

A Short Guide to **Environmental protection and sustainable development**

July 2015



National Audit Office



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This Short Guide summarises UK government action on environmental protection and sustainable development, how much it costs, recent and planned changes and what to look out for across its main business areas and services.

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Interactive

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Key facts



Some notable facts in this short guide

Scope and departments involved

Key trends

Expenditure

Spending breakdown

Major programmes and developments

Key themes from NAO reports

Appendices

Environmental protection



3 out of 10
key environmental areas
are of *particular concern*

7 out of 10
have had *unsatisfactory progress*
(Environmental Audit Committee 2014)



UK carbon emissions

are decreasing, but further action will be required to meet the 2023–2027 emissions target set under the Climate Change Act (the fourth carbon budget)

Sustainable development



Sustainable development
is a cross-government issue with Defra and DECC playing key roles



17
UN sustainable development goals
proposed, to apply to all countries

Expenditure



£11 billion
Government environmental protection expenditure (2013-14)



£677 billion
Total government expenditure (2013-14)

Key facts

Scope and departments involved

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Appendices



Departmental responsibilities on environmental protection and sustainable development

Environmental protection is aimed at maintaining (and recovering when necessary) a healthy natural environment.

Sustainable development embraces environmental, social and economic objectives, to deliver long-term equitable growth which benefits current and future generations.

All government departments have been expected to embed sustainable development across their activities: policymaking, procurement, and estates. Department of Energy & Climate Change (DECC) and Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) have key roles in environmental protection and sustainable development.

Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs
 Waste, water, fisheries, flooding, farming, forestry, embedding sustainable development in government, climate change adaptation

Department of Energy & Climate Change
 Low-carbon energy, carbon budgets, fuel poverty

Cabinet Office
 Procurement policies and framework

HM Treasury and HM Revenue & Customs
 Environmental taxation

Department for Business, Innovation & Skills
 Sustainable economic growth, green finance and research

Department for Communities and Local Government
 Planning framework and building regulations

Department for Transport
 Low carbon transport

Department for Work & Pensions and Department of Health
 Health and social care
Home Office and Ministry of Justice
 Criminal justice

Department for Culture, Media & Sport
 Heritage assets and tourism
Department for Education
 Education

Foreign & Commonwealth Office, Department for International Development, Ministry of Defence, United Nations
 International action on sustainable development

Devolved administrations
 Devolved matters – including environmental issues. In Wales the Future Generations Act is intended to make sustainable development the central organising principle for the Welsh government

Key facts

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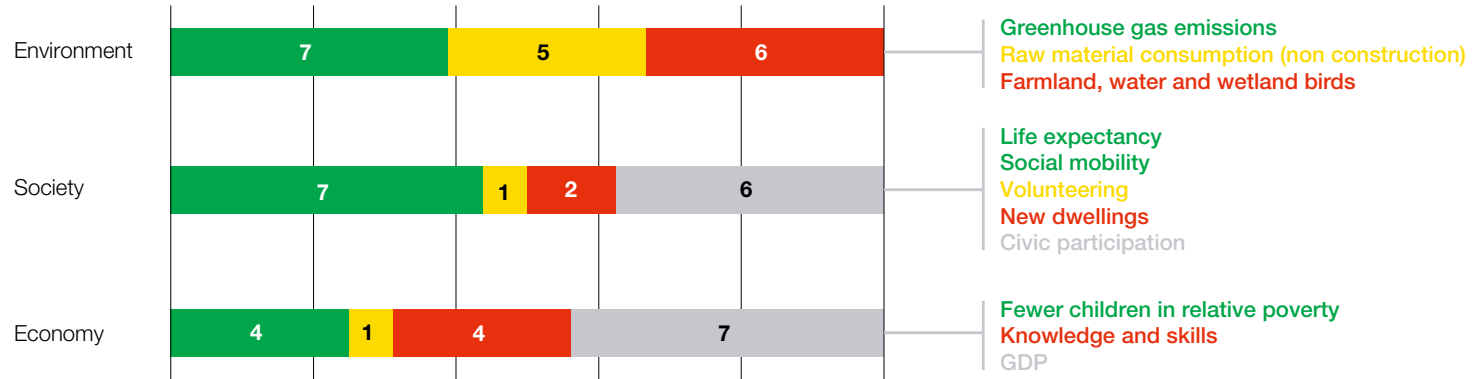
Appendices

Office for National Statistics Sustainable Development Indicators (England)

Number of headline measures

The last data set was published in July 2014 but not all were updated.

Assessment of selected measures



- Improving
- Stable
- Deteriorating
- Not assessed

Note

1 The analysis includes long- and short-term trends for each measure. Some indicators are England only, others are UK wide. Indicators not assessed includes those with no comparable past data, and those included for context.

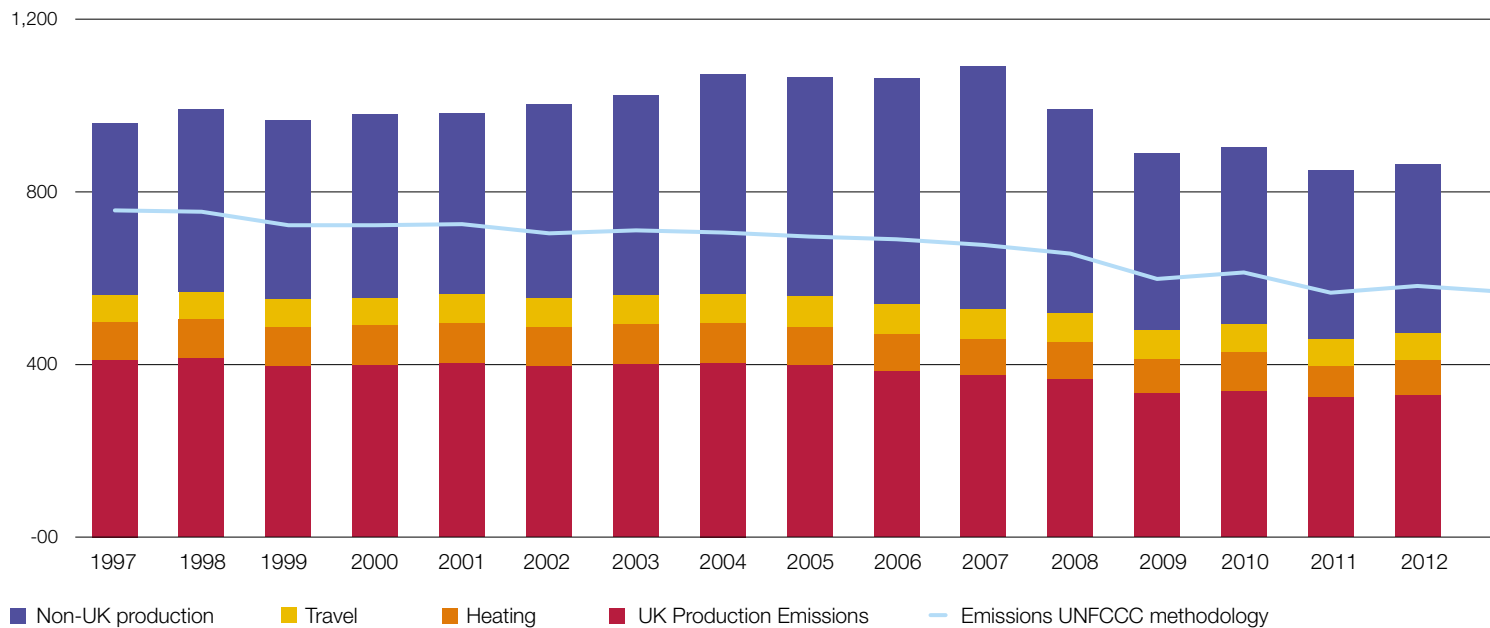
Greening Government Commitments

UK central government buildings and travel

	Baseline (2009-10)	Performance (up to 2013-14)	2014-15 Target
Greenhouse Gas emissions	3 MtCO ₂ e	-20%	-25%
Waste	333,447 tonnes	-22%	-25%
Water	38 million m ³	-9%	N/A
Number of domestic flights	201,576	-18%	-20%

