



**Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru
The National Assembly for Wales**

**Y Pwyllgor Cynaliadwyedd
The Sustainability Committee**

**Dydd Mercher, 26 Mai 2010
Wednesday, 26 May 2010**

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Cofnodir y trafodion hyn yn yr iaith y llefarwyd hwy ynndi yn y pwyllgor. Yn ogystal, cynhwysir cyfieithiad Saesneg o gyfraniadau yn y Gymraeg.

These proceedings are reported in the language in which they were spoken in the committee.
In addition, an English translation of Welsh speeches is included.

Aelodau'r pwyllgor yn bresennol
Committee members in attendance

Lorraine Barrett	Llafur Labour
Angela Burns	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Michael German	Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor) Welsh Liberal Democrats (Committee Chair)
Irene James	Llafur Labour
Rhodri Glyn Thomas	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales
Joyce Watson	Llafur Labour
Leanne Wood	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales

Eraill yn bresennol
Others in attendance

Jane Davidson	Aelod Cynulliad, Llafur (Y Gweinidog dros yr Amgylchedd, Cynaliadwyedd a Thai) Assembly Member, Labour (The Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing)
Dr Simon Bilsborough	Dr Simon Bilsborough, Cydlynnydd Dangosyddion Datblygu Cynaliadwy/Asesiadau Amgylcheddol Strategol, Adran yr Amgylchedd, Cynaliadwyedd a Thai, Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru Sustainable Development Indicator/Strategic Environmental Assessment Co-ordinator, Department for Environment, Sustainability and Housing, Welsh Assembly Government
Dr Havard Prosser	Y Prif Gyngorydd Gwyddonol Amgylcheddol, Materion Gwledig, Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru Chief Environmental Scientific Advisor, Rural Affairs, Welsh Assembly Government

Swyddogion Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru yn bresennol
National Assembly for Wales officials in attendance

Dr Virginia Hawkins	Clerc Clerk
Meriel Singleton	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk

Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 8.59 a.m.
The meeting began at 8.59 a.m.

Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon
Introduction, Apologies and Substitutions

[1] **Michael German:** Welcome to this meeting of the Sustainability Committee. We have received apologies this morning from Karen Sinclair and Brynle Williams. There are no substitutions.

[2] If you hear the fire alarm, please leave the room by the marked fire exits, following the instructions from the ushers and staff. No fire alarm tests are forecast for today. Please switch off all electronic devices, as they interfere with the broadcasting equipment. Channel 0 on the headsets in front of you provides amplification of the sound, and channel 1 provides interpretation from Welsh to English. Please do not touch any of the buttons on the microphones, as they can disable the system, and please ensure that the red light is showing before you speak.

9.00 a.m.

Craffu ar Strategaeth yr Amgylchedd—Craffu ar Waith y Gweinidog Scrutiny of the Environment Strategy—Scrutiny of the Minister

[3] **Michael German:** Today, we will be scrutinising the Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing on the Environment Strategy for Wales. We are grateful for your attendance this morning, Minister. Do you wish to introduce your colleagues, so that their names and job titles are on the record?

[4] **The Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing (Jane Davidson):** Thank you, Chair. Havard Prosser is our chief scientific officer, and the Department for Environment, Sustainability and Housing shares him with rural affairs. If there are any detailed questions on indicators, content, working groups, and so on, those issues sit with Havard. On my right is Simon Bilsborough, who leads on sustainable development for the Welsh Assembly Government. He has been specifically responsible for co-ordinating the process for delivering the environment strategy, and pulling together, for example, the external participants who work with us through the reference group. He is also known for producing the large number of reports that contribute towards the environment strategy and action plan work.

[5] **Michael German:** Do you wish to make any introductory remarks, Minister, or do you want to go straight into questions?

[6] **Jane Davidson:** I would like to say a few words, to put the environment strategy into context.

[7] You will know from your previous inquiry into mainstreaming sustainability into ministerial portfolios that our new sustainable development scheme, ‘One Wales: One Planet’, confirms sustainable development as the central organising principle of the Welsh Assembly Government. For us in Government, that scheme sets the context for achieving all the environment strategy outcomes. You will know from my paper that the environment strategy itself was published in May 2006. It set out a 20-year vision for the Welsh environment, and included 39 high-level outcomes in order to collectively achieve our vision to see by 2026 a distinctive Welsh environment that is thriving and contributing to the economic and social wellbeing and health of all the people of Wales. It therefore very much consolidates that sustainable development imperative.

