



# Quality of Life Counts

Indicators for a strategy for sustainable development for the United Kingdom

**2004 Update**

Updating the baseline assessments made in 1999





# Quality of Life Counts

Indicators for a strategy for sustainable development for the United Kingdom

## 2004 Update

Updating the baseline assessments made in 1999



**A National Statistics publication**

National Statistics are produced to high professional standards set out in the National Statistics Code of Practice. They undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure they meet customer needs.

## Introduction

The 1999 sustainable development strategy for the UK 'A better quality of life' identified a set of headline and core indicators to be used to report on progress.

In December 1999 the UK Government published 'Quality of Life Counts' (QoLC 1999) – Indicators for a strategy for sustainable development for the United Kingdom to provide a baseline assessment from which progress might be judged.

A key feature of these indicators was the 15 headline indicators of sustainable development. Making up a 'quality of life barometer' of issues such as employment, education, health, crime, air quality, road traffic and waste these indicators were intended 'to provide a high level overview of progress, and be a powerful tool for simplifying and communicating the main messages for the public'. They lie at the centre of the Government's Annual Reports on progress 'Achieving a better quality of life' and have been updated regularly on the sustainable development website. They provide a means of holding the Government and the country as whole to account in making progress towards sustainable development, and on their establishment the Government pledged:

*'the Government's aim is for all the headline indicators to move in the right direction over time, or, where a satisfactory level has been reached, to prevent a reversal. Where a trend is unacceptable, the Government will adjust policies accordingly, and will look to others to join it in taking action.'*

Since 1999, QoLC has become a model and resource for a considerable number of other indicator initiatives at local, regional, national and international levels, and the indicators have been adopted in many other indicator sets. Through the publication of QoLC and the establishment of the set of headline indicators the UK is considered to be one of the leading countries in terms of indicator development.

For further information on the background to QoLC please refer to 'Indicators and the sustainable development strategy' in 1999 report.

The wider core indicators in QoLC were intended to be next brought together to provide a review of progress after five years, rather than be updated together every year. However, many of the indicators were based on others already used across Government for policy monitoring, and so have continued to be reported and updated more frequently elsewhere. Many of the indicators have also been adopted as part of other more recent indicator sets developed for other purposes.

In this updated compilation of the indicators, as many of the original QoLC indicators as possible have now been updated and brought together again. They are intended to provide a more comprehensive assessment of our progress towards sustainable development since the 1999 Strategy than can be provided by the headline indicators alone.

This update of all the QoLC indicators complements the Government's final Annual Report under the 1999 Strategy, 'Achieving a better quality of life – Government annual report 2003', and is intended to feed into the establishment of a new framework for sustainable development in the UK.

### **Geographic coverage**

The indicators in the original QoLC were intended to monitor progress in the UK as a whole where data availability and comparability allow. However, in some cases, indicators are presented for Great Britain, England and Wales or England only, if consistent data are not available for the UK.

In addition, the devolved administrations have developed indicators to monitor priorities and progress in their respective countries:

- The Scottish Executive has developed its own indicators to monitor progress as part of its 'Meeting the needs...' statement on sustainable development. These are available at:

[www.scotland.gov.uk/about/eraden/scu/00017108/home.aspx](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/about/eraden/scu/00017108/home.aspx)

- The Welsh Assembly has also developed indicators to monitor progress as part of its '*Learning to live differently*' Sustainable Development Scheme for Wales. These are available at:

[www.wales.gov.uk](http://www.wales.gov.uk)

- Northern Ireland is in the process of developing a set of indicators, which take account of recent consultations with non-governmental organisations and Local Authority representatives.

The choice of indicators reflects the priorities of the devolved administrations but they are in many cases consistent with the UK set of indicators, either directly with the headline indicators or the wider core indicators in QoLC. However, there are some indicators used by the devolved administrations that are not included in QoLC.

### **Updates to indicators**

As far as possible, the indicators in this compilation are based on updated data consistent with each indicator as they appeared in the original QoLC (1999). The exceptions are where the indicators were based on one-off surveys, or the original data series have since been discontinued, or the basis of measurement has changed.

### **Data sources and National Statistics**

Most of the data used to compile this updated compendium have come from Governmental sources and are National Statistics. In some cases, through necessity, data come instead from reputable outside organisations.

All of the indicator updates, the assessments of progress and the compilation of the compendium have been undertaken by statisticians in Defra, in collaboration with statisticians and other colleagues in other government departments.

All the data behind the indicators are available on the sustainable development website for more detailed scrutiny ([www.sustainable-development.gov.uk](http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk))

### References

- 'A better quality of life: a strategy for sustainable development in the United Kingdom', DETR May 1999
- 'Quality of life counts – Indicators for sustainable development for the United Kingdom: a baseline assessment', DETR, December 1999
- 'Achieving a better quality of life – Review of progress towards sustainable development – Government annual report 2003', Defra, March 2004

## Indicator framework

The original structure of QoLC, dividing the indicators into families and linking them to the objectives in the 1999 Strategy, has been maintained.

