



Royal College of  
General Practitioners



*Sustainable  
Development Unit*

# A Guide to Sustainable Development for Clinical Commissioning Groups



# Commissioning for Sustainable Development

This document is designed to help clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) establish commissioning structures and processes that will deliver business profitability, longevity and resilience in a rapidly changing world.

To strategic and business minded organisations, the future challenges in health are clear:

- a perpetually increasing demand on health services, fuelled by a growing, less healthy, aging population with numerous co-morbidities;
- increasing expectations around quality of clinical outcomes, and experience of using the service;
- budgetary constraints in the public sector;
- global resource uncertainty, due to diminishing resources coupled with increasing demand from the developing world;
- a changing climate and the well documented impact this will have on health .

To manage these challenges, CCGs will need to adopt new approaches that encourage the seamless integration of services, managing demand by providing appropriate services in the community rather than incentivising secondary care activity. They will need to use evidence to underpin decision making, and take into account the wider impact of health care delivery; balancing the operational needs of the present with the strategic needs of the future. To be effective, CCGs will need to build strong collaborative links with secondary care clinicians and local authorities. CCGs need to face the challenges of the 21st century, and break the cycle of costly structural changes by delivering effective, lean, sustainable commissioning.

Doing things differently and delivering sustainability in the system requires lateral thinking, whole systems thinking and the ability to grasp the bigger picture. This is your opportunity to transform the entire health system by applying the problem solving skills honed in your clinic.

*"We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them"*

[Albert Einstein]

# What is “sustainability” and “Commissioning for Sustainable Development”?

“Sustainability” can be defined as meeting the needs of today without compromising the needs of tomorrow.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, a sustainable organisation is one that often has the best chance of long term survival.

“Commissioning for Sustainable Development” is the process by which commissioners improve both the sustainability of an organisation, and the way it provides services and interacts with people in the community. It is about striking the right balance between the three key areas of financial, social and environmental sustainability when making commissioning decisions.

Commissioning for Sustainable Development:

- saves money
- saves resources
- benefits staff and patients

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## Why is sustainability a commissioning issue?

- 1) Managing system risk: sustainability is essentially about excellence in business management. Commissioning organisations can and must take a whole systems approach to both delivery (ensuring integration of provider services) and managing future risks (for example, resource uncertainty or climate change);
- 2) Managing demand: activity based commissioning will not incentivise managing demand for health services. We need to start thinking about incentivising and enabling a ‘health and well-being service’, focussed on an upstream preventative approach, as opposed to an ‘ill health service’ based on activity;
- 3) Contractual Levers: commissioners hold the money, and therefore have the power to ensure that providers adopt sustainable business practices.

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## How can CCGs shape a more sustainable NHS?

1. By developing a “whole systems” approach to commissioning;
2. By understanding their role in improving the sustainability of healthcare;
3. By using the commissioning cycle to increase sustainability and to implement the NHS Carbon Reduction Strategy.<sup>2</sup>

The NHS Carbon Reduction Strategy has given the NHS a mandate to reduce its carbon footprint and to become far more sustainable. Cutting carbon emissions is a legal requirement, and the UK Government has committed to a 34% reduction in emissions by 2020 and an 80% reduction by 2050. The Carbon Reduction Strategy reinforces the need to integrate environmental awareness into commissioning services.

# A checklist for clinical commissioning groups

## Actions for sustainable commissioning

### The commissioner:

- has helped to develop a Board approved Sustainable Development Management Plan.
- has signed up to the Good Corporate Citizenship Assessment Model.
- measures, monitors and is trying to reduce carbon where possible across the organisation.
- is actively raising carbon awareness at every level of the organisation.

### The provider organisation:

- has a board-approved Sustainable Development Management Plan.
- has signed up to the Good Corporate Citizenship Assessment Model.
- measures, monitors and is trying to reduce carbon where possible across the organisation.
- is actively raising carbon awareness at every level of the organisation.