[8] That first environment strategy was accompanied by an action plan, which contains 62 actions, and in September 2007, a progress report was published. In October 2008, after I became Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing, we published a second environment strategy action plan, which picked up the outstanding actions from the previous action plan and laid out an agenda that moved forward from 2008 to 2011. One thing that we discussed with the external reference group at the time was the idea of having an action plan that crossed an election—hence running through to 2011—so that an incoming Government

would need to look at these issues and, therefore, recommit on the environment strategy action plan agenda. So, the strategy itself is a framework, but the action plans will drive the delivery. That action plan takes forward 41 actions, in areas not covered by other policies or strategies.

[9] We reported on progress in November 2009, when we launched our environment strategy action plan annual report. That reported on progress against those actions, which had been agreed with our external partners, together with, as I say, progress against the remaining live actions from the first action plan. It also contained a statement on how we have had regard to section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, showing how we have had regard to the purpose of conserving biodiversity. We also, through our Statistical Directorate, published a state of the environment report. That is published in July each year, and is then updated in December, and that reports on progress against the statistical environment strategy indicators. We have an indicators group that looks at developing indicators in the areas that have hitherto been undeveloped. So, my evidence to you sets out the policies and strategies that we have taken forward in my portfolio to help us to achieve the environment strategy outcomes, covering climate change, waste policy, biodiversity, water and flood management, marine policy, and water and recycling. It also sets out where the policies and programmes in other ministerial portfolios are contributing to the achievement of our environment strategy outcomes.

[10] **Michael German:** I will start with your last sentence. Obviously, the environment strategy is impacted on by a number of other Government strategies, and the process of keeping them integrated successfully is probably very difficult. Can you tell us a little about the process of how you integrate those other strategies into a whole?

[11] **Jane Davidson:** The primary tool is what we call our policy gateway integration tool, which works across the Assembly Government. That ensures that policies are joined up across ministerial portfolios and deliver the 'One Wales' commitments in an integrated way. The officials in our department ensure that the environment strategy outcomes are reflected in the official-level discussions that take place in the context of the policy gateway integration sessions.

[12] The environment strategy action plan also contains a diagram illustrating the relationship between the five themes of the environment strategy, the themes of the second action plan and the outcomes, and it shows how other key strategies contribute towards that to make it clear that integration is really important. We published the annual report on the environment strategy action plan, which includes commentary on other WAG policies. We meet with the reference group so that it can be confident about the integration of policies. For example, the actions that we specifically outlined in the action plan from 2008 to 2011 become performance targets in the Assembly Government-sponsored bodies' remit letters. For example, in the context of the Countryside Council for Wales, the Environment Agency Wales, the national parks, my department and so on, they will all have specific targets as a result of the environment strategy outcome delivery.

[13] **Michael German:** Will you say a little bit more about the policy gateway integration tool? Is it like a hoop that you have to go through? Do you have to tick the boxes to ensure that you have undertaken certain tasks?

[14] **Dr Bilsborough:** It is a hoop that has to be gone through. Although we have a checklist of questions to guide us, it is more than a checklist process in effect, because it generates a series of rich discussions between officials from different departments about how their policies contribute towards specific outcomes particular to that department. There are seven key areas that we go through, of which the natural environment is one, and, for each area, the aim of the process is to come up with a score from U, which is undermining, right

through to G, which is good. There are five key scores for each of the seven areas that we look at. Part of the discussions are to pick up on issues that are not addressed so that they can be more fully addressed in the policy, to ensure that you get that integrated approach. So, the key is to hold that policy integration session early enough in the development of a policy to ensure that there is the time to make those additional necessary links.

[15] **Michael German:** There are clearly many people involved, because every time you talk about this, in any context, a vast range of policy makers and stakeholders are engaged, and you talk about the reference group as well. Is the reference group your principal means of ensuring that partnership is working, or are there other mechanisms as well?

[16] **Jane Davidson:** Certainly, from my perspective as a Minister, the environment strategy reference group is very important. The terms of reference for the group are to assist in the process of preparing a strategy for the future of the Welsh environment and the programme of action that the Welsh Assembly Government and others will take to deliver it. So, the reference group covers a wide range of organisations, including the Confederation of British Industry and the Carbon Trust, as well as a range of environmental groups, the Welsh Local Government Association, the Wales Council for Voluntary Action and so on. I meet with them to discuss any concerns that they have about the effectiveness of partnership working, and they comment on the draft environment strategy annual report. I also meet separately with the Wales Environment Link twice a year, to consider its concerns about effective partnership working. It is our partners that provide us with case studies of good examples of partnership working. We use those real-life examples to illustrate the annual report. So, we are continually updating our examples of good practice from partners as there is always good practice to refer to, and we are continually taking this agenda forward.

