



Office of the

First Minister and Deputy First Minister

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Everyone's Involved:

Sustainable Development Strategy

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Chapter 1: Everyone's Involved

Vision Statement

A peaceful, fair, prosperous and sustainable society.

None of us can avoid the implications of our non-sustainable programmes, activities or lifestyles by ignoring them. The aim of the Sustainable Development Strategy is to identify and develop actions that will improve the quality of life for ourselves, and for future generations. The strategy involves the whole community whether we are building industry and commerce, supplying goods or services, using public or private sector services, developing our communities, or caring for our families. The strategy should be seen as a highly participatory instrument, intended to “ensure socially responsible economic development while protecting the resource base and the environment for the benefit of future generations”. (UNCED, 1992)

Sustainable development aims to bring viability, stability and opportunity to all of our social, economic and environmental activities and programmes. It does not aim to stop us from growing our economy. It does not seek to obstruct our attempts to improve our society and communities. It does not prevent us from using and capitalising on our natural resources. Rather its goal is to put in place economic, social and environmental measures to ensure that we can continue to do all of these things effectively in the years to come.

In producing a new Sustainable Development Strategy we recognise its critical importance and the need for it to extend into all that we propose to do.

The statement of our vision for Sustainable Development echoes the vision of our Programme for Government. This is intended to reinforce our commitment to ensure that the principles of sustainability reach into all the activities of Government and that everyone's involved in achieving the objectives of the Sustainable Development Strategy.

Sustainable development is not only about climate change and the acknowledged consequences that this will bring. We are most certainly determined to protect our environment and we are committed to do what is necessary to accomplish this. We also want to protect our communities and our economic well-being. With increased knowledge and awareness of environmental degradation and social and economic marginalisation, we need structures to change the way in which we manage our economic, social and environmental affairs. A strategy for sustainable development is about making and implementing such changes, in a realistic, effective and lasting way.

The Strategy we have brought forward is, we believe, balanced in social, economic and environmental terms and continues to build upon the guiding principles identified within the previous Sustainable Development Strategy.

The strategy recognises and balances our local needs with our national and international responsibilities and obligations. We intend to work with the relevant Sustainable Development bodies throughout these islands to build partnerships to promote and develop sustainable practices into all that we do, and in the wider private sector. An effective strategy for sustainable development brings together the aspirations and capacities of communities, government, civil society and the private sector to create a vision for the future and works tactically and progressively towards it.

We also recognise that sustainable development is a wider European and global issue. Our strategy will provide us with our own distinctive direction of travel, while simultaneously aligning to those adopted by the European Union, through the following:

ECONOMIC PROSPERITY:

Promote a prosperous, innovative, knowledge-rich, competitive and eco-efficient, responsible economy which provides high living standards and full and high-quality employment.

SOCIAL COHESION:

Promote an equal, democratic, socially inclusive, cohesive, healthy, safe and just society with respect for fundamental rights and cultural diversity that creates equal opportunities and combats discrimination in all its forms.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION:

Safeguard the capacity of our natural environment to support life in all its diversity, respect the limits of our natural resources and ensure a high level of protection and improvement of the quality of the environment. Prevent and reduce environmental pollution and promote sustainable consumption and production to break the link between economic growth and environmental degradation.

MEETING OUR NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES:

Build a peaceful, fair and prosperous society that makes a full contribution to national and international sustainable development programmes.

We are all affected by the challenges of sustainable development. Everyone needs to be involved. We seek to outline a co-ordinated set of participatory and continuously improving processes, which integrates responsible economic, social and environmental objectives, for the betterment of all in our society.

Chapter 2: Synergies

To successfully deliver our social, economic and environmental objectives in a responsible and sustainable way, we cannot afford to view our actions in isolation from the many other policies and programmes that serve as the foundations upon which we are building our future.

We recognise, and accept, that there isn't a 'one size fits all' solution to sustainable development, but what we are seeking to achieve through the publication of this, and other, strategies is to ensure that we create the conditions in which emerging policies and programmes can effectively integrate with, and complement, existing ones. By doing this, we intend to use these synergies to develop 'sustainability thinking' which results in a policy environment which encourages consistency of purpose.

Commitment One:

In the development of new strategies and policies, we will require Departments to incorporate comprehensive 'sustainability scans' as one component of their Regulatory Impact Assessment process, which will provide SMART evidence of the inclusion of sustainability criteria.

Our Programme for Government clearly shows our plans and priorities for 2008 – 2011, as well as setting out our longer term aspirations and intentions, and sustainable development has been placed at the heart of what we intend to do.

Alongside our Programme for Government, our Investment Strategy is the vehicle for delivering a more dynamic economy. Other strategies such as this one, the Regional Development Strategy and the Regional Economic Strategy are under review with the intention that they should support the necessary changes which will enable our economy to cope in a sustainable way with the challenges of globalisation and the changing patterns of infrastructure development.

Effective implementation of this strategy requires it to be set within a compatible policy framework. To do this successfully, we will continue to monitor and contribute

to the wider sustainable development policy framework at regional, national and international levels.

We will continue to work alongside our colleagues throughout these islands to deliver our Sustainable Development commitments. We will continue to take forward mutually beneficial and practical co-operation with other administrations to help us deliver real benefits, particularly on infrastructure, trade and business, tourism, agriculture and health service provision, and in tackling major issues that confront us all, such as social exclusion and barriers to mobility, drugs and other crime, the environment and transport.

At an international level, the EU Sustainable Development Strategy is primarily concerned with quality of life, equity and coherence between policy areas. Importantly, it recognises the role of economic development in facilitating the transition towards a more sustainable society. The Lisbon Strategy for growth and employment is a complementary plan, focussing on actions and measures aimed at increasing competitiveness, encouraging economic development and stimulating job creation.