### The relationship between commissioner and provider:

- is based on an agreed approach to sustainability and carbon reduction.

### Ensure roles are clear in areas of:

- maximising preventative measures relevant to the service.
- awareness raising for sustainability and carbon reduction.
- considering innovative ideas to improve the quality and sustainability of the service.
- reducing demand.
- measuring and monitoring carbon.

### The service pathway:

- maximises prevention, either as part of this service or another closely related service.
- reduces supply induced demand, by ensuring that need has been demonstrated for this service.
- uses best available evidence of effectiveness in deciding details of service design and local population need.

### Emission reductions and improving sustainability

Are there any substitutions or innovations that would make this service more sustainable in the following areas:

- Energy - total consumption
- Food - locally produced
- Services - sustaining the local community
- Water - better use of water
- Waste - reduce, reuse and recycle
- Travel - reducing carbon footprint
- Use of pharmaceuticals - minimise wastage

### Procurement

- Are procurement decisions being made using "The Procurement for Carbon Reduction" (P4CR) tool?

Available at: [www.sdu.nhs.uk/publications-resources/23/Procuring-for-Carbon-Reduction-P4CR--NEW/](http://www.sdu.nhs.uk/publications-resources/23/Procuring-for-Carbon-Reduction-P4CR--NEW/)

## ACTIONS:

- 1) Have a Board approved Sustainable Development Management Plan

Guidance on the NHS SDU web site. Available at: [www.sdu.nhs.uk/sd\\_and\\_the\\_nhs/sd-governance/sdmp.aspx](http://www.sdu.nhs.uk/sd_and_the_nhs/sd-governance/sdmp.aspx)

- 2) Sign up to the Good Corporate Citizenship Assessment Model

A self assessment tool to help organisations improve their sustainability, resources and case studies. Available at: [www.corporatecitizen.nhs.uk](http://www.corporatecitizen.nhs.uk)

# How can clinical commissioning groups shape a sustainable NHS?

## 1. Developing a whole systems approach

Looking through a sustainable development lens provides the big picture view that can help consider the social, economic and environmental conditions under which any approach to healthcare must achieve its outcomes. It offers a structured way for CCGs to take strategic considerations into their daily operations by: avoiding the wrong outcomes, now and for the future; cutting out waste; increasing consistency in quality of care by innovating on a systems basis; and allowing the NHS to shrink in physical terms while maintaining value for patients and communities by shifting to more preventative care.

CCGs can use a whole systems approach to sustainable commissioning to be more effective by:

- using it to make decisions as a whole system so the total picture is considered when making investment and disinvestment decisions and to ensure all of their operations boost the wider determinants of health e.g. including procurement and the healthcare estate
- helping to balance present/ future costs and benefits by managing tensions and trade-offs to balance patients'/ communities' needs now and in the future, and increasing the resilience of investment decisions by considering future trends and uncertainties.
- helping prioritise health systems over 'territories' - to overcome the scepticism and territorial attitudes that might get in the way of working as a health economy and creating a platform for collaboration across boundaries.

## 2. Foundations for effective commissioning

According to the Royal College of General Practitioners good commissioning is as holistic as good general practice. The RCGP Centre for Commissioning believes healthcare commissioning should be based on the following foundations:

### Improving outcomes

A focus on improving outcomes for patients and communities, which prioritises demand over supply and encourages innovative approaches to the delivery of services.

### Patient empowerment

The promotion of shared approaches to care, which keeps patients fully informed and gives them power to shape their own healthcare and support to care for themselves.

### Evidence-based practice

An evidence-based approach to assessing needs, designing services and monitoring outcomes, drawing on research expertise and the experience of patients and the clinical community.

### Community mobilisation

Values of public service, which place the needs of communities first, and seek to harness the power of people and communities to determine their own health outcomes, through community engagement and organising.