9.10 a.m.

[17] **Michael German:** Is there a ministerial committee that has responsibility in this area, looking across the ministerial portfolios?

[18] **Jane Davidson:** There is a ministerial committee that looks at sustainable development and climate change, and it can look right across all these areas. That ministerial committee has the responsibility of looking at sustainable development in all its forms. We are currently working in that context through all departments, looking at their commitment to sustainable development and how they are responding to the challenges from all the high-level indicators. One of those is biodiversity, which is directly linked to the environment strategy.

[19] **Joyce Watson:** Good morning, Minister, and thank you for the papers. Has an analysis of the budget and resource allocation necessary to achieve the environment strategy's outcomes been produced? If so, is it publicly available?

[20] **Jane Davidson:** In a sense, because the vast majority of the work of our department is delivering on environment strategy outcomes, we are led by the outcomes in the strategy itself. It is the main document guiding all our environmental programmes. There is a whole range of specific initiatives, such as the climate change strategy and the waste strategy, that have costed programmes attached to them to ensure their delivery. Many of the environmental outcomes are influenced directly and indirectly by policies and programmes across ministerial portfolios. So, at this point, no piece of work has been done to apportion specific costs from specific programmes to specific environmental outcomes. If the committee wants more detail on that, we could provide you with a notional breakdown, but it would have to be notional.

[21] **Michael German:** That would be helpful.

[22] **Jane Davidson:** In which case, we will do that.

[23] **Joyce Watson:** How is the Welsh Assembly Government ensuring that all actions in the environment strategy are receiving the resources required, such as the development of a contaminated land strategy?

[24] **Jane Davidson:** We agree the budgetary allocations for the policies and programmes in our departments through the normal budgetary processes. Given the active monitoring of the action plan indicators and outcomes, they are very much at the forefront of our minds when we bid to the Minister for Business and Budget, or when we have made bids to previous Ministers for finance, in the context of delivery. If we are in areas where we need to undertake more specific work, we commission that work separately. You mentioned contaminated land. We have found resources to fund the Environment Agency to carry out work on a contaminated land scoping issues paper, as outlined in action 37 of the environment strategy. The Environment Agency has recently confirmed to us that it can lead on developing that paper, and we will be working with it on that action.

[25] **Leanne Wood:** In the December 2009 statistical bulletin, there were three indicators showing a clear deterioration. One was the percentage of people volunteering. Another was the number and extent of tranquil areas, and the other was the percentage of people whose main mode of travel is either walking or cycling. There was a clear deterioration in all three indicators. Could you please tell us what the Welsh Assembly Government is doing to combat that?

[26] **Jane Davidson:** I have had a number of discussions with the third and voluntary sector on the volunteering agenda. We are looking at funding a green volunteering post for a year, for the specific purpose of taking that agenda forward in conjunction with the Wales Council for Voluntary Action.

[27] As for tranquil areas, I responded to that issue in the short debate last week. To ensure that tranquillity can be fully considered within the strategic environmental assessment process and that it is fully embedded in plan-making processes, the Countryside Council for Wales is undertaking work at the moment. It will be holding a workshop for stakeholders in the summer on the use of tranquil area maps to support the strategic environmental assessment process. Allied to that, we are also undertaking work on the environmental noise directive, in relation to candidate quiet areas. We have already identified candidate quiet areas in the urban areas of Swansea, Neath Port Talbot, Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan. They are areas that must be protected from an increase in noise levels. So, there is quite an important set of opportunities there.

[28] In the context of the indicator on walking and cycling, it is important to note that it reflects the situation prior to the launch of our walking and cycling action plan. We have a steering group that is jointly chaired by the Deputy First Minister and me. We are looking actively at those issues. We have seen a lot of increases in, for example, the number of children cycling as a result of specific Bike It initiatives in schools in Wales. The plan includes six targets for walking and cycling, and monitoring on an annual basis, and I met with that group earlier this week. We will be publishing the annual plan shortly. So, specific action is taking place in each of those areas.

[29] **Leanne Wood:** Thanks for that. Can you tell us when you expect the indicators to show signs of clear improvement?