Commitment Two:

We will, therefore, extend our efforts to work with our regional, national and international colleagues to exploit more fully the knowledge networks which support the advancement of sustainable development.

Innovation lies at the heart of sustainable development. We must therefore, continually review, and on occasions challenge, the way we create, develop and deliver our policies. In doing this, we will be able to identify and take forward actions which will allow us to achieve continuous improvement in terms of quality of life for current and future generations. We must create sustainable communities which have the capacity, knowledge and desire to use resources efficiently. We intend to encourage the use of innovation as the key to unlocking the social and ecological potential of our economy, in a way which ensures prosperity, social cohesion and environmental protection.

Commitment Three:

We will continue to further develop our relationship with national and EU institutions to explore, and consequently make greater use of, opportunities associated with innovation and sustainability programmes which complement our plans and priorities.

The effective implementation of the sustainable development strategy requires us to join together many different policies from across the social, economic and environmental dimensions, and to bring them forward within a cohesive framework for delivery. We recognise that we cannot do this without a participative approach to the way in which we engage and consult with stakeholders, and we know that this will add value to our long-term decision making. Better decisions lead to better outcomes for everyone.

In progressing the sustainable development agenda, we will seek to involve representatives from all sectors in identifying the key issues and areas of interest.

Commitment Four:

We will identify the most effective ways of encouraging stakeholder participation in informing us about our work in relation to sustainable development, and develop appropriate mechanisms to facilitate this.

Chapter 3: Key Challenges

In order to make progress on the objectives of this Strategy, we have a number of significant challenges to address. These fall broadly into four categories: mainstreaming sustainable development into Government operations; encouraging and building upon the efforts of the wider public sector, working in co-operation with the community and voluntary sector to foster sustainable communities, and; working in co-operation with the private sector to foster innovation and sustainable commerce.

Mainstreaming

We have set out our objectives and priorities in the Programme for Government (PfG). The associated Public Service Agreement (PSA) Framework is the mechanism through which plans are progressed and performance is monitored and controlled.

The current PfG sets 23 PSAs to shape the business planning of Departments for the period 2008-2011. Sustainable development is identified as a cross-cutting principle. In the context of the PSA Framework, Departments and divisions of Government prepare corporate and business plans to deliver their commitments and functions.

Commitment Five:

We will ensure that the recognition of sustainable development as a cross-cutting principle continues and is reinforced in future PfGs by running the development of future PfGs and Sustainable Development Strategy Implementation Plans in parallel.

To develop the strategy, policies and corporate and business plans to deliver PfG commitments we need to take account of the economic, social and environmental issues associated with the PSA objectives being pursued and devise objectives that aim at positive outcomes in sustainable development terms.

Individuals working in Government must be empowered to make decisions and exercise their functions to influence sustainable development outcomes for the better.

Commitment Six:

We will explore the means by which capacity building measures can be introduced to ensure that all public sector employees maintain sustainable development skills and knowledge as appropriate to their role.

The wider public sector

There is a critical contribution to the achievement of sustainable development to be made by public sector bodies outside the direct control of the Executive – of District Councils, Government owned companies, arms-length bodies, etc.

A Statutory Duty to promote sustainable development is provided for by section 25 of the Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2006, which requires Departments and District Councils to exercise their functions in the manner they consider best calculated to promote the achievement of sustainable development.

The potential impact of such a Duty is significant – in providing a mandate for public sector bodies to direct their activities to achieve positive sustainable development outcomes, and to do so without compromising their other existing statutory obligations.

On the basis of available information, however, the impact of the duty to date appears to have been marginal. The duty has proved difficult to interpret for public sector bodies, in part due to the absence of guidance associated with the legislation.

Making the Statutory Duty more effective in supporting the delivery of a positive contribution to the sustainable development agenda from the wider public sector will be an important aspect of the implementation of the Strategy.

The community and voluntary sector

A key element of this strategy is that it is inclusive and reaches all sections of society and fosters sustainable communities.

We want every community to feel involved in bringing forward and delivering this strategy so that it is relevant to everyone and not seen as a remote government initiative.

We recognise that the third sector has a wealth of experience in working throughout society on social, economic and environmental issues and we want to harness that experience by working in partnership and co-operation.

The private sector

A major feature of this Strategy is the realisation of the full potential of economic opportunities associated with the evolving sustainable development agenda.

Social and environmental concerns have sometimes been viewed as being in conflict with commercial drivers in the business sector. Equally there is a view that enterprise and development can be seen as damaging to communities and the wider environment.

Such a one-dimensional view does not stand up to scrutiny. Society can deliver the prosperity needed to make the progress that we aspire to, and should do so in a way which supports the development of a prosperous fair and equal society with long-term sustainability.

This multi-dimensional view is rapidly gaining widespread acceptance within the private sector. This new perspective is creating new opportunities to progress sustainable development against a background of co-operation between Government and the private sector and civil society.

We recognise that in order to encourage private sector innovation to deliver sustainable development benefits we must nurture markets that incentivise the responsible provision of sustainable goods and services.

