



**National Public Health
Service for Wales**

**Gwasanaeth Iechyd Cyhoeddus
Cenedlaethol Cymru**

Environment Strategy for Wales

A Briefing Paper on the new strategy and action plan and how it links to the NPHS/public health agenda and other cross cutting themes

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For: All Wales LPHTs

Approved at SMT

For: action by team leaders, action by LPHDs

Summary:

This paper gives a briefing on and an overview of the new environment strategy and accompanying action plan for Wales which was published in – 2006 and spans a 20 year timescale for delivery. The strategy and action plan are broad in their intentions and aspirations: there are five environmental themes contained within the strategy, (1) *addressing climate change*, (2) *sustainable resource use*, (3) *distinctive biodiversity, landscapes and seascapes*, (4) *our local environment* and (5) *environmental hazards*; whilst the action plan contains 62 key action points and 39 outcomes. Both the themes, action points and outcomes resonate with the domains of public health, in particular health protection and health improvement.

Several cross-cutting themes are highlighted in the strategy, i.e. community safety, inequalities and dis-advantage, access to services and lifestyle change, integrated health impact assessments and they are linked to key policies and strategies that require public health input at a local, regional and national level, e.g. Health, Social Care & Well Being, Sustainable Development, planning and remediation of contaminated land, and Integrated Prevention and Pollution Control (IPPC).

Key challenges for the NPHS will be to ensure that; their participation is integral to the relevant key health and environment related outcomes cited in the action plan; their contributions to the health inequalities and health improvement dimensions of the strategy are recognised; and, that LPHDs ensure the inter-connections between the environment and population health are given prominence locally through their participation in emerging Corporate Health Improvement Groups (CHIGs).

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Relevant Previous SMT Papers: Frameworks For Action Walking the Way to Health 2 (WW2H2)	Ref. No. SMT 09-06 SP4
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1. Introduction

This is the first distinct environment strategy and action plan for Wales and provides a context and vision for what the Welsh Assembly Government want to achieve by 2026. It builds upon the strategic agenda set out in Wales a Better Country and reflects the results of consultations held in 2004 and 2005 on *Our Environment – Our Future – Your Views*. There are nine chapters in the strategy document, the first four deal with setting the context, describing the challenges, providing a vision statement and outlining roles and responsibilities to enable change. The remaining five chapters focus on five key environmental themes: (1) *addressing climate change*, (2) *sustainable resource use*, (3) *distinctive biodiversity, landscapes and seascapes*, (4) *our local environment* and (5) *environmental hazards*. These five key chapters are structured into four sub-headings: outcomes, timescales, baseline, spatial dimension.

The strategy is accompanied by an action plan containing 62 key action points and numerous corresponding milestones together with 39 summary outcomes, of which several have a specific emphasis on health and well-being. The 39 summary outcomes have been graded in relation to their significance to other policy areas, 6 have been designated significantly relevant to health and a further 16 have been designated to have some relevance to health (see below). There is no definition given regarding health, but in the context of the strategy and action plan it would appear to relate to health and its wider determinants.

This briefing paper will not provide a detailed over view of all chapters but focus on the key environmental themes, relevant action points and summary outcomes and outline cross cutting public health related issues.

2. The vision

The strategy states that the environment has an intrinsic value, is central to quality of life and underpins economic development. It asks for a commitment from stakeholders including citizens and the public sector to sustainable development and recognises that people experience environmental inequalities which must be addressed. The vision statement for the strategy states that:

“By 2026, we want to see our distinctive Welsh environment thriving and contributing to the economic and social wellbeing and health of all people of Wales”

Related priorities are as follows:

- Minimise greenhouse gas emissions
- Conserve and enhance biodiversity
- Monitor and regulate known and emerging environmental hazards
- Tackle waste production
- Conserve land, sea, built environment and natural resources.