UK carbon emissions – consumption and production

MtCO₂e emissions



Notes

- The bars show consumption based emissions known as 'carbon footprint'. It includes **UK production**: emissions associated with the good and services produced and consumed in the UK, **Non UK production**: emissions associated with good and services produced abroad and consumed in the UK (imports), **Travel and heating**: includes emissions associated with flights and buildings' heating.
- The line shows United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) emissions inventories. These are calculated on a territorial basis, therefore exclude emissions associated with imports but include greenhouse gas emissions deriving from goods and services produced in the UK and exported.

Key facts

Measuring expenditure on environmental protection is not straightforward due to the range of government activity involved.

Scope and departments involved

Under an international framework for classifying government expenditure ('COFOG'), environmental protection represented some **1.7% (£11 billion)** of UK government spend in 2013-14 (the latest data available).

Key trends

Expenditure 

This framework classifies public expenditure according to its main objective and so gives a minimum figure for environmental protection expenditure, since environmental protection may be a secondary objective of some programmes. For example some £5 billion of spend classified as economic affairs is related to agriculture, forestry and fishing.

Spending breakdown

Major programmes and developments

Key themes from NAO reports

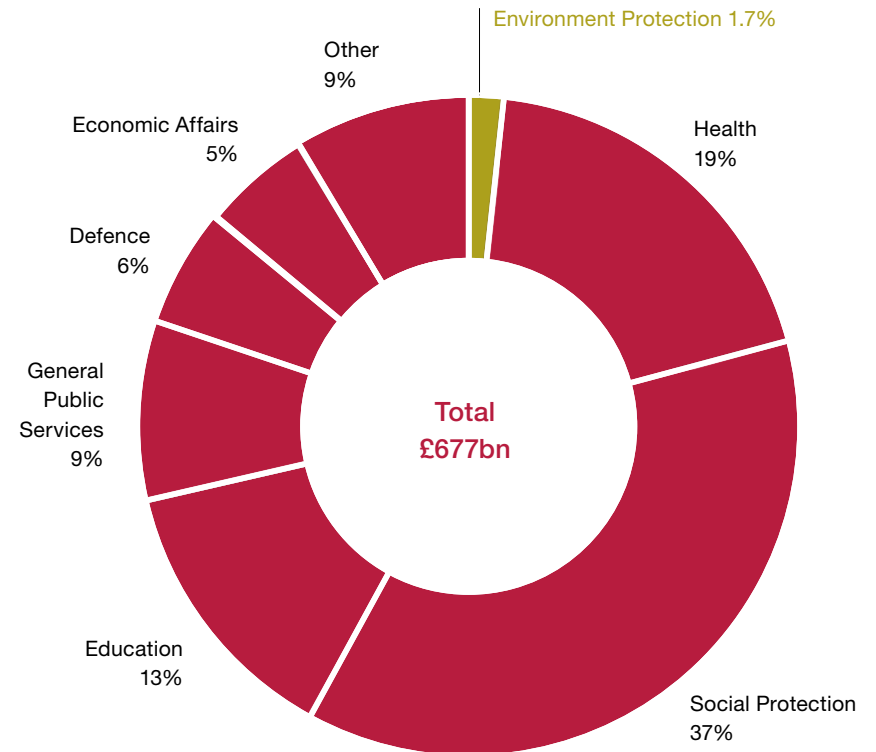
There are no available statistics for expenditure on sustainable development, as the government's ambition is to embed sustainable development into all of its activities and it is difficult to disaggregate.

Appendices

The Office for National Statistics also releases an analysis of total environmental protection expenditure, on a calendar year basis: it gives a figure of £12 billion in 2012.

A breakdown of government expenditure (2013-14)

According to the United Nations' Classification Of Functions Of Government (COFOG) framework



Note

1 The figures given are nominal spend – not adjusted for inflation. General public services includes public debt transactions and administration expenditure. Other includes public order and safety and EU transactions. Expenditure includes that by central and local government, and by the devolved administrations (whose expenditure is allocated to the relevant category).

Source: HM Treasury (whose expenditure is allocated to the relevant category), Country and Regional Analysis 2014, December 2014.

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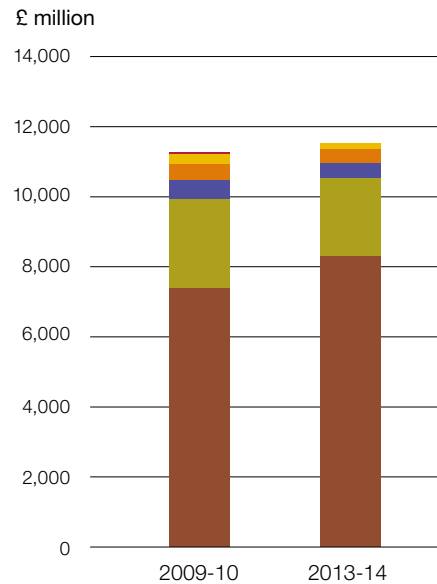
Major programmes and developments

Key themes from NAO reports

Appendices

Environmental protection expenditure, as defined under the international 'COFOG' framework, showed a marginal increase from 2009-10 to 2013-14. Within that, only waste management expenditure has increased (+12%), while all other categories of environmental protection spend have fallen.

UK government – Environmental expenditure by category



- Waste water management
- Pollution abatement
- R&D environmental protection
- Protection of biodiversity and landscape
- Environmental protection (not elsewhere classified)
- Waste management

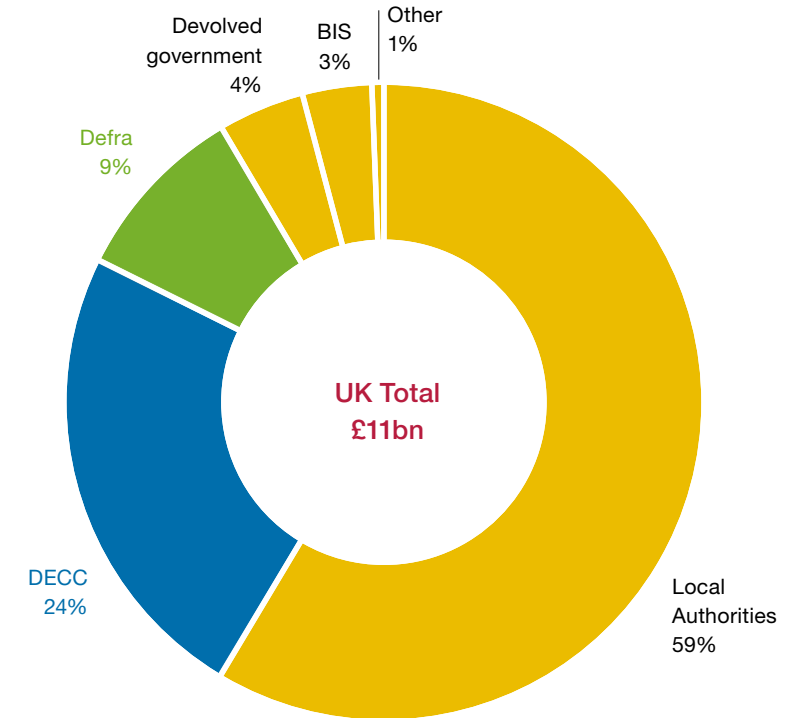
Note

1 Figures are in real terms.

Source: HM Treasury, Country and Regional Analysis 2014, December 2014.