Commitment Seven:

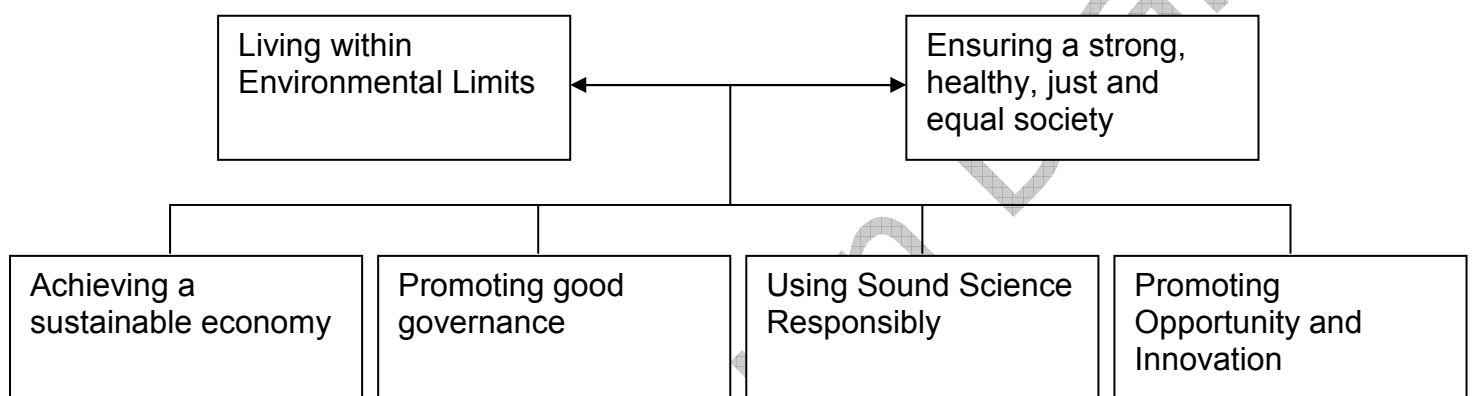
We will seek ways to assimilate our PfG priorities and principles with regulatory mechanisms to best support the achievement of positive sustainable development outcomes.

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Chapter 4: Principles, Priorities and Strategic Objectives

In this Strategy we have set out a vision of our society developing in a sustainable way. We aim to build a future characterised by economic prosperity, equality and social cohesion; strong, confident communities; and a high-quality environment. The method we will use to deliver this is grounded in the six Guiding Principles set out below.

Guiding Principles



There are two principles that express the overarching ambitions of the Strategy – Living within environmental limits and ensuring a strong, healthy, just and equal society. There are four further principles that describe the necessary conditions for the achievement of sustainable development. The relationship between the principles is set out in the diagram above.

We want to achieve our goals of living within environmental limits and a just and equal society, and we will do it by means of a sustainable economy, good governance, sound science and promoting opportunity and innovation.

These six principles continue to echo those adopted by the previous SD Strategy.

The most pressing issues affecting progress will be addressed through the application of these principles. We have expressed these issues as five Priority Areas for Action and they provide the framework for the actions Departments will take in support of the achievement of sustainable development.

In each Priority Area, a number of Strategic Objectives have been identified. It is against these Strategic Objectives that we will measure our progress towards the achievement of our sustainable development vision.

Living within Environmental Limits – Respecting the limits of the planet’s environment, resources and biodiversity – to protect and improve our environment and ensure that our natural resources are unimpaired and remain so for future generations

Ensuring a Strong, Healthy, Just and Equal Society – Meeting the diverse needs of all people in existing and future communities, promoting personal well-being, social cohesion and inclusion and creating equal opportunity for all

Achieving a Sustainable Economy – Building a strong, stable economy that provides prosperity and equal opportunities for all, and in which environmental and social costs fall on those who impose them (polluter pays), and efficient resource use is incentivised

Promoting Good Governance – Actively promoting effective, participative systems of governance in all levels of society – engaging people’s creativity, energy and diversity

Using Sound Science Responsibly – Ensuring policy is developed and implemented on the basis of scientific evidence, whilst taking into account scientific uncertainty (through the precautionary principle) as well as public attitudes and values

Promoting Opportunity and Innovation – Supporting the successful exploitation of new and existing ideas to deliver economic, social and environmental benefits

Priority Areas for Action

1. Building a dynamic, innovative and responsible economy that delivers the prosperity required to tackle disadvantage and lift people in all our communities out of poverty
2. Strengthening society so that it is more tolerant, inclusive of all communities and stable and permits positive progress in quality of life for everyone
3. Driving sustainable, long term investment in key infrastructure to support economic and social development
4. Ensuring the responsible use and protection of natural resources in support of a better quality of life and a better quality environment
5. Ensuring reliable, affordable and sustainable energy provision and reducing our carbon footprint.

Strategic Objectives

We have applied our Guiding Principles to each Priority Areas for Action to identify Strategic Objectives that we will pursue in each area. These are the biggest and most urgent challenges in each Priority Area and it is their achievement that will be the subject of the Implementation Plan for this Strategy.

By achieving our Strategic Objectives, we will be making real progress towards sustainable development.

The Implementation Plan for this Strategy will therefore clearly identify Departments with lead responsibility for achievement of targets and the contribution expected from delivery partners.

1. Building a dynamic, innovative economy that delivers the prosperity required to tackle disadvantage and lift communities out of poverty
 - 1.1 Increasing prosperity and promoting equality
 - 1.2 Increasing skills and improving education

- 1.3 Promoting entrepreneurship and innovation
- 1.4 Influencing the sustainability of goods and services through strategic procurement.
- 1.5 Tackling patterns of socio-economic disadvantage through Public Procurement
- 1.6 Promoting a responsible economic development agenda.

