



Procurement and Food

Key actions

1. The NHS should take every opportunity to manage its operations and procurement efficiently, thereby minimising wastage and carbon from the outset.
2. The NHS should work in partnership with suppliers to improve sustainable and low carbon procurement. A roadmap to support organisations in this process will be published by NHS PASA, DH, the SDC and the SDU.
3. Local procurement, whole lifecycle costs and the environmental impact of financial decisions should be considered by all NHS organisations, in preparation for the use of carbon as a currency.
4. Further research will be undertaken into the carbon footprint of pharmaceuticals within the NHS to better understand this and to inform actions to produce significant reductions.
5. The promotion of sustainable food and nutrition throughout the NHS should become the norm.

Vision:

An NHS which works in partnership with its suppliers to take into account the whole lifecycle carbon of its products, and considers carbon as part of the tender and decision making process.

Introduction

The NHS in England spends £20 billion every year on goods and services. This comprises the largest contribution to the NHS carbon footprint totalling over 11 million tonnes CO₂ per annum: nearly 60% of the total. Within this nearly 6 million tonnes CO₂ can be attributed to the pharmaceuticals, medical instruments and equipment that the NHS procures and uses. This is more than the emissions from either building energy use or travel.

Procurement is an integral part of every aspect of NHS operations. Every organisation needs to consider the approach to every commissioning, sourcing and buying process. Ensuring these systems are efficient, so wastage can be minimised, is crucial and everyone's responsibility. This includes considering the level of usage of every product, the most appropriate stock levels and reviewing whether an item can be reused or recycled prior to ordering new items. When considering a purchase, an understanding of whole lifecycle costs¹ and the potential environmental impact will be necessary.

The NHS, as a major public sector procurer has a leading role to play in partnership with suppliers to minimise carbon impact and promote sustainability. There are already many tools, frameworks and guidance to assist organisations in tackling this agenda including:

- Good Corporate Citizenship toolkit (procurement section)
<http://www.corporatecitizen.nhs.uk/library/051118%20Printable%20assessment%20model.pdf>
- OGC Quick wins
<http://www.defra.gov.uk/sustainable/government/what/priority/consumption-production/quickWins/index.htm>
- Procuring for Health and Sustainability 2012
<http://www.pasa.nhs.uk/PASAWeb/NHSprocurement/Sustainabledevelopment/Procurement.htm>
- Ethical Procurement for Health
www.pasa.nhs.uk/PASAWeb/NHSprocurement/Sustainabledevelopment/Ethicalprocurement/LandingPage.htm
- Centre for Evidence Based Purchasing - Energy efficiency assessment for electrical medical Devices: Protocol and Tool
<http://www.pasa.nhs.uk/PASAWeb/NHSprocurement/CEP/LandingPage.htm>
- Sustainable Procurement Risk and Opportunity User Tool (SPROUT)
<http://www.pasa.nhs.uk/PASAWeb/NHSprocurement/Sustainabledevelopment/LandingPage.htm>
- DEFRA 'product roadmap' programme
<http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/consumerprod/products/index.htm>.

Creating the right purchasing climate

NHS organisations should start routinely requiring all suppliers to disclose their approach to sustainable development and to carbon management. The NHS should use its buying power to ensure it takes carbon reduction and sustainability seriously.

¹ See Glossary for definition

Roadmap

NHS PASA, NHS SDU and the SDC are developing a 'roadmap' to assist organisations in this process. This will give clear guidance on how to incorporate consideration for carbon within procurement activity from engaging with suppliers through to requesting carbon related information and utilising this objectively in procurement decision making processes.

Lifetime cost

The drive to constantly reduce costs often favours the cheapest short term option, however this can often have a disproportionately high life time carbon cost². Short term cost pressures, and the inadequate pricing of carbon, can mean that services or items once delivered or procured in-house can be sourced more cheaply from a supplier who manufactures them in another continent and air-freights them to the UK. This is clearly counterproductive in the longer term.

There is still work to be done to clarify the best low carbon options for NHS organisations to choose, both in terms of services and products, which do not compromise patient safety or regulatory requirements.

Pharmaceuticals

The NHS in England spends at least £8 billion a year on prescription medicines within primary care alone. To help reduce the NHS carbon footprint, it is important that efforts are made to reduce wastage from medicines in use. Although the pharmaceutical sector recognises the need to reduce their own carbon footprint, the DH and the NHS are important customers for the industry and will therefore wish to consider how they can work with the pharmaceutical companies to address this matter. The Department of Health has already commissioned research to examine the scale and cost of medicines wasted and the complex reasons why people do not take their medicines as intended, which can itself result in greater wastage of medicines. The outcomes of this research are expected to be published during 2009 and will inform future policy.

