

**Date:** 5 July 2000

**Venue:** Committee Room 2, National Assembly for Wales

**Title: Sustainable development: analysis of the responses to the consultation paper ‘A Sustainable Wales - Learning to Live Differently’**

### **Purpose**

1. To consider the response to the consultation on the draft Sustainable Development Scheme ‘A Sustainable Wales – Learning to Live Differently’ and identify any views they would want us to take into account in producing the final draft of the Scheme.

### **Timing**

2. There will be a Plenary debate on the draft Scheme and the results of the consultation on 11 July. Officials will then make any necessary amendments to the draft. The revised final draft will be presented to Plenary in early Autumn for approval.

### **Background**

3. The Assembly has a duty under section 121 of the Government of Wales Act to make a Scheme setting out how it will promote sustainable development in all it does, having consulted upon it first.

4. At the Plenary debate on 14 September 1999, Members agreed 9 principles (see Annex A) for making the Sustainable Development Scheme including the need for wide, active and genuine consultation, involvement of Members, working with others and openness to outside input. New technology would be used where possible to facilitate this. It was also agreed that the Scheme when complete would be:

- concise, clear, usable by staff in everyday work
- tied to the Assembly’s Strategic Plan
- embedded in mainstream activities and
- have a real effect for change

5. These principles are at the heart of the consultation process and the draft Scheme. Over several weeks we talked to key sectors and organisations in Wales about sustainable development, their perspective on it and what they thought needed to happen to make sustainable development a reality in Wales.

6. We were given considerable, invaluable support and advice from a group of people from local government, business, the voluntary sector, the ASPBs and academia in drafting the Scheme. Although not claiming that the resulting consultation document has the support of those sectors, we believe it reflects their concerns and views. A three month period for the consultation was allowed, which began on 26 January 2000 and closed on 25 April 2000. Prior to this working drafts of the consultation paper were available on the Assembly's website.

## **Summary**

7. The analysis of the responses was undertaken by Environmental Resource Management (ERM). A copy of the analysis was distributed to every Assembly Member on 21 June. It can also be found on the Assembly's sustainable development webpages (with all the consultation responses) at [http://www.wales.gov.uk/polinifo/sust\\_dev/sustaina1\\_e.htm](http://www.wales.gov.uk/polinifo/sust_dev/sustaina1_e.htm)

8. Chapter 1 of the analysis details the breadth and variety of the consultation process. 161 responses were received from organisations and individuals. Table 1.1 in that chapter shows the distribution according to the different types – local authorities and individuals provided the highest response rates.

9. The main conclusions of the consultation are as follows:

## **General Issues and Comments**

### **The Consultation Process**

10.1 Respondents generally expressed a lot of positive comments about the consultation process itself, with 34% of respondents stating that they welcomed the publication of the consultation document and the opportunity to comment. More specific comments on the process congratulated the Assembly on the use of the website (5 respondents), on the breadth or inclusiveness of the consultation process (5 respondents) and on the regional roadshows (3 respondents).

10.2 In terms of the general content of the draft Scheme and consultation document, 26% stated that they welcomed and supported the overall approach of the Scheme.

### **General Comments**

10.3 There were a number of comments made in general terms on the draft Scheme, most commonly (by 20% of respondents) on the relationship of the Scheme to other Assembly strategies. The common view

(13%) was that the Sustainable Development Scheme should form the overarching framework for all other Assembly strategies and policies, particularly the Strategic Plan. The Sustainable Development Scheme should provide the overall vision and the Strategic Plan should be the mechanism by which the Scheme is implemented. A further 7 respondents drew attention to the introduction to the consultation document, which states that the aim is for a Scheme which is consistent with the Assembly's Strategic Plan. This was felt to be wrong, that in fact it is the Plan which should aim to be consistent with the Scheme. An additional 6% made the related comment that the Scheme should ensure that sustainable development is integrated across all Assembly strategies and policies.

10.4 Another commonly occurring view (16% of respondents) was that the document does not make it sufficiently clear what the Scheme will actually mean in practice, about how the aims are to be achieved, what action will be needed and how a sustainable Wales will be different from at present. It was considered that the inclusion of examples and more details about implementation and measures to be adopted would be helpful clarification.

10.5 Other general comments made included:

- the document does not give sufficient attention to the international perspective and context (8%);
- there needs to be more emphasis in the Scheme on the importance of sustainable development education in its wider sense (7%);
- the Scheme should recognise that sustainable development is a process (6%), although respondents were evenly split as to whether it defines both a process and a destination or only a process;
- welcome the recognition in the consultation document that GDP is an inadequate measure of sustainable development (5%);

## **Main Issues and Key Messages**

10.6 A number of key messages emerged clearly from the consultation responses, relating to both general aspects of the Scheme and issues of sustainable development, and to specific policy areas. These are described in the following paragraphs.

### **The Definition of Sustainable Development**

10.7 The adoption of the Brundtland definition was generally supported, although there were concerns about its clarity of meaning. A number of respondents felt that its meaning was not sufficiently clear, and that more clarification was required, or the inclusion of examples to explain what it actually means in practical terms. The alternative definitions did not seem to help greatly in this respect.

### **The Vision, the UK Objectives and the UK Principles**

10.8 This section engaged respondents well, with half responding to the vision statements, a third to the

objectives and a quarter to the principles.

