



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Sustainable Development Strategy for the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

April 2010

**Corporate
Governance**

**Community
Engagement**

**A Sustainable
Workplace**

**Contributing to a
Sustainable
Economy**

**Environmental
Impact
Reduction**

**Communicating
Sustainable
Development**

Working for You

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1. Purpose

The purpose of this Strategy is to:

- Implement initiatives which support the Commission's aspirations of becoming an exemplar organisation in respect of sustainable development; and
- Facilitate the transition to a more proactive and structured management approach to sustainable development.

2. Introduction

Under Section 25 of the Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2006, Northern Ireland government departments and district councils have a statutory duty to carry out their functions in a way which contributes to sustainable development.

Whilst the Assembly is not a government department, it is vitally important that it is seen to lead the way and set an exemplar example in sustainable development for other organisations to follow.

Equally, the Commission should also have a positive corporate reputation within the general public, achieved through conducting its activities in a responsible manner.

The effective implementation of this Strategy will support several corporate objectives related to the Northern Ireland Assembly's Secretariat Corporate Plan 2008/11, which in turn will support the wider vision, values and strategic priorities of the Commission.

As sustainable development is cross cutting, the contribution of several business areas throughout the Secretariat is vital to the successful implementation of this Strategy.

The main aim of this Strategy is to embed responsible business practice throughout the Northern Ireland Assembly Secretariat so that the Commission becomes an exemplar organisation in respect of sustainable development.

In general, for an organisation to operate sustainably, it must consider its direct and indirect economic, environmental and social impacts during its decision making processes and everyday operations.

An organisation must therefore be committed to responsible business practice in the community, economy, environment and workplace. Embedding responsible business practice within these areas also demonstrates that the Commission is committed to behaving as a good corporate citizen.

Of considerable importance is the role that corporate governance plays in the development and, more importantly, the implementation of responsible business practice.

The Director of Facilities/ Keeper of the House, supported by other Directors, is responsible for developing and overseeing the implementation of this Sustainable Development Strategy. The Secretariat Management Group (SMG) has responsibility for approving the Strategy and reviewing the progress of its implementation.

It should be noted that the effective implementation of this Strategy will only be achieved if all Directors take collective ownership of the Strategy to ensure that it is fully implemented. All Directors will have a crucial role to play in ensuring that the initiatives within the Strategy, particularly those where staff

participation is necessary to achieve improvements, are fully supported and implemented by their respective business areas.

This Strategy is divided into the following six key themes:

- Key Theme 1 - Corporate Governance
- Key Theme 2 - Community Engagement
- Key Theme 3 - A Sustainable Workplace
- Key Theme 4 - Contributing to a Sustainable Economy
- Key Theme 5 - Environmental Impact Reduction
- Key Theme 6 - Communicating Sustainable Development

It should be noted that these themes are not presented in order of priority. The ultimate goal of a wholly sustainable Assembly will only be realised when all these themes are considered together.

Actions associated with each of the key themes are presented in the Sustainable Development Strategy Action Plan, presented as Appendix 1.

The Strategy has been developed with the view of being a high level document, with the detail on how the Strategy's purpose and aims will be achieved provided within the Action Plan.

As the ultimate aim of the Strategy is to continually improve the sustainable development performance of the Commission, it is therefore an evolving process. As a result, the Action Plan will be reviewed and redeveloped on an annual basis at the start of each business year.

The potential benefits of the effective implementation of this Strategy are wide ranging. The potential key benefits are as follows:

- Lower operating costs and greater efficiency;
- Enhanced public reputation;
- Greater productivity and quality;
- Increased staff engagement and morale;
- Improved recruitment and retention;
- Lower risk and more effective risk management; and
- Reduced environmental impact.

In terms of budget planning for development of this Strategy, the funding required for the introduction of the actions detailed within the Action Plan for 2010/11 (Appendix 1) has been identified and included within budget forecasts for the year.

Going forward, funding requirements for the subsequent Action Plans will be included within the annual budget forecasting exercises.

3. Background

The 'Northern Ireland Assembly Secretariat Review Report' stated that, "Sustainable Development has become a significant government priority in both the UK and Ireland and is at the forefront of many Departmental strategic plans."

As a result of this, one of the recommendations of the Report was that the Assembly was to become an exemplar organisation in respect of Sustainable Development.

The development and implementation of a Sustainability/Sustainable Development Strategy was subsequently included within the Northern Ireland Assembly Secretariat Corporate Plan 2008/2011 (revised 2009).

This was the planned outcome included within strategic priority 4, 'Ensuring the effective governance of the Secretariat'; under associated corporate objective 4.3, 'To reduce the environmental impact of the Assembly'.

It is a common misconception that sustainable development relates to environmental issues only. As mentioned in the previous section, for an organisation to truly consider its sustainable development obligations, it must also consider economic, social and workplace issues. The ultimate aim of sustainable development is that all of these themes are considered together in decision making processes and within the subsequent activities/operations of an organisation.

To reflect this, corporate objective 4.3 has been amended to read, 'To enhance responsible business practice within the Assembly Secretariat.'

As a starting point to the goal of becoming a truly sustainable organisation, the Commission approved and adopted a Sustainable Development Policy Statement in December 2009.