[30] **Jane Davidson:** Indicators are often fairly slow to show specific improvements, because the actions often take a number of years to be taken forward. Like any other statistical indicator, you can only look back when you have the evidence to take it forward. I

will ask Havard to come in on this, because he has been working on the indicators specifically.

[31] **Dr Prosser:** With these types of indicators, the issue is to ensure that we have a reasonably sensitive methodology. Clearly, in some of these areas, we find that monitoring is not done every year, but every two or three years. The data often lag behind what we require. To take another example, greenhouse gas emissions are another very high priority, but there is still an 18 month lag, so, even when we have a measure in place, it will be in the range of two or three years before we start to see a signal in response to the policy measure.

[32] **Jane Davidson:** There is a critical point there, namely that, where we have seen a deterioration in the indicators, the Government has taken action to address that.

[33] **Leanne Wood:** We want to be satisfied that the action that the Government takes will have an outcome that takes us in the right direction. If there is a two or three-year time lag, we do not necessarily know whether what you are doing will have the desired outcome.

[34] **Jane Davidson:** If you were to talk to members of the walking and cycling steering group—with the vast majority coming from outside the Assembly Government—they would tell you that they are confident that the actions that are being taken forward in the plan will deliver the outcomes that you want and will deliver an increase. However, measuring it statistically is an important aspect of this, to show long-term trends. The statistical measurements will always have a time lag.

9.20 a.m.

[35] **Dr Prosser:** This shows the vital importance of having a policy that is based on evidence. In appraising different options to achieve the desired outcome, one is looking for a substantial evidence base to show that, if you use certain policy levers, you will achieve certain improvements.

[36] **Leanne Wood:** That is not easy.

[37] **Dr Prosser:** No, but, in a sense, one is looking at experience not just in Wales but in other countries, which may have used these sorts of measures, to establish whether that helps with regard to moving in the right direction.

[38] **Jane Davidson:** It is not the policy that has a time lag, but the statistical measurement. It has a necessary time lag in order for the information to be accurate. You have to look back at it.

[39] **Leanne Wood:** I understand that point. I am just concerned that, potentially, if you do not know for sure that a certain course of action will achieve something, and will not know that for three years, and if you have made the wrong decision and the outcomes have deteriorated further over that time, three years later is too late to change policy direction. You have lost that time because of the statistical time lag.

[40] **Jane Davidson:** Yes, but of course we have not done that. I referred to the walking and cycling group again, because we met this week to look at what the annual report will look like. When we saw the deterioration of the indicator, we set up a specific group to look at this. It is full of expertise from outside the Assembly Government, as well as from within it. It has defined, on the basis of evidence, the actions that need to be taken. It was introduced in 2008, and we can see that there is now a much greater appetite for walking and cycling. It has influenced investment by the Assembly Government in Cardiff becoming the first sustainable travel town. We are seeing a whole range of policy imperatives for tackling that indicator. In

order to see how successful those policy imperatives have been—and they are not policy imperatives that I have defined as Minister; they have been defined by other partners with expertise in a whole range of areas—we will need to look at statistics a couple of years down the line.

[41] **Lorraine Barrett:** Earlier this year you acknowledged that Wales had missed its target to halt the decline in biodiversity by 2010. The RSPB commented that there needs to be a shift in the way in which this is viewed and how it is incorporated into other policies and plans. Can you tell us about the progress that has been made to halt the loss of biodiversity? What are you doing to ensure that the environment strategy, looking specifically at halting that decline, is integrated into all Welsh Assembly Government policies and schemes?

[42] **Jane Davidson:** This is a critically important issue, because we signed up to three 2010 targets: the convention's target for significantly reducing the current rate of biodiversity loss by this year, the EU commitment, and outcome 21 of our Wales environment strategy. I launched a review of the targets in September of last year, when it became clear that we were unlikely to meet them. Through the Wales biodiversity partnership, we worked, through the conference and its policy group and steering group meetings, to look at how we can develop the evidence base. We have responded to the challenge set by the RSPB and internally by us, which is to take a more strategic approach to biodiversity loss through habitat fragmentation. We announced in January, when I issued a statement on biodiversity, that we will be developing a natural environment framework to allow a clearer focus on habitat resilience and on sustainable land and marine management that is based on ecosystem services, and that we will promote cross-sector partnerships to protect habitats and species at a regional landscape level.

