

## CHAPTER 4

# The core set of indicators

### SUMMARY OF MAIN MESSAGES

#### **A sustainable economy**

##### **Doing more with less: improving resource efficiency**

At the whole economy level, UK energy consumption per unit of output reduced by 40 per cent between 1970 and 1998, although energy use per household changed little.

The volume of household waste increased between 1983/84 and 1997/98. Although the amounts recycled increased, the rise in total household waste outstripped the higher amounts recycled. No information on trends in industrial, commercial or construction and demolition waste is available.

Recycling rates for scrap metals were fairly stable between 1984 and 1998. After increases in the mid-1980s and early-1990s, recycling rates for paper and glass have shown no further increases up to 1998.

##### **Economic stability and competitiveness**

Between 1970 and 1998, the UK economy grew by 86 per cent in real terms, producing higher standards of living for most people. But there have been three major recessions which have been costly in both economic and social terms.

In 1998 and 1999 the inflation rate has been stable and close to the target of 2.5 per cent annual increase in the RPIX index.

Public sector net borrowing has reduced from the high levels in the early 1990s to 4 per cent of GDP in 1996 and is estimated to have declined to around 0 per cent of GDP in 1998.

Labour productivity in the UK in 1997 was much lower than in Germany, France, Canada and the USA.

UK exports and imports more than doubled in real terms between 1980 and 1998.

The UK has invested too little in buildings, modern plant and machinery. Total investment declined as a per cent of GDP over the period 1970 to 1998.

##### **Developing skills and rewarding work**

There has been a steady improvement in the proportion of young people gaining formal educational qualifications. In 1999, 74 per cent of 19 year olds had achieved qualifications to NVQ level 2 or equivalent. And the percentage of 16 year-olds in

England achieving no qualifications has decreased. But about a fifth of all adults of working age in the UK were estimated to have low literacy and numeracy skills in 1996; these were predominantly older people with low levels of education. In 1997, just over a quarter of respondents to a survey in England and Wales said they had done no learning in the previous three years, or since leaving full-time education if that was more recent.

In 1999 almost three-quarters of people of working age were in work. But in 1998 13 per cent of working age adults lived in households where no-one works, and in 1999 13 per cent of people of working age had been out of work for more than two years. In 1998 a quarter of the population worked long hours (over 45 hours a week) and 14 per cent worked over 50 hours per week.

The work place became safer between 1986/87 and 1998/99.

### **Sustainable production and consumption**

Expenditure per household increased in real terms by 8 per cent between 1989 and 1998. Almost 40 per cent of spending is on transport and recreation.

Growth in the number of households, in transport use, and in leisure activities have all increased pressure on resources and the environment.

Although energy efficiency of homes and appliances improved between 1989 and 1998, overall energy and water efficiency of households did not improve.

Farming methods led to lower pesticide residues between 1989 and 1998.

The increase in passenger travel has been accompanied by a similar increase in fuel consumption between 1970 and 1998. Road freight grew considerably between 1970 and 1998, whereas rail freight declined.

There was a large growth in overseas air travel between 1983 and 1998, which has implications for noise levels and climate change.

In 1998 almost half of the FTSE 100 companies had organisational and performance environmental targets compared with about a quarter in 1996.

### **Building sustainable communities**

#### **Promoting economic vitality and employment**

Although the economy grew overall between 1970 and 1998, there are large regional differences in economic activity in the UK and the benefits of economic growth have not been shared by everyone. In 1998 many areas contained pockets of high or severe deprivation. Almost a fifth of children in 1994 lived in households with persistently low incomes; over half of single people over sixty experienced fuel poverty in 1996; the UK has the highest teenage birth rate in Western Europe; and employment rates for ethnic minorities in 1999 were much lower than the GB average.

### Better health for all

Average life expectancy for both men and women increased between 1981 and 1995. Healthy life expectancy also increased but not as fast as total life expectancy, so by 1995 men could expect to spend 8 years of their lives and women 11 years in poor health. Men in unskilled occupations have a 9-year lower total life expectancy than those in professional occupations.

Death rates from cancer, circulatory disease, accidents and suicides declined between 1970 and 1996.