This Policy Statement sets out the Commission's aspirations to operate more sustainably. The content of this Strategy details how the Commission will attempt to achieve these aspirations through a series of supporting policies, strategies and improvement initiatives.

It should be noted that there are already several initiatives underway within the Secretariat which contribute to the ultimate goal of sustainable development.

One of the main aims of this Strategy is therefore to consolidate both existing and new initiatives to ensure that:

- The concept of Sustainable Development is better understood within the Secretariat and the Assembly as a whole; and
- The Commission becomes an exemplar organisation in respect of Sustainable Development.

4. Key Theme 1: Corporate Governance

Related Corporate Plan Objectives

- 4.2 To improve key business processes
- 4.3 To enhance responsible business practice within the Assembly Secretariat
- 4.5 To ensure good governance arrangements including statutory compliance
- 4.8 To ensure the effective, efficient and economic use of resources

Corporate governance, which is generally only used to apply to the high level direction and control of an organisation's financial interests, also applies to sustainable development.

The Commission, being the corporate body of the Northern Ireland Assembly, is accountable for the Assembly's environmental and social impacts as well as its longer term financial sustainability.

It is crucial therefore that the Commission and the Secretariat fully understand and properly consider sustainable development issues when governing the organisation and formulating corporate policy.

Having a commitment to operating sustainably is also regarded as a key factor of a positive corporate reputation within the community.

Building oversight and responsibility for sustainable development within the Commission's corporate governance arrangements will help embed responsible practices within the activities of the Secretariat. It will also contribute significantly to the effective management of the sustainable development agenda.

The inclusion of this Strategy and the associated Policy Statement within corporate governance arrangements will guide and influence the behaviour of all staff on sustainable development.

Good governance of sustainable development:

- Demonstrates transparency and social accountability and enhances corporate reputation with all stakeholders;
- Helps keep corporate and individual staff behaviour in line with the Assembly's policies and values; and

- Streamlines management of emerging sustainable development challenges, as they can be addressed rapidly and decisively where necessary at the top level.

For this Strategy to be successful, it is crucial that it and the supporting sub-strategies, policies and improvement initiatives are endorsed and supported from the top level of the organisation i.e. by the Clerk/ Director General and the Speaker of the House.

With this in mind, a clear mechanism for keeping the Secretariat Management Group (SMG) and/or the Commission apprised of issues and performance on sustainable development will be introduced.

The inclusion of sustainable development within SMG/ Commission board level activity should ensure that it will be considered during the wider business strategy and decision making processes.

Detailed reports will be tabled at SMG meetings on at least a six monthly basis. Each report will detail progress on the implementation of the Strategy's Action Plan as well as inform SMG of other initiatives underway outside the Action Plan. These may include ongoing background work on initiatives which may take longer to implement than the period of the Action Plan, or new initiatives being considered for implementation.

As a result, SMG will effectively operate as a Sustainable Development Steering Group.

A report will also be tabled at Commission meetings on at least an annual basis. Each report will provide a summary on the progress of implementing the Strategy's Action Plan, thereby advising the Commission of the improvements to sustainable development performance over the Action Plan period being reported.

5. Key Theme 2: Community Engagement

Related Corporate Plan Objectives

- 2.1 To increase public engagement with the Assembly
- 2.3 To ensure effective partnership arrangements
- 3.3 To have in place a dedicated, professional and motivated group of staff to meet the needs of the Assembly
- 4.3 To enhance responsible business practice within the Assembly Secretariat

A sustainable organisation can play a major role in the development of a sustainable community. The Commission therefore wants to be an active member of the community within which it governs and operates.

The Northern Ireland Assembly, as Northern Ireland's legislature, recognises that it has a vital role to play in the development of a strong and cohesive community.

Investing time and effort in engaging with and supporting the local community will help the Assembly strengthen and develop positive relationships with them. This clearly supports the Commission's vision of an Assembly that strengthens democracy and engages the people of Northern Ireland in creating a better future for all.

In addition to the excellent work already underway as a result of the 'Engagement Strategy for the Northern Ireland Assembly', which focuses on engaging the public with the democratic process, the Commission can also contribute to the community by enabling its staff to contribute time to voluntary and charitable activities.

The key community engagement initiatives detailed within this Strategy which will contribute greatly to the achievement of the Commission's sustainable development aspirations include:

- Encouraging public participation in the democratic process through the 'Engagement Strategy for the Northern Ireland Assembly';
- Supporting outward engagement of staff within the community through the development of a volunteering policy for staff; and
- The adoption of a formal Charities Policy so that the Assembly can support fundraising activities of nominated charities.

Engaging with the community not only benefits the community itself but it also benefits the Northern Ireland Assembly and its staff. Table 1 on the following page summarises these key benefits.

Table 1 - Key benefits from engaging with the Community

Community	Assembly	Staff
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvements to the local environment • Supporting social and economic development • Empowerment through consultation and engagement in the democratic process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced public profile/ reputation • Improved relationships with local communities • Improved democratic process • Staff development leading to improved morale and staff retention • Team building opportunities • Improved recruitment of staff through being deemed as a responsible employer • Supports the embedding and living out of its corporate values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal development • Improved sense of belonging • Sense of pride in working for the Assembly

5.1 Engagement Strategy for the Northern Ireland Assembly

The purpose of the Strategy is to improve further the Assembly's engagement with the general public. It is a dynamic and responsive strategy for outreach and public engagement.