Local authorities, being in charge of waste collection, are responsible for nearly 60% of environmental expenditure under this classification.

Environmental expenditure by department 2013-14



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Key themes from NAO reports

Appendices

Environmental protection

The current strategy for environmental protection

The 2011 White paper [The Natural Choice: Securing the Value of Nature](#) set out the government's strategy on the natural environment. It included 90 commitments intended to protect and improve the natural environment, grow a green economy, reconnect people with nature, and demonstrate international and EU leadership. An October 2014 update concluded that three-quarters of commitments were complete, albeit that in many cases the commitments represent initial steps towards long-term ambitions. Commitments completed include the establishment of an independent advisory body on natural capital (the Natural Capital Committee), and a new [Biodiversity Strategy](#) for England. Those in progress include research on low-carbon infrastructure and a new approach to offsetting biodiversity loss from development.

Mitigating climate change

Under the 2008 Climate Change Act, government must reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 80% by 2050 from 1990 levels. The 2011 [Carbon Plan](#) is the latest summary of policies and measures in place to reduce these emissions. Further measures will be needed to meet the government's interim carbon target for 2023–2027 (the 4th carbon budget).

Adapting to climate change

The impact of past greenhouse gas emissions means that some climate change is inevitable, and is expected to lead to rising sea levels, higher temperatures and increased frequency of extreme weather events, including flooding. The 2013 [National Adaptation Programme](#) set out actions planned and in progress to ensure resilience to a changing climate, including investment in flood defence, improved planning and design of major infrastructure projects, and health sector heatwave planning. The programme aimed primarily for England but also covers reserved, excepted and non-devolved matters.

Sustainable development

Embedding sustainability in government

The government's 2011 vision for sustainable development set an ambition to 'mainstream' sustainable development into all aspects of government activity including policies and policymaking, procurement, and estates management. Since 2011-12, HM Treasury guidelines have required UK central government departments to report on sustainability issues in their annual reports. Government has reduced the environmental impact of buildings and travel covered by the [Greening Government Commitments](#).

Key facts

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Appendices

June 2014: Environmental protection

Our review of progress on ten areas of environmental protection highlighted a mix of positive trends, such as improvements in the proportion of fish stocks fished sustainably, and challenges, such as meeting air quality targets on nitrogen dioxide, and on the proportion of water bodies with good ecological status. (See [progress chart](#) for more detail).

Departmental sustainability briefings

We reviewed how the [NHS](#), [Home Office](#) and the [Department for Business, Innovation & Skills](#), had embedded sustainability in their activities, covering governance, policymaking, procurement and operations. Findings include:

- The NHS had developed a sustainability strategy encompassing the whole health and social care sector. This did not dictate mandatory requirements but instead presented the case for change and identified key areas for action.
- The Home Office had a good understanding of the sustainability impacts of its activities and had focused on reducing the environmental impact of buildings and business travel under the Greening Government Commitments. It was not actively managing the significant sustainability impacts of the asylum estate.
- The Department for Business, Innovation & Skills had appointed a new departmental champion for sustainable development though it had not yet carried out a strategic assessment of the sustainable development impacts of all of its policy responsibilities.

February 2015: Sustainability reporting in central government: An update

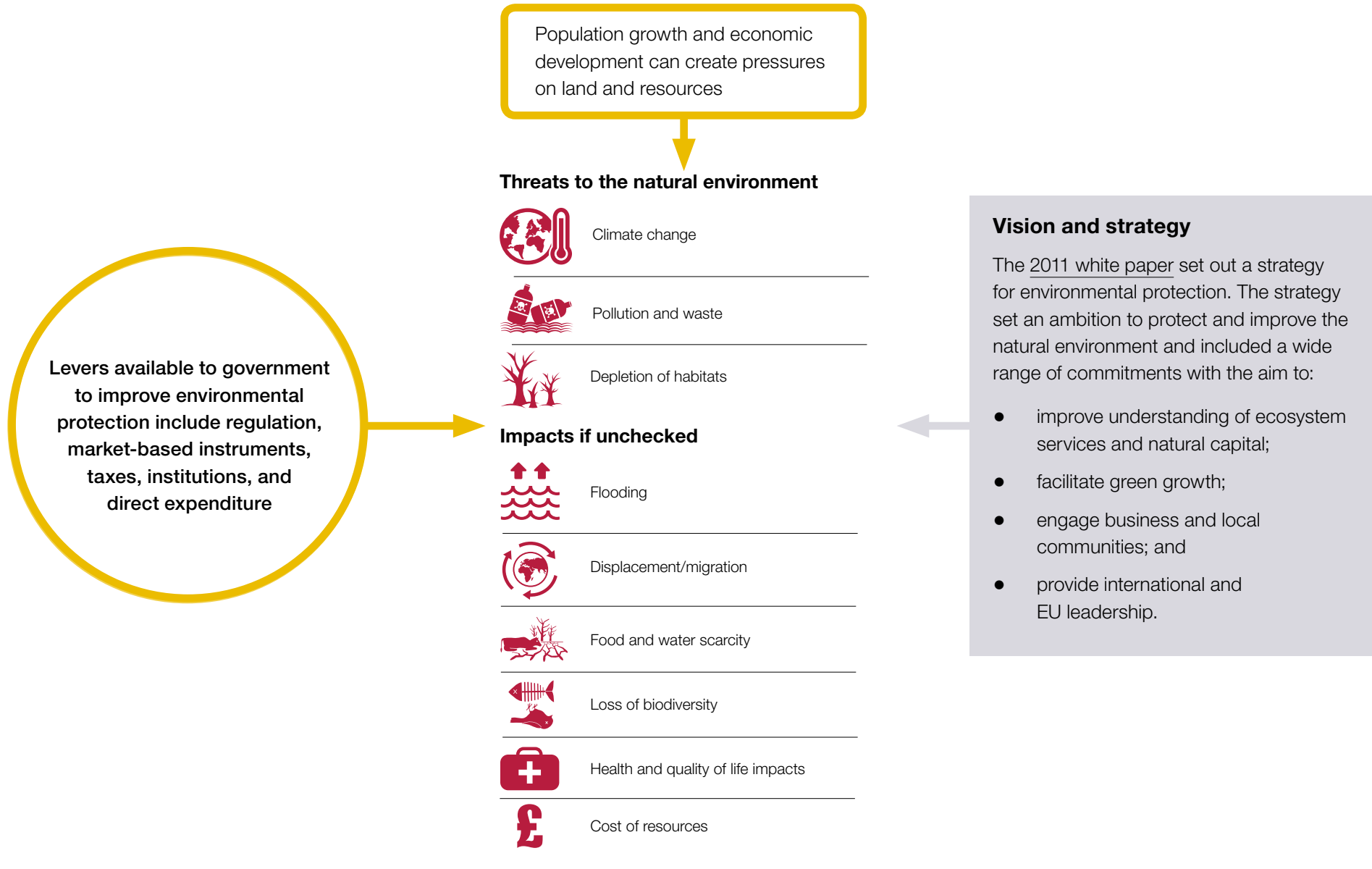
This review of sustainability reporting in central government annual reports identified some good practice examples and that quality had mostly improved. We found room for further improvement in some areas such as reporting on a department's wider impact on sector sustainability issues, and that government plans to streamline annual reports could be an opportunity to improve sustainability reporting.

