Ceredigion Association of Voluntary Organisations

Your local county voluntary council

2. Running your organisation

2.15 Environmental policy

What is an Environmental Policy?

An Environmental Policy (also known as a Green Policy or Sustainability Policy) is a written statement, which acts as a “window” into your organisation’s environmental intentions and principles in relation to managing the environmental impacts of its operations. It demonstrates a commitment and provides the starting point for all future environmental improvements. It will typically form part of a larger Environmental Management System (EMS), which will include:

- Measurable **objectives** that you hope to achieve
- **Action points** - the practical steps you will take to meet the objectives
- Identified **Indicators** that will be used to measure the success of the policy
- A time-table for **monitoring and review**.

Being sustainable involves a commitment to balance the economic, social and environmental impact of whatever we do.

Why have an Environmental Policy?

The Welsh Government has a legal obligation to promote sustainable development in all it does (see www.wales.gov.uk/themessustainabledev/index.htm) Producing, and putting into action, an Environmental Policy not only demonstrates publicly that you as an organisation are taking your impact on the environment seriously but internally some measures could also save you money. Having a Green Policy in place may be a requirement for some funding bodies.
The benefits associated with writing an Environmental Policy include:

- Assuring customers/partners of commitment to demonstrable environmental management
- Maintaining good public/community relations
- Enhancing image and market share
- Improving cost control
- Reducing incidents that result in liability
- Conserving raw materials and energy
- Improving industry/government relations.

Reviewing current practice

Before developing a policy it is important to ask, ‘Where is the organisation now?’ and ‘Where does it want to go?’ Your organisation’s existing policies and activities need to be audited for its present environmental impact. This will help to determine what needs to be covered by your policy and where improvements can be made. It is important that this review is done with the organisation as a whole so that you have support and understanding of everyone in working towards an effective Environmental Policy.

What should an Environmental Policy contain?

The policy is an agreed baseline and will be different for every organisation. It is not appropriate to adopt a policy off the shelf - the following notes provide a starting point for a discussion about what a policy and action plan might include. Every organisation can do something positive towards creating a healthier environment. Concentrating on something that can be done straight away, however small, is a good starting point. It makes an impact, creates confidence, and engenders support.

There is no standard content for an Environmental Policy, although as a rule the policy should fulfil the following requirements:

- Introduce the organisation
- Provide a commitment for continual environmental improvement
- State a commitment to compliance with relevant environmental legislation as a minimum level of performance.
- Give a commitment to prevention of pollution
- Address the specific impacts of the company, these could include:
    - Transport
    - Recycling of packaging materials
    - Minimising waste
    - Efficient use of water and energy
    - Use of biodegradable chemicals
    - Minimising use of solvents and lead-based paints
    - Use of timber from sustainable (managed) forests
    - Procedures to minimise noise disturbance to neighbours
    - Phasing out of CFCs and ozone-depleting substances.
- Remain specific to the size and nature of operations of the company
- Provide a framework for reviewing environmental objectives
- Communicated to all relevant parties internally and externally
- Continue to be a working document with periodic (usually annually) reviews to reflect environmental performance

An environmental policy is on most occasions a concise single page document therefore making it quick and easy to read.

Opening Statement

Your policy should start with a statement that acknowledges that your activities have an impact on the environment and demonstrates the commitment the organisation is making towards developing and putting into action an environmental policy. For example:

> *<Name of Organisation> recognises that our work may have a direct or indirect effect on the local, regional and global environment. We are committed to reducing any harmful effects on the environment and promoting the understanding of sustainability in its broadest context.*

You might find it helpful to think about the detail of your policy and action plan under different headings such as:

Waste reduction

It is most effective to minimise waste at source. Think about disposal of a product before you make a purchase.

Possible action points: Buy reusable, refillable or recyclable products; avoid using disposable items such as plastic plates, cutlery and cups; look for products made from recycled materials (purchasing recycled goods ensures the economic viability of recycling and helps create markets for collected materials).

Purchasing

All purchasing decisions should take account of the environmental factors involved in production, use and disposal of the product. Do you need to buy new? Could you borrow or share with another organisation?

Possible action points: Buy recycled and recyclable products; shop locally where possible; check if there is a fair trade option; buy eco-friendly cleaning products.

Energy and water saving

Energy production consumes valuable non-renewable resources and causes massive pollution.

Possible action points for energy efficiency: switch to green electricity suppliers; switch lights off wherever possible; use energy efficient light bulbs; use electrical equipment efficiently and ensure radiators have adjustable controls.

Possible action points for water efficiency: install water saving devices in toilet cisterns; regularly check for leaky taps, pipes and toilets and repair immediately.

Travel

Your environment policy could aim to reduce the impact of vehicle emissions by encouraging the application of sustainable principles to travelling and arranging meetings.

Possible action points: promote public transport, cycling or walking as the preferred form of transport for staff and volunteers; introduce extra allowances for those using alternative travel; car share where possible; use audio conferencing; work from home if appropriate.

For each section consider appropriate **policy, objective(s), action points** and **indicators**. For example:

Waste Reduction	
Policy	[Name of organisation] will reduce the amount of waste generated by reusing and recycling
Objective	To reduce waste generated by [name of organisation] by 10% by [target date]
Action points	Reduce consumption of materials; Reuse products where possible; Use refillable products where possible
Indicators	Amount of waste collected by the cleaners and recycling company Number of refuse bags purchased by [name of organisation]

Where to begin?

Spend a few moments thinking about your organisation, consider:

- The environmental impacts of your organisation
- How you would like to improve your environmental impact?
- What is practical for your company to achieve?

Allocate responsibility for:

- Drafting the policy
- Reviewing the policy
- Approving and signing the policy (the policy must be approved by the most senior level in your organisation).

Remember, that to be really effective, your policy must be understood and accepted by *all* employees. Think about how employees can provide their input e.g. set up a team to develop the policy which includes management and employees, organise a meeting with employees to discuss the policy, ask different employees on an individual basis what they think.

Disclaimer
The information provided in this sheet is intended for guidance only. It is not a substitute for professional advice and we cannot accept any responsibility for loss occasioned as a result of any person acting or refraining from acting upon it.

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