

SPECIAL REPORT

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AS PCTs are wound down they can still help new organisations seize the sustainability baton

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POWERED BY PASSION

EXCELLENCE

All PCTs have seen huge challenges this year but Sandwell has managed to continue the efforts which earned it an HSJ Award

Almost as soon as Sandwell Primary Care Trust staff had recycled the champagne bottles from celebrating their 2010 HSJ Award for Good Corporate Citizenship, the government announced plans to abolish PCTs from 2013.

For public health manager Shaukat Ali, this meant a whole new challenge – keeping the award-winning sustainability programme at the top of a seismically shifted agenda.

“A lot of energy is now being put into transition work, and we are a bit further down the pecking order,” says Mr Ali. “The chair of the good corporate citizen group here is very supportive but obviously now our work has to be aligned with everything else going on.”

It would have been easy for Mr Ali and his small team of sustainability champions to put the HSJ Award on the mantelpiece and allow the campaign to drift until 2013. But they decided it was too important a fight to give up.

“We tried to keep the momentum going ourselves, by focusing on projects that did not require additional investment,” says Mr Ali.

He concedes that it was harder to justify invest to save measures such as expenditure on the estate. But effort was redirected into other ideas.

“We have increased staff



‘Keep doing things that require little investment, like awareness raising’
Shaukat Ali

SANDWELL'S WINNING FORMULA

The PCT established a good corporate citizenship working group to drive its response to a wide range of sustainability legislation, policies and plans.

Initiatives pushed by the working group included:

- Offering cycling proficiency training to staff and the public
- Conducting a staff travel survey
- Introducing salary sacrifice schemes for bus passes and bicycle purchases
- “Dump the car” days, car share and lease of hybrid fuel vehicles
- Including sustainability reporting in the public health annual report

awareness of sustainability using in-house communications,” he says.

Desk-side waste bins have been moved and replaced with recycling points. “This was a difficult message initially, but now every evening I see the recycling bins are full.”

The board reprioritised its work programmes and dropped regular monitoring of energy usage – so Mr Ali and his team do this work themselves.

There is also more emphasis in using hotdesking at the trust's headquarters, which could allow it to release some of its leases in the near future.

Sustainability is being embedded into contracts with suppliers, requiring bidders to demonstrate their commitment to the issue.

The trust's carbon footprint fell 21 per cent from 4,552 tonnes of CO₂ in 2008-09 to 3,754 tonnes in 2009-10. As many as 20,000 people engaged in a physical activity programme.

Mr Ali is hoping the team will be rewarded for these efforts with a further reduction in carbon emissions for 2010-11.

The HSJ Award judges said the Sandwell strategy touched on all the cornerstones of good corporate citizenship.

They added: “Executive level commitment has helped push

forward a wide-ranging programme that has cut waste and carbon output within the organisation, increased physical activity among the population and improved career opportunities for local people.”

But the trust is well aware that it will eventually have to hand over the baton for sustainability as well as commissioning, and is working hard on doing so.

“We have to get on to the clinical commissioning groups' agendas,” explains Mr Ali. “We have to tell them that sustainability is important.”

A leaflet has been sent to GPs telling them of the benefits of sustainable practices, and how the PCT can help.

For trusts in a similar position Mr Ali has some simple words of encouragement.

“Keep doing the important things that require little investment, such as awareness raising,” he says. “And try to get onto the forums and agendas of the new organisations to speak about sustainability.”

He says sustainability champions should be identified to lead on the issue in the GP groups. “It will need to be based on passion,” he says. “But then that is how it started for us.” ●

Find out more

HSJ Awards 2011

→ www.hsjawards.co.uk

PLANNING

LIGHTBULB MOMENT

Don't go to sleep on sustainability. Safeguarding the NHS for the future means focusing now on preparing for carbon reduction and energy management across the board

In the fast changing world of the NHS, sustainability is already starting to sound like yesterday's buzzword. In fact, it may well be the only way to survive tomorrow.

Many experts believe the only way the health service will cut its costs, remain relevant to patients and attract the best staff is to embrace sustainability in its purest form.

Making sure lights are turned off in unused rooms, while important, is just the beginning. The health service needs to think far more deeply about the real meaning of providing a sustainable service. Trusts need to ensure they are meeting the health needs of the current generation without compromising those of generations to come.

NHS Sustainable Development Unit director David Pencheon says the challenge requires an entirely new way of thinking.

"We have got very good at running hospitals more efficiently, but now we need to think about how many hospitals we need and where we need them," he says.

The reasons why the NHS must strive for sustainability can be divided into four main arguments, all of them compelling: saving money; complying with the law; improving health; and protecting reputation.

Simple savings

The NHS has some quick work to do if it is to meet its target of finding £20bn in efficiency savings by 2015.

"Many people believe it costs money to behave sustainably," says Mr Pencheon. "But the evidence shows that in many areas, it will quickly save you money."

Simple steps, such as installing motion sensor lights that switch off in empty rooms, can provide significant cost savings across large NHS organisations.

