

Environmental scan for the public sector

Introduction

This short note summarises a long list of environmental factors which are having, and will continue to have, an impact on public sector organisations in Great Britain. They will of course impact different organisations in different ways – not all will be relevant in every case.

Global

Continued globalisation and concentration of business, and expansion of trade.

Technological advances.

Global warming.

Asian economies (especially China and India) greatly expand share of world GDP.

UK

Declining birth rate, but overall population growth.

Declining average household size, so more households, especially one person households.

Number of marriages is falling and number of children born outside marriage is increasing.

Increased life expectancy, with narrowing gap between men and women. Hence increasing proportion of older people.

Increased migration, including internally.

Growth in number and proportion of people living with disabilities.

More frequent extreme weather events, increasing threats to river and coastal areas

Increasing environmental pressures (e.g. waste management, greenhouse emissions) requiring behavioural changes from individuals and organisations.

Relative growth in service and knowledge industries. Managerial, professional and technical employment continues to grow, while manual employment declines further.

Increasing importance of religion as a key basis of social division.

Growing expectations of the responsiveness and customisation of goods and services.

Continually rising expectations for quality of life.

Continuing increase in inequality of wealth (not income).

Being born in a poor family is a strengthening indicator of being relatively poor as an adult.

Decline in social trust (agreement with the statement that “most others can be trusted”).

UK Public sector

(leaving aside all the various change initiatives)

Continuing pressures to cap public expenditure.

Regulations increasingly originate in Brussels.

Citizens less engaged in traditional political processes, but increasingly involved in single-issue campaigns and direct action.

Still more intense media scrutiny of government – increasing expectation of transparency.

Consequential effects

Continuing growth in the importance of verbal, planning and communication skills.

Increasing pressure on land use in green belts and rural areas.

Greater difference and variation: differences between individuals and households: those with high skill levels and those without; those with property-related inherited wealth and those without; those who are fit and healthy and those who are not; those in traditional households and those who are not. And differences between communities: those which are ethnically mixed and those which are not; those with access to employment opportunities which match the new global economy and those without; those which are casualties of environmental pressures and those which are successfully responding to them.

Main sources

The Prime Minister's Strategy Unit's strategic audit 2005:

http://www.strategy.gov.uk/downloads/work_areas/strategic_audit/strategic_audit2.pdf

All our futures. ODPM (now CLG) commissioned research on the challenges for local government in 2015:

http://www.communities.gov.uk/pub/325/AllOurFuturesThechallengesforlocalgovernancein2015_id1165325.pdf

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