideas into the organisational mainstream. Local government sustainability officers who frequently find themselves operating on limited budgets and power do not have a similar source of authority on which they can draw to engage their colleagues or politicians (see section on Local Government).

So are Remit Letters and other guidance helping to make a difference to the work of ASPBs? Are they addressing sustainability in a more meaningful way than they might otherwise have done without Section 121? Such questions are, of course, very difficult to answer but there are some tantalising hints about what may be happening. First, ASPBs can point to all sorts of activities, initiatives or policies that they are involved with that have show an engagement with sustainability. There is clearly much that is happening in Wales that reflects the Assembly’s sustainability agenda. Probing deeper, though, it is difficult to ascertain how much of such activity would have happened in the absence of the Assembly’s sustainable development duty. At least three different perspectives can be detected.

One view is that those ASPBs who had an interest in sustainability were addressing the topic before the Assembly and any initiatives that they have adopted would have happened anyway. This is not, though, to dismiss the Assembly’s efforts because as one interviewee commented “The Assembly has been a good reminder, focussing and reinforcing our need to do things in this area.” The implication of this view is that the Assembly has not been sufficiently adventurous, it has not challenged some ASPBs to take sustainability further.

Another view is to be found amongst those ASPBs who believe that they can point to tangible differences that have been made in relation to policies or initiatives. Where a difference has been made on the ground is more difficult to detect at this stage. Here the Assembly is regarded as supportive and the most recent Remit Letter is, for example, regarded as helpful in taking forward the agenda on sustainable development. Since the Remit Letters are addressed to the most senior management in ASPBs it may help to more fully engage them in sustainability.

The Environment Agency offers a third perspective. Here it is possible to show that the Assembly has made a difference to its remit in Wales. The Agency is given formal guidance on how it should contribute to sustainable development (DEFRA 2002). The guidance for England makes clear that the Agency's contribution is environmental and not more broadly sustainable: "The Agency's advice [to Ministers] and influence should reflect the environmental perspective, where its expertise is greatest" (para 3.8). In Wales, however, the Agency is required to more fully embrace social and economic factors when offering advice and making decisions. Over time it is quite possible that the operating practices of the Agency in England and in Wales will be observably different with that latter more fully embracing a sustainability led approach to decision making.

From an Assembly perspective Remit Letters are an indication of their mark of authority over an ASPB as they establish "the government's expectations of the body" (Hall, 2002). But the Letters are also an expression of the Assembly's limits in that they must work within the statutory boundaries that govern the working of ASPBs. There is a clear sense of frustration from parts of the Assembly that the statutory remits of key ASPBs are militating against a more holistic approach to sustainability decision making. For example there is a belief that historically the Environment Agency and Countryside Council for Wales are very good at promoting environmental protection but they cannot make the broader trade-offs that are a necessary part of sustainable development. So, the argument goes, as they seek to take sustainable development forward and address large and complex issues the Assembly is running up against the statutory remits of some of their ASPBs. One senior official argued that "The tension within the system is preventing us discussing sustainable development in a grown up way. We cannot work as Team Wales." Whether this situation will change following the Environment Agency's

belief that it now has a much stronger sustainability remit than it has enjoyed in the past is a debatable point and not one likely to be quickly resolved.

Assessment

The ASPBs have a key role in delivering the Assembly's sustainable development agenda. However, it is clear that there is variability in the extent to which such bodies are currently willing or able to mainstream sustainable development in their activities. The Assembly is also inconsistent in its encouragement of ASPBs to deliver on sustainability.

