2019 Northern Ireland Environmental Benchmarking Survey Guidance Notes

Section 1 – Corporate Strategy

### 1. Strategic Decision Making

Including environmental issues in the decision-making process can protect an organisation against a range of financial and non-financial risks. If organisations make public statements about the importance of the environment to their business, which is not reflected in strategic decision-making, then they expose themselves to criticism.

### Guidance

To respond positively, your organisation must have a procedure/policy in place (or supporting documentation) to demonstrate that the environment is considered when making strategic business decisions. This may be through a formal due-diligence process, conducting a risk assessment, life-cycle assessment, social impact assessment, etc.

Operational decisions are classified as those that concern your day-to-day ability to run the organisation effectively.

Long-term, strategic decisions are classified as those that concern a period of greater than three years into the future and/or have a potentially significant impact on your organisation’s success.

**Examples of supporting evidence**

* Risk evaluation headings highlighting the key issues identified
* Board meeting agenda
* Certification to BS 8900/Sustainability Standard

2. Leadership

### 2a. Leadership Responsibilities

Creating change within business requires senior management commitment and clarity of purpose. Without leadership from the top, environmental responsibility will not be considered strategically important and may be implemented in an ad-hoc fashion**.**

### Guidance

Organisations have different board structures; however, environmental management is most effective when a senior employee has been specifically allocated responsibility and is accountable for performance.

### 2b. Board-Level Discussion

Formal review and discussion of environmental issuesat a senior or board level is a key means of ensuring that top-level staff are aware of, and engaged in, environmental issues and performance.

**Examples of supporting evidence**

* Board agenda and/or minutes
* Scope of responsibility for board member/senior non-executive board member
* Description of the process for reporting issues to the board and list of recent reporting dates
* Job description of board members, indicating roles and responsibilities

### 2c. Advocating Commitment

Consider encouraging and supporting one of your key suppliers or contractors to take part in the NI Environmental Benchmarking Survey to help them get started on their environmental improvement journey.

The **Bring a Business** initiative asks Survey participants to encourage one of their key suppliers or contractors to take part in the NI Environmental Benchmarking Survey, in an effort to challenge participants to work with their supply chains to improve their environmental impacts. Organisations who ‘Bring a Business’ will gain extra marks in their own submission.

Things you must do:

* Inform Business in the Community of the nominated company and contact details. Email the details to [keelin.mccone@bitcni.org.uk](mailto:keelin.mccone@bitcni.org.uk) before 31 May (to allow the nominated organisation time to compete the Survey)
* Ensure that the company completes the Survey before the deadline Friday 21 June 2019 (this is important for you, so that you can avail of extra marks within the Survey)

### 2d. Public Reporting

By reporting publicly on environmental performance, an organisation is holding itself accountable for its environmental impacts. It shows responsibility and commitment to transparency and improvement. Reporting on performance can also help an organisation to engage its stakeholders more effectively and improve perceptions of the organisation.

### Guidance

Public environmental reporting can be carried out as part of a wider *Annual Report* or as a more specific *Sustainability Report*. Robust reporting of environmental issues should include quantifiable targets and reporting of progress towards these. Data recorded should be reported honestly; if current trends suggest the targets will not be met, the report should state what changes will be made in order to achieve the targets.

### 2e. Making Leading Commitments

Creating a step-change towards a circular economy will require organisations to take a leading position on not only reducing their environmental impacts but eliminating them and having an overall positive impact on the environment.

### Guidance

Responses should reflect the commitments the organisation has made with regards to its environmental objectives, which are in the public domain.

**Examples of supporting evidence**

* A public environmental sustainability report or annual report with an environmental section

3. Stakeholder Engagement

### 3a. Employee Engagement

Mobilising employees on environmental issues has proven to have significant business benefits, as well as environmental benefits; for example:

* Changing employee behaviour at work so that it supports environmental targets
* Increasing morale
* Attracting and retaining a workforce that is becoming increasingly aware of environmental issues
* Developing your employees as positive ambassadors of your business' environmental activities

### Guidance

Employees with environmental responsibilities should include line management in all operational business units. Employees in corporate functions who might have environmental responsibilities include the following:

* Purchasing (environmental issues in the supply chain)
* Facilities management (utilities conservation)
* Communications (environmental/internal communications)
* Human resources (integrating environment into staff training)
* Information technology (environmental issues in equipment specification)
* Transport (fleet managers)
* Finance (environmental data collection, reporting investment criteria)
* Marketing and sales (environmental issues in customer communications)
* Research and development (new product development)
* Audit (auditing systems related to environmental management)