It is vital that the Assembly engages with Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs), Committees and channels of influence, such as the news media, organisational partners, young people and strategic partnerships to ensure that the awareness of the workings of the Assembly are communicated to the wider community with the aim that they engage in the democratic process.

The Assembly hosts a wide range of visitors each year through its Education Service, Events Office, MLA sponsored tours and public tours, as well as visitors on business either with MLAs or the Secretariat.

Community Outreach

The Assembly organises and delivers outreach events, public meetings and talks in local communities throughout Northern Ireland.

Meeting groups in the heart of their communities, not only raises awareness of what the Assembly is and how it works, but perhaps more importantly, it

positively influences how local community groups and individuals can engage with the democratic process.

Educational visitors are a priority, particularly school children and young adults, so that they can both experience the surroundings of a working legislature as well as learn about our democratic institutions and processes and how they work. Improving public access to the Assembly and knowledge and understanding of its work and role, are primary objectives of the Engagement Strategy.

The Assembly needs to combine improvements to the experience visitors receive when they come to Parliament Buildings with improvements to the way the Assembly connects with those not able to attend.

Conservation of Parliament Buildings

Parliament Buildings is an iconic landmark in Northern Ireland, and one of the great architectural buildings in Belfast.

As the custodian of such an impressive building, the Commission recognises that it has an important role to play in its conservation and protection. The conservation of this unique building therefore places a significant responsibility on the Commission.

It is recognised that Parliament Buildings is a very popular tourist attraction. The Commission will ensure that the building is maintained with historic preservation in mind so that it will continue to be enjoyed by Members, staff and the visiting public.

5.2 Staff Volunteering within the Community

The Commission is committed to supporting the local community.

With this in mind, a staff volunteering policy will be developed which will contribute to addressing social issues within communities by volunteering staff members' skills and time both during business hours as well as 'out of hours'.

Getting involved in communities and their issues gives the Assembly an insight into the hearts and minds of their staff and 'customers' i.e. the public. It therefore allows the Assembly to make a positive impact on their communities, both internally with their staff and externally with the public.

Having a policy in place which encourages staff to volunteer within the community provides benefits to the community itself, members of staff and the Assembly as a whole. Table 1 on page 10, provides a summary of these benefits.

The Engagement Strategy in the previous section focuses on the engagement of the public with the democratic process.

The engagement of staff within the community to support and provide advice and assistance complements this Strategy and contributes to the wider principle of community engagement within this Sustainable Development Strategy.

As part of staff volunteering arrangements the following key initiatives will be considered:

1. Mentoring within the community, whereby staff can use their skills and experience to help others;
2. Building relationships with schools/community groups;
3. Staff development and motivation opportunities through mentoring and volunteering; and
4. Teambuilding opportunities through volunteering.

Staff volunteering within the community has a positive contribution to staff engagement. As a result, it has a clear link with the staff engagement section within Key Theme 3; A Sustainable Workplace.

5.3 Supporting Charitable Organisations

Parliament Buildings is used throughout the year for numerous 'public good' events.

Supporting charitable organisations is a key role of a sustainable organisation.

A formal Charities Policy has recently been adopted by the Commission, which has formalised the arrangements for the selection and engagement of a charitable organisation. This Policy clearly demonstrates the Commission's commitment to sustainable development.

The formal arrangement also provides clear guidance to staff on organising lower level charity fundraising events and opportunities within Parliament Buildings.

A charity will be selected on an annual basis. During the year, the selected charity will be accorded a number of privileges. The charity is permitted to hold a number of fundraising and revenue generating opportunities in Parliament Buildings.

The Commission will work with the selected charity during the year in order to maximise fundraising opportunities.

The Policy and its implementation demonstrates the Commission's commitment to responsible business practice both through the privileges afforded to the charity by the Commission and promoting the charitable endeavours of the Secretariat staff.

6. Key Theme 3: A Sustainable Workplace

Related Corporate Objectives

- 1.1 To ensure the effective operation of the Assembly
- 1.2 To support Members in fulfilling their Assembly, constituency and office holder duties
- 2.4 To promote good relations
- 3.2 To improve the way we communicate with each other
- 3.3 To have in place a dedicated, professional and motivated group of staff to meet the needs of the Assembly
- 4.3 To enhance responsible business practice within the Assembly Secretariat

It is recognised that having a diverse, engaged, healthy and valued workforce has significant benefits to the Commission.

Whilst it is recognised that the financial aspects of staff terms and conditions of employment are an important consideration, the non-financial benefits also play a key role in the recruitment and retention of talented staff, which in turn plays a crucial role in the development of a sustainable workplace.

The workplace element of this Strategy focuses on the following key areas:

- Staff Engagement;
- Health and Wellbeing;
- Workplace Health and Safety; and
- Equality and Good Relations.

6.1 Staff Engagement

The development and motivation of Secretariat staff is vital for the effective and efficient operation of the Assembly.