5 Local government

As part of the new devolution politics the Government of Wales Act formally strengthened links between the Assembly and local government by placing a duty upon the former to sustain and promote the latter. This commitment has taken a number of forms including a commitment to partnership working and the signing of compacts and policy agreements. Policy agreements, for example, are to be set with individual local authorities to further the aims of Better Wales, a key policy document. The idea behind them is "to facilitate a change in the relationship between local and central government based on agreements focussed on the delivery of key policy outcomes as opposed to and led by finance" (WLGA 2000, para 2). This means that the Assembly will negotiate targets with local authorities, and provide associated funding to meet these targets. However, it is important to note that the WLGA does not wish to see a direct link between funding and individual targets but rather they "are seeking a corporate payment of money as opposed to a target-by-target achievement payment. The presence of hypothecated funding in England means that ring fenced payment by service is acceptable. In Wales the Association feels that this defeats the object of Policy Agreements, which aims for agreements across the board and rewards authority wide corporate performance" (WLGA 2001, para 6). These negotiations will be underpinned by the Assembly's cross cutting theme of sustainable development. In real terms, this has great potential to influence the local authorities activities i.e. cash with sustainability strings attached. From a practitioners point of view, this can provide access to areas of authority activity that would normally be beyond the scope of their remit.

The question that arises then is, do these new arrangements that are meant to ensure more consensual central-local relations based around shared agendas and focussed on delivery (i.e. outcomes) rather than simply monitoring inputs (i.e. funding) provide the means to deliver sustainable development at the local level? Whilst the new arrangements may take time to settle down and deliver the results below do seem to show that there are difficulties in mainstreaming sustainability in local government. This is despite the considerable enthusiasm that exists amongst local government sustainability coordinators for the Assembly's sustainable development agenda. Part of the problem appears to be that there is no overall requirement from the Assembly for local government to demonstrate that they are mainstreaming sustainable development.

The results below summarise in tabular form and using selected quotes the views of local government sustainable development officers. Please note that in reporting the findings below it has not been possible to categorise all of the responses and so the numbers will not always tally with one another.

The results are presented around four tables:

- Officers perceptions of Section 121
- The actions that they believe have resulted from Section 121
- Officers perceptions of the Sustainable Development Compact
- The actions that they believe have resulted from the Compact.

Officers perceptions of the influence of the Sustainable Development Scheme on their authority

Lot of influence	Limited influence	No influence or limited to rhetoric
0	13	8

One of the most enthusiastic comments on the Scheme was:

‘That we have a Scheme is a major achievement. It has raised the profile of sustainable development and provided opportunities to begin to understand what can be done (e.g. procurement). ... It’s like the penny is just dropping. But there is only so much WAG can do. Eighty per cent of delivery of sustainable development is through local authorities and QUANGOs. At the moment it’s all talk.’

Another sympathetic comment but with a caveat was:

‘It is positive that sustainable development is in WAGs constitution. Local authority policy agreements have been influenced by the Scheme. But Wales seems to be being marketed as being great in the SD department, but the Scheme is not making a huge difference.’

Seven of the officers who believed that the Scheme was having a limited influence on the work of the council also mentioned unprompted that its influence was weakened because the council was receiving confusing messages from WAG. Comments from these officers included:

‘There is a piecemeal approach from WAG in mainstreaming sustainable development into the agenda. There is evidence from a variety of schemes (Communities First, Health etc) that thinking is not being joined up with WAG and that affects the authority in delivering WAGs aspirations.’

‘There is no consistent message from WAG.’

Negative comments on the Scheme included:

‘There is no clear carrot for local government [on sustainability]. There is hardly any member and officer awareness due to this.’

‘There is no link between the Council’s corporate objectives of SD and the Scheme. The only link is with the Waste Strategy.’

Whilst another commented that they had not been able to use the Scheme to influence senior management or politicians. They continued:

‘Sustainable development is not seen as a key issue. Its never been on the agenda of the management team.’

‘The SD Scheme has no influence on the Council, other than the SD Co-ordinator.’

‘The Scheme has had no real influence on the Council. It’s just SD policy rhetoric. There is no evidence of language or understanding changing in the Council as a result [of the Scheme].’

‘The Council say the words [on SD] but it’s pretty much lip service.’

‘Officers and members are unaware of the Scheme.’