3. Five Environmental themes

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3.1 Addressing Climate Change

This theme focuses on identifying annual emissions through a basket of greenhouse gases, assessing the ecological footprint and assessing changes in soil organic carbon. Relevant *public health challenges* are related to the expected increase in temperatures during summer and increased air pollution and associated health effects, including increased hospital admissions, and an increase in rainfall during the winter, including anticipated floods/storm damage and further coastal erosion. Conversely milder winters should result in less demand for winter heating and less cold-weather related illness..

The impacts of climate change for the next 30-40 years are largely set by emissions that have already occurred, so planning for and management of the anticipated impact of climate change as well as reducing further impact is paramount.

To note: The environmental impact through a likely increased use of air conditioning as a result of warmer temperatures has not been recognised or quantified.

Public health links to: Keep Well this Winter, the Heat wave Plan, Local Resilience Forum's risk assessments/Major Incident Plans.

3.2 Sustainable use of resources

This theme focuses on: materials consumption and waste, water, soils and minerals and aggregates. It outlines the need to adopt the '*proximity principle*' whereby resources are produced and consumed as close to source as possible. Waste outcomes are associated with reducing the quantity of municipal waste per person per annum (ongoing), increasing the proportion of municipal, industrial and commercial waste that is recycled (by 2026) and minimising the amount of waste going to landfill (by 2013).

Timescales have been introduced to improve the efficient use of water and improve the quality of drinking water whilst action to change soil carbon and increase more sympathetic extraction of minerals and aggregates has been singled out with a timeline of 2026.

To note: the shift in treatment and care from acute to community based settings, as a result of implementation of Designed for Life and regional plans for the secondary care reviews, could result in an overall net increase of health care related waste requiring disposal.

Additional work is required to promote the use of more efficient methods to prepare and cook food in both commercial, statutory, voluntary and domestic settings to conserve energy resources.

Public health links to: Healthcare Waste Management Strategy, Framework For Action (healthy eating and food miles), NPHS and EA collaborative work on waste management, Sustainable Development Toolkit for use by NHS organisations.

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3.3 Distinctive biodiversity, landscapes and seascapes

The need to halt the loss of bio-diversity and make the environment more favourable to bio-diversity is highlighted as is the need to ensure that sites of international, Welsh and local importance are maintained to support the species and habitat they are renowned for. There is an international commitment to halt the loss of bio-diversity by 2010 and indicators to reflect this will include trends in the wild bird population, the proportion of land which is in conversion to organic use and the proportion of woodland that is certified.

The conservation of the marine environment, coastal zones and fisheries are going to be central to the new Marine Bill (no publication date given) with an anticipated outcome of seas that are clean and support healthy, diverse ecosystems.

The national parks and areas of outstanding beauty, which covers 25% of Wales' land area is recognised as making a significant contribution to quality of life and a methodology referred to LANDMAP will be used to provide a baseline of information to enable decision makers to assess the impact that developments will have on local landscapes.

Public health links to: Mentro Allen, Walking the Way to Health 2 (WW2H2), [Planning, Health and Well Being – draft ministerial interim policy statement \(WAG, 31st July 2006\)](#)

3.4 Our local environment

This theme recognises the relationship between a poor quality environment and deprived communities. Clear links are made with the key role that Community Strategies and Local Development Plans have to play in supporting delivery of this theme. The chapter considers in detail the following priority areas:

- The built environment and access to green spaces
- Environmental nuisances
- Walk ability in urban areas and improving access to the countryside and coast
- Flood risk management

Improving access to green spaces, improvements to existing building stock and environmental quality standards of new buildings features strongly, as does the need for a reduction in neighbourhood and environmental noise. There is a clear commitment made to increasing the number of people walking and cycling and using the natural environment for physical activity.

Key outcomes have also been set for the risk management of flood and coastal erosion as over 150,000 residential properties are currently at risk of flooding and about half a million people live and work on flood plains. By 2008 there will be a plan

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for public awareness activity in place and by 2026 there will be appropriate measures in place to manage the risk of flooding from the sea and rivers

Public health links to: The Spatial Plan, HSCWB strategies, Routes to Health Improvement, WW2H2, Local Resilience Forms (flood planning), Planning, Health and Well Being – draft ministerial interim policy statement (WAG, 31st July 2006) .

