National SEA Forum 2018: SEA and the Planning Review

Workshop Report - Workshop 3: SEA Objectives and Indicators

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Workshop Exercise - Objectives
The following questions were discussed: Would a reference suite of example objectives be useful for proportionality? What are the challenges in drafting objectives? Should we consider a different approach for future place-based plans?

Key Themes
Key themes that emerged from workshop discussions were:
  o Objectives should be flexible, relevant to the assessment area, and based on sound environmental baseline data. A national database/'State of the Environment' dataset would be helpful for preparing the baseline;
  o Examples of objectives are welcomed but should not be too prescriptive in order to allow for regional and geographical variation, and variation in the type of plan, programme or strategy that is being assessed;
  o There was some discussion of framing objectives in terms of enhancement, rather than just the avoidance of negative outcomes;
  o It was acknowledged that differences in the wording of objectives can lead to confusion about how they are developed and interpreted;
  o Many Local Authorities frequently reuse the same objectives and there is a lack of confidence to break away from the norm. Can there be guidance around developing innovative, bespoke objectives?
  o There was a consensus that taking an ecosystem services approach to SEA is generally too complicated and only suitable in certain circumstances. However, other assessment methods such as a GIS approach were discussed and the recent Perth and Kinross Council Proposed Local Development Plan 2 SEA was cited as an interesting example of a combined ecosystem services and GIS-based assessment with maps showing the spatial extent of different ecosystem services [1]. In general, GIS may become more important to SEA as we move towards a place-based planning system.

Workshop Exercise - Indicators
The following questions were discussed: What should an effective indicator look like? What are the challenges in identifying and using effective indicators? What would help you to produce effective indicators? How can indicators be made smarter?

Key Themes
Key themes that emerged from workshop discussions were:
  o The quality of indicators depends on the quality and availability of data;

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[1] Perth & Kinross Council (2017) Proposed Local Development Plan 2 - Appendix B: Baseline Data and Maps [online] Available at: http://www.pkc.gov.uk/media/41047/Appendix-B-Baseline/pdf/Appendix_B_-_Baseline

- An indicator should be proportionate, relevant to the plan, and reliably and repeatedly measurable (for comparison to the baseline). Ideally, indicators should be represented spatially and based on up-to-date data. It is also important to consider the time periods over which potential effects may appear and choose indicators accordingly. It was frequently mentioned that indicators should meaningfully relate to the SEA objectives and be easy to monitor;
- Participants identified difficulties in selecting effective indicators, collecting and interpreting indicator data, and ensuring assessment objectives and indicators are aligned;
- Guidance on how to make indicators robust and useful and on how to interrogate the data as part of monitoring would be welcomed;
- As with objectives, example indicators which link to data that is already gathered by the Consultation Authorities would be a helpful start, as long as they can be tailored to different assessments and different geographical areas;
- There was some discussion around how to identify indicators that can be adequately applied to cumulative impacts;
- There are currently limitations around data availability, particularly in terms of quality, ease of sourcing, frequency of updates, availability at different spatial scales, and sharing between different departments and councils;
- Guidance on data that is fit for purpose to serve as indicators would be welcomed, particularly examples of differences in indicators to support site specific/spatial and proposals as well as overarching policies;
- There was discussion in terms of the use of short term objectives for long term issues/objectives and whether there is a need for different indicators for different timespans.