2. Strengthening society such that it is more tolerant and stable, inclusive of all our communities and permits positive progress in quality of life for everyone

- 2.1 Improving health and access to Healthcare
- 2.2 Reducing poverty and social exclusion
- 2.3 Building safer, higher-quality and more sustainable urban and rural communities
- 2.4 Increasing community engagement and responsible citizenship and supporting behavioural change for sustainable development

3. Driving sustainable, long term investment in key infrastructure to support economic and social development

- 3.1 Improving transport, telecommunications and energy infrastructure
- 3.2 Improving education infrastructure
- 3.3 Improving health infrastructure
- 3.4 Improving water infrastructure
- 3.5 Improving cultural infrastructure
- 3.6 Improving infrastructure required for access to new technologies

4. Striking an appropriate balance between the responsible use and protection of natural resources in support of a better quality of life and a better quality environment

- 4.1 Effective regulation to protect the natural environment and biodiversity.
- 4.2 Promoting the protection and enhancement of the physical, built environment.
- 4.3 Effective planning that enables development to meet social and economic requirements while respecting our natural environment.
- 4.4 Increasing resource efficiency

5. Ensuring reliable, affordable and sustainable energy provision and reducing our carbon footprint.

5.1 Reducing greenhouse gas emissions

5.2 Increasing the proportion of energy used that is produced from indigenous, and renewable sources

5.3 Ensuring affordable access to energy provision and fuel and security of supply

5.4 Planning and preparing for the impacts of climate change

Our Guiding Principles, Priority Areas and Strategic Objectives have been produced to set out what we want to achieve with this Strategy and to set a framework for action to achieve it. Meaningful progress will require a serious undertaking on behalf of all Departments to adopt these Strategic Objectives and bring forward plans for their delivery that are solidly founded on our Guiding Principles.

It will also require recognition of the interdependence of the economic, social and environmental aspirations of government, manifested in our approach to policy development and implementation.

OFMDFM will provide strong leadership to ensure delivery of this Strategy. Clearly, this will require close cooperation and partnership working with other Departments.

Commitment Eight:

In 2009, we will publish an Implementation Plan setting out how we will achieve our Strategic Objectives covering the period to 31 March 2011. This will set SMART targets for action to achieve each Objective and identify a Department with responsibility for leading progress on each target.

Chapter 5: Policy Drivers

The Public Service Agreements (PSAs) within the Programme for Government contain many actions and targets which support sustainable development, and we have a clear commitment to “promote sustainable development across the public sector, business and wider society.”

To deliver on this commitment we must continue to promote sustainable development within Government in two ways: firstly, we need to ensure that our existing policies, which have shaped the current Programme for Government are continuously reviewed to ensure that they remain sustainable; and, secondly, we must strive to ensure that future policies and programmes for Government become more ambitious in their aims to deliver fully sustainable outputs. This is a bold ambition, which will require direction and leadership from the Executive, support from the Assembly and participation by all sectors of society.

Equally, we recognise the importance of promoting the sustainable development agenda beyond the confines of Government to wider society. Our policies will continue to provide a framework which supports our desired outcomes and we will ensure that their development will consider the social, economic and environmental impacts of our proposals in a balanced way.

In moving towards a shared and better future, we will have an effective and constructive engagement and dialogue with groups from all sectors of society, we will primarily seek to drive our sustainable development agenda forward on the premise of our **‘A,B,C Principles’**

A – Assimilation. We will use our resources effectively to assist others to more fully understand the benefits of adopting a sustainable approach to the ways in which we live as individuals and function as a modern, inclusive society.

B – Brokerage. As a first choice, we will encourage changes towards more sustainable actions and lifestyles, and negotiate ‘improvement pathways’ for those individuals, departments and organisations which are identified as falling below recognised standards of sustainability performance.

C – Collaboration. We will seek to increase the momentum of the sustainability agenda by collaborating with decision-makers and influencers to secure long-term positive behavioural change.

While our primary approach will be the use of our **A,B,C** Principles, we also recognise the need to support this with appropriate legislation.

Commitment Nine:

We will, therefore, ensure that guidance relating to the existing Statutory Duty on Sustainable Development, contained within Section 25 of the Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2006, is appropriate in supporting our ongoing sustainable development ambitions.

International policies will continue to focus and shape our actions and decision-making as we take a full and active part in contributing to national and international policy-making on sustainable development. At the very highest level, the UN Millennium Development Goals and Agenda 21 will continue to provide targets to which we, as a society, will contribute. The Earth Summits of Rio de Janeiro (1992) and Johannesburg (2002), along with the UN Climate Change Conference in Bali (2007) have had significant impacts on the way in which we think about our planet, and it is our goal to ensure that our children, the leaders of tomorrow, can inherit a political legacy which makes ‘sustainability thinking’ the norm, rather than the exception.

At national and regional levels, we remain committed to ensuring that the actions and outcomes emanating from our policies and strategies – whether they are social, economic or environmental – are capable of providing consistent progress towards

our strategic plans and priorities. To do this, we will continue to refine our approach to developing and delivering our policies and programmes in a way that promotes and instils a more cohesive and joined-up approach across all departments of government.

Commitment Ten:

The inclusion of the principles of sustainability will, alongside existing statutory obligations, be central to all policy training developed and delivered in the Northern Ireland Civil Service. This will mainstream sustainability into the heart of all policy making.

Our priority areas of action as detailed in Chapter 4 are summarised below:

- Building a dynamic, innovative economy
- Strengthening society
- Driving sustainable investment
- Environmental protection and use
- Sustainable energy provision / reducing carbon footprint

These priorities form our own particular 'sub-set' of larger international and national priorities which relate to, among other things: trade; finance; poverty reduction; integration; renewable energy/energy efficiency; biodiversity; forestry; marine issues; corporate social responsibility; governance; partnerships; climate change and, education.

While it is appropriate that, as an Executive, we set our priorities against a background of our own particular needs and ambitions, we are committed to ensuring that while they may not be a 'mirror image' of policies elsewhere, we will take care to ensure that our priorities remain compatible with the principles of sustainability, and continue to be complementary to the overall objectives for sustainable development at international level.

Chapter 6: Integrating Sustainable Development into the Policy Process

We have made an unequivocal commitment to sustainable development in identifying it as a cross-cutting theme which underpins our strategic priorities. This requires its effective integration into policy-making at all levels of government. To speed its widespread adoption and to make it a core function of our governance, we recognise the importance of promoting a wider understanding and knowledge of the issue.