Officers perceptions of the actions of their authority as a result of the Sustainable Development Scheme

Mainstream sustainable development	Influence policies and/or programmes	Influence senior management (officers and/or councillors)	Tick boxes
0	9	3	3

Officers who could begin to recognise the influence of the Scheme on their council said:

‘The SD Scheme has been used to a certain extent to promote this [SD] to senior and middle managers and politicians to drive activity... There is some evidence of the Scheme filtering through the Council’s activities...’

‘The Scheme has been used to influence members and senior managers. There is some link with the regeneration strategy.’

‘The SD Scheme has had some influence. Information and messages coming from WAG mean the Council is shaping documents to fit in with those of the Assembly.’

‘The Scheme has been used to persuade awkward departments. It’s used as an angle to pull them into line. Objective 1 grants tied to SD make a huge difference...’

Officers were also asked specific questions about the Sustainable Development Compact agreed between the Assembly and the WLGA in July 2002. The aim of the Compact is “to promote close and harmonious relationships and good communications and to foster constructive co-operation.” It

outlines areas where the Assembly and local government will co-operate to deliver policy outputs, and these are education; sustainability appraisal; climate change; community planning and developing quality of life indicators. There are very few commitments within the Compact and rather more aspirational language in the form of ‘promoting’ and ‘encouraging’.

Officers perceptions of the influence of the Sustainable Development Compact on their authority

Lot of influence	Limited influence	No influence or limited to rhetoric
0	6	15

Typical comments on the Compact included:

‘It is just about protocols. It has no real relevance or direct impact to our work.’

‘It’s another piece of paper.’

‘Another document with fine words.’

‘I haven’t come across this, so I’ve no view.’

‘There is no resonance between the aims of the Compact and of the Council.’

‘There is no ownership of the Compact [in the council]. Members reaction was “who do WAG think they are telling us our priorities”.’

Officers perceptions of the actions of their authority as a result of the Sustainable Development Compact

Mainstream sustainable development	Influence policies and/or programmes	Influence senior management (officers and/or councillors)	Tick boxes
0	0	2	3

‘It [the SD Compact] needs greater buy in from members and senior officers.’

‘In principle this [the Compact] is good but it has an undefined method of delivery especially in engaging members and senior managers.’

It [the Compact] has been endorsed by the Council but it has no meaning. There is no pressure for this to be recognised or taken on board by the Cabinet. This is the challenge.’

‘The weakness is it [the Compact] has no influence on corporate management.’

Assessment

In some respects the findings on local government are the most worrying. Local government has been dealing with sustainability issues for well over a decade and has dedicated staff in post to promote local sustainability and who identify with the Assembly’s agenda. What emerges, though, is a mismatch between the expectations of staff over what they believe the Assembly should be doing to promote the mainstreaming of sustainability and what they can feel is happening within their own organisations. Officers do not believe that there is the external scrutiny of local government and sustainability processes to ensure that senior management is engaged. They also believe that local government is subject to inconsistent messages on sustainable development in different policy areas from the Assembly.

6 NGOs and the Assembly

The Welsh NGO community contributing to debates on, and the implementation of, sustainability is large and diverse. At other points in the text NGO views have been included in the analysis and in this section NGO perspectives on the Assembly’s sustainable development duty are briefly outlined and whilst it is not possible to do justice to the variety of the sustainability community common themes do emerge. Foremost is the divide between those drawn from environment, social and development

groups who believe that the Assembly's agenda is relevant for their work and those from the business community who largely believe that the Assembly's agenda is marginal to their core concerns. Other issues for the NGO community are: partnership and distinctiveness and each of these is addressed in turn.

The Assembly's agenda

The challenges that the Assembly faces in engaging business as a partner in promoting sustainability are very similar to those experienced by sustainability co-ordinators across Britain seeking to promote local sustainability strategies. The Assembly has been no more successful in its efforts than many councils. It is important to recognise, however, that there is not a single business perspective on the environment or sustainability but a number.

