

World FM Day 'leading a sustainable future: what is shaping the opportunities in facilities management?

3 years ago



The IWFM Sustainability SIG is contributing to World FM Day 2022 by publishing an article a day during the week. Kicking off the series, SIG Chair, Greg Davies, sets the scene.

COVID, climate, compliance, continuity, COP, commitment, communities and C-suite, what is shaping the opportunities for FM?

In the workplace, both sustainability and FM, cover very broad topic areas and activities. FM in organisations also directly affects and influences more areas of sustainability than any other function. As workplace and facilities management became central to organisations' success over the pandemic, so our profession must be front and centre if the same is going to be true for the sustainable future we all need to achieve. But are we ready for the opportunity?

From the impact of running the workplace itself (energy, water, waste, etc.) to aspects including cleaning, catering, transport, health and safety, suppliers and contractors, risk and compliance management, FM has long managed the more traditional areas associated with corporate responsibility and sustainable practises.

The agenda continues to change.

Rather than in environmental isolation, aspects are extended, aggregated and expanded to provide an ever bigger, more comprehensive and wider view of organisational sustainability, embedding the social and economic sustainability angles too. This has seen the thinking, concepts and lexicon change to

include, for example:

- net zero
- circular economy
- whole life
- social value
- governance
- equality, diversity and inclusivity
- embedded carbon.

This aligns well with the findings from the Sustainable Facilities Management Index (SFMI), from assessments of over a dozen FM operations, where Net Zero, transparency and disclosure and supply chain management are the strategic challenges. The Roadmap developed by the SFMI is seeing these three areas as critical for the sector to deliver its ambitions.

Alongside the ever-increasing levels of voluntary reporting frameworks coming into the public domain, more established measures such as ISO 14001, the Carbon Disclosure Project (CDP), Global ESG Benchmark for Real Assets (GRESB) and a myriad of environmental indexes are seeing newer initiatives like the Task Force on Climate-Related Financial Disclosures (TCFD) coming into play. Accurate and consistent measurement must be fundamental to our ongoing plans; and with the UK's Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) publishing new rules for listed in-scope companies on diversity and inclusion for company boards last month too, these are not expected to stop soon.

COP 26, Net Zero and a plastics crisis

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDG/SDG), launched in 2015, provide a consistent focus on key (and broad) aspects of sustainability and are increasingly referenced or adopted by organisations. 17 primary goals are supported by over 240 targets. Outcomes of COP 26 at the end of last year maintained the hope of limiting human-caused global warming to 1.5°C and to setting more ambitious emission cutting goals, an undoubted ongoing theme for the immediate future.

Changing and severe weather did not take any furlough over the pandemic, with catastrophic floods, fires, freezes, droughts and heatwaves affecting all continents to varying degrees of devastation. Just in case you've missed it too, heatwaves in the Arctic and Antarctica have seen recent temperatures between 30°C and 40°C above average.

Energy use and carbon, both because of our response to COVID-19 and in terms of cost and security of supply, remain concerns; and shortages of various natural resources (COVID-19 and non-related) continue to hamper supply chains. Where and how we produce and procure our energy in the future is on the agenda, organisationally as well as nationally and internationally. This will generate more activity around renewable supplies and smarter use of energy in our buildings at all levels and FM should be instrumental in this.

As a consequence of this and to an extent COP26, the net zero agenda has gathered even more traction, although this is in no way a "quick fix". To be effectively delivered, it needs to be clearly understood and planned, so the organisation can set realistic targets based on facts, not good intentions. Time and engagement to develop these plans and report on progress will be the platform for success. As an

indication of the “scope” of the task, pleasingly 35% of responders to the [IWFM Sustainability Survey 2021](#) believed they “had access to all baseline/ongoing data they need to help reach their targets”. But that leaves no small amount of work to do for the majority 65%.

Another unintended consequence of the pandemic has seen a years’ worth of benefit from targeting plastic bags, and latterly, single use plastics lost in the deluge of testing and PPE of the last two years. By way of example, just between November 2020 and April 2021, the National Audit Office (NAO) estimate approx. 691 million COVID-19 tests (with everything else that went with them, bags, vials, swabs, etc) were distributed in England alone! With plastic waste already being talked about as a severe threat to ecosystems, how could this situation affect the already predicted two-fold increase in plastic debris we will see by 2030? A better approach to all-natural resource use and ultimately disposal, more circular economy and whole of life thinking must be introduced.

A Broader agenda, a sustainable future and FM’s opportunity

Wellbeing and air quality (internal and ambient) were two further themes strongly associated with the pandemic. There was more encouragement from the IWFM Sustainability Survey 2021; in response to the question, “Does your organisation actively invest in any of the following areas of wellbeing?” responses included:

- mental health and stress (support, first aiders, employee assistance schemes, counselling etc.) – 95%
- workplace (air and water quality management etc.) – 78%
- working practices (flexible working, training and development, charity, community etc.) – 93%
- physical health and exercise (e.g. cycling initiatives, gym, health checks etc.) – 76%.

Many of these topics fall under the workplace and facilities manager’s agency. So, it is a great demonstration of our profession’s value and its ability to respond to needs, that all areas are showing improvement on the 2020 findings.

Our continued return to a “new normal” will see health, safety and wellbeing remain central to providing reassurance to both staff and management that their working environment is safe, healthy and compliant. Verifiable independent and assured information on your risks and controls is therefore invaluable.

With communities and social value a growing theme over recent years too, the introduction of the [National TOM’s FM Plug in for Social Value](#) is a welcome addition. Supported by IWFM, it provides a single reporting and measurement standard, with 5 goals, 26 outcomes and over 100 core and additional measures. It also reflects the continued maturing of the sustainability and ESG agendas.

The challenges in creating a sustainable future are complex, but vital if we are to continue to enjoy the many and diverse gifts our planet offers. Increasing urbanisation and technological developments mean our buildings and how we manage them will (and do) play a significant part in how successful we are. That in turn means those responsible for managing those assets have a significant role to play in leading on and delivering that success too. The opportunity is ours to take.

Over this week also look out for further content from members of the IWFM Sustainability SIG committee who will be using their expertise to target some of the themes and challenges we face, these include:

- Retaining FMs role in the ever-broadening sustainability agenda (Ann Beavis, Head of Sustainable Development, Crown Workspace).
- Leading a sustainable culture? (Reid Cunningham, Strategic Development Director, BAM FM Ltd & BAM Energy Ltd)
- Climate Risk and FM: (Sunil Shah, Managing Director, Acclaro Advisory)
- Net zero (Toby Morgan, Senior Manager Built Environment, Climate Group)

Greg Davies, Chair of the IWFM Sustainability SIG and Director of Market Development at Assurity Consulting