Staff engagement is all about maximising the potential of people at work, giving them a sense of ownership and making them feel proud to work for their organisation.

There are many benefits which result from implementing effective staff development and engagement initiatives. Indeed, there are numerous best practice case studies from organisations committed to responsible business

practice which show that effective engagement and development of staff results in excellent levels of productivity and performance.

It is widely recognised that an organisation functions at its best when it makes their staff's capability, commitment, creativity and potential central to their operation.

For staff to feel engaged with their employer, a two way relationship between employer and the staff member must be nurtured. Staff need to feel respected, involved, heard, well led and valued by both the organisation and their colleagues.

The Commission recognises that it must continually improve engagement with its staff. How effective it is in this regard will influence the level of engagement offered by members of staff. The Commission recognises that each complements the other.

What is very clear is that employers can do a great deal to impact on people's level of engagement. The approach an organisation has to its staff can impact positively or negatively. The embedding of the Commission's values within the Secretariat will be a key contribution as to how engaged staff will feel.

Key considerations for effective staff engagement include:

- Internal communication;
- Learning and development; and
- Reward and recognition.

6.1.1 Internal Communication

Informing and consulting staff, staff having confidence in senior managers and staff understanding the overall objectives of the organisation are key considerations for assessing staff engagement levels within an organisation.

Effective internal communication between staff and the Commission is critical to its success/productivity.

Effective two way communication allows staff an opportunity to express their opinion and have a say on how the Assembly operates. With this, staff can feel that they are involved and their opinions are sought and respected. Allowing staff to have a say in how the Assembly Secretariat operates is fundamental to its success.

Internal communication within the NI Assembly Secretariat is the responsibility of the Corporate Policy Unit. The Unit aims to ensure that staff are given access to corporate information and that they have the opportunity to raise issues with, or seek information from the Clerk/Director General.

(i) Internal Communications Working Group

An Internal Communications Working Group (ICWG) was established in February 2008 to provide advice on internal communications to the Secretariat Management Group. The Group's aim is to ensure that internal communications within the Secretariat are of a high and appropriate standard

Other key internal communication mechanisms in place which are excellent examples of effective two way communication include staff surveys, team briefings and questions to the Clerk/Director General.

(ii) Staff Surveys

Staff surveys are undertaken within the Secretariat on a relatively frequent basis. Surveys allow staff to relay their views to senior management, with subsequent action taken by senior management to make improvements where relevant.

(iii) Team Briefing

The team briefing process in place within the NI Assembly is another excellent example of effective two-way communication.

The objectives of the team briefing process are to:

- Promote corporate understanding, leading to improved organisational cohesion;
- Contribute to improved organisational, team and individual performance;
- Provide a regular, formal and structured mechanism for face to face communication;
- Encourage staff participation, development and commitment; and
- Assist members of staff in understanding the significance of their individual contributions to the work of the Assembly.

(iv) Questions to the Clerk/ Director General

This allows staff to submit questions, suggestions or comments in relation to Assembly Secretariat policies or procedures to the Clerk/ Director General.

Submissions are considered and a response is sent on behalf of the Clerk/ Director General. Where suggestions/ comments are deemed to add value to the activities of the Secretariat, they are introduced into practice. This is a clear demonstration of how staff can contribute to the workings of the Assembly Secretariat.

6.1.2 Learning and Development

The Commission is fully committed to the provision of high quality learning and development opportunities to ensure that staff are appropriately skilled to meet the current and future aims and needs of the Assembly.

Investing in staff through learning and development also makes them feel valued by the organisation and can also increase morale.

A Learning and Development Strategy has been developed by the Human Resources Office. Its principle aim is to ensure that learning and development actively supports the Secretariat as well as providing career development opportunities for staff within the Secretariat.

People development and motivation are vital for an organisation to operate effectively and efficiently.

Of particular importance is the development of staff members with people management responsibility, who are critical to the success of embedding sustainable development principles in an organisation. They can have a significant effect on employee engagement and performance.

They also have a key role in maintaining staff health and wellbeing e.g. through minimising the likelihood of stressful circumstances by proactive management of workload and effective communication.

6.1.3 Reward and Recognition

The Commission is committed to attracting, developing and retaining high calibre staff. It recognises that it will continue to face challenges from other public and private sector employers in the recruitment market.

Whilst the importance of paying competitive salaries cannot be overstated, the 'non-pay' element of an employee's terms and conditions are arguably just as important.

The Commission currently provides a generous range of non pay benefits including:

- Pension scheme;
- Leave entitlement; and
- Work life balance policies.

In its efforts to operate more sustainably, the Commission is committed to retaining its people by rewarding, motivating and engaging with them.

Rewarding and recognising excellent performance by staff contributes significantly to staff morale, which in turn enhances staff wellbeing and the sense of feeling valued by the organisation.

Schemes to reward and/or recognise staff performance do not necessarily have to be financially based. There are other non-financial schemes such as letters of appreciation to recognise good performance which can also have the desired effect.

The Commission will consider the introduction of further schemes to reward and recognise excellent staff performance.

6.2 Health and Wellbeing

Employee health and wellbeing is an extremely important initiative within an organisation's human resources strategy and sustainable development agenda. As a result, a growing number of employers have recognised this as a strategic priority.