An integration of healthcare services with the wider public health agenda, to prevent ill health and promote wellbeing in its widest sense.

The promotion of health, ensuring that the voice of the vulnerable, overlooked and ignored is heard and their needs safeguarded.

### Sustainability

A commitment to the sustainable use of resources, including the natural environment, NHS finances and the time and spirit of staff.

Visit the RCGP website for further details and to view the commissioning competency framework: [www.rcgp.org.uk/centre\\_for\\_commissioning/effective\\_commissioning.aspx](http://www.rcgp.org.uk/centre_for_commissioning/effective_commissioning.aspx)

# Why take it seriously?

The five main reasons for sustainable commissioning are:

- it saves money;
- it produces health benefits as well as other advantages in both the short and long term;
- NHS organisations have huge purchasing power and prominence, and should take a lead in their local community;
- natural resources are limited;
- there is a legal duty to cut carbon emissions under the 2008 Climate Change Act.

The NHS Carbon Reduction Strategy suggests simple steps that can be taken to become more sustainable. These include:

- reducing the amount of resources used;
- reusing resources where possible;
- recycling resources that cannot be reused;

## 3) Monitor, review and report on carbon across the organisation

Three main sectors contribute to the overall carbon footprint of the NHS:

- Procurement: Goods and services purchased by NHS England (excluding energy and travel).
- Building energy: Heating, hot water, electricity consumption and cooling.
- Travel: Movement of people (i.e. patients, visitors and staff).

## 4) Actively raise awareness of sustainability and carbon reduction at every level of the organisation

Guidance and case studies are available on the SDU website at [www.sdu.nhs.uk/publications-resources/case-studies.aspx](http://www.sdu.nhs.uk/publications-resources/case-studies.aspx)

### 3. Understanding the role of clinical commissioning groups

Commissioners are ideally placed and have a vital role to play in improving the sustainability of healthcare. It will often be cheaper to act sustainably and commissioners can commission services that have positive benefits and provide win-wins. For example, commissioning a local health service that will offer employment opportunities can improve social networks. Commissioning a service that uses more local food for patients can improve local employment and is also more sustainable. Web search "Cornwall Food Programme."

Commissioning services that provide benefits for the local community can help produce a "virtuous circle." See diagram below.

If commissioners understand how they can create a sustainable healthcare service they will be able to:

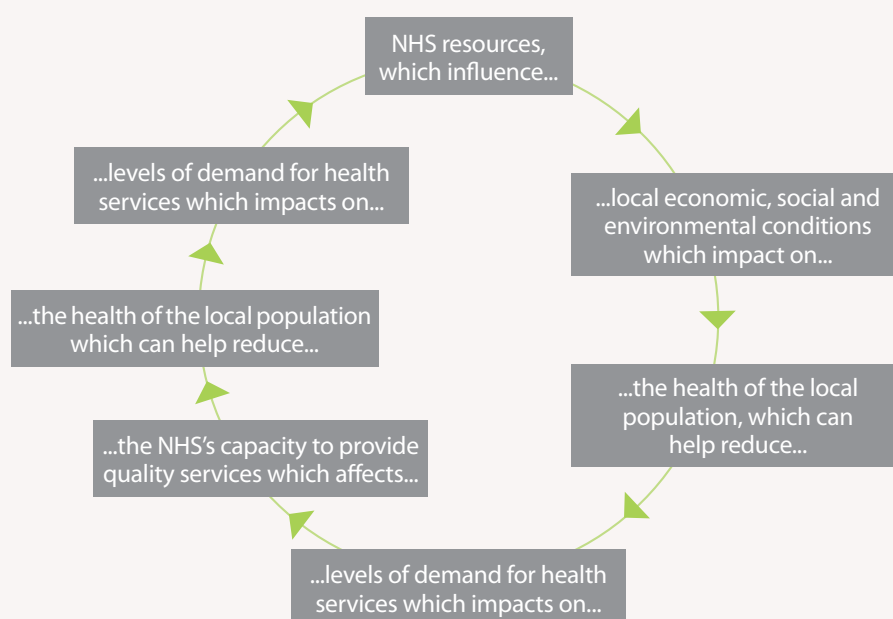
- Find potential areas of synergy between reducing health service use, improving health and sustainability

- Review existing services to see if gains are being maximised
- Use this information to decide on commissioning priorities

The Department of Health has produced an interactive mind map to help identify the links between any particular service and sustainability.