### Travel

People made about the same number of journeys per year in 1985/86 compared with 1996/98, but their journeys were much longer. They made a quarter more journeys by car, significantly fewer journeys by public transport, bicycle or on foot and nearly twice as many children travelled to school by car.

People who had the highest incomes in 1996/98 – those in the top fifth – travelled over three times further than those whose incomes were in the lowest fifth.

Traffic congestion is expected to increase significantly by 2006.

### Access

Householders without a car were much more likely to report access difficulties to certain key amenities than those who had a car, according to a survey in England in 1997/98. People aged 75 and over, and those living in very rural areas, had more access problems than other groups. Basic services such as a general store, post office, doctor, and daily bus service are often not available in rural areas. In 1996, around 40 per cent of people with a disability reported difficulties with accessing goods and services.

The quality of the housing stock improved over the period 1986 to 1996, in terms of the number of homes judged unfit to live in. The number of households in temporary accommodation increased throughout the 1980s.

The number of fuel poor households in England decreased by a fifth between 1991 and 1996.

### Shaping our surroundings

UK population projections indicate a growing and ageing population up to 2031. The number of households in England and Wales is projected to rise by 19% between 1996 and 2021 – the main reason is the change in the size and age structure of the population, but changing family structures and life styles also play an important part.

The need to accommodate new housing will put pressure on green land. In 1997, 55 per cent of new homes (including conversions) in England were built on previously developed land, and there is a target of 60 per cent by 2008. Between 1986 and 1998 new retail floorspace was dominated by out-of-town shopping centres and retail park developments.

In 1999, nearly 4 per cent of grade I and II\* buildings and monuments were at risk through neglect or decay.

Despite recent declines in vehicle crime and burglary, the level of recorded crime increased substantially between 1970 and 1998. In 1998 fear of crime was common, particularly among women. In a survey in England in 1997/98, many householders reported problems in their area related to crime, vandalism and hooliganism, litter and rubbish, graffiti, and noise, although the prevalence of these problems had decreased since 1992.

#### **Involvement and stronger institutions**

Many local communities have developed and published Local Agenda 21 strategies and local indicators to monitor progress.

In 1996/97 about one in eight householders participated in local voluntary work, but the levels of voluntary action in the most deprived areas tended to be very low. In England in 1997/98, just under half of all households thought that their area had a lot of community spirit, the same proportion as that reported in earlier surveys in 1992 and in 1994/95.

#### **Managing the environment and resources**

##### **An integrated approach**

Concentrations of dangerous chemicals and radionuclides in the environment generally declined in the decade up to 1998.

##### **Climate change and energy supply**

Some climate change is already occurring, and further change is inevitable. Large emissions reductions will be necessary to stabilise atmosphere greenhouse gas concentrations; Kyoto targets are only the first step.

The UK succeeded between 1970 and 1998 in reducing overall emissions of CO<sub>2</sub> and will be one of the few countries to meet the Rio commitment to reduce emissions to 1990 levels by 2000. However, CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are expected to start rising again after 2005 so in the longer term action will be needed to tackle this trend.

Only 2½ per cent of electricity was generated from renewable sources in 1998. Discovery of additional oil and gas reserves has matched increases in production.

##### **Air and atmosphere**

Emissions and concentrations of most of the key air pollutants declined between 1987 and 1998, but concentrations of ground-level ozone fluctuated and showed no trend. Acid deposition generally fell between 1986 and 1997, but lakes in sensitive areas have yet to show any signs of becoming less acidic.

If all countries meet their obligations under the Montreal Protocol, the ozone layer is expected to recover fully by 2050.

##### **Freshwater**

River water quality generally improved between 1990 and 1998. Freshwater resources are under pressure in some areas because of abstraction for public water supply. Although action by water companies to reduce leakage was successful between 1994/95 and 1998/99, further reductions will continue to be mandatory.

### Seas, oceans and coasts

Between 1990 and 1997 the overall quality of UK estuarine waters improved and contaminant inputs generally decreased. Bathing water quality improved between 1988 and 1999. However, about a half of fish stocks in marine waters around the UK were thought to be under threat from over-fishing in 1997. Globally, the proportion of fish resources considered to be fully or over-exploited steadily increased between 1951 and 1994.

