

Information Sheet:

Writing an Environmental Policy

An environmental policy sets out your intentions to improve your environmental performance.

You may have a number of motivations for doing this, to do your bit for the environment and act as a responsible organisation, to reduce costs and improve your efficiency, or to respond to demands from your customers or other stakeholders. For some social economy organisations, environmental benefits might form part of your core objectives too.

This information sheet suggests an outline for your policy and lists some areas of focus for environmental performance improvement.

What to include in your policy

An environmental policy statement

This should set out the organisations' commitment to, and plans for improving its environmental performance. This might include further details including:

1. A statement of intent by way of introduction.
2. An overview of relevant environmental legislation
3. Management responsibility
4. Processes for improving operational practise, including the procedures for measuring and monitoring results.
5. Internal and external communication of the policy, setting out plans for ensuring all staff are aware of and contribute to achieving policy objectives, and for communicating to other stakeholders.
6. A commitment to continuous improvement including a monitoring review process for the environmental performance targets, and a review process for the policy overall.

This statement, or an abridged version of it, could also be displayed in a prominent position where staff, volunteers, customers and visitors can see it.

Current practice and areas for improvement

This section should set out the environmental measures you have in place and identify areas for improvement. If possible, targets should be set for each area. These could be for example, to start recycling plastic cups within 12 months, or reduce electricity bills by 5%.

Environmental improvements to focus on

The key areas to focus to include, waste and recycling, energy and water, purchasing and supplies, transport, products and services, customers and clients. The following questions should help you to start looking at each of these areas in more depth.

Reducing waste, reusing and recycling

- Are you recycling as much as you could be? (Within Bristol it is possible to recycle paper, plastic cups, printer cartridges, cardboard, bottles and cans)
- Have you ever thought about refilling your cartridges?
- Can you reduce your costs by recycling more? (It is very often the case that you can reduce the costs of disposal of your waste by recycling more. It is often helpful to audit the waste you produce in order to identify the major items of waste)
- How can you reduce the amount of waste you produce? (For example, double sided printing)
- How can you promote re-use of envelopes, paper and files?
- Could you compose green waste?
- How do you dispose of hazardous waste?

Energy and water

- How can you improve the energy efficiency of you building? (Insulation, doors and windows, using long life and low energy bulbs)
- Could you put up signs to encourage staff and visitors to save electricity by turning off lights, computers and other electrical items that can be turned off when not in use?
- Could you improve or better manage your heating system, for example by altering the timing or thermostatic controls?
- Could you save water by installing modern/efficient taps or toilet cisterns, or putting up signs reminding employees and visitors to save water.
- Who is your energy supplier, do they use sustainable sources of energy?

- Can you generate some of your own energy from solar power or other sustainable sources?

Purchasing and supplies

- Have you looked into alternative sources of products, ethical banking, environmentally friendly cleaning materials, recycled products, using local suppliers to reduce transport costs?
- Where do your products come from, how far have they travelled to get to you?
- Do you use organic and/or fair trade products?
- What are the ethical credentials of your supplier?
- Can you reduce the amount of waste by choosing products with less packaging?
- Are you sure that your products are durable, will they be sustainable
- Do you use disposable products?

Transport

- Do you offer a mileage allowance for cyclists and walkers as well as motorists?
- What provisions do you make for staff, volunteers, customers and visitors to use more sustainable means of transport such as cycling, walking or public transport? (For example, changing, storage and shower facilities, cycle parking)
- Do you distribute information on how to use sustainable transport to get to your premises from key locations, bus and train stations (websites, leaflets, info on request)?

Products and services

- If you produce a product, what are its environmental impacts? Can it be recycled, is it energy efficient, does it have a net benefit on the environment?
- How can you reduce the environmental impact of your products and services?
- Does the production of your products or provision of services cause pollution? If so, how can this be minimised? Do you comply with environmental legislation?
- It may not be possible to reduce pollution, so what steps could you take to balance your environmental impact? Could you support a tree-planting programme for example?

Considerations for writing your policy

In order to successfully improve your environmental performance, you will need the support of your staff and volunteers. It is a good idea to involve them in the process of developing your environmental policy. Invite staff and volunteers to suggest what they can do to improve your environmental performance and involve them in a regular process.

It is one thing to have a well written environmental policy but unless it is a living document that represents continuous improvements, is it worth little.