Carbon Trust head of carbon programmes Tim Pryce says many organisations use vast quantities of unnecessary energy: "There is a lot of equipment in big trusts: heating and ventilation and medical equipment that is often left on when it doesn't need to be."

There is also a range of financial benefits beyond energy bills. Encouraging flexible working practices for certain staff, for example, can increase productivity and efficiency while also reducing carbon emissions and fuel costs from unnecessary journeys.

According to Mr Pencheon, the biggest opportunity, and indeed the biggest challenge, is to reduce the number of times people need to use the NHS. Almost every appointment uses carbon in some form.

"The health service spends

lots of time trying to cure people from illness. If we invest more in prevention, we will have better outcomes, better value for money and be more sustainable."

Ultimately, if fewer facilities are needed to treat patients, the NHS will be much more sustainable and deliver greater savings. Closing hospitals may not be an easy political message, but in time and in certain circumstances, it may yet be seen as a positive step.

Greater regulation

The government is committed to cutting greenhouse gasses, and it is passing this commitment on to major organisations to ensure they play their part.

The carbon reduction commitment now requires all organisations using more than 6,000 MWh per year of electricity to report on their emissions.

From 2012, these organisations – which include almost all NHS trusts – will have to buy allowances from the government at £12 per tonne of carbon dioxide emitted in the previous year.

Aside from this, the NHS itself has pledged to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 10 per cent from 2007 levels by 2015. And the government has signed up to cut Britain's carbon emissions by 50

per cent between 1990 and 2025.

Mr Pryce warns that one way or another, this will increase the pressure on the NHS to become more sustainable.

"The government may want to achieve this target by increasing the cost of carbon through the commitment, or it may even set the NHS a specific stepping-stone target," he says.

The Climate Change Act (2008) set longer term targets for the UK, including an 80 per cent cut between 1990 and 2050. It will also require organisations to demonstrate how their efforts are being measured, monitored and managed. But regulation can act as a carrot as well as a stick. The renewable heat incentive will pay organisations a tariff for using biofuels to generate heat.

Health consequences

The financial penalties and regulatory incentives show just how seriously the government is taking the threat of global warming. The NHS should be at the front line of this campaign to change behaviour.

Sustained severe weather patterns would put an intense strain on health services.

"If climate change takes off like it looks like it will then it will have serious consequences for health," says Mr Pencheon. "Very hot summers bring direct health consequences, and there



Switching off unneeded lights and computers is a good start but far more action will be required

could be floods, heatwaves, possible increases in food poisoning, an influx of tropical diseases and more.”

This gives the health service a major motive not only to act more sustainably itself, but to promote the concept to the population.

“People didn’t see smoking as a threat until doctors stopped people smoking,” says Mr Pencheon. “If people see the NHS not behaving sustainably, they have an easy excuse not to bother themselves.”

He adds that the NHS sees one million people every 36 hours, so has a huge opportunity to influence the nation’s psyche.

Mr Pryce adds that there is a clear link between sustainable lifestyles and healthy people, making it incumbent on the NHS to promote such behaviour.

Responsible reputation

Cleanliness and intervention success rates may be the main building blocks of a hospital’s reputation, but there is every reason to take sustainability seriously as well – especially post-reforms.

‘Closing hospitals may not be an easy message, but in time it may yet be seen as positive’

HOW TO REDUCE YOUR CARBON EMISSIONS

A five-step guide from the Carbon Trust

- Mobilise your organisation – make sure you have the right resources and commitments in place
 - Understand where you are now – record your carbon footprint and energy bills in a detailed fashion
 - Identify the opportunities – analyse a wide range of options and quantify a shortlist of targets
 - Finalise a strategy – decide why, what, how and when you will reduce carbon emissions
 - Implement the plan – communicate what you are going to do, make it happen and measure it
- For more information see www.carbontrust.co.uk**

KPMG director Matthew Custance says: “In the presence of choice and contestability, patients could pay more attention to sustainability.”

Perhaps even more importantly, so could staff.

“Every business needs to care about sustainability because staff care. If you want to attract the best graduates – and the NHS is trying to recruit highly skilled staff amid fierce international competition – you have to pay attention to sustainability.”

Given the health benefits of sustainable lifestyles, and the health risks of global warming, the NHS could also suffer deep reputational damage if it is seen to act irresponsibly in this area.

The carbon reduction commitment league tables out later this year will quickly earn some trusts a reputation for acting unsustainably and uneconomically.

Comprehensive planning

Few can remain unconvinced of the need to embrace sustainability. But many may be unsure how best to do so.

The best way, according to the

NHS Sustainable Development Unit, is to draw up a board-approved sustainable development management plan. This sets out how an organisation intends to measure and report on sustainability across a range of areas.

Almost three quarters of NHS organisations now have plans – but that leaves one in four without a comprehensive strategy to benefit from going green.

NHS North Yorkshire and York is using a plan in a bid to save £5m over five years and cut its carbon emissions by 25 per cent by 2014 (see case study, overleaf). It drew this up using advice from the Carbon Trust, which has a five-step plan for improving the sustainability of an NHS organisation (see box, left).