The term 'sustainable development' is often quoted as being "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". The terminology sometimes leads to confusion, and the concept itself is often accused of being too abstract in the way in which it is presented. A challenge for us, and governments around the world is to make this concept 'real' for everyone. This is why we are producing this Strategy as a high-level, enabling document which points the way forward for our plans, rather than as a finely detailed, technically based document which is difficult to understand and of restricted interest. Our intention is to make this Strategy a 'touchstone' for everyone involved in the delivery of sustainable outcomes, whether social, economic or environmental, and regardless of what sector they are involved in, while at the same time making it a first point of reference for those people who are seeking to become introduced to or informed about sustainable development here.

It is often widely – and wrongly - perceived that sustainable development is solely an environmental issue. A successful sustainable development strategy must also embrace the need to tackle social inequality and assist economic growth and wealth creation. It is not a constraint to economic growth; indeed, it can serve to focus attention on our desire to identify the opportunities for innovation. This will become even more important in the future, as we start to move beyond our dependence on the fossil fuels that underpin our current economy and look for viable and environmentally responsible alternatives.

We are determined to embed sustainability within the culture of our Departments and Agencies, and into their processes, with the aim of securing real and sustained improvements in the services that benefit our people.

This requires:

- High-level commitment from government to deliver our strategic plans for sustainable development
- The development of ownership, understanding and the application of sustainable development practices by all areas of government
- The integration of sustainable development thinking into Departmental priorities and processes
- A coherent and proactive approach to liaison with stakeholders to encourage their active participation in delivering sustainable development

Long-term planning is fundamental to the formulation of policies that support and promote sustainable development. So too is the need to examine how our policies may have impacts beyond our own region, and the integration of social, economic and environmental considerations. This has led us to look at a number of policy areas across government Departments, and to begin work on reviewing various strategies and plans to better reflect our emerging priorities and ambitions within the context of sustainable development.

Each Government Department has an essential role in delivering our commitment to sustainable development. This will include testing their own policies and programmes against our six guiding principles, contributing in an appropriate way to our priority areas for action and, importantly, embedding a positive approach to sustainability within their operations and management.

As we have outlined in Chapter 2, all new strategies and policies will be subject to a 'sustainability scan' as part of our Impact Assessment process, using the NICS Policy Toolkit. This will enable Departments to balance the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. To do this we will,

Commitment Eleven:

Review and consult on the effectiveness of our current policy making guidance to reflect the objectives expressed throughout this Strategy

Unprecedented levels of resource will be utilised through our Investment Strategy (ISNI) in the coming years. Like our Programme for Government, the Investment Strategy has clear economic, social and environmental objectives. The scale of the projected expenditure within ISNI – some £20bn in the next ten years, allied to our annual public procurement budget of around £1.8bn, offers enormous potential to achieve both equality of opportunity and sustainable development and we have published procurement guidance to ensure the effective deployment of public funds in serving these purposes.

A formal programme of training for sustainable development has already been initiated within the NICS (see Chapter 8) but it is necessary to promote our commitment to sustainability well beyond this audience. In moving beyond this Strategy, we will place emphasis on addressing the most cost-effective means of communicating sustainable development to a targeted range of audiences from different sectors of society. This is likely to embrace a variety of media and methodologies, with IT solutions at its heart

Chapter 7: Joining Things Up

To make the changes necessary to create a truly sustainable society we need to comprehensively examine the interactions between our major strategies and plans, and the implications that each may have on the successful delivery of the other.

As an Executive, it is essential that we continually examine all of our plans to ensure that the policies we develop deliver positive impacts of a cross-cutting nature. Like everyone else, we must work within limited resources, and we must be confident that in using those resources, our decisions are fully informed and that the subsequent outcomes provide the greatest and most equitable benefit for all our people now and in the future.

The work of the Department for Social Development plays a key role in terms of urban regeneration, housing and community development. Within our Programme for Government, we are tackling the core causes of deprivation in our society and we are putting plans in place to ensure that the people living in deprived areas are given the same life chances as everyone else.

The Department of Agriculture is continuing to lead the way in its role as rural champion, with objectives which support, amongst other things, improvements in rural infrastructures, including improving mobility in terms of European integration and the single market, and socio-economic initiatives to provide support for organisations with a social, community or ethical purpose.

For example, as we are seeking to drive investment in our key infrastructure over the next 10 years it is essential we do so in a way which supports our intentions to develop communities in both urban and rural areas, in which our children are safe and where people have access not only to public services, which include amongst other things high quality education and skills programmes which will enable them to contribute positively and productively to our wider society. It is in these areas that we will be looking towards the Department of Employment and Learning and the Department of Education to co-ordinate a large number of existing and new

initiatives, although the work of other departments and agencies will also have an important and complementary impact.

Our goal is to ensure that those communities which are lifted out of deprivation will become places where people seek to live by choice, knowing that they will have equal access to opportunities to create lifestyles for themselves which are healthy, environmentally friendly and centred on well-being.

Our Investment Strategy recognises that, "...the creation of a sustainable infrastructure will bring with it societal change and environmental enhancement, while helping us to deliver better public services for all..." It is our strong view that we all have our part to play in delivering this goal. We are already moving in the right direction by ensuring that the principles of sustainability will be built into each infrastructure project as comprehensively as possible.

The Executive has approved new guidance on integrating equality of opportunity and sustainable development into public sector procurement. This guidance provides practical advice on how to take account of equality and sustainable development when procuring goods, works and services. This guidance will be kept under review to see where we can improve and build upon best practice. With approximately £20bn being invested over the next 10 years in new infrastructure, and in some of our most deprived areas, the time for 'sustainability thinking' is now.