[43] In addition, technical advice note 5 tackles biodiversity loss through the planning system. The Countryside Council for Wales is providing training and new guidance to local planning authorities aimed at raising awareness of their biodiversity duty. As I say, we are working specifically with the Wales biodiversity partnership and the local authority biodiversity champions, because the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 placed a biodiversity duty on all public bodies, and we are very active in the delivery of that function here in Wales.

[44] **Lorraine Barrett:** Are you getting a positive response from public bodies and other Government departments to engaging with this project?

[45] **Jane Davidson:** We have been very clear about integrating elements into other ministerial portfolios. The most obvious one, which has been under a great deal of discussion recently, is the way in which biodiversity is fully integrated in Glastir, which is a really innovative agri-environment scheme. We know that there is very strong support across Government for moving away from the narrower conservation habitats and species relationships to looking more broadly at the natural environment framework and delivering on our biodiversity duty alongside our other high-level indicators on sustainable development.

[46] **Lorraine Barrett:** You mentioned the Countryside Council for Wales. With regard to action 1a of the action plan for 2008 to 2011, the RSPB said that the actions database and extranet infrastructure set up by the Countryside Council for Wales—I am trying not to use the acronyms that we talked about in the Chamber yesterday—are not fit for purpose. How do you respond to that?

[47] **Jane Davidson:** They may not have been fit for purpose at the point when the RSPB wrote its evidence for you. There were problems with the launch of the actions database to allow direct access over the web. It was delayed due to technical security issues. However, those have been resolved, and the actions database is now fully functional.

[48] **Angela Burns:** Good morning. I have two questions for you, the first of which is to do with marine policy. I want to know how you respond to a couple of statements made by the RSPB when its representatives came in to give evidence. They were very concerned that the draft marine policy statement currently fails to integrate sectoral policies or the concept of sustainable development with the ecosystem-based approach to management. Do you agree with that?

[49] **Jane Davidson:** It is probably important to say that we are all doing something very new with the marine policy statement. It is as though we all waited 30 years to get a piece of legislation that would allow a co-ordinated approach to our seas. This needs to operate across all UK administrations and, as a result, it is not about prescribing relative priorities, criteria or limits; it is about setting a framework for those to be developed through the marine plan process and in line with relevant legislation. Therefore, we sent out a pre-consultation document—a discussion paper—in March, because we wanted partners to bring their expertise to bear on that so that, when we send out the formal consultation this summer they will have had a chance to influence it. I know that the RSPB and others are taking that chance. I certainly want to ensure that, in the context of environmental limits in Wales, the Welsh draft formal consultation document will be set more in the context of the marine strategic framework directive, under which member states will need to achieve good environmental status by 2020, deploying an ecosystem-based approach. So, it is new territory for us, but very exciting territory, and it is a real opportunity for partners to participate in developing the document that is formally consulted on.

[50] **Angela Burns:** So, to sum up, you are saying that organisations such as the RSPB may be looking at too much detail at this time and that they need to step back, because you are still considering the whole framework.

[51] **Jane Davidson:** It is a major challenge for us all, because we have not been through this process before. We need to work out how to adopt a UK marine policy statement and then move down to the marine plans, which will be developed by the devolved administrations. It will be a while before we are in agreement on what needs to go into the overarching statement and what can be appropriately left to the plans that will be developed by the devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Marine Management Organisation in England. I am sure that you will return to it in this committee.

9.30 a.m.

[52] **Angela Burns:** I am sure that we will. My second question relates to monitoring. I will try to pick my way through it, because I do not understand some of the information that I have from you. This may be your speciality subject; I am not sure.

[53] **Dr Bilsborough:** It is a starter for 10, is it?

[54] **Angela Burns:** As I understand it, between the environment strategy and the action plans we have six main themes, we have 39 high-level environmental outcomes, which were the combination of the two strategy plans, and we now have 103 actions, which tie in to, or should be monitored by, 103 indicators. I got that figure because there were 62 actions in the first strategy and 41 new actions in the second strategy, which have also been subsumed into 10 priority areas of work. That is my starter for 10. Would that be right? Then, I can ask you my question about monitoring.

[55] **Jane Davidson:** Not quite. Let me hand over to Simon, who develops the process for the delivery on this.

[56] **Dr Bilsborough:** It is complex.

[57] **Angela Burns:** You say that in your action plan. You state that it is too complex to describe each of these.