Our work for the Environmental Audit Committee has covered a broad range of topics.

All our briefings are available at: www.nao.org.uk

Protecting the environment in the UK

What are the key themes?



Protecting the environment in the UK

What progress has been achieved?

“Despite recent progress in some areas, we are not on a trajectory to meet the government’s long-term vision [...] of being the first generation to leave the natural environment of England in a better state than it inherited”.

Natural Capital Committee, The State of Natural Capital, 2014.

Evaluation – Ten areas of environmental protection

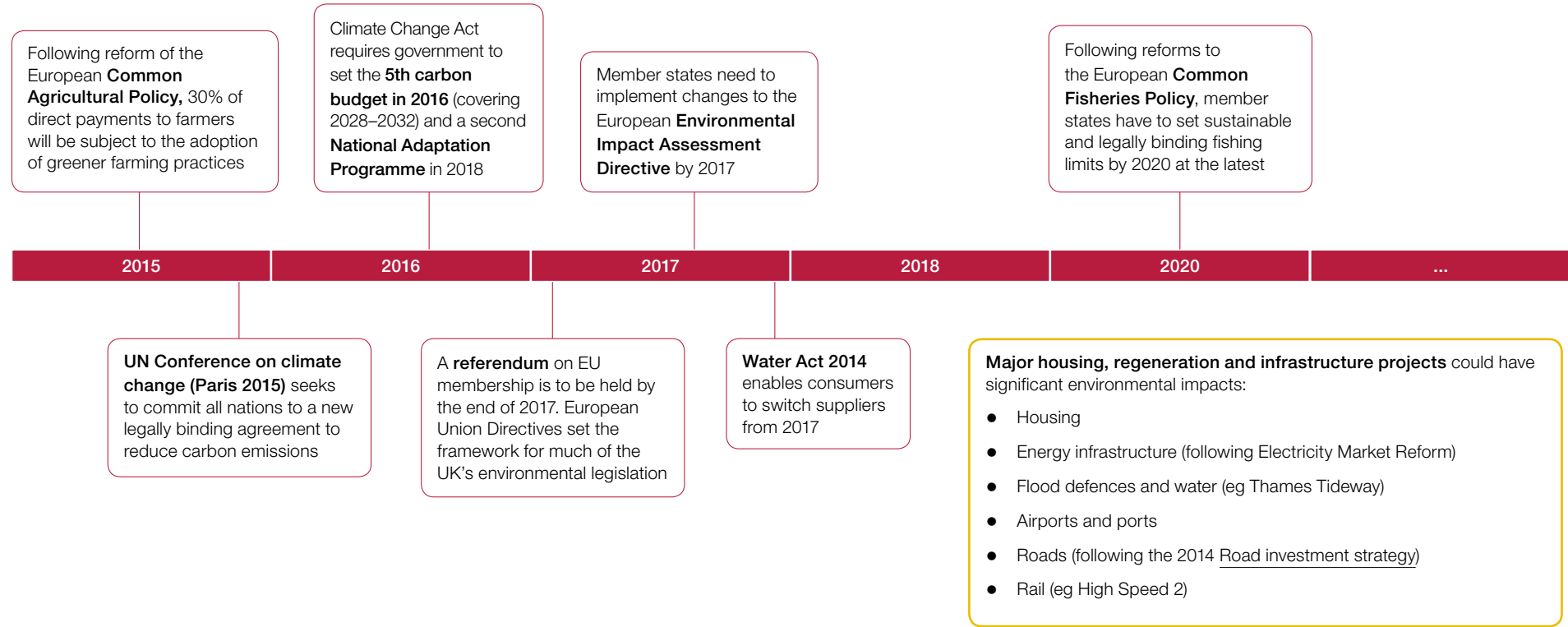
Area	Progress assessment	
	EAC	NAO
Emissions and climate change	●	The government expects to meet the third carbon budget but further policies will be needed to meet the fourth carbon budget (2023–2027).
Air pollution	●	UK meets air quality limit values for particulate matter and sulphur dioxide but not for nitrogen oxides.
Biodiversity	●	New biodiversity strategy launched in 2011, indicators show mixed performance between 2008 and 2013.
Forests	●	Rate of tree planting funded through Forestry Commission grants is not sufficient to meet ambition on forest cover. No clear numbers on deforestation, but National Forest Inventory shows strong growth in overall forest cover in England since 2010.
Soils	●	Most upland peat in areas of Sites of Special Scientific Interest now recovering. Lowland peat under pressure from intensive farming, particular concern over the loss of fertile peat topsoil in the East Anglian Fens.
Flooding and coastal protection	●	Environment Agency has increased the number of homes protected from flooding, but properties are still at risk from river and coastal (2.4 million) and surface water (3 million) flooding.
Resource efficiency and waste	●	UK expects to meet EU Landfill Directive target on biodegradable municipal waste to landfill, but not on track to meet recycling/reuse target for household waste.
Freshwater environment	●	Only one quarter of water bodies have good ecological status, behind target.
Water availability	●	Water Act 2014 seeks to improve sustainable water resource management by reforming the water market. Several basins currently under stress.
Marine environment	●	EU has reformed the Common Fisheries Policy. Improvements in the proportion of fish stocks fished sustainably.

Source: This table summarises our 2014 review of progress on ten areas of environmental protection, and the Environmental Audit Committee’s subsequent hearing and report. The latter assigned each area a scorecard rating with red signifying an area of particular concern, and amber insufficient progress. Our review focused on environmental protection in England and UK-wide targets and ambitions.