Our Regional Development Strategy places a strong emphasis on sustainable development, social cohesion and the sensible use of resources while caring for the environment. The Spatial Development Strategy is central to this, and seeks to make best use of key regional assets to accommodate growth. The strategic planning guidelines within the Strategy provide the long-term policy directions from a spatial perspective in the form of strategic objectives, set out by topics which include: Strengthening Regional Cohesion in a Global Context; The Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan; Derry/Londonderry: Regional City for the North West; Rural Northern Ireland; Meeting Housing Needs; Supporting Economic Development; Developing a Regional Transport System, and Caring for the Environment.

Our Regional Innovation Strategy contains a number of imperatives and objectives which are designed to support the development of our innovation system and infrastructure. Central to this is the involvement of lead organisations from key stakeholders from industry, academia and government, and the changing nature of how they work together in collaboration and co-operation to deliver the innovation agenda.

In highlighting some of the major strategies that affect us all, and considering their respective objectives, it is clear that in many cases there are already common and cross-cutting issues both in terms of the approach to delivery and the desire to create sustainable solutions.

The Executive recognises the challenge to 'join-up' government, in respect of the ways in which we develop our policies and strategies in the future. We need to take account of the intentions of the full suite of plans and ensure mechanisms are in place which optimise the opportunities to integrate strategies and multiply the benefits of consolidated thinking to everyone involved.

We have stated elsewhere in this Strategy, the importance of involving everyone in progressing our sustainable development ambitions, and to do this,

Commitment Twelve:

We will develop a sustainable development information database which is accessible to all, which reports and informs on strategic developments across the NICS.

Chapter 8: Working Together

While sustainable development may be considered a political commitment, its successful delivery requires the consensus and contribution of society as a whole. In leading the development of our new Sustainable Development Strategy, we are making a commitment to, and setting an agenda for, an open and participatory environment in which everyone can contribute to the achievement of our collective ambitions.

To successfully achieve a peaceful, fair and prosperous society, we need to involve the private and voluntary/community sectors and civic society, as well as government, in a partnership. This will need processes that will facilitate stakeholder involvement in developing and implementing our key programmes and strategies in a sustainable way. By taking this approach, we will better understand the different perspectives and needs of wider society, as well as the local issues that affect particular sectors and groups.

The move towards a 'sustainability focused' society – with a shared and better future – depends upon collaboration between partners in different sectors, each of whom possesses different but potentially complementary skills, experiences and attributes. The public sector can provide governance, stability and information; the private sector contributes innovation, focus and responsiveness; the voluntary and community sector can reach into areas and interests otherwise difficult to access; while society itself can capture and express local issues. By bringing these together, we can achieve far more than with any of the sectors acting alone. In recognition of this:

Commitment Thirteen:

We will create a collaborative mechanism which brings together representatives from each of these sectors, with the common purpose of progressing our sustainable development ambitions.

We have developed this Strategy as a 'compass' to set the direction of our sustainable development 'journey'. We recognise the need to turn our ambitions into actions, which in turn lead to achievements in social, economic and environmental terms. In doing this, we must build upon the good work already done by creating a clearly defined and articulated plan of action. In Chapter 4, we have identified the objective of creating an Implementation Plan, which will express the objectives of this Strategy explicitly.

This plan will be the single most important document that we produce in terms of sustainable development over the next few years. The Plan will be the 'nuts and bolts' of our work. It is therefore essential that the targets we set within the plan itself fit with our other strategies, and that we consider the opinions and views of everyone, in a balanced way, throughout its development. We intend to draw on the wealth of expertise and knowledge that lies beyond government to inform our actions in creating a sustainable development Implementation Plan which contains social, economic and environmental targets which are relevant, realistic and quantifiable, while at the same time being challenging. To do this:

Commitment Fourteen:

We will invite stakeholder representation from the social, economic and environmental sectors to ensure a balance of interests in the development and consultation phases of our new Implementation Plan.

Since the publication of the previous Sustainable Development Strategy, progress has been made in raising awareness of sustainable development across both the public and private sectors. Within government, training programmes have been developed which aim to inform and advise civil servants at all grades about the importance and relevance of sustainable development to the work that they do. Staff from all areas of government including policy-making; procurement, project management, finance etc have now been equipped with new skills which will allow them to improve the sustainability of their decisions and their associated impacts.

We recognise that we still have a long way to go with this work, and while we will continue to deliver sustainability training across government, we want to share our experiences and resources with others wherever possible.

As Albert Einstein once said, “We cannot solve the problems we created with the same thinking that created them”. There are many examples of ‘best practice’ in relation to sustainability projects. We are keen to publicise these and to help in showcasing them as examples to others. It is often the case that the full potential of these examples is, for different reasons, not immediately recognised. In certain cases, opportunities may exist to ‘scale up’ successful projects and we are keen to work with everyone to examine the potential to do so. Therefore,

Commitment Fifteen:

We are committed to exploring ways in which we can build upon our e-govt infrastructure to more effectively promote, share and communicate sustainable development learning, practices and experiences in such a way as to promote the achievement of targets within the Implementation Plan.

Chapter 9: Realising the Benefits

Sustainable development is not just a philosophy, or a scientific theory, or indeed a political slogan. Properly implemented, it can deliver real, wide ranging, and lasting benefits, but it takes positive action to realise these. The transition towards real sustainability will be enabled by the development of a dynamic, responsible and diverse economy that is capable of responding to change and is supportive of innovation. An enduringly successful economy will effectively use natural resources and contribute towards the protection of the environment. It must also create the conditions necessary to build a society that is fair, inclusive, stable and prosperous.

All sectors of our society have an opportunity to contribute towards the realisation of these benefits by engaging in the agenda that we are developing through this Strategy and its subsequent Implementation Plan. We are mindful of the need to turn words into actions, and a challenge for Government, in our role as policy maker, is to make these benefits visible and obtainable for everyone. We are committed to tackling problems which obstruct progress or contradict principles, while at the same time, working to encourage the involvement of everyone involved throughout all stages of the sustainable development journey, and not just in the delivery aspects of our plans.

