



Sustainable Development Research Network

SDRN ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday 17th April 2007

University of Westminster, London

Present: Roland Clift (CES, University of Surrey); Stephen Bass (Defra); Ruth Coward (Defra); Andrew Dobson (Keele University); Arik Dondi (Defra); Malcolm Eames (Brunel University); Isabella Earle (Defra); Hazel Granger (CLG); Gary Kass (soon to be Natural England); Karen Lucas (University of Westminster); Kate McGeevor (SDRN); Alan Paterson (DfT); Tanja Pless-Mulloli (University of Newcastle); Katharine Ross (Environment Agency); Ben Shaw (SDRN)

Apologies: Paul Ekins (PSI); Julie Foley (Environment Agency); Peter Hedges (EPSRC); Helen Marquard (Defra); Evan Williams (SEPA)

1. Welcome and Introductions

Roland Clift welcomed new and returning members of the Advisory Committee and explained the Committee's revised structure. Meetings will seek to cover day-to-day business and issues in the first hour. The bulk of each meeting will be devoted to the discussion of key issues/questions (for example, SDRN's work plan).

2. Outline of SDRN III Proposal

Ben Shaw introduced PSI's proposal for the third phase of SDRN to the group, outlining the aims and objectives of the Network and key planned activities. SDRN will continue with a number of existing activities (namely, communications (Annual Conference; Lecture series etc), liaison with Policy-makers, and the undertaking of research and evidence reviews) but will feature a new focus on research into practice. This will be delivered by four new workstreams, each led by a partner.

There was some discussion about what constitutes sustainable development research as a focus for the Network. In the past, SDRN considered research that considered two of the three pillars of SD as 'sustainable development research'. It was agreed that developments in the SD agenda mean the Network should consider all three pillars as integral to sustainable development.

The Committee was keen to ensure that all four of the Research into Practice workstreams retain a focus on these three pillars, in particular the Business Resource Efficiency stream. Defra confirmed that this focus would be expected.

It was noted that it is timely for the Network to be considering greater involvement in health as the Department for Health and UKHPA have both been considering SD

issues recently. For similar reasons, it was identified as a good time to be working with the engineering community.

3. Advisory Committee: Terms of Reference

It was suggested that the Research into Practice workstream should be reflected under the Terms of Reference' first point. There was some discussion about whether SD research should include monitoring. SDRN has fed into the development of Defra's SDIs in the past; it was also recognised that SDC holds a monitoring role.

The Terms refer to 'research funding agencies' but not all RCs are represented in the AC's revised membership. PSI is to discuss with Peter Hedges, from the EPSRC, to see to what extent he can provide the Committee with input beyond that of just the EPSRC. A clearer view of the contribution of RCs and science to SD is expected soon following the CSR. The AC should also ensure that action in the devolved administrations is included.

The Committee discussed research gap analysis and the role of SDRN within this. Previous SDRN work – e.g. the ERFF report, MFA workshop etc – have already done this, but it is also something that RCs are responsible for. There are a range of activities that can be used to perform gap analysis from structured events to the more rigorous and longer processes of rapid reviews. PSI should discuss this with Defra and Research Councils, to determine how SDRN could help with this in the future.

Malcolm Eames suggested that one of the problems with the ERFF report was that it was not aligned closely enough with spending decisions and those responsible for them. Any future gap analysis should ensure engagement with these decision-makers, to guarantee appropriate follow-up. PSI will consider how this role fits in with the agreed contract for SDRN.

4. Progress to date

▪ Communications

Kate McGeever updated the AC on progress with SDRN's new communications strategy. A new website and newly designed Mailing had been launched the previous day and members were asked to feedback on these. Amazon PR have been working on the Communications Strategy, but have delayed the identification of key audiences and topics for the Annual Conference, Research reviews etc have been decided. KM will send a press release to AC members, so they can circulate information about the new site to colleagues.

▪ Research into Practice Workstream

Ben Shaw introduced the two draft proposals for the Research into Practice workstreams. The Sustainable Transport theme is to be led by external partner the Centre for Sustainability (C4S) at TRL, and is likely to focus initially on climate change adaptation. The Committee agreed that this is potentially a huge topic; the work is likely to focus on transport infrastructure but Ben Shaw will clarify this with C4S. C4S should consider the work that Defra is undertaking on its climate change adaptation framework.

The Spatial Planning and Development theme will be led jointly by Land Use Consultants and the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI), and is likely to focus on Sustainability Appraisal (SA). There are lots of examples of how to 'do' an effective SA, but less about the institutional structures needed to support one and the barriers that prevent successful implementation. The work should address these organisational and cultural issues.