**Examples of supporting evidence**

* Job descriptions including key environmental responsibilities
* Summary of training courses and awareness-raising initiatives taken, including attendee lists
* Examples of internal communication channels established
* Copy of employee surveys, including environmental issues
* Agenda and date of last 'consultation meeting'

### 3b. Customer Engagement

### Guidance

This is about communicating sustainability issues in an engaging way to customers, telling a clear and authentic story about what your organisation is doing, and encouraging more sustainable customer behaviour, such as recycling product packaging or providing detailed information on materials used. Your customer engagement may involve tailored advice to customers on how they reduce the environmental impacts involved in using your products or services. More advanced respondents may also be working directly with customers to reduce impacts, for example, by recovering used or end-of-life materials.

**Examples of supporting evidence**

* Results of risk and opportunity assessments
* Summaries of approaches used to engage with customers
* Examples of sustainable marketing materials, engagement programmes, and sustainable innovation
* Sales figures for sustainable products/services
* Key performance indicators highlighting impact of sustainable products/services to the business (eg enhanced brand image or improved customer retention) or materials recovery initiatives (eg Kg of used product recovered from customers for recycling/reuse)

### 3c. Supplier Engagement

Small and medium-sized companies and self-employed people together provide 75% of employment, 75% of turnover, and 81% of GVA in NI’s private sector. Furthermore, SMEs **employ** more people than NI’s large companies and the public sector combined\*  
\**DETI, Quarterly Employment Survey, Table 5.10 (March 2014 figures); ONS Business Population 2014.*

However, one in five cites a lack of resources as the primary reason for not adopting green policies. By engaging smaller suppliers, larger businesses can extend the impact of their environmental activities into these key businesses.

### Guidance

An organisation may have either a specific Procurement Policy that addresses environmental impacts or it may refer to environmental supply-chain management and procurement within its Environment Policy.

See WRAP’s guidance on helping you procure more sustainably by [clicking here](http://www.wrap.org.uk/content/sustainable-procurement)

**Examples of supporting evidence**

* Environmental supply chain policies
* Criteria for prioritisation of suppliers
* Supplier audit schedule
* List of suppliers engaged with on sustainability issues, and how you engaged

### 3d. Regulator Engagement

### Guidance

This question addresses the extent to which an organisation communicates with those bodies responsible for ensuring compliance with environmental regulation, ie, through inspection, permitting, enforcement, etc.

Depending on the nature of your business, these are likely to include the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, other government departments and agencies, and local councils.

While responding to requests from regulatory bodies should be a minimum requirement (and may, in many cases, be mandatory), actively seeking advice and guidance in order to ensure effective compliance demonstrates a positive approach.

Going beyond this and engaging in dialogue with appropriate regulatory bodies is likely to represent responsible business practice, for example, consulting with regulators when developing new approaches to reducing environmental impacts with the aim of exceeding compliance requirements.

4. Sustainable Development Goals (unscored)

### Guidance

The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a blueprint to achieve a more sustainable future for all. Whilst the seventeen over-arching goals address global challenges, they are sufficiently general to be relevant organisations of any size and scope of operations. The SDGs can act as a framework for organisations to take action on social and environmental issues, and report impact.

This question asks whether your business has had any engagement with the SDGs, and what that engagement has been. It is an unscored question which will help us gauge the level of interest in the SDGs in Northern Ireland.

Section 2: Environmental Management

5. Environmental Management System

An Environmental Management System (EMS) is the part of the overall management system that includes the organisational structure, responsibilities, practices, procedures, processes and resources for determining and implementing the environmental policy [source: EMAS]. As a minimum, your EMS should be compliant with a recognised international standard for environmental management, such as ISO14001 or BS8555.

External certification does not need to take place annually but should be periodic and should provide a level of confidence that the internal audit process is robust, independent, and objective.

See **NetRegs** guideline on implementing an Environmental Management System [click here.](http://www.netregs.org.uk/environmental-topics/environmental-management/environmental-management-systems-ems-and-environmental-reports/)

### Why is this important?

An EMS can help an organisation improve its environmental performance, and it demonstrates their commitment to incorporate environmental issues in its key business practices.

An EMS can also help an organisation improve its information management systems, to better understand and manage the impacts of its operations and to increase efficiencies.

Benefits can therefore include increased compliance with environmental legislation and regulation, improved risk management, reduced liability costs, increased competitive advantage, more employee involvement, and improved public image.