In addition, the DH has disseminated educational resources to both community and hospital pharmacies to assist them in engaging in and influencing members of the public to adopt practices that are consistent with the sustainable development agenda, helping to reduce the carbon footprint not just by reducing the amount of medicines wasted but also by adopting other practices that will help to improve health, and at the same time reduce the carbon footprint.

Information technology

The global information and communications technology (ICT) industry accounts for approximately two percent of global carbon emissions, a figure equivalent to aviation³. All NHS organisations require significant ICT infrastructure. Leading NHS organisations should work with national supply

² See glossary definition for whole life costing

³ Gartner Inc, 2007 [Online] Available at: <http://www.gartner.com/it/page.jsp?id=506571> [Accessed 07 January 2009]

agencies to develop a specification for ICT provision which fits criteria for low carbon manufacture, energy use, and disposal. The NHS should routinely do business with providers who can demonstrate the most innovative technology solutions that will reduce energy costs and carbon emissions. Many ICT companies take the provision of low carbon ICT seriously and the NHS should systematically support such innovations. NHS organisations should emulate and exceed the private sector in challenging their ICT providers to develop a low carbon ICT contracts.

Improving the economic health of the community

NHS organisations should demonstrate corporate social responsibility (CSR) in increasingly explicit ways. As part of the organisational commitment, they should develop and demonstrate procurement practices that support the economy of the community they serve. The purchasing and employment power of the NHS should be sensitively harnessed to ensure the most effective investment in communities who stand to benefit most – with the important potential to reduce health inequalities. There is a wealth of good practice in the NHS about how to procure sustainably in ways that benefit both patients and the economy.

Responsible procurement

Responsible procurement means being increasingly sensitive to the whole supply chain – NHS organisations should avoid being party to avoidable environmental damage, often in distant countries, by being fully aware of the products and raw materials, and the consequences of their use, in goods purchased.

The UK Government's Global Health Strategy (September 2008)⁴ recognises a responsibility to harness the opportunities of globalisation to improve the health of people across the world, and in particular people in the UK. The strategy encourages greater alignment of the Government's domestic and foreign policy where it affects global health and commits to work for stronger, fairer and more ethical trade in the health sector.

⁴ Health is global; UK Government wide strategy, 2008. London: Department of Health

Food

The NHS is one of the largest purchasers and providers of food in the UK. The NHS will take action in procuring and producing more sustainable and healthy food for patients, visitors and staff.

What is a sustainable and low carbon food system?

The actions needed to develop a more sustainable food system whilst maintaining nutritional value include the use of seasonally adjusted menus, increased use of sustainably sourced fish and a reduction on the reliance on meat, dairy and eggs. Such actions also involve developing and using suppliers that can demonstrate lower carbon forms of transport and production.

Carbon management as a part of sustainability

Improving the procurement and quality of NHS food must be achieved through an approach that promotes sustainability 'in the round', reducing the carbon footprint is a priority however it should not be the only consideration and sometimes may not be the most important. For example, if fish is on the menu you should carefully consider which species you serve as many fish populations are overexploited. This may in some cases mean importing fish from further afield rather than using more local stock. The imported species may have a higher carbon footprint, however in this instance it is more important to ensure that you buy species from well managed fisheries. Indeed ensuring you use sustainably managed fish can be one of the most significant steps procurers can take in improving their service⁵.

Meat and Dairy Products

The NHS will be increasingly scrutinised over the way it procures and serves meat and dairy products. Action is needed by those responsible for food procurement in the NHS to understand this, and to ensure that costs, risks and benefits are well understood and clearly balanced.

Food waste

In 2005-2006 over 13 million patient meals were wasted (untouched or un-served)⁶ in the NHS – an average of over nine meals wasted per patient. The better the food, the less is likely to be wasted. Many initiatives (such as the Cornwall Food Programme) have deliberately exchanged quantity for quality with the result being reduced levels of waste.

Managing food waste is an important action in reducing the overall carbon footprint. The approach should be customer focused – producing meals people want to eat.

⁵ Kirkup, B., 2009. Food in the NHS [Email] (Personal Communication, 22 January 2009)

⁶ Hansard (House of Commons Daily Debates)-Hospitals: Food, 2007 [Online] Available at: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmhansrd/cm071008/text/71008w0058.htm> [Accessed 07 January 2009]

Food and health

It is well known that food is an important determinant of health and the exemplar role of the NHS in relation to food should not be underestimated. The health effects of poor diet across the nation cost the NHS billions of pounds a year.⁷ The NHS has every opportunity and every need to demonstrate that healthy and tasty food can be procured and produced on a reasonable budget, setting an important example to the 1 million people the NHS sees every 36 hours.