As most people in employment spend a considerable portion of their waking hours in work, it is quite reasonable to suggest that the workplace is a great place to promote the benefits of a healthy lifestyle.

The proactive management of employees' physical and mental health can produce a wide range of important business benefits such as

- Reduction in sick absence;
- Improved staff engagement and productivity;
- Enhanced corporate reputation both internally and externally; and
- Reduced staff turnover and recruitment costs.

The Learning and Development Strategy 2009/2011, developed by the Human Resources Office, has committed to the development of a Wellbeing Strategy under the Strategy's 'Relationship Management' theme.

6.3 Workplace Health and Safety

The Commission is committed to developing a positive health and safety culture throughout the organisation.

The Facilities Directorate, responsible for the development of health and safety policy, has put in place a health and safety training programme for Secretariat staff to promote positive behaviours to ensure a safe environment for staff, Members and visitors.

6.4 Equality and Good Relations

(i) Equality Scheme

Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires that all public authorities who are designated under the Act must set out in an Equality Scheme how they propose to fulfill the duties imposed by Section 75 of the Act.

Section 75(1) of the Act imposes a statutory duty on public authorities to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between the following groups—

- (a) persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation;
- (b) men and women generally;
- (c) persons with a disability and persons without; and
- (d) persons with dependants and persons without.

The NI Assembly Commission is committed to developing a culture of confidence and trust within the Secretariat that embraces equality, diversity and good relations.

Through its Equality Scheme, the Commission is committed to the principle of equality of opportunity and good relations. In this context the Commission aims to ensure that the entire community can enjoy full and fair access to and participate in the operations of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

(ii) Good Relations Action Plan

Section 75(2) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 imposes a statutory duty on public authorities to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group, and Equality Schemes must show how the public authority proposes to fulfill this duty.

Whilst, historically, the main focus of Equality Schemes has been to address the requirements outlined under Section 75(1), the good relations duties under Section 75(2) have presented greater challenges for public authorities.

Section 75 (2) formalises the shift from managing diversity and difference to promoting diversity and integration. It requires public authorities to take a pro-active initiating approach to contributing to a shared society, rather than responding to the effects of a divided one.

The Commission has adopted the following Good Relations Commitment:

“The Northern Ireland Assembly Commission is committed to the promotion of good relations between persons of differing religious belief, political opinion or racial group and is committed to challenging sectarianism and racism.”

A Good Relations Action Plan has been developed to ensure that this commitment is realised. The implementation of the Plan will underpin and inform the development of a Good Relations Strategy.

The Action Plan includes specific measures and associated targets for completion or review and is based around the following six aims;

1. Promotion of good relations
2. Equal protection
3. Equality of service provision
4. Participation
5. Dialogue
6. Capacity Building

Within the Secretariat, every effort will be made to create an environment where everyone is treated with respect and dignity.

The Commission's Equality and Good Relations commitments not only apply to staff within the Secretariat, but also to equality in terms of service provision and access to Parliament Buildings.

(iii) Disability Action Plan

Under Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA 1995) (as amended by Article 5 of the Disability Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 2006), the Commission is required to have due regard to:

- the need to promote positive attitudes towards people with disabilities; and
- the need to encourage participation by people with disabilities in public life ('the disability duties').

Under Section 49B of the DDA 1995, the Commission is also required to submit to the Equality Commission a Disability Action Plan showing how it proposes to fulfill these duties in relation to the functions for which it is responsible.

The Commission has a Disability Action Plan in place which sets out a range of actions and targets which have been agreed for introduction within the Assembly to fulfil the requirements of the legislation. Under the Plan, an informal advisory group has been established to assist in the development of the facilities and services within Parliament Buildings.

7. Key Theme 4: Contributing to a Sustainable Economy

Related Corporate Objectives

- 1.1 To ensure the effective operation of the Assembly**
- 1.2 To support Members in fulfilling their Assembly, constituency and office holder duties**
- 4.3 To enhance responsible business practice within the Assembly Secretariat**
- 4.8 To ensure the effective, efficient and economic use of resources**

The Commission is committed to contributing to the development of a sustainable economy.

In relation to this Strategy, efforts will be divided into the creation of sustainable 'economics' internally through sustainable expenditure and sustainable consumption of resources, and externally through the development of a responsible procurement strategy.

This key theme is therefore divided into the following sections;

- Sustainable Expenditure and Consumption; and
- Responsible Procurement

7.1 Sustainable Expenditure and Consumption

Sustainable expenditure and consumption relates to the creation of sustainable 'economics' internally within the Secretariat through the prudent use of available funds and resources.

This will be achieved by optimising the use of resources (goods/ supplies) through the optimum procurement of those resources, and by doing 'more with less' by maximising the effective and efficient use of resources through the reduction of unnecessary consumption.

In addition the Internal Audit Unit, which provides an independent and objective internal audit service within the Secretariat, will continue to play a key role by monitoring how economic, efficient and effective resources are used.

The Unit's ongoing internal audit programme reviews current practice within the Secretariat and recommends changes to practice where relevant. This, in turn, contributes greatly to continual improvement in the efficient and effective use of resources.