Please Note: If you selected that you have an externally certified EMS, you will NOT be required to answer any further questions within the Environmental Management Section and will move automatically to the next section.

6. Policy

An environmental policy is a detailed statement of commitment and intent regarding an organisations performance on environmental issues, and it gives merit to the organisation's objectives and targets in this area. It should describe how environmental matters are managed and who is responsible.

### Why is this important?

Policies reflect an organisations commitment to environmental responsibility and set out the framework for the management of relevant environmental issues. Policies help an organisation to communicate its vision and principles to both internal and external stakeholders. It provides the foundation to set environmental targets and objectives.

### Guidance

An environmental policy should link the values and corporate responsibility principles of the organisation, should address all relevant environmental activities, and should enable control of the key environmental issues and risks.

**Examples of supporting evidence**

* Copy of environmental policy
* Details of web address for environmental policy

7. Issues

Determining an organisation's key environmental impacts is the critical first step in managing them effectively.

### Guidance

The type of environmental issues important to your organisation will be dependent upon the nature of your organisation's business activities, its impacts, and the geographic location of your markets. Business in the Community suggests that you consider both the local and global environmental impacts of your business activities.

Organisations will not be scored on the list of key environmental issues they have identified but on how they have determined that list. If issues have been evaluated as part of an ad-hoc review carried out for the purpose of completing the Survey, then this will score less than if issues have been evaluated as part of a regular, independent review process built into an organisation's strategic decision-making, risk-management, or management system review process.

**Example of supporting evidence**

* Brief description of how the key environmental issues were identified for its business, eg aspects and impacts review

8. Register

Legal compliance is a fundamental part of any business. It is imperative that all organisations become aware of the environmental legislation that is relevant to them and ensure they are legally compliant. A starting point would be to develop a ‘register of environmental legislation’—a document listing legislation relevant to your business.

9. Legislation

A business also needs to have a formalised system for reviewing and updating this register as new legislation is introduced. For more information on Northern Ireland environmental legislation, [click here](http://www.netregs.org.uk/) for NetRegs guidance.

10. Objectives

Environmental objectives are the overall goals arising from the environmental policy that an organisation sets itself and that are quantifiable [Source: BS EN ISO 14001/EMAS].

### Why is this important?

Objectives and targets help an organisation to translate policies into focused action—in this case, to reduce negative environmental impacts. Internally, objectives and targets also help to prioritise workloads and review progress. Externally, they demonstrate commitment to continual improvement and transparency.

### Guidance

Objectives should be documented, reviewed, and updated (at least annually) to be considered 'regular'. The objectives should reflect the areas of significant environmental impact. Organisations use different methods to assess significance, but the process might include the following:

* A formal environmental impact review/assessment
* Compiling a register of relevant legislation
* Compiling a register of aspects and impacts
* Assessing liability/cost
* Identifying significant indirect impacts, eg, product impacts, the results of lending decisions, etc
* Considering reputational risk, eg, media interest
* Assessing supply-chain pressure

**Examples of supporting evidence**

* Summary of environmental objectives
* Description of the process by which the organisation has identified the key environmental issues for its business (eg brainstorming or a structured risk assessment process for the whole or part of the business)
* An Aspects Register and an impacts review for the business
* Documentation on how the organisation has assessed its significant impacts

11. Targets

Environmental management targets are the detailed performance requirements that arise from the environmental management objectives. Targets should ideally apply the SMART principle: namely, they should be Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and have a Time scale [source: BS EN ISO 14001/EMAS/EPE Executive Briefing]

Section 3: Environmental Performance and Improvement

12. Climate Change

This section looks at how your organisation is addressing climate change related issues. From reducing greenhouse gas emissions, to planning and adapting for the impacts of climate change.

### 12a. Measuring and Reporting

Measuring and monitoring impact enables an organisation to evaluate its performance over time, identify and address problem areas and opportunities, improve performance and ensure compliance with legal requirements.

Reporting on performance can help an organisation to engage its stakeholders more effectively and improve their perception of the organisation. It shows responsibility and commitment to transparency and improvement.

### 12b. Scope and boundaries

The scope of information measures how much your organisation is integrating this aspect of corporate responsibility through your business activities. An organisation may have main operation sites and smaller satellite operations, if the KPIs and active travel planning covers only those main sites - this should be indicated by the percentage of total employees working from those sites.

### 12c. Data quality

The quality of the information collated provides an indication of its reliability and hence how much onus management should place on the data gathered.

