

## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

Sustainable development recognises the links between environmental, social and economic concerns. Although sustainable development has been a prominent concept since 1992 and is enshrined in the Programme for Government as an overarching principle, Northern Ireland's revised Sustainable Development Strategy is still in draft.

The Draft Strategy is welcomed as a necessary and important step towards moving Northern Ireland towards delivery of a more sustainable future which takes into account the needs of our people, our economy and our environment in the difficult circumstances facing us now and in the future.

Northern Ireland needs a Sustainable Development Strategy which will provide the overarching and forward looking framework to allow us to move forward in response to major threats such as climate change and energy price instability in a way which will encourage integrated action to tackle problems and take advantage of the opportunities they provide.

Global challenges have significant local impacts in Northern Ireland and we must recognise and respond appropriately to them.

- Climate change,
- Depletion of natural resources (fossil fuels, fresh water, biological diversity, productive cropland) and the support services they provide,
- Economic and social problems (recession, poverty, refugees),
- Human health (communicable diseases, obesity, diet, effects of environmental pollution).

All factors are strongly inter-related and have profound local implications in the short as well as longer term. Addressing them will provide many advantages to our people, economy and environment. Ignoring them will be extremely costly to all.

***A strong and effectively delivered Sustainable Development Strategy will create opportunities while addressing these issues.***

### KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The SDS should provide the framework for all government strategies, policies and actions, and be delivered through the Programmes for Government.
- Key priorities should equate to UK and EU priorities.
- Sustainable Consumption and Learning should be reinstated as Priority Areas
- The Draft Strategy should be revised to include some high level targets such as Greenhouse Gas Emissions, Resource Efficiency, Ecological Footprint, Reducing Health Inequalities.
- Specific structures, including a designated Minister, are required to deliver the required priority for sustainable development.
- Involvement of other sectors is required in devising and delivering the Strategy for effective delivery by Government.
- A cross-cutting Action Plan is required which sits above Departmental Action Plans and integrates across Departments and Sectors.
- Monitoring, auditing and reporting arrangements need to be specified.

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### A new Sustainable Development Strategy must:

1. Provide an **overarching framework** for all other government strategies, policies and action.
2. Contain **high level targets** (e.g. on greenhouse gas emissions, resource efficiency, social equity, economic progress/prosperity).
3. Enable progress to be measured and **provide key drivers** for all government action.
4. **Be inclusive** and recognise that all sectors need to play their part to make Northern Ireland more sustainable.
5. The Programme for Government should be the **mechanism used to deliver the Strategy** with specific actions and targets.

### Addressing Sustainable Development strongly will:

6. Enable Northern Ireland to **develop techniques, technology and process**, transforming its international image.
7. Use programmes like the **Green New Deal** to bring immediate and lasting environmental, social and economic benefits.
8. Provide a coherent and comprehensive set of **indicators** which will allow progress to be measured and reported.
9. Enable **sectors other than central government** to play their full part in delivering sustainability in Northern Ireland.
10. Complement and **facilitate delivery of actions** identified in EU and UK Strategies.

### The draft Strategy needs to be modified:

11. It does not provide adequate mechanisms for **integrating sustainability actions** across Departments.
12. It does not recognise the vital contribution of **non-government sectors**.
13. The Strategic Objectives are **vague and aspirational**, making progress reporting and assessment difficult.
14. The priority areas within **do not match the priority areas** within the original NI Strategy, the UK Strategy and the EU Strategy.
15. It contains **no commitments** to address consumption, governance or education.
16. It needs to be updated to **take account of current and future international** requirements.

### The Assembly should:

17. Provide **political leadership** and understanding to give the Strategy high priority across society.
18. Facilitate **capacity building** at all levels of government, including providing clear guidance.
19. **Set statutory targets** to ensure central and local government accord sufficient priority for effective delivery and progress.
20. **Develop monitoring, reporting and enforcement** mechanisms to hold all involved to account for Strategy delivery.
21. **Place the Strategy at the heart of government policy.**