For instance, large companies in Wales, such as the inward investors, will recognise the economic value of improving their resource efficiency and that they cannot ignore the corporate social responsibility agenda. A common argument here is that business is often undertaking many activities that as part of its normal practices contribute to sustainability. The Welsh economy, though is dominated by SMEs and from such businesses point of view the Assembly's sustainability agenda is largely an irrelevance. Businesses, particularly SMEs, are "fighting to survive and messages on sustainability pass them by." The Business Partnership Council, where the Assembly discusses matters of common concern with representatives of business has done little to address sustainable development or make it meaningful for Welsh businesses. Even in a sector like tourism where the links between sustainability (or at least environmental) issues and firm performance could be made more easily it is still rare to find businesses who subscribe to green tourism. The large majority of tourism enterprises are yet to be convinced that sustainability relates to them because they still see environmental (let alone sustainability) concerns as a cost for them to bear rather than a business opportunity.

Although "sustainability is a difficult message to get across to businesses" there are a number of initiatives to promote better environmental or sustainability practices in firms. One interviewee claimed that the business and environmental support services in Wales are amongst the most

sophisticated in Britain. The increasing number of Green Dragon awards (a Welsh environmental system standard) was noted as an indicator of the growing recognition by business that it had to address environmental issues. The business perspective was much more critical: those gaining environmental accreditation are in a minority and many services for business were viewed as funding led rather than responding to demand. The business contribution to sustainability in Wales is at present firmly based around improving environmental management and resource efficiency within firms.

A more positive picture of the Assembly's sustainability agenda emerges from other parts of the NGO community. The duty within the Government of Wales Act is regarded as a positive feature. One member of an NGO argued "The fact that the duty is there put Ministers in a rather exposed position. It was not an option for them to ignore sustainable development." Another interviewee believed that the duty meant that "sustainability is higher in the consciousness of AMs. They are aware it is a responsibility." There is a widespread belief that sustainability would have slipped down the political agenda if Section 121 had not been in the Government of Wales Act.

Even within the NGO sustainability community groups are assessing the performance of the Assembly in rather different ways. Some are very issue centred and, for example, are looking for action by the Assembly in particular areas such as waste. Others are recognising a change in the language that is used. The phrase 'sustainable development' or variations on it are now becoming much more widespread, even if the message is not always consistent. The sense that something was now different for Wales was regarded as important. One interviewee commented "There is a recognition outside of Wales that something different is happening inside Wales and this has been shown in the Sustainable Development Commission visits to Wales". Another interviewee suggested that Section 121 had helped to "get the Assembly outside of Wales. Rhodri [Morgan, the First Minister] and Wales are being applauded and people in regional governments elsewhere are interested in what is happening [in Wales]."

Amongst many of the groups there was a great deal of sympathy for Assembly staff and recognition that change is taking longer than expected. There was also a clear sense that in the near future people wanted to be able to point to tangible differences that the Assembly's duty had made to both policies

and projects. One interviewee commented that “We are now waiting for the Assembly to deliver.” There is also for some groups a sense of frustration beginning to emerge at what they regard as the highly variable progress that the Assembly has made. Whilst they applaud high profile initiatives such as the Assembly’s role in the Guateng Network or the First Minister’s attendance at Johannesburg, they do not see a consistent pattern of achievement. The belief that “We [Wales] are not as far ahead as we could have been”, or that “Wales was making quite a lot of progress up to two years ago”, or “We are now falling behind Scotland” are views that a number of groups would have sympathy with.

Partnership

Although there are a number of different meanings of partnership (see Bristow et al 2002) for many of the social and environmental NGOs the belief that they could be a partner with the Assembly is an important one. By and large that belief in partnership is not based around institutional structures but rather that “the Assembly is a permeable institution” That permeability leads to opportunities for NGOs to exploit in promoting their agenda.

The spirit of partnership and co-operation that infused the creation of the Assembly, combined with their practical experiences, has influenced the strategy that many of the NGOs adopt. For some NGOs working with the executive is part and parcel of their operating style, for others there has been a conscious decision about the relationship that they wished to cultivate. One interviewee commented “We decided as an agency very early on that we would work with the Assembly from the inside rather than throwing bricks from the outside.”