**Guidance**

**Example of supporting evidence**

Summary of verification statement (either internal statement, or provided by independent third party)

Information on commuting and business travel can be collected through staff questionnaires or site audits.

* Verifiable data collection is defined as any data collection process that has an audit trail.
* Verified data is any data that has been independently verified by a third party. Independent verification may include a formal review by the company internal audit department or by external verifiers.

### 12d. Taking Action

It is important to be developing and managing additional environmental projects that aim to drive continual improvement in performance.

This section is an opportunity to gain marks for environmental improvement projects beyond the scope of the questions covered in the rest of the Survey.

### 12e. Renewable Energy

Increased use of renewable energy is a key element of emissions reduction and addressing climate change. Whilst recognising the limits in the market at present, Business in the Community believes that organisations can spur the growth of the market by bolstering supply and demand sides of the equation.

Renewable energy is defined as energy generated from wind, solar, wave and tidal, geothermal, biomass and hydroelectric sources. This is in line with the UK government's definition.

### 12f. Carbon Footprint

Energy usage and transportation transport miles allow an organisation to understand their overall consumption, but another step is required to understand how this consumption results in carbon emissions. This question asks about the extent to which your organisation understands its carbon footprint, and whether it has set targets to reduce overall emissions.

An organisation’s emissions are commonly split into three categories:

* Scope 1 means any emissions that your organisation emits directly
* Scope 2 means any emissions that are emitted by another organisation on your behalf. Key examples of these are electricity and steam purchased.
* Scope 3 refers to all other emissions, that are emitted by your suppliers, and those emissions that result from the use of your products.

### 12g. Business continuity

As the world starts to realise the tangible effects of climate change, organisations must adapt to minimise physical disruptions to their operations. For example, there may be more disruptions due to an increase in extreme weather events. They must also understand and manage the risks and opportunities presented to the organisation as society adapts to climate change and transitions to a lower-carbon economy.

This question asks about the extent to which your organisation has considered these risks, and action to develop a plan to mitigate them.

Business in the Community have created a quick-to-complete guide for creating your own bespoke emergency plan, which provides practical steps to help prepare your business for a range of disruptive events. For more information [click here](https://www.bitc.org.uk/campaigns-programmes/communities-place/business-emergency-resilience-group).

13. Circular Economy and Resource Use

This section asks about how your organisation is transitioning to a more circular economy, by minimising the use of resources, re-using these resources where possible, and diverting any waste from landfill.

### 13a. Measuring and reporting

Please refer to the guidance in [Section 10a](#_10a._Measuring_and).

### 13b. Scope and boundaries

Please refer to the guidance in [Section 10b](#_10b._Scope_of).

### 13c. Data quality

Please refer to the guidance in [Section 10c](#_10c._Quality_of).

### 13d. Taking Action

It is important to be developing and managing additional projects that aim to drive continual improvement in resource use and the circular economy.

This section is an opportunity to gain marks for such projects beyond the scope of the questions covered in the rest of the Survey.

### 13e. Circular Economy

This question deals with the concepts of life cycle analysis, product life cycle, design for the environment, circular economy etc. It seeks to assess the level of commitment to the circular economy, from design, to manufacture, to post factory use and final disposal.

Companies that provide products must consider the environmental impact of products they produce throughout their entire life cycle – how they are designed, the manufacturing process, what they are used for and how, and finally how they are disposed of, reused or recycled. It might mean that some products are discontinued, an alternative found, or that they are significantly altered to reduce their environmental impact.

For service companies or organisations (including Health Trusts and Local Councils), consider the lifecycle of products purchased and used.

14. Additional Impact

This impact area **must be completely different** to the core impact areas already covered. Energy/CO2 emissions, transport, waste generated/disposed and waste re-used/recycled or water will not be accepted and no points will be awarded. **Business in the Community will not accept duplicated answers,** and you will automatically lose the marks for this question if you input duplicated answers.

In choosing an impact area to report on, organisations should focus on the most significant impact to their sector. Please select the relevant additional impact area from the dropdown list, providing further detail about the specific indicator you’re measuring, and the units you are using, see examples in the table below.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Category | Examples |
| Pollution/environmental incidents | Number of complaints, spills, etc. |
| Biodiversity initiatives | Number of initiatives, area of land restored or dedicated to biodiversity, investment in biodiversity initiatives |
| Pollutant usage | Volume of harmful chemicals/oils/solvents used, or volume re-used or replaced with an environmentally friendly alternative |
| Pollutant discharge/emissions | Concentration or volume of CBOD/VOC/Nox released into the environment, refrigerant gas emissions |
| Environmental awards or recognition | Number of green flag awards, externally recognised environmental scores (e.g. Considerate Constructors Scheme (CCS) score, BREEAM score, etc.) |
| Environmental training or engagement | Number of employee volunteering hours on environmental projects, Sessions held in schools, etc |
| Material usage | Weight of product packaging, paper consumed, materials used |
| Other |  |

### 14a. Measuring and reporting

Please refer to the guidance in [Section 12a](#_10a._Measuring_and).