10.9 However, many felt that the vision was lacking in some particular aspect, mostly that there was insufficient emphasis on the environment as a component of sustainable development or that the vision lacked emphasis on the particular needs and circumstances within Wales.

10.10 Similarly, the proposal to adopt the four objectives of the UK Sustainable Development Scheme met with concern. In particular, 20% of respondents felt that the fourth objective of the ‘maintenance of high and stable levels of growth’ was incompatible with the achievement of sustainable development, and specifically that high levels of economic growth have been a cause of many current environmental and social problems. Alternative suggestions were made, for example ‘stable and *equitable* levels of economic growth’ or ‘high and stable levels of economic *activity*’.

10.11 In contrast, the UK principles were broadly supported, in particular the precautionary principle, which was considered to be a helpful concept in addressing issues of intergenerational and international equity.

## **Specific Policies**

10.12 A number of themes emerged in relation to specific policy areas. A key theme which recurred throughout the Scheme, was the importance of education in sustainable development. Many respondents felt that the behaviour and lifestyle of individuals was the key factor in sustainability, and therefore the key to this was changing people’s attitudes and improving their understanding, both of the meaning and the relevance of sustainable development. The most effective way to do this was felt to be through education in its widest sense, not only in schools and in particular through changes to the national curriculum, but also in lifelong learning and education. A national information campaign would be a part of this, but only a part.

10.13 Other policy areas which were felt to be key to the achievement of sustainable development were:

- transport, including improved public transport, reduced car use, integrated systems, and reducing the need to travel;
- agriculture, including support for agri-environment practices and sustainable land management, and wildlife-friendly farming;
- energy, including renewable energy generation and energy efficiency initiatives;
- waste, including waste management, waste minimisation, recycling and re-use;
- planning, mainly for influencing sustainable patterns of transport and for protection of environmental assets.

## **Partnerships**

10.14 Respondents are looking to the Assembly to provide a key leadership role in a number of ways.

These included championing sustainable development, leading by example, promoting best practice, influencing other organisations through its interactions with them (including by incorporating sustainability criteria into its procurement policies and funding programmes), taking an international role in promoting sustainable development, and providing a vision for sustainable development in Wales.

10.15 Key issues in relation to the roles of others include:

- the role of the voluntary sector could be wider than that envisaged in the consultation document;
- Local Agenda 21 will be most important way in which local government can help to deliver sustainable development;
- financial support from the Assembly is needed for local government and the voluntary sector;
- financial incentives are an important mechanism for encouraging business to deliver sustainable development;
- other public bodies should formally adopt their own sustainable development objectives and principles, which should be consistent with the national Scheme.

10.16 The creation of a Sustainable Development Forum is generally supported, independent of the Assembly, and consisting of both experts and stakeholders.

## **Consideration**

11. The analysis indicates that the consultation document and the process were well received with a high level of support expressed. We believe that this reflects the preliminary development work that was put into the pre-consultation stage. The overall impression from the analysis is that there are some key concerns to be considered for example in terms of the relationship between the SD Scheme and the Strategic Plan and the adoption of the UK's Objectives but that generally the Assembly have made a good start. Particularly important in terms of the impending budget round, are the issues respondents think should be tackled (ERM analysis, paragraph 3.6) if sustainable development is to happen in Wales and the policies and programmes that respondents consider best support it.

12. The consultation document discussed the importance of 'working with others', acknowledging that there was only so much the Assembly could do to deliver sustainable development. Much is dependent on others particularly local government. Paragraph 3.8 of the analysis covers this issue including the response to the question about what local government could do to deliver sustainable development and what the sector needed from the Assembly to do this.

13. Although the Scheme has yet to be made, Assembly Secretaries are already taking account of sustainable development issues in their planning, with a view to refocusing expenditure and mainstreaming such considerations from the earliest opportunity. However the duty – if it is to mean something – is likely to drive the need for some specific extra expenditure. The issues identified by respondents through the consultation process will need to be considered as part of budget decisions. *The Committee is not asked at present to endorse any particular financial proposal.*

14. There are no novel or contentious proposals in the paper or issues of regularity or propriety.

### **Cross cutting themes**

15. The development of the Scheme is being taken forward in the context of the other Assembly schemes and specifically underpins the work being done on social inclusion.

### **Action**

16. The Committee is invited to comment on the outcome of the consultation process.

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## **ANNEX A**

### **Plenary Debate - 14 September 1999: Assembly's agreed Statement of principles to inform the pursuit of the Assembly's obligations under section 121 of the Government of Wales Act 1998**

- That work towards the making of the scheme, and subsequently to implement it, should be conducted as openly as possible, making use of new technology for this purpose as appropriate
- That consultation should be wide, genuine and proactive, and that Assembly Members should have the opportunity to be involved in it
- That the concept or definition of sustainable development that the Assembly embraces should be broad, giving equal importance to environmental, economic and social aspects of sustainability
- That sustainable development should become part of the mainstream of the Assembly's work
- That the Assembly should seek to build on the UK strategy for sustainable development
- That the Assembly itself will need to give a lead within Wales in promoting sustainable development
- That the Assembly should also take every opportunity to work with others in this promoting sustainable development, and should be open at all times to outside input
- That the promotion of sustainable development is a continuing process, not a single action

- That we work towards a scheme which will set out a clear action plan, indicators of success, targets and objectives.