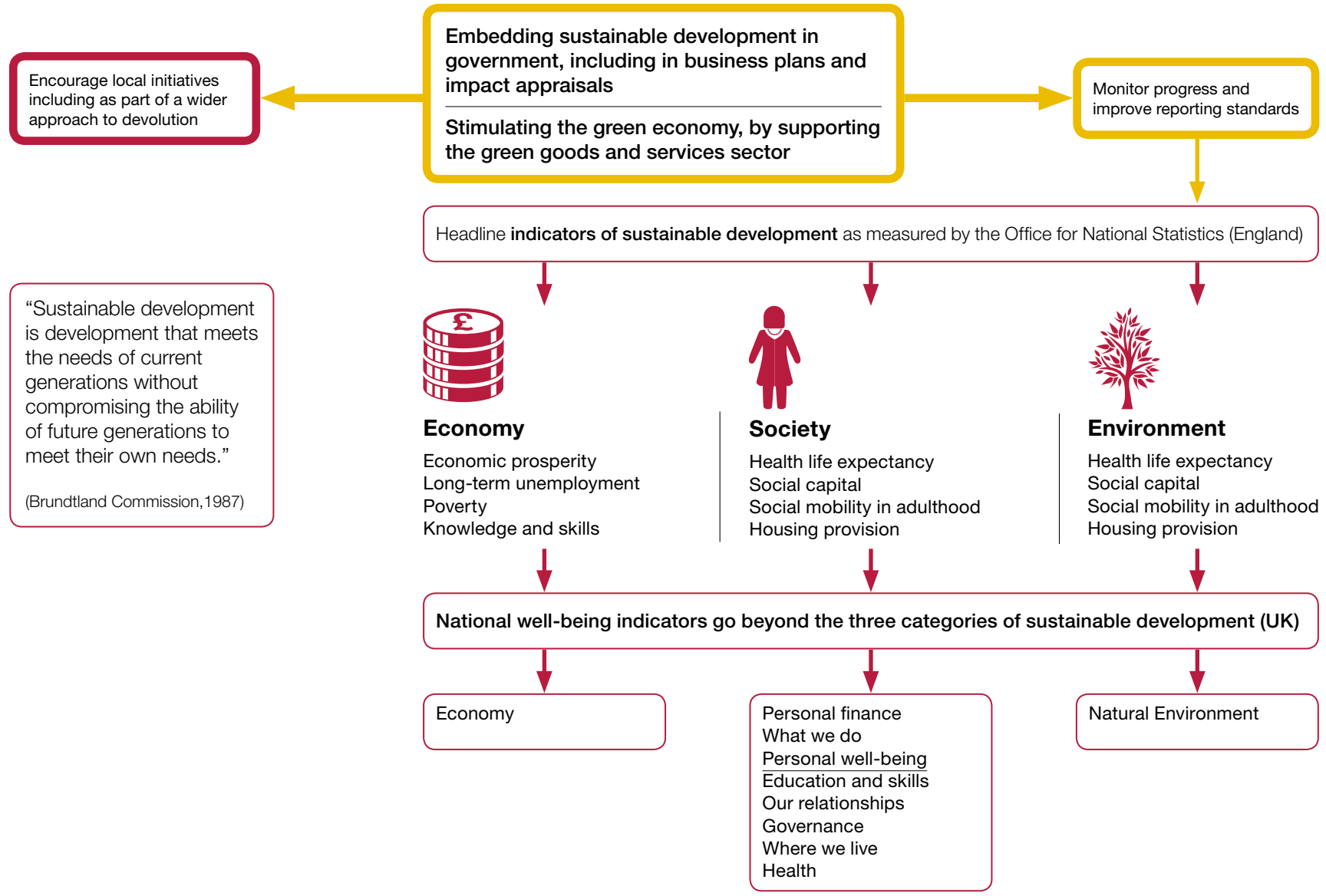
Protecting the environment in the UK

Anticipated future developments



Sustainable Development

Key themes of the coalition government's approach were to:



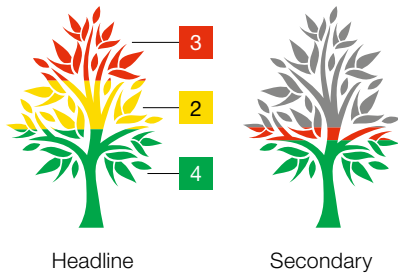
Sustainable Development

What progress has been achieved?

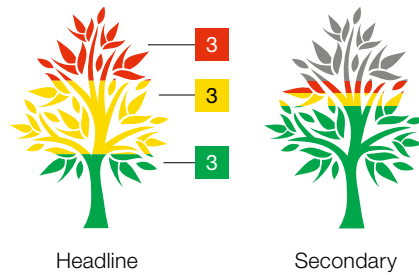
Sustainable Development Indicators (England)

Environment

Long term



Short term

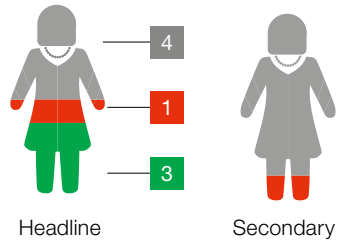


Number of measures that are:

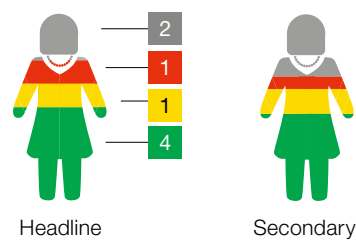
- Improving
- Stable
- Deteriorating
- Not assessed

Society

Long term

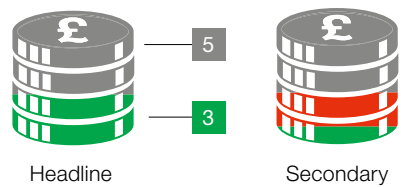


Short term

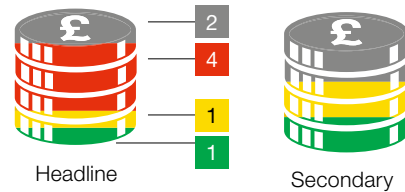


Economy

Long term



Short term



Embedding sustainability



Progress on meeting the Greening Government Commitments though not consistently across government

Introduction of sustainability champions in Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, Department of Health, Home Office



More should be done to:

- Address sustainable development policy gaps in departmental plans
- Improve government sustainable procurement standards

(Environment Audit Committee March 2015)

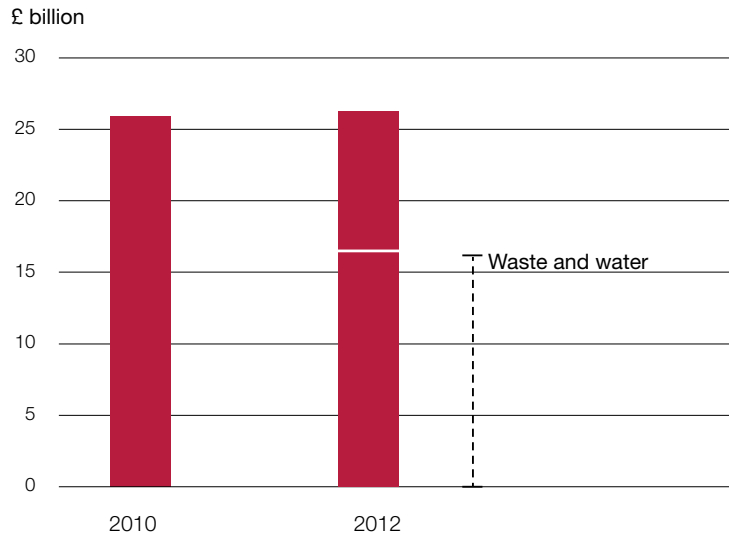


Sustainable Development

What progress has been achieved? *continued*

Green goods and services (UK)

Environmental goods and service sector-contribution to the economy (gross value added) +1.4%

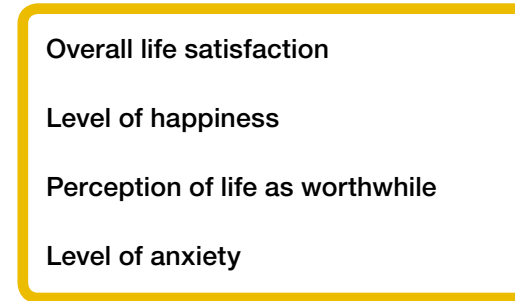


Source: Office for National Statistics, April 2015

Waste and water management contributed the most. Other significant contributors were recycling and renewable energy.

The Sustainable Development Indicators include a different measure of total sales in the goods and services sector. Both measures are experimental statistics.

Personal well-being (UK)



“there have been small but significant improvements in average ratings in all four measures of personal well-being”

(Frontier Economics)

Sustainable Development

Anticipated future developments



Third UN Conference on Financing for development (Addis Ababa, July 2015): to evaluate progress and consider next steps for international development finance, in the context of a new UN development agenda to be framed by the forthcoming Sustainable Development Goals.

Wales' **Well-being of Future Generations Act** introduces a framework for ensuring that public bodies in Wales take the needs of future generations into account.