3.5 Environmental Hazards: pollution and chemicals and radioactivity

The World Health Organisation and the European Commission have initiated programmes to investigate links between poor health in vulnerable members of society and environmental hazards. Planning systems for land use are using health impact measures and draft policy guidance on this is out for consultation whilst accompanying technical advice will be issued in 2006/07.

Key outcomes are listed as follows:

- by 2020 a reduction in air pollution leads to increased life expectancy and ecological protection
- by 2026 the extent of contaminated land is better understood and actions are being taken to remediate contaminated land for beneficial use where appropriate
- by 2015 the quality of our rivers, lakes and coastal waters is maintained and enhanced
- by 2015 diffuse pollution is better understood and action is being taken to reduce and manage diffuse pollution
- there is an ongoing timeline to: minimise the risks posed by exposure to chemicals with an emphasis on protecting vulnerable members of society; raise awareness to those at risk from radon and minimise that risk; and to minimise doses of radioactive discharges to the public and concentrations in the marine environment

The legacy of historical chemical contamination is noted and the ongoing affects of the Chernobyl accident in 1986 on upland north-west Wales, where restrictions remain in place. The chapter concludes by stating a commitment to developing a better understanding of the impacts from environmental hazards on the environment and human health and to convey that information to the public and health professionals.

Public health links to: Sustainable development (toolkit for NHS organisations), CHARISMA project, COMPACT arrangements for chemical incidents, Integrated Pollution and Prevention Control (IPPC)/contaminated land

4. Action Plan and Summary Outcomes relevant to health

4.1 Action plan – overview of relevant action points

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It is not possible to provide an explanation or detailed overview of the 62 actions so brief reference to a few key actions likely to have a direct relevance to public health are made below, all other actions may have an indirect relevance to public health related work.

- **Action 49** – through targeted action for delivery of Health Challenge Wales the relevance of the environment to health and well being should be highlighted – July 2006 strategy for consultation – lead WAG (PHS)
- **Action 50** – ensuring that links between health and the environment are more clearly demonstrated and ensuring increased sustainability – from 2007 voluntary sector grant scheme shows commitment to strengthening links – lead WAG (PHID)
- **Action 51** – to implement a Wales wide exercise referral scheme which will include opportunities for outdoor activities – October 2006, grants awarded, January 2007 schemes launched – lead WAG (PHID)
- **Action 52** – research conducted to establish most effective methods for achieving behaviour change on environment issues – March 2007 research begins
- **Action 58** – we (WAG) will ensure that good quality, consistent environmental data is readily available to inform policy – by the end of 2006 future format of the state of the environment agreed – lead WAG (EvnP&Q)
- **Action 59** – we (WAG) will provide guidance to enable community strategy partnerships to address issues in the environment strategy – By end of March 2007 inclusion in statutory guidance – lead WAG (LGP)
- **Action 60** – performance indicators developed for Local Authorities relevant to outcome of the strategy - April 2006 first indicators, April 2007 additional indicators – lead WAG (LGP)
- **Action 61** – each Spatial Plan area to address issues in the environment strategy and report on progress – by November 2006 each Spatial Plan area group to have agreed priority areas and how to tackle them, lead - Spatial Plan Area Groups

4.2 Summary outcomes – overview

The strategy presents a table (p.68) depicting the relevance of the 39 summary outcomes to key policy areas including health. The relevance has been graded as: *significant relevance, some relevance, limited relevance and process related*, i.e. some relevance to all. This section lists the six summary outcomes that have been designated as having *significant relevance* to health, a further 16 summary outcomes have been designated as having *some relevance*.