The indicators are structured within six themes and 18 families:

1. *Assessing overall progress and priorities*

H - Headline Indicators

2. *A sustainable economy*

A - Doing more with less: improving resource efficiency

B - Economic stability and competitiveness

C - Developing skills and rewarding work

D - Sustainable production and consumption

3. *Building sustainable communities*

E - Promoting economic vitality and employment

F - Better health for all

G - Travel

J - Access

K - Shaping our surroundings

L - Involvement and stronger institutions

4. *Managing the environment and resources*

M - An integrated approach

N - Climate change and energy supply

P - Air and atmosphere

Q - Freshwater

R - Seas, oceans and coasts

S - Landscape and wildlife

5. *Sending the right signals*

T - Sending the right signals

6. *International co-operation and development*

U - International co-operation and development

In addition there are a further sixteen indicators providing further analysis of the relationship between economic, social and environmental issues.

Annex A lists all the indicators along with their associated objectives in the 1999 Strategy.

Annex B provides a list of key words to help identify the indicator that covers a particular issue.

For further information on the establishment of the indicators and the QoLC structure please refer to 'Criteria for sustainable development – framework and models' and 'Consultation to develop the indicators' in the 1999 report.

## Assessments of progress





The original QoLC (1999) established a system of traffic lights to show the baseline assessments for each indicator. This updated compilation uses a similar traffic light system.

For each indicator, where possible, an updated assessment of progress has been made by comparing the latest data with the position at three baselines:

- Since 1970
- Since 1990
- Since strategy baseline

For the third assessment, the 'strategy baseline' is the year for which data were available for the baseline assessment in QoLC in 1999, which in most cases was 1998 or 1997, but varies from indicator to indicator.

The traffic light assessments are as follows:

-  = significant change, in direction of meeting objective (improvement)
-  = no significant change (little or no change)
-  = significant change, in direction away from meeting objective (deterioration)
-  = insufficient or no comparable data

na = not applicable

revised = method of assessment has changed since QoLC (1999)

† = Indicator has been developed since QoLC (1999)

**The assessments of progress are made without reference to policy targets or other strategies put in place to tackle the issues behind the indicators. The assessments are not therefore based on the success or otherwise of such targets or strategies.**

**The assessments only relate to changes in the indicators since the baseline assessments made in QoLC (1999) taking into account the objectives in the 1999 Strategy.**

**It should be noted that a green 'traffic light' does not signify that the situation is now "sustainable", merely that progress has been made since the baseline. An amber 'traffic light' may reflect that progress was made prior to the baseline and can indicate that this level has been maintained, though this is not to say that further progress should not be expected.**

Some indicators are for contextual purposes only and assessments of progress have not been made. In a few cases indicators that were to be developed following QoLC (1999) have not yet been developed or in some cases the way an indicator has been assessed has been changed since QoLC (1999). In these instances 'na' (not applicable) will be shown instead of a traffic light assessment as appropriate. Indicators that were included in QoLC (1999)

only in outline and have since been developed are highlighted with the † symbol.

For most indicators it is very clear whether or not progress has been made, but in some cases it is difficult to judge whether the change is significant. For example, where there have been large year-to-year fluctuations, or where the indicator is at a very high level (e.g. 95 per cent) with little room for large improvement, or where the data have large margins of error. In general an increase or decrease of 3 per cent or more compared with baselines has been assessed as significant. However, this is not a fixed rule, because in making each 'traffic light' assessment, consideration has been given to the nature of the indicator and data variability and reliability.

### **Presentation of the indicators**

A summary of progress is provided which highlights the main messages taken from the indicators for each indicator family. This is followed by a table showing 'traffic light' assessments for each indicator as they appeared in the original QoLC together with the updated assessments based on the latest data available. The fifteen headline indicators are presented as a family of their own, but the assessments for them are also included the summary tables of the indicator family to which they most closely relate.

Following each family summary, each individual indicator is presented in a chart, along with the objective to which it relates in the 1999 Strategy. Accompanying each indicator chart are the traffic light assessments and a short statistical commentary to support them.

Commentary on each indicator has been kept to the minimum necessary to explain the trends, with very little reference to its policy context. For the background and policy relevance for each indicator please refer to the indicator as it appeared in QoLC (1999).

For more detailed information on the indicator's relevance and background reference should be made to the indicator as it appeared in QoLC (1999).

The data behind each indicator are available on the sustainable development website ([www.sustainable-development.gov.uk](http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk)).