UN Summit, Sustainable Development Goals (New York, September 2015): to adopt a set of development targets to replace the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), to be achieved by 2030 and to be applicable to developed and developing nations.

New HMT financial reporting requirements to streamline annual reports, including sustainability reporting (2015-16)

Further devolution: Under the Smith Commission proposals, the Scottish parliament is to be given increased powers including over income tax, a number of welfare benefits, energy efficiency obligations and rail franchises.

Appendix One

Defra and DECC

Defra and DECC have key roles in environmental protection and sustainable development. This appendix gives some summary information on the two departments. For more detail see our short guides on Defra and DECC.

Some key environmental policies in Defra and DECC

Defra

- **Common Agricultural Policy**, to provide over £15 billion of funding over seven years to support the rural economy in England.
- The **Thames Tideway Tunnel**, a project to build a large sewer running under the River Thames.
- Designation of new **Marine Conservation Zones**.
- **Waste** prevention programme.
- **Flood Reinsurance scheme**, to improve flood insurance affordability and **flood risk management**.
- **Animal and Plant Health**, to reduce threats from animal and plant diseases.

DECC

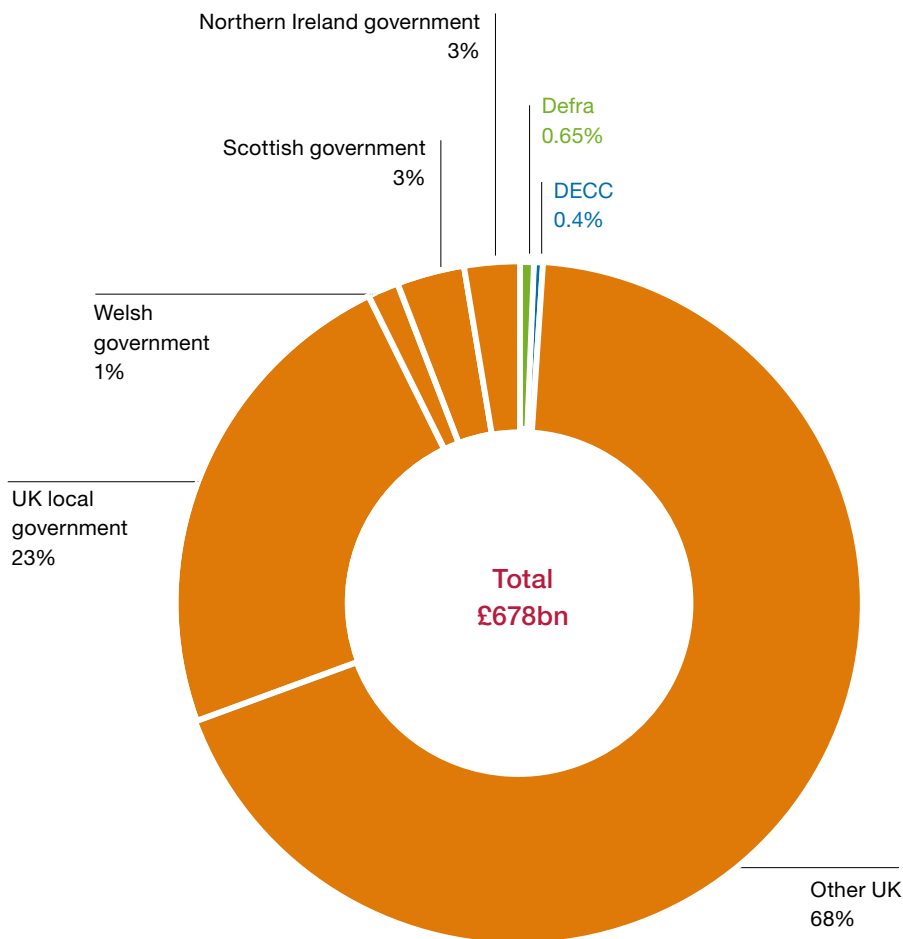
- **Electricity Market Reform**, to deliver low carbon and affordable electricity. It includes Contracts for Difference, long-term contracts to stimulate investment in low-carbon energy and the emissions performance standard, which limits carbon intensity of power stations.
- **Smart-metering** programme, to encourage households and businesses to reduce their energy use.
- **Renewable Heat Incentives and Feed-In-Tariffs**, to stimulate small scale renewable energy generation.
- **Green Deal/ECO**, to support energy efficiency investments.
- **Nuclear and coal legacy**, to manage and reduce environmental and safety hazards from disused coal mines, spent nuclear reactors and nuclear waste.

Official Development Assistance, to support developing countries to reduce emissions adapt to climate change, adopt low-carbon growth, and tackle deforestation.

Appendix One

Defra and DECC expenditure

Funding to Defra and DECC represents some 1% of total government expenditure

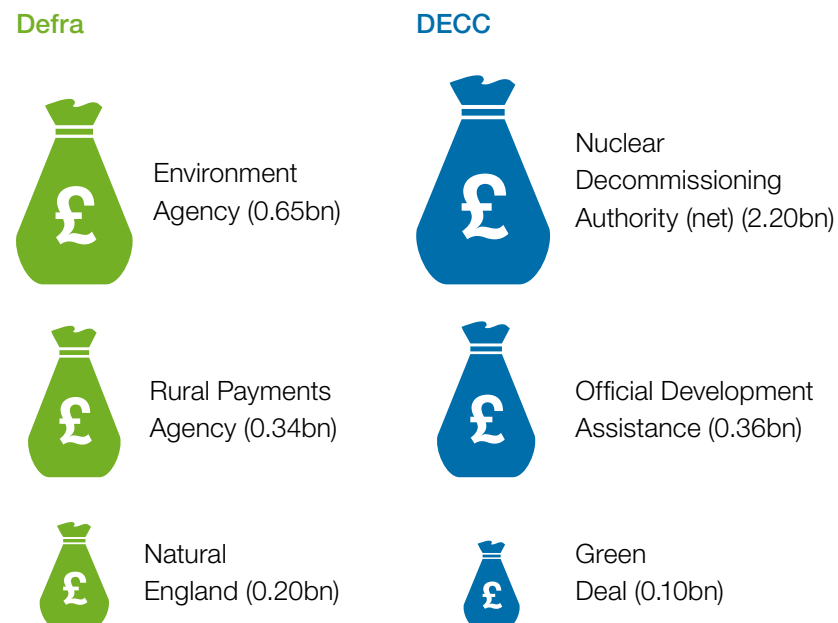


Much of DECC and Defra policies do not involve departmental funding.

In particular the Rural Payments Agency is responsible for payment of EU funds, with total expenditure amounting to £3.1 billion in 2013-14.

Many DECC policies such as the Green Deal and ECO are principally funded by consumers through electricity bills (Green Deal through a private loan recovered in bills).

Departmental funding to major programmes and agencies 2013-14



Note

1 Funding to the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA) is shown net. NDA spent £3.3 billion gross in 2013-14 and surrendered £1bn from its commercial activities to HM Treasury.