NGOs look to particular parts of the Assembly to develop a relationship. Neither NGOs nor the Assembly have the resources to spread themselves and so for both parties there develop key points of access. These are used to exchange ideas and agendas. Not surprisingly groups develop their closest relationships with those parts of the Assembly that they feel is most sympathetic to their ideas. For environmental NGOs, for instance, that will mean they will want to cultivate good contacts with the parts of the Assembly that deal with environmental and sustainability issues and that their links with the economic development functions of the Assembly are much less well developed. However, it is

worth pointing out that both groups and the Assembly enjoy wide-ranging links. Environment groups, for example, have contacts with the Assembly that spread well beyond the traditional environmental activities of government. This is because groups believe that the “Assembly is massively more accessible to us.” One NGO warned, though, that access is not the same as influence: “You can have access but achieve nothing.”

Distinctiveness

Amongst the business community Section 121 has had less impact than elsewhere. However, for some NGOs there is a clear sense that they are gaining an increasingly distinctive presence compared to their English counterparts. Indeed, there are groups who owe their existence to devolution. In addressing the Welsh sustainability agenda NGOs are beginning to formulate ideas and approaches that are different from those of their English colleagues. One interviewee claimed that “Section 121 encouraged NGOs to work with government and ASPBs.” There are also patchy signs emerging of a common language and perspective on sustainability amongst NGOs that transcends narrow group objectives and manifests itself in a wish to work co-operatively. For example, the socio-economic dimension of sustainability is well recognised, and as one interviewee from an environmental NGO put it: “there is an environmental leg [to sustainable development] but we also have to make the social and economic link.”

Assessment

NGO perceptions of what the Assembly has achieved in relation to its sustainable development agenda are nearly all positive. There are, however, a number of interviewees who feel that the Assembly’s progress has not been as rapid or consistent as it could have been. Amongst some NGOs there is a very strong belief that other parts of the UK are now becoming more advanced than Wales in their efforts to implement more sustainable practices. The business community has at best only been partially engaged as a partner in sustainability and the agenda remains largely focussed on business and the environment.

7 Procurement and the Integration Tool

The Remit Letters to those ASPBs where the Assembly has been keenest to promote sustainability mention that they should pursue efforts in relation to procurement and appraisal. Both topics are also highlighted in the Assembly's Annual Sustainable Development Report. They are clear examples of areas where the Assembly may hope to mainstream sustainability. So what has the Assembly been able to achieve?

Procurement

Excesses and inefficiency in government have long been a source of concern and have led to a range of initiatives. One of the most recent is the setting up in April 2000 of the Office of Government Commerce (OGC). The remit of the OGC is to modernise procurement in government, and deliver substantial value for money improvements. To do this the OGC has developed an integrated procurement strategy and policy that applies across government. In other words, what from one perspective was locally sensitive purchasing and from another perspective fragmentation, is to disappear. As its chief executive has noted "OGC is committed to providing strong leadership from the centre and to developing a more strategic and coherent approach to Government procurement" (Gershon 2001). For the OGC environmental procurement has to be taken forward within its value for money framework and EU procurement criteria and this gives departments only limited flexibility, for example, in specifying products that are in line with their environmental strategies or that can show reduced running costs (e.g. energy saving) over the life of the product (Gershon 2001). For the Assembly with its sustainability remit it is not sufficient to simply engage in greener purchasing it needs to further to consider, for instance, social issues as well. So how has it gone about meeting this challenge and how constrained has it been by the OGC strategy?

Traditionally procurement in the Assembly has been undertaken on a mixture of principles. Some purchasing decisions are decentralised while others are the responsibility of the Procurement Unit. The result has been that over the years discretion has built up over who buys what and whilst such flexibility may be useful for line managers their individual purchasing decisions may not accord with

the principles of sustainable development. Therefore, the Procurement Unit and the then SDU formed a working group to develop a common purchasing framework in which sustainable development principles were enshrined. The public outcome of the work has been to encourage the Assembly's suppliers to think in sustainability terms. The key development here has been the formulation in October 2001 of a Voluntary Code, *Winning Our Business*, which it is hoped suppliers to the Assembly will subscribe to.