Table 1 Summary outcomes with a significant relevance to health*:

No.	Outcome
8	Wales has improved resilience to the impacts of climate change. A clearer flexible programme of measures is in place to enable Wales to respond and adapt to climate change
10	Reduce, reuse and recycle is universally accepted in government,
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	business, industry and home life
15	The high quality of our drinking water is maintained
37	The risks posed by exposure to chemicals is minimised with emphasis on protecting vulnerable members of society
38	Those at risk from radon are aware of the risk they face and what they can do to minimise that risk
39	Radioactive discharges in Wales and doses to the public will be minimised. Discharges to the marine environment will be minimised to the extent that additional concentrations in the marine environment above historic levels are close to zero.

* Health was not given a definition, therefore the above represent rather a limited focus on the wider health, environment and well-being agenda, and arguably all 39 summary outcomes are related to the discipline of Public Health. For example summary outcome 33 = 'a reduction in air pollution leads to increased life expectancy and ecological protection' (Authors viewpoint).

5. Cross cutting themes and policies

Sustainability and tackling inequalities are underpinning themes that cut across all dimensions of the strategy and action plan and other key strategies. There are also key themes, processes and issues that link the Environment Strategy with specific policies, strategies and plans. This is illustrated through examples presented in the table below.

Table 2 examples of cross cutting themes and policies between inter-agency public health work and the new Environment strategy

Policy/strategy/Plan(s)	Priority area(s)	Environment Strategy
		Links to key chapters and themes in Strategy
Community strategy	Community safety Housing	Our local environment
Routes to Health Improvement	Integrated Health Impact Assessments	Our local environment
Assembly's Sustainable Development Scheme	Toolkit for use by Trusts and LHB's	Sustainable use of resources
Health and Well Being strategies	Local physical activity and food action plans Sustainable Development Toolkit	Access to green space Proximity principle Our local environment
The National Waste Strategy The Sustainable Development Action Plan Healthcare Waste Strategy for Wales	Waste Definition Waste Segregation Procurement	Sustainable use of resources

Spatial Plan	Rural Proofing	Distinctive biodiversity, landscapes, seascapes Our local environment
Climbing Higher Health Challenge Wales	Local Physical Activity Action Plans Mentor Allen	Our local environment
Environment Protection Act	Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control (IPPC)	Environmental Hazards
Major Incident Plans	Floods	Our Local Environment
Planning, Health and Well Being – draft ministerial interim policy statement (WAG, 31 st July 2006)	Improved integration of planning, environmental and public health assessments	Access to green space Our local environment

6. Summary points/observations

- Although commendable overall and in the main clear intentions, actions and expected outcomes are evident throughout– some of the baseline information is vague as is the detail for some indicators and the section on monitoring and evaluation.
- Inclusion of the sections on environmental links to equality and links to other policy areas and significance of relevance is very helpful.
- There is no reference to the National Public Health Service
- Does the NPHS, in an advisory capacity regarding delivery of Designed for Life, have a role nationally, regionally and locally in highlighting anticipated effects on waste management from the transfer of care to community based settings.

7. Recommendations

- 7.1 SMT to consider how the NPHS at a national and regional level can raise awareness of the role that public health plays in contributing to the delivery of the new Environment Strategy and Action Plan and how it links with existing NPHS work
- 7.2 All Local Public Health Directors/Associates familiarise themselves with the Strategy and action plan, in particular the five environmental themes and action points and summary outcomes relevant to health and well-being.
- 7.3 All Local Public Health Directors/Associates consider what particular local issues they may face in relation to some of the challenges posed in the strategy and action plan, i.e. working in partnership to achieve better access

to green spaces and supporting the Proximity Principle for healthy eating action plans.

- 7.4 All Local Public Health Directors/Associates ensure the inter-connections between the environment and population health are given prominence locally through their participation in emerging Corporate Health Improvement Groups (CHIGs) as part of the Routes to Health Improvement agenda.
- 7.5 The NPHS, as an all Wales service, should review its own policies, and procedures to ensure it is supporting and contributing to sustainable environmental good practice, i.e. increased use of tele-communications to reduce the need to travel long distances.