[58] **Dr Bilsborough:** It is. In our environment strategy action plan, the Minister's environment strategy reference group asked us to do a pictorial diagram showing the relationship between the themes of the environment strategy, the second action plan themes, the 39 outcomes and the other policies that impact on those outcomes. We pulled that together, and if you look at the diagram, which is in the action plan, you will see that it demonstrates the complexity of the relationships. This is what we are trying to do, so that we have a consistent integrated approach. That is the diagram. That is the simplest that we could make it.

[59] The answer is that the first action plan contained 62 actions, most of which were complete by the time that we launched the second action plan. There were a number that were still ongoing, which is why, when we had the annual report, we reported on those few numbers of existing actions from the first action plan. The second action plan had a separate suite of 41 actions, which followed on from those initial 62. The purpose of the second action plan, if you like, was to sweep up necessary actions that were not being captured by other Assembly Government policies and programmes, to make sure that we covered the full ambit of the environment strategy outcomes that we were trying to work out.

[60] Separately to that are the 100 or so indicators that we report against—

[61] **Jane Davidson:** There are 101.

[62] **Angela Burns:** It is 103.

[63] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** StatsWales states that the figure is 102.

[64] **Dr Bilsborough:** The purpose of the indicators is to reflect the impact of the actions that take place in the action plan, plus the actions that take place under other WAG policies and programmes collectively. There is the issue of a lag in terms of the data that we get from those indicators.

[65] **Angela Burns:** Okay. Can I raise your diagram with my diagram? I am sure that we have a copy. We had a look at three of the high-level actions from the second action plan. We looked at biodiversity, research and evidence, and people in the environment. One thing that comes out of the evidence is that people find it very complicated to understand whether what they are doing is having an impact upon the indicators. I know that we have debated this before, and it is something that comes up, but we are trying to understand how well those indicators tie into the action plans and monitor them. At the end of the day, they are the only way that we have of knowing whether or not things are working, as Leanne mentioned earlier.

[66] Looking at this very complicated diagram, we are not convinced yet that all of these indicators tie in terribly well to the outcomes and the actions. We can see some of the tie-ins but not all of them. We just want to understand whether you think that they are sufficiently related to the indicators? Do you think that we should get rid of some of the indicators and do you think that we should have some other indicators to be able to truly monitor whether or not we are achieving these actions?

[67] **Jane Davidson:** I will leave some of the detail with regard to the match between the ones that you looked at to Havard. It is important to say that, where there was no reporting in December 2009 for 27 indicators, 15 of those data sources are being identified for the next

report, so we will be able to incorporate them. Eight methods of defining the indicators and data collection are being investigated, but the environment strategy reference group is going to come to me with five of them in due course because they are not considered feasible. The priority will be to complete the data collection where methods have been defined. However, it is a long process to make it statistically valid, and I am told that the work that the environment strategy indicators' group is undertaking will take up to two years to complete.

[68] Returning to my previous response to Leanne, the delay in the competing indicators does not stop us from aiming to achieve the outcomes, because the actions are taking place through the action plan. It is about ensuring that the indicators actually give us the long-term trends that can be consistently monitored. I will now hand over to Havard with regard to the match that you questioned between the outcomes and the indicators.

[69] **Dr Prosser:** In a sense, what we have is 39 outcomes, which we are focusing on. The various actions in the action plans are to try to deliver on the 39 outcomes. Therefore, the environment strategy reference group fixed that these were the 39 outcomes from the strategy that it wanted. We then, internally, went away and worked with the Countryside Council for Wales, the Environment Agency, the Welsh Local Government Association and other partners to try to work out how to find the sorts of indicators that will track progress in the outcomes. The list that we came up with was as a result of a debate between us and the reference group with regard to what the reference group thought it wanted and what we felt was practical.

[70] One of the issues that we have in taking some of these things forward is that we had real difficulty in trying to identify methods of tracking or methods of getting hold of the data. The data is often not for Wales as a whole and some of it is anecdotal. For instance, there is a particular measure to look at the extent to which businesses undertake a life-cycle analysis for their products, and there was guidance from the reference group stating that it wanted that as an indicator. However, frankly, we are really struggling to get our minds around how to collect the data for all the businesses in Wales. Therefore, we will be going back to the reference group again on some of these to say that we have looked at it, investigated it, but we cannot realistically see how we can get a reasonable data source. There is a similar measure, for instance, on the biodiversity side for genetic biodiversity. We did some work in conjunction with the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to look at genetic biodiversity and the only handle that we could get on it was on farm animal genetic diversity, which is not anywhere near what we need. So, there simply have not been the scientific advances with regard to monitoring and so on that would allow that to happen. There are other cases, for instance on green space indicators and landscape, where, for instance, CCW has been developing methods on the landscape side, on the land map for example, and is now piloting that in one of the local authorities.