It is vital that we remove barriers to change. The relationship that exists between Government as policy-maker and industry as a vehicle for delivery is critical. We have, through listening to various representatives from across the business sector, taken notice of the importance of creating conditions which, while ensuring the principles of sustainability are mainstreamed into business, support and stimulate conditions for economic growth and prosperity.

We intend to seek to develop effective and constructive relationships in line with the principles contained within chapter 5 of this Strategy.

To develop a cohesive approach to delivering sustainable development we need to recognise that we work within an environment in which there are different cycles, whether political, social, economic, environmental or fiscal. These can place

constraints on our ability to synchronise programmes which contribute towards sustainable development objectives.

The various sectors of our diverse society and mixed economy will often have competing priorities and work within differing timelines and horizons. Our challenge is to limit the undesirable impacts of these types of constraints while delivering our common and shared sustainable development ambitions.

To achieve this, we will translate the long-term ambitions of this Strategy into sensible targets. We will lead Government Departments in reviewing progress against targets on an annual basis, and supplement this with a succession of three-year Implementation Plans which match the timing of future Programme for Government cycles.

Commitment Sixteen:

We will develop robust reporting mechanisms for sustainable development to provide information in support of the management of implementation.

Of course, there are public sector investment decisions where economic, social and environmental impacts extend into the long term, and clearly, some assessment of the sustainability of these impacts will be required – including the ‘sustainability fit’ of particular projects within the context of our strategic objectives. Therefore:

Commitment Seventeen:

We will ensure that policy, strategy and investment decisions taken by Government are based on a strategic consideration of their ‘whole life’ consequences and measure this against the achievement of long-term economic, social and environmental impacts

For the private sector there is a window of opportunity to realise benefits from the growing investment in sustainability and the emerging markets in eco-technology. However, it should be recognised that this window will not remain open indefinitely and that competition on regional and international levels, in terms of developing intelligence, skills and market share will be strong. To allow us to optimise this

opportunity, we must act quickly and with purpose. A major consequence of failing to do so will mean that the costs of tackling climate change in the future will be much higher for everyone.

It is necessary that we do what we can to champion pro-activity and innovation across the private sector in support of our sustainability vision. Many of the technologies and solutions which support the guiding principles contained within Chapter 4, already exist, but may not yet be commercially viable – we must use our powers to create a pathway to accelerate implementation and up-scaling. In this respect our Regional Innovation Strategy is the catalyst through which the private sector can drive the innovation, creativity and design agenda.

Historically, we have a poor record in terms of utilising internationally funded enterprise programmes. It is important that we raise awareness of the opportunities that these programmes can offer to both new and established businesses.

Therefore:

Commitment Eighteen:

We will publish a comprehensive programme to promote, establish and facilitate ethical and fair trade relations which support sustainable growth. We will continue – to proactively promote our programme internationally through the lifetime of this strategy.

In Chapter 8, we identified the need to include sectoral representatives in a collaborative mechanism to progress the overall sustainability agenda. By doing this, we are creating conditions where stakeholders have the opportunity to interact with Government at the formative stages of decision-making processes, which may potentially impact on their plans and performance, and to affect change through discussion and consensus. This is a critical step in our move towards the creation of a low-carbon economy where consumers and businesses are rewarded for making the right choices.

Chapter 10: Implementation, Monitoring and Follow-up

Our approach to delivering on the Strategic Objectives and commitments set out in this Strategy will be predicated on four principles:

1. Clear designation of leadership responsibility to Departments in areas for which they are the policy lead;
2. Acceptance of corporate responsibility by Departments for achievement of targets;
3. Setting specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound objectives for what we will do; and,
4. Making an objective and quantitative assessment of what progress we achieve towards our strategic objectives.

In terms of Government, measurement of progress on sustainability needs to do a number of things:

- It needs to assess how well we are doing collectively in making progress on each Strategic Objective;
- It needs to assess whether those charged with delivery of actions to achieve our Strategic Objectives are making satisfactory progress on their obligations; and,
- It needs to take proper account of limiting factors and risks that may impede progress.

Implementation Plan

The Implementation Plan for this Strategy will be designed to ensure achievement of the principles above. It will translate the aspirations of this Strategy into a firm, detailed plan of action, with clear statements of what will be achieved, by when, and identify those with responsibility for ensuring delivery.

The success of such a Plan will require all involved to play an active role in development and delivery. Responsibility for the development of sustainability in their areas of policy will be clearly defined and assigned.

In developing the Implementation Plan, OFMDFM will work with all Departments to assist them in the development of appropriate SMART targets for inclusion in the plan, and facilitate inter-Departmental discussion in areas of mutual interest.

Indicator Set

To assess how well we are doing collectively in making progress on each Strategic Objective, and in fulfilment of principle four above, we will compile a regular report containing indicators of progress against Strategic Objectives.

The indicators in the report will constitute the headline measure of the success with which we are delivering sustainability and will feed into national and international reports.

Commitment Nineteen:

We will develop indicators to monitor progress against our Strategic Objectives that complement existing national and international monitoring and reporting frameworks.

Monitoring Implementation of the Strategy

Monitoring is a core component of this strategy. It will need to cover processes (such as the quality and coverage of participation and information systems), outcomes and the changing baseline. Monitoring is not a separate exercise. On the contrary, process and outcome indicators need to be considered on a regular basis by all the stakeholders at the same time as vision and objectives.

To assess whether those charged with delivery of actions to achieve our Strategic Objectives are making satisfactory progress on their obligations, we will regularly

monitor the progress of Departments in meeting the SMART targets set out in the Implementation Plan.