This is available at: [www.dh.gov.uk/prod\\_consum\\_dh/groups/dh\\_digitalassets/documents/digitalasset/dh\\_085158.pdf](http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/documents/digitalasset/dh_085158.pdf)

Virtuous circle



### COMMISSIONERS ARE INTEGRAL TO REDUCING THE NHS CARBON FOOTPRINT BECAUSE:

NHS commissioners have huge power and huge responsibility. Holding over 80% of the NHS budget, they make decisions that can have immediate and long-lasting consequences in the communities they serve.

## 4. Using the commissioning cycle to increase sustainability

Commissioning organisations can use commissioning processes such as service design, service specifications, tendering and contracting to increase sustainability at the same time as improving quality.

Good quality healthcare delivered at the right time and in the right place to the right person reduces the use of resources, carbon and improves sustainability.

So commissioners should continually:

- Ensure that services meet identifiable population needs
- Ensure best available evidence is always considered



### 3.1 Increasing sustainability

Reducing use of goods and services is the first step towards improving sustainability. Commissioners should assess whether services include steps that appropriately reduce demand for the service. For any acute service it is important to ensure that the relevant preventative services are also adequately commissioned.

- a) Assess needs so that supply induced demand is avoided. Adequate needs assessment at the stage of strategic planning will ensure that the services provided are those that are actually needed.
- b) Ensure effectiveness is evidenced and applied to service design. Fewer resources are used if both the design and delivery of the service are as efficient as possible. Using available research and best practice evidence is an integral part of effective commissioning

- c) Improve overall efficiency of patient care pathway. Commissioners often hold different contracts with different providers for different aspects of a patient pathway. To reduce waste across the whole system commissioners should try to improve the efficiency of patient pathways. The NHS Institute for Innovation and Improvement offers a comprehensive collection of relevant tools to do this. Available at: [www.institute.nhs.uk/option,com\\_quality\\_and\\_service\\_improvement\\_tools/Itemid,5015.html](http://www.institute.nhs.uk/option,com_quality_and_service_improvement_tools/Itemid,5015.html)
- d) Identify key areas to make the service more sustainable. Staff and patients often have ideas that could make a service more sustainable.

A neonatal nurse in one Acute Trust (Addenbrookes, Cambridge) saw the wastage from opening 10 different sterile packs for one line insertion. She worked with suppliers to reduce the number of packs needing to be opened from 10 down to one.<sup>3</sup>

Nearly one third of the NHS carbon footprint can be attributed to pharmaceuticals, medical equipment and devices. This is more than from buildings use or travel. Using pharmaceuticals and equipment appropriately minimises waste, saves money and reduces the carbon footprint of the service.

## 4. Using the commissioning cycle to increase sustainability continued

As part of improving quality and sustainability commissioners can create processes that capture these ideas and then ensure they are used appropriately. For example, big financial and carbon savings can be made through:

- Energy - more renewable energy
- Food - sustainably produced
- Services - sustaining the local community
- Water - better use of water
- Waste - reduce, reuse and recycle
- Travel - reducing carbon footprint
- Use of pharmaceuticals - minimise wastage

The NHS Sustainable Development Unit has published a series of Marginal Abatement Cost Curves. These model the carbon and financial savings from various carbon reduction measures and provide ideas on “quick wins” which will save money and improve sustainability. Available at: [www.sdu.nhs.uk/publications-resources/9/Save-Money-by-Saving-Carbon/](http://www.sdu.nhs.uk/publications-resources/9/Save-Money-by-Saving-Carbon/)

Further guidance and case studies are available in the expanded chapters of the NHS Carbon Reduction Strategy on the SDU website.