It should be noted that it is not only the Internal Audit Unit's responsibility to ensure the efficient and effective use of resources. Heads of Business should also review contracts/practices in place within their respective areas to reduce overconsumption and wastage. This will be crucial given the potential for reduced funding provision, particularly as a result of the next spending review for the period 2011-14 which is likely to impose widespread cuts on public sector expenditure.

The Commission will also consider the adoption of 'invest to save' initiatives related to sustainable development where feasible. Examples of such initiatives which may be brought forward for consideration include:

- Investing in energy efficient technologies which, following installation would result in longer term cost avoidance. With this, there would also be the added benefit of reducing the Assembly's environmental impact through reduced carbon dioxide emissions; and
- Investing in the promotion of health and wellbeing, which could have indirect benefits to the Commission such as reduced sickness absence, improved productivity and reduced staff turnover.

This would also link with the responsible purchasing element of this theme as such 'invest to save' initiatives can typically relate to whole life costing considerations during the evaluation of products and/ or services during procurement exercises.

7.2 Responsible Procurement

The Commission recognises that there is potential for significant adverse environmental and social impacts to arise through its procurement activities.

The Commission is therefore committed to reducing both the direct and indirect environmental and social impacts of its supply chain.

A responsible procurement strategy will be developed with the aspiration of selecting those suppliers of services and products who have sound environmental and social standing, as long as the products and/ or services they provide can also demonstrate value for money.

The Strategy will be developed around the following key criteria;

- Professionalism and ethics;
- Equality of opportunity;
- Social justice and inclusion;
- Resource efficiency and environmental impact; and
- Value for money and continuous improvement.

8 Key Theme 5: Environmental Impact Reduction

Related Corporate Objectives

4.3 To enhance responsible business practice within the Assembly Secretariat

4.5 To ensure good governance arrangements including statutory compliance

4.8 To ensure the effective, efficient and economic use of resources

The Commission understands that its everyday activities have adverse direct and indirect impacts on the environment.

Significant quantities of resources are consumed by the Northern Ireland Assembly as a result of its everyday activities. These include utilities (electricity, gas and mains water) and office consumables (paper and toner cartridges). Furthermore, a considerable volume of waste is generated on a daily basis.

The Commission is committed to reducing its direct and indirect environmental impact through the adoption of effective resource and waste management programmes.

An initial environmental review of the Secretariat's activities has been completed which has identified the Assembly's significant environmental impacts. The Review has also established a baseline of environmental performance which will be used to measure progress in environmental impact reduction going forward.

The Commission's significant environmental impacts are as follows:

- Energy and water usage;
- Air pollution; air emissions;
- Land/soil pollution; non-hazardous waste; and
- Resource depletion; procurement and use of goods/supplies.

The Commission will reduce its environmental impact primarily through the development, implementation and ongoing maintenance of an effective environmental management system.

8.1 Environmental Management System (EMS)

An EMS is a structured framework for managing the significant environmental impacts of an organisation.

An EMS is a series of procedures, improvement programmes and records which result in reduced environmental risk, legal compliance and continuous improvement in environmental performance.

The Commission will develop and introduce an EMS throughout the Secretariat. Once it has been operating for a period, it will then undergo external assessment for certification to the ISO14001 standard, which is the internationally recognised standard for best practice environmental management.

Certification to ISO14001 will have several benefits to the Commission, such as:

- Reduced costs in terms of waste management, energy and resource consumption;
- An established framework for continual improvement in environmental performance;
- Enhanced corporate image among regulators and the general public; and
- Increased credibility from external, third party assessment

One of the requirements of an EMS is the establishment of an Environmental Management Review Group to oversee the development, implementation and ongoing maintenance of the EMS.

The Environmental Management Review Group will comprise of Secretariat Management Group members and key staff involved in the development, implementation and management of the EMS.

It is envisaged that during the development and implementation of the EMS, the Review Group will need to meet on a quarterly basis.

Once the EMS has been established, the frequency of formal Review Group meetings will reduce to once per annum. The purpose of this annual meeting will be to formally review the EMS and its outputs to ensure its continuing suitability, adequacy and effectiveness.

Progress on the development, implementation and management of the EMS will be communicated to the Commission during the annual sustainable development reporting arrangements detailed in section 4 of this Strategy.

An EMS certified to ISO14001 shares common management systems principles with ISO9001 (quality management standard), OHSAS18001 (health and safety management standard) and BS25999 (business continuity management standard).

Effectively this means that such management systems could be implemented more easily using the EMS as a template if required at a later date.

8.2 Reduced Environmental Risk and Legal Compliance

The Commission is committed to ensuring that its activities are undertaken in compliance with the relevant environmental legislation.

Reduced environmental risk and compliance with environmental legislation is achieved through the completion of regular, systematic environmental audits on those areas where the significant environmental impacts arise. Specific legal compliance audits are also undertaken periodically.

In addition, the potential for environmental incidents occurring which could result in breaches of environmental legislation will be reduced through the introduction of effective operational control procedures, which will be formalised and kept under review within the environmental management system.