As a cross-cutting priority of the Programme for Government and the Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland and a statutory obligation of all Departments, the achievement of sustainable development will be mainstreamed into all the activities of Government. In light of this, it is appropriate that the mechanisms for planning, management and reporting of Departmental performance should reflect efforts to progress the sustainable development agenda.

Commitment Twenty:

We will explore ways to effectively report on Departments' sustainable development performance, in line with established international good practice guidance.

Strategy Renewal

In ensuring currency and relevance of our plans we will periodically review the various strategies which inform and support the ambitions of the Executive. This approach will be applied to this Strategy as we progress our sustainable development plans.

Conclusion

This Strategy has been designed as an enabling document, which has steered away from being overly prescriptive. We view this document as a catalyst for change.

The Implementation Plan for the period to 2011 will detail, identify and allocate specific actions and responsibilities. To do this successfully we will require cooperation and engagement from a range of sources throughout the process. We look forward to working with everyone involved.

Annex – Compilation of Commitments

Commitment One:

In the development of new strategies and policies, we will require Departments to incorporate comprehensive 'sustainability scans' as one component of their Regulatory Impact Assessment process, which will provide SMART evidence of the inclusion of sustainability criteria.

Commitment Two:

We will, therefore, extend our efforts to work with our regional, national and international colleagues to exploit more fully the knowledge networks which support the advancement of sustainable development.

Commitment Three:

We will continue to further develop our relationship with national and EU institutions to explore, and consequently make greater use of, opportunities associated with innovation and sustainability programmes which complement our plans and priorities.

Commitment Four:

We will identify the most effective ways of encouraging stakeholder participation in informing us about our work in relation to sustainable development, and develop appropriate mechanisms to facilitate this.

Commitment Five:

We will ensure that the recognition of sustainable development as a cross-cutting principle continues and is reinforced in future PfGs by running the development of future PfGs and Sustainable Development Strategy Implementation Plans in parallel.

Commitment Six:

We will explore the means by which capacity building measures can be introduced to ensure that all public sector employees maintain sustainable development skills and knowledge as appropriate to their role.

Commitment Seven:

We will seek ways to assimilate our PfG priorities and principles with regulatory mechanisms to best support the achievement of positive sustainable development outcomes.

Commitment Eight:

In 2009, we will publish an Implementation Plan setting out how we will achieve our Strategic Objectives covering the period to 31 March 2011. This will set SMART targets for action to achieve each Objective and identify a Department with responsibility for leading progress on each target.

Commitment Nine:

We will, therefore, ensure that guidance relating to the existing Statutory Duty on Sustainable Development, contained within Section 25 of the Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2006, is appropriate in supporting our ongoing sustainable development ambitions.

Commitment Ten:

The inclusion of the principles of sustainability will, alongside existing statutory obligations, be central to all policy training developed and delivered in the Northern Ireland Civil Service. This will mainstream sustainability into the heart of all policy making.

Commitment Eleven:

Review and consult on the effectiveness of our current policy making guidance to reflect the objectives expressed throughout this Strategy

Commitment Twelve:

We will develop a sustainable development information database which is accessible to all, which reports and informs on strategic developments across the NICS.

Commitment Thirteen:

We will create a collaborative mechanism which brings together representatives from each of these sectors, with the common purpose of progressing our sustainable development ambitions.

Commitment Fourteen:

We will invite stakeholder representation from the social, economic and environmental sectors to ensure a balance of interests in the development and consultation phases of our new Implementation Plan.

Commitment Fifteen:

We are committed to exploring ways in which we can build upon our e-govt infrastructure to more effectively promote, share and communicate sustainable development learning, practices and experiences in such a way as to promote the achievement of targets within the Implementation Plan.

Commitment Sixteen:

We will develop robust reporting mechanisms for sustainable development to provide information in support of the management of implementation.

Commitment Seventeen:

We will ensure that policy, strategy and investment decisions taken by Government are based on a strategic consideration of their 'whole life' consequences and measure this against the achievement of long-term economic, social and environmental impacts

Commitment Eighteen:

We will publish a comprehensive programme to promote, establish and facilitate ethical and fair trade relations which support sustainable growth. We will continue –to proactively promote our programme internationally through the lifetime of this strategy.

Commitment Nineteen:

We will develop indicators to monitor progress against our Strategic Objectives that complement existing national and international monitoring and reporting frameworks.

Commitment Twenty:

We will explore ways to effectively report on Departments' sustainable development performance, in line with established international good practice guidance.

Annex B – Consultation Questions

1. Do you agree the draft Sustainable Development Strategy presents itself as an enabling document which paves the way for the creation of an Implementation Plan containing explicit plans and targets in support of sustainable development? If you do not agree, please explain why and what alternatives you would propose.
2. Do you agree that the draft Sustainable Development Strategy will effectively link high level objectives to delivery of plans? If you do not agree, please explain why and what alternatives you would propose.
3. Do you agree with the Principles, Priorities and Strategic Objectives identified within the draft Sustainable Development Strategy? If you do not agree, please explain why and what alternatives you would propose.
4. Do you agree the Commitments (Annex A) will be sufficient to make sure those inside and outside government contribute to the Strategy? If you do not agree, please explain why and what alternatives you would propose.
5. Do you agree with the scope of the four broad Key Challenges for cross-sectoral engagement set out in Chapter 3? If you do not agree, please explain why and what alternatives you would propose.
6. Does the draft Sustainable Development Strategy provide you or your organisation with sufficient information to facilitate the shaping of your own sustainable development plans? If you do not agree, please explain why and what alternatives you would propose.
7. We will develop indicators of sustainability which will align with the Programme for Government and National and European indicators. To what else should we have regard in doing this?
8. Do you agree that the draft Sustainable Development Strategy supports the delivery of the Executive's strategic priorities, as expressed in the Programme for Government? If you do not agree, please explain why and what alternatives you would propose.
9. Are there any others issues in the Strategy that you wish to comment on?