Notes

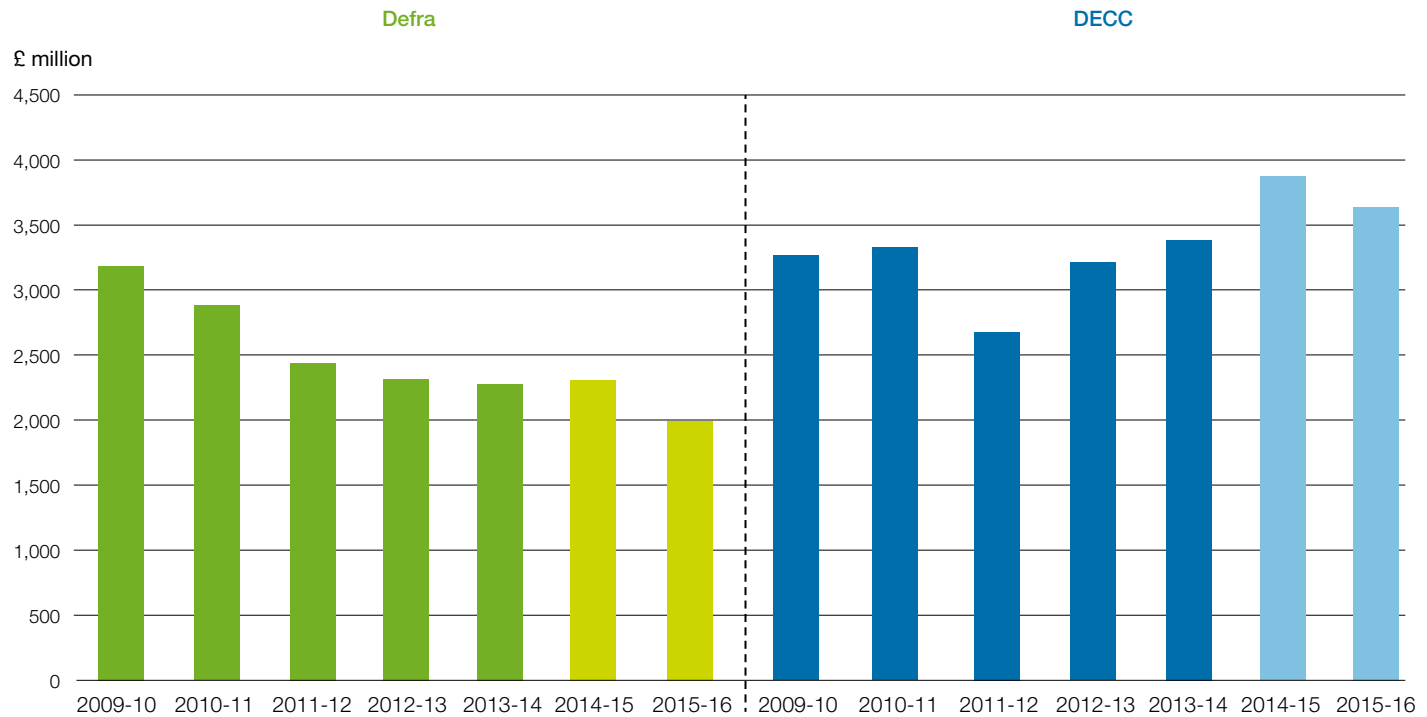
- 1 The figures shown are taken from HM Treasury, Country and Regional Analysis 2014, December 2014.
- 2 This gives a figure of £4.4 billion for Defra expenditure in 2013-14 including £1.9 billion of market support under the Common Agricultural Policy; and £2.7 billion for DECC expenditure in 2013-14.

Appendix One

Defra and DECC spending reductions

Following the 2010 and 2013 spending reviews, Defra expenditure limits (DEL) will be 37% lower in 2015-16 compared to 2009-10 (-£1.2 billion). Over the same period, DECC departmental expenditure limit will have increased by 12% (+£0.38 billion), due to additional expenditure on nuclear decommissioning, Official Development Assistance, and the Green Deal.

Total departmental expenditure limits in real terms



- Outturn
- Plans
- Outturn
- Plans

Note

1 The chart shows DEL; a further budget component is Annual Managed Expenditure. AME is classified as such on the basis that it is difficult to predict and is not entirely under departmental control. It covers costs such as liabilities, debt interest, and payments to EU institutions. Figures are in real terms (2013-14).

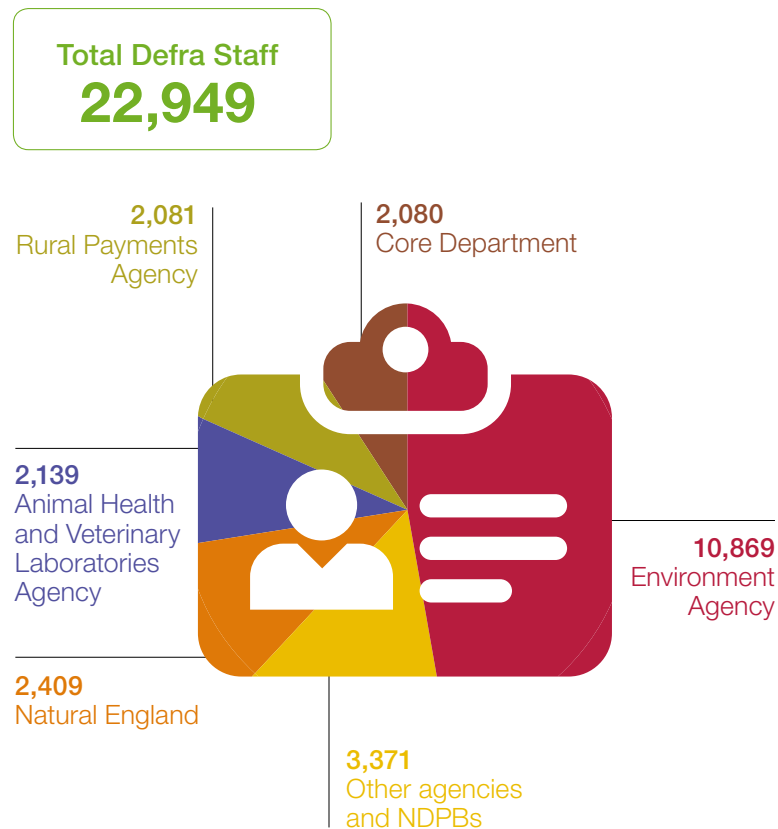
Source: The figures shown are taken from *Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses 2014 – Chapter 1: Departmental budgets tables*, HM Treasury, August 2014.

Appendix One

Defra and DECC staffing

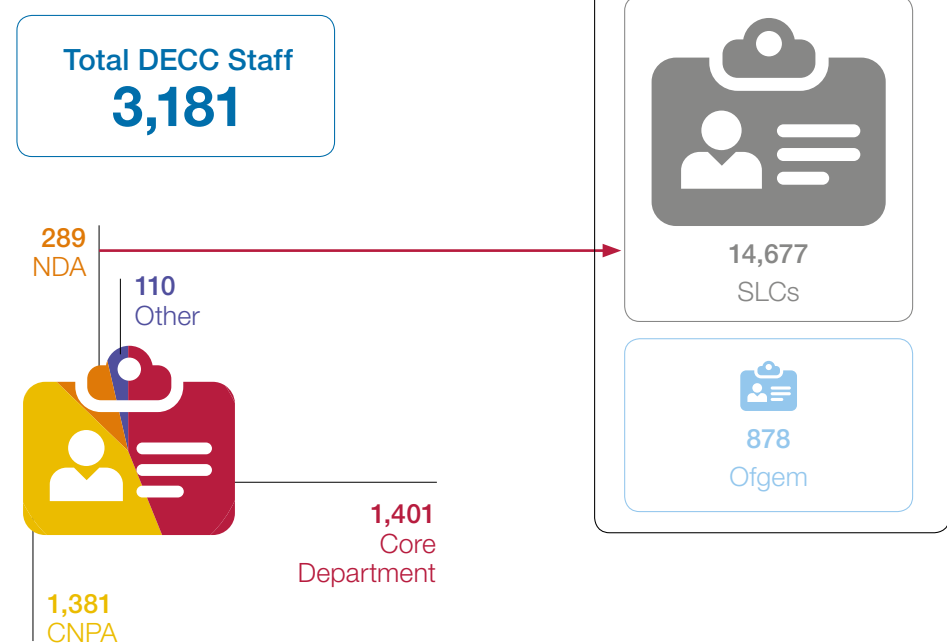
In 2013-14, Defra and its arm's-length bodies employed nearly 23,000 full-time equivalent (FTE) permanent staff. The Environment Agency employed the largest proportion (47%) of these staff.