8.3 Continuous Improvement in Environmental Performance

Within the EMS, a series of environmental improvement programmes will be developed and implemented to improve the environmental performance of the Assembly, thereby reducing its impact on the environment.

Environmental improvement programmes will initially concentrate on the significant environmental impacts highlighted previously.

Examples of programmes to be introduced include those to reduce utilities consumption, increase waste recycling and increase the use of more environmentally friendly supplies/ consumables.

9 Key Theme 6: Communicating Sustainable Development Related Corporate Objectives

3.2 To improve the way we communicate with each other

4.3 To enhance responsible business practice within the Assembly Secretariat

It is widely recognised that sustainable development targets are more easily achieved when the communications element is planned professionally and at an early stage.

The development and delivery of an effective sustainable development communications campaign is critical to the success of this Strategy. The key objectives of the campaign will be to:

- Raise the awareness of sustainable development within the Assembly;
- Change attitudes towards sustainable development, in particular environmental impact reduction, within the Assembly; and
- Change behaviour within the Assembly to ultimately improve its sustainable development performance.

Changing the attitudes and behaviour of staff and Members towards sustainable development will result in significant improvements to efficiency and effectiveness within all of the key themes detailed within this Strategy.

The key areas to be included within communication initiatives include:

- Energy and water conservation;
- Waste reduction and recycling;
- Responsible procurement;
- Health and wellbeing; and
- Staff engagement.

The communication of sustainable development will be both internal within the Assembly to inform and educate staff and Members, as well as external to contribute towards a more sustainable society.

It is hoped that by communicating our efforts on improving our sustainable development performance to the general public, they in turn will be encouraged to adopt the initiatives and principles we communicate thereby embedding sustainable development practices within their everyday lives.

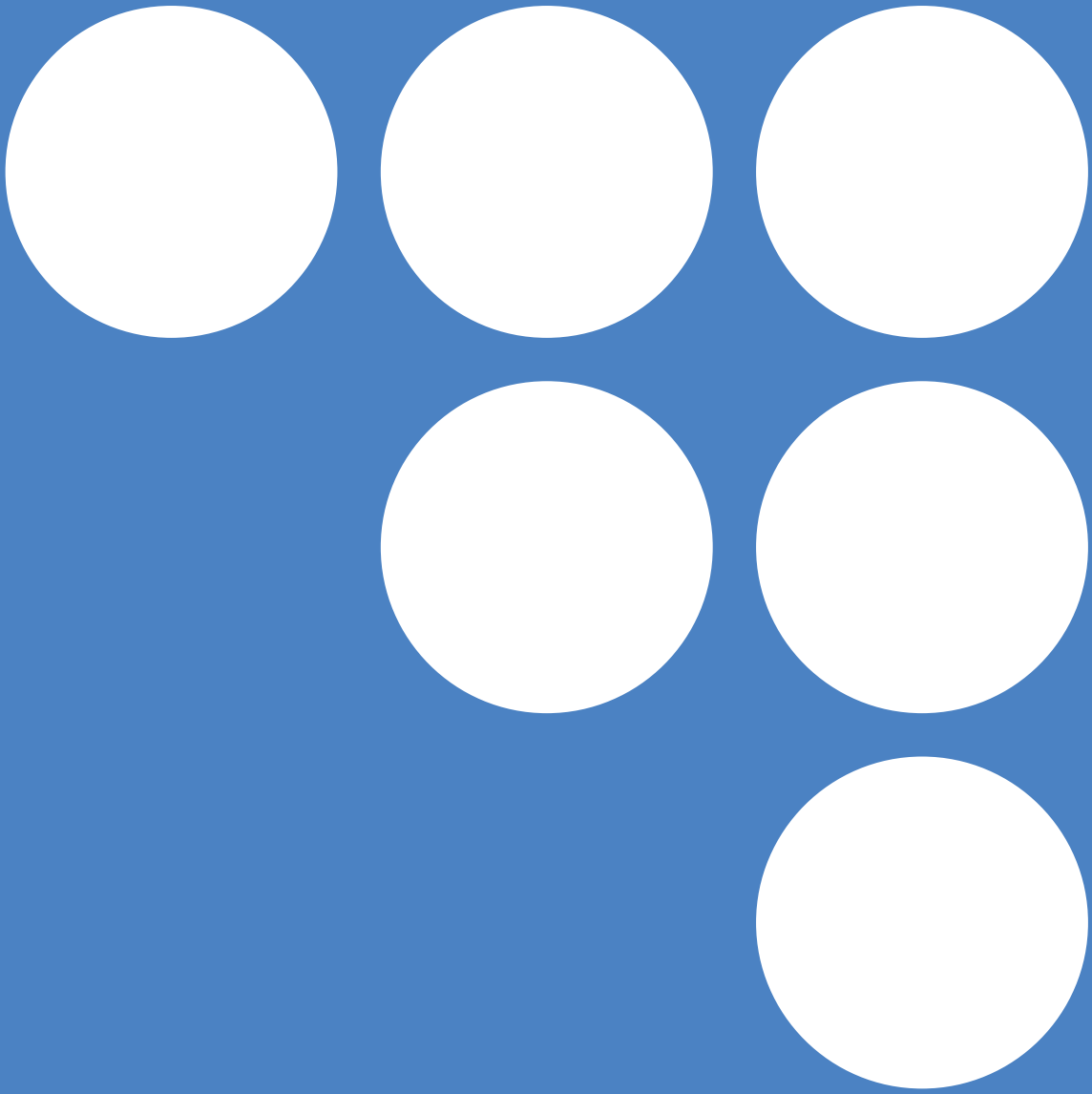
Externally communicating our efforts in improving sustainable development within the Assembly should also result in an enhanced public reputation.