The Voluntary Code notes that the Assembly has a budget of over £8 billion a year and that "The impact of this spending in social, economic and environmental terms is significant, so we want to ensure that the impact of that money is positive rather than negative." The Assembly intends to achieve this aim by promoting or reinforcing three types of actions amongst its suppliers. First, the Assembly wishes to encourage local firms to win its contracts. An important expression of the philosophy behind the Voluntary Code is that "Many people living in Wales are without jobs so, wherever possible, the Assembly would like to use its money to create jobs. Positive action – but not positive discrimination – will be taken to assist this process. (A buy local approach). Second, workers should be treated fairly. Third, suppliers should strive towards continuous environmental improvement. What can the Code achieve? In a message to its suppliers the Assembly point out "The more you are doing, the more likely it is that you will win our business – particularly on large contracts."

Promoting more environmental or sustainable procurement is bedevilled by the (perceived) constraints of national (i.e. the OGC strategy) and EU principles that operate in this area. For example, one of the implications of the buy local approach in *Winning Our Business* is that it should be clear that buying local is being promoted but instead something vaguer has been formulated, presumably because local procurement would be seen as discriminatory by EU procurement rules. And yet local production and consumption may well be an element of a more sustainable Welsh economy. It is a moot point as to whether the Assembly's legal duty to promote sustainable development would override procurement imperatives that may undermine sustainability. In what may become a test case, and was recognised as "pushing at the perceived boundaries of public procurement" the Assembly has asked suppliers to

include benefit to the community in contract delivery (Assembly Press Notice 4 February 2003). In this case a regeneration scheme will include training for the unemployed in the contract.

The Integration Tool

The Integration Tool is designed as an integrated appraisal mechanism to be used by officials when developing policies and evaluating projects. It was developed with the Assembly by Forum for the Future. The Tool asks decision makers a number of standard appraisal questions such as what is being proposed, why, and potential risks. What it then adds is a set of questions about how a policy will contribute to a set of Assembly objectives. It works as an integrative tool in two ways. First, it encourages officials to see how their work contributes to broader goals. Second, appraisal is a group activity involving individuals from outside the source of the policy, so again encourages thinking beyond departmental boundaries.

The Tool has been promoted internally and externally and has generally been well received. A number of interviewees have seen the Tool as one of the Assembly's major achievements for its first term. One interviewee from an NGO claimed that the Tool showed the way the Assembly was trying to work, that it was trying to break down barriers between divisions and that this would never have happened before. There were, however, also misgivings about the Tool. Criticisms focussed on two issues. One was that the Assembly goals in the Tool were drawn from Better Wales and this adopted something of a pepperpot approach to policy and so the Tool could not be regarded as a sustainability appraisal mechanism. One interviewee commented "It may have value as a policy tool, but it doesn't contribute much to sustainable development." The second criticism is that in the development of the Tool the Assembly has not utilised the expertise of its stakeholders or sought to involve them in its development.

The role of Winning Wales in the Integration Tool is worthy of further mention because it does provide further evidence of the mainstreaming of sustainability within the Assembly. According to one interviewee A Winning Wales received brickbats from the business community because they claimed it was not tightly focussed enough – it had too many objectives – and a business plan should only have

two or three key objectives. But, the interviewee continued, what A Winning Wales did have was a commitment to sustainable development, politicians who believed in it, and a recognition that you could no longer go for an old-fashioned development strategy. It is not a business plan or a plan for business because it is broader. It is, therefore, something different from previous development perspectives.