Guidance

The initiatives designed to provide guidance and stimulate action include:

- DEFRA's (2007) Catering services and Food procurement Toolkit – this includes a template invitation to tender specification.
- NHS PASA is currently leading work with a range of key stakeholders on the development of guidance for the sustainable procurement of hospital food which should be issued in 2009.
- A toolkit for developing your own Catering Environmental and Social Responsibility Action Plan will be published in 2009 by the North East Improvement and Efficiency Partnership⁸.
- The cabinet Office Food Matters Report (2008) proposes that a Healthier Food Mark scheme should be developed and piloted in the NHS and other public sector bodies to improve quality. All NHS organisations, (even those who are already applying Good Corporate Citizenship principles in the way they operate) should sign up to the Healthier Food Mark.
- Other third sector organisations (e.g. The Caroline Walker Trust⁹) have produced useful guidance to improve health through good food to particular groups of people.

⁷ One study estimated that food-related ill health cost the NHS £6 billion in 2002 – 9% of NHS costs. Pro-rated to 2007, this would be £7.7 billion. Rayner, M and Scarborough, P., 2005. The burden of food related ill health in the UK. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 59 (1054–7)

⁸ Developing your Environmental and Social Responsibility Action Plan – a toolkit for public sector catering services. North East Improvement and Efficiency Partnership. To be published: 2009

⁹ The Caroline Walker Trust, Improving public health through good food [Online] Available at: <http://www.cwt.org.uk/> [Accessed 22 January 2009]

Learning from others

Although there are many excellent examples of sustainable food procurement and provision in the NHS; such practices are not universal throughout the service. Other sectors have made more systematic efforts to ensure a sustainable food system from which the NHS should learn¹⁰.

Other European countries are taking even more specific action. The Netherlands Government¹¹ has recently set obligatory and ambitious targets for 100% of central government public procurement (including, but not limited to, food) to be from sustainable sources by 2010. The NHS should examine the feasibility of emulating this action.

Case studies

[1]

The Isle of Man Real Nappy campaign has introduced cloth nappies into the maternity unit of Noble's Hospital on the Isle of Man. The midwives at the hospital created the sustainable Stork-eco nappy specifically for the NHS. The non profit making project is supported by the Government and provides interest free loans for cloth nappies in receipt of income support benefit in the Isle of Man.

The project has showed that introducing cloth nappies into maternity services has increased the number of parents using cloth nappies at home.

By procuring in this way the carbon footprint of the NHS organisation has been reduced and it has also influenced the behaviour and carbon footprint of the parents who continue to use cloth nappies at home.

The introduction of the Stork-eco nappy into the Jane Crookall Maternity Unit at Noble's Hospital has effectively reduced the Unit's disposable nappy waste and their total clinical incineration by 99.9% and their total clinical waste by 83% helping to make long-term financial and environmental savings.

[2]

The NHS spends around £500 million on food to serve 300 million meals in 1,200 hospitals every year. This two-year project aimed to increase the proportion of local and/or organic food to 10 percent of the catering provision of four London NHS hospitals. Ealing General, Lambeth Hospital, St. George's Hospital and the Royal Brompton Hospital, worked in partnership with the Soil Association to increase the proportion of locally produced nutritious food served in London hospitals.

¹⁰ School Food Trust guide: A fresh look at school food procurement efficiency and sustainability, 2008. School Food Trust [Online] Available at: http://www.schoolfoodtrust.org.uk/doc_item.asp?DocId=79&DocCatId=9 [Accessed 07 January 2009]

¹¹ CSR: National public policies in the European Union [Online] Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/emplweb/csr-matrix/csr_countryfiche_en.cfm?id=31 [Accessed 07 January 2009]

The project evolved after initial encouraging research in 2002 and 2003 by the Soil Association and funding was secured from the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) under the Rural Enterprise Scheme and the King's Fund.

[3]

The project, which received almost £2 million from the Objective One European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund and DEFRA, as well as NHS and local LIFT Company investment, offers tasty, healthy food to patients, staff and visitors. At the same time the project boosts economic sustainability within the region by sourcing local produce and helping the environment by cutting food miles. The £4.6m food production unit is exemplar.

The development of the CFPU has been led by the Royal Cornwall Hospitals Trust, as a partnership project for the NHS across Cornwall and is being developed as part of the LIFT initiative by the county's LIFTco: Community 1st Cornwall Limited