10. Appendix 1 – Sustainable Development Action Plan April 2010-March 2011

	Action	Responsible	Due Date
Key Theme 1 - Corporate Governance			
1	Addition of Sustainable Development Policy Statement and Strategy to the relevant section(s) on the AssiSt web pages	Sustainable Development Office	June 2010
2	Ensure SMG are kept up to date on the progress of the Action Plan's implementation to enable them to provide high level guidance and support as required	Sustainable Development Office	Ongoing
3	Form a Sustainable Development Working Group to oversee the implementation of this Strategy	Sustainable Development Office	June 2010
4	Review the outcome of the 2010 Staff Survey and develop an implementation plan for corrective actions/ improvements where identified	Corporate Policy Unit	July 2010
5	Consider the addition of sustainable development/ responsible business practice as a corporate risk within the formal risk register for the Secretariat	Facilities Directorate	August 2010
6	The Commission to be an active member of Business in the Community Northern Ireland to ensure that it gains the maximum benefit of membership support and services to support the implementation of this Strategy	Sustainable Development Unit (as co-ordinator)	Ongoing
Key Theme 2 - Community Engagement			
7	Link to Implementation Plan of the 'Engagement Strategy for the NI Assembly' (Feb 09)	Engagement Directorate	Ongoing
8	Ensure the effective implementation of the 'Northern Ireland Assembly Charities Policy'	Engagement Directorate	June 2010
9	Develop a staff volunteering policy to enable staff members to go out into the community to provide assistance to community groups etc.	Human Resources Office	March 2011
Key Theme 3 - A Sustainable Workplace			
10	Develop a Wellbeing Strategy for the NI Assembly Secretariat	Human Resources Office	October 2010
11	Link to Learning and Development Strategy and Action Plan 2010/12	Human Resources Office	Ongoing

	Action	Responsible	Due Date
12	Link to 'Equality and Good Relations Action Plan Dec 09-March 2011	Commission Support and Compliance Unit	Ongoing
13	Develop a revised Disability Action Plan	Commission Support and Compliance Unit	March 2011
14	Deliver health and safety training programme to Secretariat staff	Building Services Office	Ongoing
15	Continue to monitor, review and assess H&S polices/programmes/procedures to ensure continuous improvement	Building Services Office	Ongoing
Key Theme 4 - Contributing to a Sustainable Economy			
16	Review existing procurement strategy/ policies/ procedures to assess existing sustainable development commitments and amend accordingly	Procurement Office Sustainable Development Office	Nov 2010
17	Develop a supplier environmental evaluation process for inclusion within pre determined tenders	Procurement Office Sustainable Development Office	Sept 2010
18	Develop a procedure which allows sustainable development requirements to be included within specifications for tenders which have the potential to result in an adverse impact in relation to the sustainable development performance of the NI Assembly	Procurement Office Sustainable Development Office	Sept 2010
19	Continue with the process of conducting audits/ assessments within business areas to ensure improvements on the economic, effective and efficient use of resources	Internal Audit Unit Heads of Business	Ongoing
Key Theme 5 - Environmental Impact Reduction			
20	Develop an Environmental Policy Statement for the Commission	Sustainable Development Office	June 2010
21	Develop and implement an Environmental Management System to oversee the reduction in environmental impact through risk reduction, legal compliance and continuous improvement in performance	Sustainable Development Office	July 2010
22	Achieve certification to the ISO14001 Environmental Management Systems Standard	Sustainable Development Office	Dec 2010

	Action	Responsible	Due Date
23	Complete third party energy audits to inform energy conservation initiatives to reduce consumption and subsequent carbon emissions	Sustainable Development Office	July 2010
24	Develop a carbon management programme to coordinate energy conservation and emissions reduction improvements	Sustainable Development Office	Nov 2010
25	Develop a waste management programme to improve waste reduction and recycling within Parliament Buildings and Annexe C	Sustainable Development Office	Aug 2010
26	Complete a water consumption audit of Parliament Buildings and Annexe C	Sustainable Development Office	Jan 2011
27	Procure and install an effective monitoring and targeting system to identify patterns of energy and water consumption in a timely manner to reduce the wastage of energy and water	Sustainable Development Office	Oct 2010
28	Develop an action plan for sustainable travel for the Commission, adapted from the wider Stormont Estate Workplace Travel Plan	Sustainable Development Office	August 2010
Key Theme 6 - Communicating Sustainable Development			
29	Develop a highly effective internal and external sustainable development communications campaign	Communications Office Corporate Policy Unit Sustainable Development Office	October 2010
30	Improve provision of sustainable development awareness posters/ signage throughout Parliament Buildings and Annexe C	Sustainable Development Office Printed Paper Office	July 2010



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