### 3.2 Actions commissioners can take in conjunction with providers

#### Agree the role

It is important that roles and responsibilities for improving sustainability and cutting carbon are clear between commissioners and providers. It is important that providers report back on agreed targets and actions.

In particular commissioners and providers should agree who is responsible for:

- Maximising preventative measures relevant to the service
- Reducing demand
- Improving the quality and sustainability of the service
- Raising awareness of sustainability and carbon reduction among staff and patients
- Measuring and monitoring the carbon emissions of the service
- Considering the implementation of innovative ideas that could provide a higher quality, more sustainable service

#### Tendering and contracts

Criteria relating to sustainability and low carbon operations can be used in tendering documents and contracts for services. Examples of potential statements are given below.

“Each year we will increase the weighting given to our commitment to a sustainable and lower carbon health service as measured by qualitative indicators such as the Good Corporate Citizenship Assessment Model and quantitative indicators.” For indicators see: [www.sdu.nhs.uk/sd\\_and\\_the\\_nhs/measuring.aspx](http://www.sdu.nhs.uk/sd_and_the_nhs/measuring.aspx)

“This Commissioning Organisation includes sustainable development criteria within all service contracts. Service providers will be expected to provide a copy of their organisational carbon management plan and demonstrate how they are monitoring performance.”



“Service providers are expected to have in place mechanisms that enable and encourage each and every member of staff to take responsibility for energy consumption and carbon reduction.”

NHS Manchester have successfully used sustainability criteria in their tendering process. Their wording is provided in Appendix 1 on page 11.



### Managing performance

Commissioners should use the contracting process to ask providers to review performance in energy efficiency and carbon reduction. This can be reported as part of the performance indicators for contracts.

The metrics for commissioning for a low carbon and sustainable health service are not comprehensive. Work is ongoing. But there is good data on energy use and travel already available and these should be used as a starter.

In some areas commissioners can ask their providers to innovate and design the best way of measuring their own sustainability and carbon footprint of the services they provide.

Advice is available on the NHS SDU website and this will be updated as metrics are developed. Available at: [www.sdu.nhs.uk/sd\\_and\\_the\\_nhs/measuring.aspx](http://www.sdu.nhs.uk/sd_and_the_nhs/measuring.aspx)

Commissioners will also find Procuring for Carbon Reduction (P4CR) a helpful document. Produced by the NHS SDU in conjunction with the Department of Health P4CR is a toolkit to help Trusts begin procuring more sustainably. Available at: [www.sdu.nhs.uk/publications-resources/23/Procuring-for-Carbon-Reduction-P4CR--NEW/](http://www.sdu.nhs.uk/publications-resources/23/Procuring-for-Carbon-Reduction-P4CR--NEW/)

### Outside forces

As the world adapts to increasing energy prices and strives for less reliance on fossil fuels the NHS will need to face these growing challenges.

It will need to embrace unexpected opportunities and plan for the long term to make sure it can be fit for the future. An NHS with a sustainable vision will be prepared for a changing world. A world which could be changing more quickly than expected. A world in which commissioners will play an ever important role in forging a world class sustainable NHS.