### Landscape and wildlife

There has been a decline in some highly valued species, habitats and landscapes especially in farmland areas over the last 30 years.

Although the rate has slowed since 1987, soils are continuing to be lost to development, at the rate of about 6,500 hectares per year between 1990 and 1994.

The overall area of woodland has been increasing since the 1920s, but we still need to consider the better management of our existing woodland.

There has been an increase in the use of recycled minerals.

### Sending the right signals

The effect of tax increases on petrol and diesel prices has been somewhat offset by falls in underlying prices. The real cost of motoring remained unchanged between 1974 and 1998, whereas public transport fares increased by over 50 per cent and disposable income by about 80 per cent.

Public awareness and understanding of sustainable development issues was low in 1996/97.

Whilst the proportion of women in senior positions increased between 1970 and 1998 there is still some way to go before parity with men is established.

Energy efficiency in the non-devolved government estate improved by 19.1 per cent between 1990/91 and 1997/98.

### International co-operation and development

In 1998, some 1.2 billion people, around a quarter of people in developing countries, were living on less than \$1 per day. Global population is expected to continue to increase, from 6 billion people in 1999 to a projected figure of almost 9 billion by 2050.

In 1995, UK emissions of carbon dioxide per head were similar to the European average, but about twice the average for the world as a whole

## INTRODUCTION

- 4.1 This chapter gives more details of the core<sup>1</sup> set of approximately 135 non-headline indicators. Each indicator is presented in one of 18 ‘families’ in which it occurs within the Strategy<sup>2</sup>. Many indicators are relevant to more than one issue or family, however, to avoid duplication each is only included in one family and cross-references given to other related issues and indicators. The complete list of the indicators in the core set is given in Annex A together with the associated objectives from the Strategy.
- 4.2 Each family has a brief introductory section which covers:
- the relevance of the family to sustainable development;
  - a summary table including each of the indicators in the family;
  - the main messages from the family of indicators;
  - references to key strategies and policies;
  - other related issues or indicators.
- 4.3 The summary table includes the period of the data used for each indicator and a baseline assessment of the change since 1970 and 1990, where data are available. Where targets or goals exist for the indicators these are also given in the table. In a few cases projections are available, but the assessments have been based only on historical data. In most cases the latest available data are for 1998, or earlier, and so the assessment gives a historical perspective against which future progress can be measured. The core set of indicators contains a few ‘contextual’ indicators, which are not linked to any objective. These are included because they give relevant background information, which helps to explain trends in other indicators – for example, indicators of demographic change. Baseline assessments have not been made for these contextual indicators.
- 4.4 The baseline assessments are presented using the following symbols:
- ✓ significant change, in direction of meeting objective;
  - ✗ significant change, in direction away from meeting objective;
  - ≈ no significant change;
  - ... trend is uncertain or no quantitative data available;
  - na not applicable, in cases where the indicator is for contextual purposes.

The summary tables also include, where appropriate, summary information for the 15 headline indicators. The more detailed illustrations for the headline indicators are presented in Chapter 3.

1 See Chapter 1 for definition of the core set of indicators of sustainable development.

2 Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, (May 1999). *A better quality of life: a strategy for sustainable development in the United Kingdom*. TSO, London (Command number 4345)

4.5 Within the families each indicator is presented in a similar format, which includes:

- the objective as set out in the indicator framework *Monitoring progress*<sup>3</sup>;
- an illustration of the indicator ;
- the main trends;
- the relevance of the indicator to sustainable development;
- any targets (if appropriate);
- further trends and statistics;
- background information.

In approximately 20 cases the indicator is still to be developed and in a number of the other cases there are plans to change or refine the indicator in the future.

4.6 Further background and technical information and details of sources for each indicator will be included in a technical annex attached to the electronic version of the publication on the DETR website (see also final section of Chapter 2). Data for each indicator will also be available on the website.

3 Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, (May 1999). *Monitoring Progress: Indicators for a strategy for sustainable development in the United Kingdom*. DETR, London

**Families from the strategy used for the framework for the core set of indicator**

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