



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

**COMMITTEE
FOR THE OFFICE OF THE
FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY
FIRST MINISTER**

**OFFICIAL REPORT
(Hansard)**

**Interim Consultation Report on the Draft
Sustainable Development Strategy**

20 January 2010

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER**

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Development Strategy**

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Danny Kennedy (Chairperson)
Mrs Naomi Long (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Alex Attwood
Mr Tom Elliott
Mr Francie Molloy
Mr George Robinson
Mr Jim Shannon
Mr Jimmy Spratt

Witnesses:

Mr John Bradley)
Mr Damian Prince) Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister
Mr Jim Sutherland)

The Chairperson (Mr Kennedy):

Good afternoon, Mr Prince; you are very welcome. Mr Sutherland and Mr Bradley, thank you very much for your attendance. You are here to brief the Committee on 'Everyone's Involved', the interim consultation report on the draft sustainable development strategy from the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM). The evidence session is being recorded by Hansard. You may begin by making an opening statement, after which members will ask questions.

Mr Damian Prince (Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister):

Thank you, Chairman. I am accompanied by Jim Sutherland and John Bradley, who are from

OFMDFM's sustainable development unit. We very much appreciate the opportunity to update the Committee on progress that has been made with the consultation process on the draft sustainable development strategy.

Committee members will recall from our meeting of 30 September 2009 that we were working towards getting Executive approval to release the draft strategy for consultation. That approval was received at a meeting on 22 October 2009, and we launched a 12-week public consultation process on 26 October 2009. The consultation period concluded last Friday, 15 January 2010, and we received around 60 written responses, which we are working our way through.

As part of the overall consultation process, we hosted 12 meetings to listen to stakeholders' views. We provided the Committee with an interim report that details stakeholders' comments and findings so far, although I understand that that report has only recently made its way to the Committee. Nevertheless, we are happy to answer members' questions about the consultation to date. We intend to prepare a final consultation report, which we hope to give to the Committee shortly.

In summary, it is fair to say that, so far, stakeholders have welcomed the production of the new strategy. However, we recognise that several recurring themes have emerged. First, there is a view that, although the strategy is welcome, it is too high level and needs to set out specific actions and targets. Secondly, some people have questioned the degree of commitment behind the strategy, and there is fear that we are merely paying lip service to some of the core issues. Thirdly, several stakeholders with interests in specific aspects of sustainable development have suggested that their particular theme should be more heavily represented in the strategy. We feel that we can address those matters as we finalise the strategy for publication.

Mrs Long:

This is the interim consultation report, and you are still working through the written submissions. If everything runs smoothly, what is the time frame for putting in place a strategy?

Mr Prince:

If everything runs smoothly, taking account of the weight of concerns that are raised in the written consultation, we hope to put together a final consultation report by 1 February 2010 and issue it to Ministers and to the Committee to allow them to consider the final outcome

and the range of all the issues that are raised.

Thereafter, depending on the weight of any likely changes, we hope to produce the second version of the strategy and the equality impact assessment (EQIA) by about 15 February 2010. That is a challenging timetable. Stakeholders are welcoming the strategy and saying positive things about it. Therefore, we could be able to produce a final draft of the strategy for the Committee's consideration very quickly. We hope to submit the strategy to the Executive for final approval on 11 March 2010 and seek publication towards the end of March.

We accept that those are challenging targets and timelines. However, as the Committee knows, there has been some delay in the strategy's reaching this point. We are keen to launch it. At the same time, we must take account of some issues that arose in the consultation process. The implementation plan that will flow from the strategy is one of the more important issues. It will tackle the hard issues, such as what the strategy will do and how we will make it work. That process will run in parallel.

The Chairperson:

That is relatively straightforward. Thank you for your attendance. The final consultation report is due in early February, is that right?

Mr Prince:

Yes; we are happy to return to the Committee any time. However, if the Committee wants to discuss the final scope of the strategy and the outcome of the consultation, the end of February would be the best time.

The Chairperson:

We will undoubtedly have a more in-depth discussion then. Thank you very much.