### 14b. Scope and boundaries

Please refer to the guidance in [Section 12b](#_10b._Scope_of).

### 14c. Data quality

Please refer to the guidance in [Section 12c](#_10c._Quality_of).

### 14d. Taking Action

Please refer to the guidance in [Section 12d](#_10d._Performance_Improvement), as well as the below information.

15. Environmental performance and improvement

The measurement of improvement is an indicator of how your organisation has addressed this issue within the overall business. Activities may be undertaken on an ad-hoc basis throughout the business, but if there is no mechanism to report centrally, then the organisation is not able to demonstrate improvement overall.  
  
Performance improvements should relate to your KPI(s) specified for this impact area and to the scope of information measured and reported on. If you have stated that you measure and report on your energy impact for greater than 75% of your business, then any performance improvements indicated in this question should also relate to greater than 75% of your business.

**Examples of supporting evidence**

* Record sheet showing environmental issues being recorded
* Internal reports showing all environmental data
* Reference to where information is publicly available

By measuring participants based on the SUM of the total % performance improvement over the past three years, we are lessening the impact of a bad year, recognising the overall performance improvement an organisation has made.

**Normalised Figures**In order to best reflect performance, we ask participants to normalise data wherever possible eg kWh per no of employees or turnover or unit of production.

**Reporting Period (Year) Column**Each reporting period must be 12 months long, this can be calendar year, financial year etc. with Year 4 being the most recent. Your performance will be assessed against your base year (Year 1).

**Energy Column**This column is for the total energy use across your organisation including electricity, gas, oil etc. Individual types of energy use will need to be converted into one unit (kWh) so that they can be combined. The Survey Scoring Methodology will reward a decrease in the energy used compared with the base year. Providing normalised data will help avoid discrepancies based on changing scales of production.

**Transportation Column**This column should contain data on mileage for either business or commuting travel. Where possible, this should be normalised against turnover, number of employees etc. The Survey Scoring Methodology will reward a decrease in mileage. Providing normalised data will help avoid discrepancies based on changing scales of production.

**Waste Generated Column**This column is to show the total amount of waste generated by your organisation. This includes both waste sent to landfill and waste diverted from landfill. This data should be expressed as a normalised figure where possible. The Survey Scoring Methodology will reward a decrease in the annual waste generated. Providing normalised data will help avoid discrepancies based on changing scales of production.

**Waste Diverted from Landfill Column**In this column we are looking for **percentage** of waste which has been diverted from landfill. This refers to any waste materials which has been extracted for a specific next use – this may include internal or external re-use of discarded items, recycling of materials, use of appropriate materials in processes such as anaerobic digestion or composting, or recovery of energy from materials through processes such as gasification or combustion. The data should be expressed as a percentage of the total waste generated. The Survey Scoring Methodology will reward an increase in the percentage of total waste generated that is diverted from landfill, compared with the base year.

**Water Column**This column should contain data on water consumption. Provide normalised data where possible, eg litres of water per unit produced. The Survey Scoring Methodology will reward a decrease in the water used. Providing normalised data will help avoid discrepancies based on changing scales of production.

Section 4: Assurance

16. Assurance

An assurance management process is a formal system used to provide a level of confidence that all information collected for a particular purpose is of an acceptable quality. In the case of environmental issues, such a system would ensure that a company’s information relating to the environment is accurate, relevant, and reliable.

### Why is this important?

This is important to ensure accuracy, relevance, and reliability of any information provided within this Survey. The Survey is a self-assessment process, but the organisation should be assured that its responses can be justified both internally and if there are external enquiries in its positioning within the Survey.

Management Sign-off

When you have completed the Survey, you must print the sign-off sheet and have this completed by your Chief Executive or Managing Director.

This should then be scanned and emailed to [kylee.lawlor@bitcni.org.uk](mailto:kylee.lawlor@bitcni.org.uk).

Queries

If you have any queries relating to the Survey, or for further information, please contact Keelin McCone – [keelin.mccone@bitcni.org.uk](mailto:keelin.mccone@bitcni.org.uk)