Committee members are to be sent both proposals and are asked to send comments to Ben.

Kate told that Committee that RICS are keen to hold another series in conjunction with SDRN, and are prepared to help organise speakers and to provide the venue. Gary Kass suggested that that lectures should reflect RICS broad remit (e.g. land management), rather than just the built environment. Kate will discuss this with RICS.

It was suggested that SDRN might also be involved in an event following up the RCEP's Urban Environment report. Defra's Sustainable Communities Division are coordinating the government's response to the report.

5. Defra Research and the role of SDRN

- Presentation by Louise Shaxson, Defra

Louise Shaxson made a presentation to the group on the management of the research process within Defra (see Annexe 1). She highlighted the Defra publication 'Our Approach to Evidence and Innovation', a culmination of work on evidence that is often overlooked. She reported that, within Defra, work on research and synthesis, and the research-policy interface will not be funded as initially hoped. This creates big opportunities for SDRN. It is recognised that the research / policy interface needs improving and that this is a role that SDRN should be taking on. This would not require SDRN to change its function, but the way that it does things needs to operate in a more fluid way.

Four elements need to be brought together if going to get good policy:

1. Scoping the question – requires time and an iterative approach
2. Procuring new evidence – government good at this relative to others
3. Interpretation evidence
4. Existing and emerging evidence – need to get better at using this and research networks/SDRN have important role to play

1 and 3 are demand side and need to be policy relevant and timely. 2 and 4 are supply side and need to be robust. Defra's 'Innovation and Evidence Strategy' has more on this.

Different actors in the research and policy system work to very different timescales which presents problems to the process; a rapid review for policy-makers may be two weeks or less. Essentially, the issue is how to match policy makers' needs with researchers in a more effective way. The example of DTI's Science and Society programme was cited.

6. Rapid Research and Evidence Review

Ben Shaw introduced a paper which summarised the purpose of the Rapid Research and Evidence Reviews and presented the Committee with a number of suggested themes. It was agreed that a key criterion for the Reviews should be 'additionality' – the extent to which SDRN can make a difference to an area and avoids repeating any other, existing work. Concern was expressed that the possible move away from the existing rapid review process could result in it being less rigorous. There was some discussion about whether Reviews should only focus on areas where there is an existing body of evidence or whether a purpose should be to identify gaps. It was agreed that SDRN's work should be identifying what will appear on the policy agendas in the future, rather than just reacting to issues when they arise. SDRN should play a role in the co-production of policy agendas. Decisions on possible themes should be made based on how well the theme addresses the following: policy

needs; relevance; timeliness; and, value-added, with due consideration for the resources required.

The Committee felt that sustainable procurement presented good opportunities as a review theme. PSI should consult with Andy Davey of Defra to determine whether SDRN could usefully support the work of the SP Task Force.

Defra has recently commissioned work on food (e.g. shopping trolley' project) and is working with the results of this. It remains to be seen how much scope there is for further work on sustainable food. A review of procurement could consider food, although there is ongoing work within DH on this. It was suggested that research gaps may have emerge following the recent RCEP Urban Environment report.

It was agreed that there could potentially be cross-over between possible themes. For example, a review of procurement could consider market transformation and innovation. Similarly, market transformation contains element of leadership, as does the achievement of sustainable communities. Karen Lucas referred to Defra's review of behaviour change which looked at how transformation can be brought about, and what role champions play in this.

DH have just produced Guidance on Health in SEA (together with HPA, CLG, Defra), which highlighted the need for a better evidence base (a 'review of reviews') to support SEAs. There is a lot of work on health prevention and the environment, but less on the way that the environment promotes health. A review of research on this would be very beneficial to DH and has potential links with the spatial planning workstream and the RCPE Urban Environment report.

7. SDRN Annual Conference 2007

It was suggested the Annual Conference could be held in December, but members agreed that September was more desirable. The RSA has been provisionally booked for Thursday 20th September. A number of suggested session themes for conference were discussed.

Defra has recently commissioned a number of projects on the public understanding of sustainable food, transport, energy use etc. which could be showcased in a session on pro-environmental behaviour. Place-making was also agreed on as a good theme, although GK pointed out that place-making is about more than just the built environment (*as suggested in the briefing paper).

It was suggested that conference could use 'interactive' sessions / workshops to get input into research reviews or research into practice workstreams,

Tanja Pless-Mullooli, Karen Lucas, Louise Shaxson and Andy Dobson all offered to provide further input into the conference organisation

SCP was suggested as a general theme, which would be broad enough to incorporate most of the suggested ideas. 'Research into Practice' was also suggested by GK as a good option, that would highlight the practical focus of SDRN's third phase.