A draft of A Winning Wales was passed to Forum for the Future for their assessment and “secured a broadly favourable initial sustainability appraisal” (The Second Sustainable Development Report, p5). One interviewee from an NGO noted that one of the achievements of the Assembly was that “policies are different from what they would have been. The Winning Wales redrafts recognised sustainable development.” The benefit of the Integration Tool here is twofold. One is, it is seen as an aid to better decision making and is therefore something that officials can feel comfortable with. For instance, A Better Wales was being drafted from a development-oriented division within the Assembly that may not have been perceived as naturally sympathetic to sustainability ideals. The other point is that the Tool made a difference to a flagship Assembly policy in draft form and so quickly proved its credibility both internally and externally. Feedback from the appraisal on how the content and delivery of A Winning Wales could be amended in the future has led to suggestions for the revising of the awarding of grants so that they “act much more as a lever to achieve as many as possible of the Assembly’s goals” (interview with Assembly official).

Assessment

The Assembly’s approach to procurement and appraisal provide useful insights into its efforts to mainstream sustainable development. At their heart both initiatives are an approach to mainstreaming that works with the grain of the system and seek to bring people along with the agenda. Procurement also illustrates the caution of the Assembly; a soft approach to sustainability. Local government, for example, has been more adventurous in pushing at the boundaries of environmental and sustainable procurement. The Integration Tool raises a rather different challenge for the Assembly. The Tool represents a considerable effort of time and resources to improve decision making and as such appears

to have gained considerable legitimacy within the Assembly. As yet, though, there is little to show as to what it has achieved or that it made any impact at senior political levels.

8 Issues, agendas and change

Despite limited resources, but with great goodwill and enormous enthusiasm the Assembly and its partners have begun to engage with the sustainability agenda. The key findings from the project are:

6. people across all categories of interviewee are comfortable talking the language of sustainable development and supportive of the Assembly's agenda.
7. Mainstreaming of sustainability is taking place. The commitment of senior politicians in the Assembly to sustainability is applauded.
8. Amongst some organisations there is a desire for further and more rapid progression of sustainability. Expectations have been raised, not least by the Assembly itself, and people are keen to see the challenges of sustainability faced. This is a very positive message.
9. The Sustainable Development Scheme, Learning to Live Differently and its associated Action Plan do not provide an effective agenda for action for the Assembly and its partners.
10. Initiatives to promote sustainability have often been opportunistic rather than based on an evidence-based analysis of where the Assembly and its partners could best place their efforts.
11. As one interviewee noted a lot of sustainable development policies may not have seen the light of day during the first term of the Assembly without Section 121. "The duty has made a lot of difference in getting the [sustainability] framework there. The outcomes we are still awaiting."

A key challenge for the second term is, therefore to turn that agenda into a programme for delivery. In other words to pull the levers and press the buttons of implementation. This raises quite separate

challenges and in some ways they are even more difficult than putting sustainable development on the public policy agenda. For it may mean that the Assembly has to address three priorities: recognising tensions in sustainable development, broadening and deepening the commitment to sustainable development, and promoting a consistent message.

Tensions in sustainable development

The WDA and WTB have strong economic imperatives guiding their approach as shown, for example, by their corporate plans. Adding explicit commitments on sustainable development to their roles may lead to the realisation of a triple bottom line dividend in which economic, social and environmental goals are realised simultaneously. Or it may mean that the Assembly is placing a 'soft' sustainability commitment on ASPBs. In this case the expectations of ASPBs of what they will deliver is limited and a business as usual scenario will prevail. Or it could mean that the Assembly recognises that there are tensions in its economic, cultural, social and environmental ASPBs meeting multiple objectives as they are currently formulated and that it needs to recognise those tensions and decide what the corporate priorities of its ASPBs should be.