9.40 a.m.

[71] Assuming that that works, that process will be rolled out. Similarly on a green space indicator, it has now developed a toolkit and is looking at rolling that out across the local authorities in Wales. So, there are real problems in identifying methods and then there are real issues in getting the data.

[72] **Angela Burns:** I am pleased to have heard your answer because I was never clear, to be honest, how well the indicators were tied in—it is not clear as to which came first because, in so many ways, they do not appear to relate. I am glad to hear you mention a wish list of what you would like to monitor and that some of it is unmonitorable; you cannot monitor everything because sometimes you just have to wait for the empirical evidence to prove something rather than directly monitoring it.

[73] However, all of this causes confusion for the non-governmental organisations that have to report their results to you, or even for business organisations that are trying to meet environmental targets. It is very difficult and the evidence that we received indicated that they are subsumed by this plethora of targets that they have to meet, but they cannot figure out on which indicator their actions directly impact. So, I am glad to hear you say that you will go back to the group and recommend that some of the indicators go. Will you consider doing a complete overhaul of the indicators? I know that when you have some that have been running for a number of years, you do not want to throw them out because you have just started the measurement, but there are obviously some that have not yet been created. The first action plan started in 2006, so, four years on, you must be bashing your head against a brick wall, trying to find ways of monitoring it.

[74] **Dr Prosser:** We are making progress, but clearly we would like to make faster progress. However, scientifically and technically, we must get the methods right and while some people say that there must be data around for a particular indicator, when you dig down into the detail, it is quite difficult to get statistically robust data. At the end of the day, these are official statistics of the Office for National Statistics and, therefore, it is quite concerned to ensure that they are of the required standard. We have to meet that standard as best we can. So, in the interim, we have proxy information, which we can sometimes use as a first step towards knowing how the outcomes are going. It is not quite anecdotal, but it would not meet the statistical tests that the Office for National Statistics requires. So, we sometimes have to work in greyer areas in terms of standards.

[75] **Jane Davidson:** May I just add a couple of points on that? It is very easy for politicians to suggest that indicators are inadequate; in fact, politicians do that all the time, but it has been very clear, from the environment strategy reference group, that many people are struggling with how to ensure that an indicator becomes an appropriate proxy for the delivery of the set of outcomes that they have identified through working with us, because the outcomes are those that the environment strategy reference group wanted to see. So, they are very much outcomes for the whole of Wales, developed by a range of organisations in Wales. The job of Government in this context is to try to find the best match, working with others on delivery. That is why I said, just before Havard came in, that there are a number of indicators on which attempts have been made to find ways forward, but in the case of five of those indicators, they will need to go. I will need to be approached by the reference group as to whether or not they want other indicators or whether those indicators just need to go.

[76] However, I do not pretend to have expertise, and it is dangerous for politicians to pretend to have expertise about the content of indicators. Our job is the policy end and we then ask others to look at the best way of ensuring that that is measured. They are not targets, but indicators. They tell us what is happening in an objective way. If you change them too much, you will end up with the problem that we often have as politicians, of not having comparable data because the indicators have changed. Probably every politician in this room has had a go at some aspect of policy in which the baseline or the information has changed and, therefore, it is difficult to make comparisons in terms of performance.

[77] As the environment strategy is a long-term plan, in the context of its delivery, I have been trying to ensure that Simon and others keep a close eye on ensuring that the outcomes are continually in people's minds; that the gateway process is used to make it work effectively; that the indicators are used as effectively as possible; and that we continue to work, as Havard says—progress is being made—on the appropriateness of those indicators with regard to their fitness for purpose. There is also the issue of comparability with other parts of the UK, and that is also a critical element in relation to our sustainable development indicators, which we have talked about before, so that we can look at the performance of Wales in the context of other parts of the UK.