Trust collaboration

Once trusts have made an objective and frank assessment of how sustainable they are, and how sustainable they would like to be, they need to work out what projects would take them on that journey.

For examples they need look no further than each other. Mr Pryce says trusts should draw up carbon management plans together – benefiting from each other's experiences.

"All the NHS trusts in Liverpool are currently sharing ideas to produce a city-wide behaviour change campaign to reduce carbon emissions," he says.

"If the NHS knew what the rest of the NHS knew, we truly would have a world-beating health service," says Mr Pencheon. "No one hospital is doing everything right, but across the board there are some fantastic examples of innovative sustainable practice."

And collaboration need not be confined to within the health service.

"The new academic health science centres bring great opportunities for NHS trusts to work with universities on decentralised energy – for example within King's Health Partners in London," says Mr Pryce.

Such a move could see trusts team up with higher education institutions to produce electricity locally, using the waste heat for central heating, cutting emissions and bills.

Buyer power

There is plenty of sustainability innovation going on in the health service.

Nottingham University Hospitals Trust has been working for several years to provide a sustainable food service.

It put measures in contracts to help local suppliers compete with national counterparts, and began to give additional weight to bids from suppliers that invested in sustainable initiatives.

By buying produce locally it has reduced transport emissions, cut waste to landfill,

boosted its standing in the local community and promoted recovery by improving the freshness of patients' food.

Other areas of procurement can be treated in the same way.

Rotherham Foundation Trust was the first health service organisation to adopt the forward commitment procurement approach to stimulate innovation in the supply chain.

It promised to buy lighting that had yet to be manufactured, as long as it was produced to certain sustainability and performance specifications.

Mr Pryce says: "The NHS has a lot of buyer power and can ask suppliers to be more resource efficient by buying products that have not been through an energy-intensive process."

"Also, if a trust is buying a photocopier, it should count the cost of the energy it will use over its lifetime – including charges through the carbon reduction commitment and any impact on health of climate change – as well as the up-front cost of the machine."

Travel awareness

With petrol prices soaring, transport is another area where trusts can make big savings both in their carbon emissions and fuel bills. These efforts can take many forms.

One plan could be reducing the number of journeys staff have to make to attend work functions and meetings, as NHS North Yorkshire and York did.

Or it could involve reducing patient journeys – both by more efficient prevention and treatment methods, and by more organised use of ambulances and other trust vehicles.

"By using the most efficient fleet, only resorting to heavy vehicles where you need to, and some good solid logistics, ambulance trusts can make big savings," says Mr Pencheon.



'Trusts should look to draw up sustainability plans together'

David Pencheon

Non-carbon waste

Although carbon emissions are the hottest sustainability topic, and often the most demonstrable way of cutting bills and scoring green points, there are many other avenues available.

Reducing the amount of waste and water it uses will save a trust money as well as help save scarce resources, according to KPMG director and head of public sector sustainability Jon Gorrie.

"Increased sorting of waste and maximum recycling will reduce the amount of money a trust has to pay to waste management companies to take rubbish to landfill," he says.

Using more grey and brown water will also cut water bills significantly across a large trust.

Energy efficiency

Simple steps should not be overlooked. Simply making sure staff turn off computers when they finish using them, and that lights are programmed to go off in unused rooms, will take trusts a long way.

There is also room for innovation in the use of energy.

"One area we think is coming is performance contracting," says Mr Gorrie. "This involves paying a consortium to improve energy efficiency and only paying them out of the savings."

The model could see energy firms or utilities contractors working with professional services firms and banks to reduce trusts' bills and benefit from the savings.

So there is plenty of guidance, and a bounty of simple, challenging and innovative ideas out there to help trusts benefit from sustainability.

The only choice they do not have is whether to do embrace the concept. Whichever routes they decide to go down, they need to start planning now if they want to survive in a rapidly changing landscape. ●

CASE STUDY: NHS NORTH YORKSHIRE AND YORK

NHS North Yorkshire and York launched its sustainable development management plan in March 2010.

It set out to make a net saving of £1m over five years through initiatives that were forecast to cost £4m. It also targeted a 25 per cent reduction in carbon emissions by 2014.

Bruce Willoughby, consultant in public health at the PCT, says the Carbon Trust helped it through the process of drawing up and implementing the plan.

"Gathering the baseline information was very interesting. People thought transport was the big source of emissions for us, as we are a big rural trust,

but actually energy accounted for three quarters of our footprint," he says.

The trust found simple housekeeping measures would often bring big improvements so it appointed energy champions in each workplace and held regular telephone conferences and

web chats to keep them informed and engaged. It also cut carbon emissions from travel by 7 per cent within a year of launching the plan, after the chief executive sent a group email endorsing phone and internet meetings where practical.

The biggest challenge is maintaining a focus on

sustainability as the PCT is abolished: "Our main focus now is making sure we hand over responsibility for sustainability to the new commissioning organisations. We are producing board reports and trying to work closely with the clinical commissioning groups as they evolve."