A separate poster session was also proposed. Karen Lucas suggested a journal special edition could be organised, to encourage high quality submissions, and that the session be held during the evening reception. It was agreed that the conference would provide young researchers with valuable networking opportunities, and this

should be enough to encourage participation. PSI will look into the possibility of the session being sponsored.

8. Time and date of next meeting

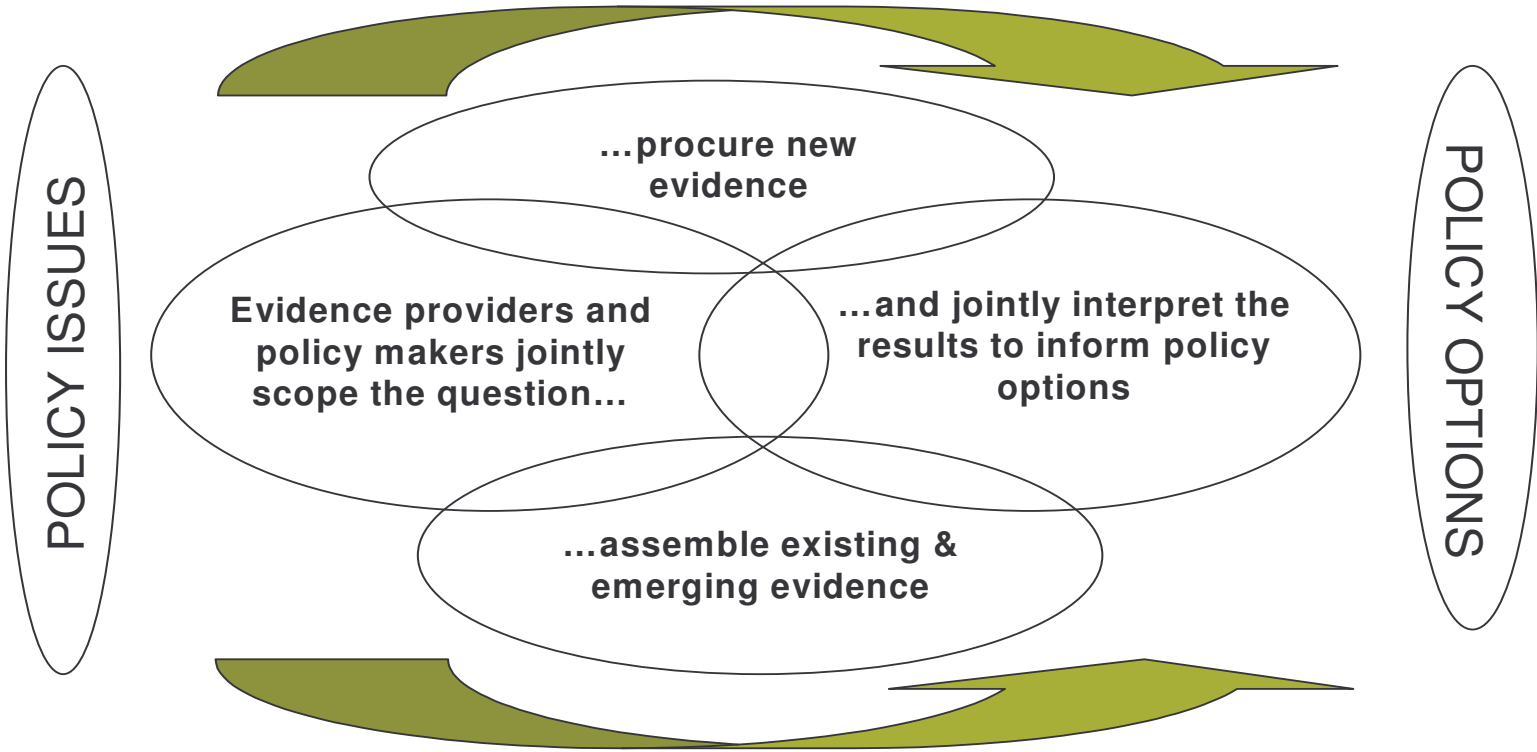
- Friday 6th July 2007
- Wednesday 10th October 2007 (tbc)

9. A.O.B.

Tanja Pless-Mulloli brought a new UKHPA report '*A Call to Action: A background report to the National Symposium on Health and Sustainable Development*' to the attention of the Committee and offered to provide copies to anyone interested.

Annexe 1: Knowledge management roles

A longer time frame allows evidence from primary research to complement existing knowledge.



A shorter time frame means that secondary research and evidence networks will be more cost-effective.