Broadening and deepening the commitment to sustainable development

There is evidence of the mainstreaming of sustainable development in the Assembly, its ASPBs and local government. However, key individuals recognise that there are pockets of indifference or resistance to sustainable development. Within the ASPBs Remit Letters can, for instance, provide a lever to stimulate organisation-wide thinking on sustainability. The political and senior management commitment within the Assembly also makes people aware that they cannot ignore sustainability. Broadening and deepening that commitment to sustainable development will require political and senior management input, and that is, perhaps, most especially true for local government. To move beyond a shallow mainstreaming may also raise questions about the authority and resourcing of units or individuals charged with promoting sustainability within their organisations. Mainstreaming may progress smoothly but what if resistance should be encountered? How is it to be overcome? Within an evolving partnership between central and local government (see below) different buttons may need to

pushed and new levers identified by the Assembly to ensure that the current experiences of sustainability co-ordinators are not repeated in the future.

A consistent message

The Assembly is working within a complex network of relationships. Although it is still working through those relationships with its partners an indication of the variety of those relationships can be drawn from the two ideal types (coercive and partnership) of governance illustrated in the table below.

Delivering sustainable development in Wales: models of governance

Feature	Coercive	Partnership
Targets	Set from centre, prescriptive	Agreed by consent
Means to achieve goals	Hold to account and audit, rule bound relationships	Educate and spread knowledge
Agendas	Likely to be different agendas held by different actors	Seek shared agenda
Lower level autonomy	Minimise local discretion	Accept local discretion and autonomy
knowledge	Concentrated at the centre and to be dispersed from the centre outwards	Knowledge diffused and seek means to utilise local knowledge
Openness	Limited and to favoured few	Consultative and participatory
Views of lower tier of government/ASPBs	hierarchy	Partner in policy delivery
Funding	Ring fence budgets	Budgets determined according to local priorities within a common agenda
Policy outcomes	Seek uniformity around a baseline because monitoring for compliance with targets	Accept variability above baseline because seeking improvements in practice and spreading knowledge

The two models of governance involve quite different means for seeking to achieve sustainability goals. How might these best be utilised to promote sustainability? What capacity (e.g. power, resources, skills) are required by different participants to utilise features of the different models?

Annex A

Sources of data

The data used in this report has been collected from a number of sources. These include:

Documentary sources - material produced by the Assembly, ASPBs, local government, the Welsh Local Government Association and NGOs has been extensively utilised to provide contextual and interpretative data on the implementation of sustainable development in Wales.

Interviews – where there have been gaps in data from the documentary sources these have been closed wherever possible by undertaking key person interviews. The interviews have targeted three groups: those who work in the Assembly, local government officers and the NGO community. Much of the data on local government reported here has been collected from local government officers whose primary responsibility is to promote sustainable development and all are members of a Sustainable Development Co-ordinators Cymru (SDCC) network¹. The interview programme with local government officers was extensive and involved contacts with staff in all councils. It was not possible to repeat such a comprehensive exercise with other groups and a more selective approach has been adopted.

When conducting interviews in order to facilitate the free and open exchange of information wherever possible visits were made to the offices of interviewees to conduct face to face interviews. Interviewees were promised that neither they nor their organisation would be identified when reporting on the project findings. Interviews lasted up to two hours.

Local government interviewees were asked structured questions that related to the influence of the Sustainable Development Scheme and the Sustainable Development Compact. By asking each officer very similar questions it has enabled comparisons to be made between authorities. Questions probed the perceptions of officers because their perceptions will be key to the actions that they take (or do not take) in progressing sustainability in their organisations. A similarly structured interview schedule was

not appropriate for the other interviewees because of the diversity of organisations from which respondents were selected. Nevertheless interviewees were asked common questions to ascertain: their perceptions of Section 121; the impact (if any) that they believed that the Assembly's sustainable development remit may have had on their organisation; any changes that they may have observed in their relations with the Assembly, ASPBs or NGOs; and what they believe have been the successes or failures to date in the implementation of the Scheme.

Feedback - early results from the project were presented to the Welsh Sustainable Development Forum and the feedback from Forum members incorporated into the subsequent analysis. I would like to record my thanks to the Forum and its members for the opportunity that they give me to discuss preliminary findings with them.

¹ The data on local government was collected by my colleague Alan Netherwood and I would like to record my gratitude for him allowing me access to his material.

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