## References

- <sup>1</sup> Brundtland Commission [Online]  
Available at: [www.un-documents.net/a42r187.htm](http://www.un-documents.net/a42r187.htm)  
[Accessed 12 Nov 2009]
- <sup>2</sup> NHS Carbon Reduction Strategy for England:  
Saving Carbon, Improving Health, 2009. Cambridge:  
NHS Sustainable Development Unit.
- <sup>3</sup> Maisie & George and the future of their planet, 2009 [Online  
Video] London: BMJ Publishing Group Ltd.  
Available at: [www.bmj.com/video/climate.dtl](http://www.bmj.com/video/climate.dtl)  
[Accessed 13 April 2010]

## Further resources

- Good Corporate Citizenship Assessment Model  
This model has been developed for the NHS by the Sustainable Development Commission. The NHS Carbon Reduction Strategy recommends that it is used to think about how organisations can contribute to sustainable development. Available at: [www.corporatecitizen.nhs.uk](http://www.corporatecitizen.nhs.uk)
- Advice on Carbon Reduction Metrics for NHS organisations  
This is available on the NHS SDU website at: [www.sdu.nhs.uk/sd\\_and\\_the\\_nhs/measuring.aspx](http://www.sdu.nhs.uk/sd_and_the_nhs/measuring.aspx)
- "Fit for the Future - Scenarios for low-carbon healthcare 2030"  
This publication from the NHS Sustainable Development Unit and the charity "Forum for the Future" recommends five key steps to creating a sustainable low-carbon healthcare system, ready for whatever the future may hold. The report details a set of scenarios which managers and clinicians can use to test their medium and long-term strategic plans. Available at: [www.sdu.nhs.uk/publications-resources/4/Fit-for-the-Future/](http://www.sdu.nhs.uk/publications-resources/4/Fit-for-the-Future/)
- Managing the health effects of climate change  
Lancet and University College London Institute for Global Health Commission. Lancet 2009; 373: 1693–733
- Department of Energy and Climate Change  
information on the Carbon Reduction Energy Efficiency Scheme  
Available at: [www.decc.gov.uk/en/content/cms/what\\_we\\_do/lc\\_uk/crc/crc.aspx](http://www.decc.gov.uk/en/content/cms/what_we_do/lc_uk/crc/crc.aspx)

# Appendix 1

## NHS Manchester - Wording from a tender process that includes sustainable development

This example is given by permission of NHS Manchester.

Sustainable development has been defined by the government as 'development which meets the needs of the present generation, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' ([www.sustainable-development.gov.uk](http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk)). Good corporate citizenship is the mechanism by which organisations can deliver sustainable development goals. The Choosing Health White Paper (DH 2004) outlines the significant contribution the NHS can make to the health and sustainability of the communities it serves by good corporate citizenship.



Manchester PCT is committed to providing and purchasing health care in a way that supports the UK sustainable development agenda and contributes to environmental improvements, regeneration and reducing health inequalities. The PCT commissions extensive healthcare services for the people of Manchester. As employers and users of resources, these services have an impact on the local economy, environment and community. Implementing responsible policies, which benefit rather than damage social, economic and environmental conditions can help to improve the health of the people of Manchester and reduce inequalities. This can be done in a range of ways, e.g. by developing employment opportunities for local people, minimising energy use and waste production, promoting sustainable travel and opening up procurement contracts to local suppliers.

The Primary Care Trust has used the NHS Good Corporate Citizenship Assessment Model ([www.corporatecitizen.nhs.uk/](http://www.corporatecitizen.nhs.uk/)) to identify progress and develop a Sustainable Development Action Plan. Short Listed Bidders may wish to use this tool to help inform their action plans and responses. It is expected that Short Listed Bidders will have considered sustainable development in their responses to other sections of this document.

**Sustainable Development Plans**  
The Provider will need to demonstrate awareness of sustainable development and describe how it plans to improve the sustainability of its service. The Provider will be expected to provide ongoing evidence of improvements in sustainability.

Short Listed Bidders must describe their plans to promote sustainable development, through their activities in procurement, employment, energy use, waste management, estates, transport and community engagement.

Please let the NHS Sustainable Development Unit know of any case studies that you have which illustrate how commissioning for sustainability can further improve the quality of your service.



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The NHS Sustainable Development Unit develops organisations, people, tools, policy, and research to help the NHS in England fulfil its potential as a leading sustainable and low carbon organisation.

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