Defra Staff breakdown 2013-14



DECC and its non-departmental public bodies employed 3,181 permanent staff in 2013-14. On average core department staff was 1,401 FTE in 2013-14. Site Licence Companies (SLCs) employ a further 14,677 FTE for nuclear decommissioning activities.

DECC Staff breakdown 2013-14



Notes

- 1 The Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA) owns 17 nuclear sites. Site Licence Companies (SLCs) employ staff and contractors to manage and decommission their sites on behalf of the NDA.
- 2 DECC has two public corporations, the **Low Carbon Contracts Company** and the **Electricity Settlements Company**, which were established in shadow form in 2013-14, and became operational in 2014-15, building up their staff.
- 3 CNPA is the Civil Nuclear Police Authority.

Appendix Two

Key environmental policies and programmes across UK central government departments (excluding DECC and Defra)

All government departments



Business plans must adhere to sustainable development principles.

Policy appraisals should address material sustainability impacts.

Sustainable **procurement**, including sustainable food catering.

Greening Government Commitments, to reduce impacts of departments' operations by 2015.

Sustainability **reporting**: Departmental annual accounts include sustainability reporting.

Sustainable Development Indicators (ONS).

Department for Communities and Local Government – National Planning Policy Framework (England)

Guidance for local planning authorities and decision makers, in drawing up plans and making decisions about planning applications, intended to ensure sustainable development.

Department for Communities and Local Government – Building Regulations (England)

Building regulations include mandatory requirements concerning the **energy efficiency** of new homes.

Department of Health – Sustainable Development Strategy (England)

The Sustainable Development Strategy for the NHS, public health and social care system sets out a vision for a **sustainable health and care system** by reducing carbon emissions, protecting natural resources, preparing communities for extreme weather events and promoting healthy lifestyles and environments.

Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, DECC, Defra – **Green economy council**

Supports the government in the transition to a green, low carbon economy. Works include a 2013 **Review of sustainability in industrial strategy**, but the council has not met in the last two years and membership is under review.

Department for Business, Innovation & Skills – **The Green Investment bank (UK)**

Provides **financial support to private sector's projects** related to the green economy, mostly supporting investments in renewable energy. It had committed £1.3 billion by 2014, mobilising a total of £4.8 billion.

Department for Business, Innovation & Skills and Department for Communities and Local Government – **Local Development: City deals (England)**

Agreements between the government and a city that give local administrations control and responsibility for decisions that affect their area. Several city deals include environmental or sustainability objectives.

Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, Department for Transport – **Low carbon vehicles innovation platform (UK)**

Research and development to accelerate the introduction of low-carbon vehicle technologies.

Department for Transport **Renewable Transport Fuel Obligations (UK)**

Require fuel suppliers to source a share of their **fuel from renewable and sustainable sources**.

HM Revenue & Customs – **carbon price floor (UK)**

Imposes a **minimum price** of £18 per tonne of carbon dioxide emitted.

Note

1 Environmental issues are a devolved matter.

Appendix Three

Major international conventions and agreements on sustainable development and environmental protection

Waste, chemicals and hazardous materials



Basel Convention on control of transboundary movements of hazardous wastes (1989, in force 1994)

Provides that management, movement and disposal of hazardous wastes is consistent with protection of human health and the environment.

Rotterdam Convention on trade in hazardous chemicals and pesticides (1998, in force 2004)

Aims to protect human health and the environment from potential harm from trade in hazardous chemicals and pesticides.

Stockholm Convention on persistent organic pollutants (2001, in force 2005)

Protection of human health and environment from effects of toxic chemicals which interact with the environment for long periods.

Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety to the Convention on Biological Diversity (2000, in force 2003)

Ensures protection from potentially adverse effects on conservation, biodiversity and human health from use of living modified organisms resulting from biotechnology.

Climate change/ atmospheric protection



UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) (1992, in force 1994)

Aims to **stabilise** greenhouse gas emissions and manage the impacts of climate change. To be reviewed at Paris conference in December 2015

Kyoto Protocol to UNFCCC (1997, in force 2005, Doha amended 2012)

Requires **reduction** of greenhouse gas and pollution emissions

Vienna Convention on Protection of the Ozone Layer (1985, in force 1988)

Measures to protect human health and environment against adverse effects resulting from human activities modifying ozone layer

Montreal Convention on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer (1987, in force 1989)

Measures to eliminate substances depleting the ozone layer (CFC gases)

Global sustainable development



The **2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20)** agreed to renew and increase the efforts for **more equitable and sustainable growth**. The strategy will be based on a set of Sustainable Development Goals, to be approved by the UN General Assembly in October 2015.

Environmental information



Aarhus Convention (1981, in force 1998) individual right to live in environment adequate to health and well-being; access to environmental information, public participation in decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters

Kiev Protocol (2003, in force 2009) establishment of nationwide pollutant release and transfer registers detailing pollution from industrial sites and other sources.

Appendix Three

Major international conventions and agreements on sustainable development and environmental protection *continued*

Marine and freshwater environment



UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (1982, in force 1994)

Obligations on protection of marine environment in national waters.

UN Fish Stocks Agreement (1995, in force 2001)

Principles for conservation and management of migratory fish stocks.

MARPOL Convention on prevention of pollution from ships (1973–78, in force 1983)

Aims to eliminate marine pollution from oil and other harmful substances and to minimise accidental discharges.

International Whaling Convention (1946, in force 1948)

International regulation for whale fisheries, provision for conservation of whale stocks and 'orderly development' of whaling.

OSPAR Convention on NE Atlantic (1992, in force 1998)

Prevention and elimination of pollution of NE Atlantic, to safeguard human health, conserve marine ecosystems and restore adversely affected marine areas.

Nature conservation and biodiversity



Convention on Trade in Endangered Species (CITES: 1973, in force 1975)

Controls on international trade in endangered wild animals.

Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (1971, in force 1975)

Conservation and 'wise use' of wetlands as a contribution to sustainable development.

Bonn Convention on conservation of migratory species (1979, in force 1983)

Conserving/restoring habitats and mitigating obstacles to migration.

Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD: 1992, in force 1994)

Conservation of biological diversity and fair and sustainable sharing of benefits from utilisation of genetic resources. See also Cartagena Protocol to CBD, on biosafety issues, above.

Nagoya Protocol to CBD (2010, in force 2014)

Fair and equitable sharing of benefits from utilisation of genetic resources, contributing to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity.

International Tropical Timber Agreement (ITTA: 1994, in force 1997)

Application of guidelines on management, conservation and sustainable development of timber-producing forests.

International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC: 1951, in force 1952)

Common action to control and prevent spread of pests of plants/plant products.

Plant Genetic Resources Treaty (2001, in force 2004)

Conservation and sustainable use of plant genetic resources as per CBD.