[78] **Angela Burns:** Your comments are very interesting, Minister. I would reply, however, that what these politicians are interested in doing is seeing that the action plans tie into the outcomes and that the indicators are a decent measure of whether or not we are achieving those outcomes. We have been talking to witnesses from all walks of the environmental sphere, and two of the things that have come across are their confusion about their measurability and our confusion about whether they are meeting their targets. I am no statistician; I will accept whatever indicators you choose to put forward, as long as those indicators are accurate and can be measured. It seems quite odd to produce an indicator, saying that an action will be measured on it, when you cannot put the indicator in yet. Would it not be better to have your action plan, the outcomes, the current indicators that work and that you know that you can measure, and then, as and when you figure out a way to measure a particular bit that you want to measure, to come up with a process and then go out to the non-governmental organisations and the environmental sphere and say, 'Right, now we know how to measure carbon, this is how we're going to do it from this point on'? You seem to be putting the indicators first. All that we are looking to do is to ensure that the people who come to us understand what they have to achieve and that we can look at how they achieve it and ensure that they are achieving it properly.

[79] **Dr Prosser:** The indicators definitely do not come first. The environment strategy was put together with the environment strategy reference group as a key component, because this is a strategy for Wales, and it needs a lot of different organisations and individuals to deliver it. Therefore, that was set up to ensure that there was this participation. On the environmental indicators, we also have a group that meets routinely a couple of times a year, which reviews where we are with those indicators. It is also a group of data providers, including representatives from the non-governmental organisations, CCW, the Environment Agency and the Forestry Commission. I do not know how well the representatives on that group communicate with their organisations; perhaps there is a weakness there. However, we have a co-ordinating group that is up to speed with where we are and how we are progressing with this. We take its advice on how we progress with framing the indicators, the methodology and where we can get the data from.

[80] **Angela Burns:** That is very useful, thank you very much.

[81] **Michael German:** Joyce wanted to come in on this point.

[82] **Joyce Watson:** I agree that the action plan has to come before the indicators, otherwise, it would be an absurd situation. Where would your indicators come from if you did not have your plan? So, let us get things straight in that respect.

9.50 a.m.

[83] I am one of those sad people who love stats, and what you can do with them, so I understand the difficulty of getting scientifically acceptable performance indicators. However, the problem that we will have as a Government is in trying to tell the public that what it is doing will make a difference to people's lives, and improve the environment, if there is a concentration on measurements—whether they are on the table, or not—as a way of feeling good about that. I know that the action plan is a clear statement of that.

[84] It is not an easy question; this is quite a conundrum that you have in front of you in terms of trying to deal with these issues. I suppose that what I am trying to say is this: how do you intend to take the public with you in managing these things? We have some clear measurements that we can look at, which people can understand, and I have looked at those tables. However, there is also a bit of confusion around areas that people do not or will not understand. We all know that people give up easily if they do not think that we can produce a result. That is not the same thing as saying that we are not producing results. It is about

managing expectations in a way that people can understand. We are making progress, but how are we to convince people of that?

[85] **Jane Davidson:** That is a very important point. The way that I have felt comfortable doing this in my time in this role has been to refer back to the environment strategy itself. For example, the 39 outcomes in the environment strategy have been well thought through. Although the document was published in 2006, all those outcomes still read to me as being fully live nowadays. One outcome, for example, is that

[86] ‘Wales demonstrates the contribution that a small developed nation can make to global sustainable development and environmental improvement’.

[87] All the appropriate waste management facilities are in place to minimise the amount of waste going to landfill, and the public can very much get behind the underpinning philosophy of the environment strategy outcomes, which is the sustainable development principle. Then, under any of these, even if they do not have specific indicators because of the lack of data at the moment, we can give them specific actions that are being undertaken to fulfil the outcome. That narrative is extremely helpful. I find that, when I talk to members of the public, it is through the filter of an environmental organisation, but they tend to be very happy that we have a commitment as a Government to deliver on this major environment strategy. They will be asking for more, and more often, with more money, and understandably so—as any group would. However, they are comfortable with the overarching agenda, which has been a classic partnership agenda in its creation.

[88] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Derbyniat i raddau yr hyn y mae'r Gweinidog yn ei ddweud ynglŷn â dangosyddion a'r perygl i ni, fel gwleidyddion, orbwysleisio neu orfanylu ynglŷn â dangosyddion, ond mae'r dangosyddion hyn yn bwysig. Yr ydych chi eich hun wedi dweud mai dyma'r modd y gwelwn y tueddiadau tymor hir, a dyma'r ffordd y gallwn fesur unrhyw gynnydd o ran gweithredu'r strategaeth. Mae problemau gyda'r dangosyddion; yn ogystal â'r pump yr ydych wedi cyfeirio atynt, sydd wedi cael eu cyfeirio yn ôl i'r grŵp cyfeiriadaeth oherwydd eu bod yn eich barn chi yn anymarferol, mae tua 30 ohonynt lle nad oes fawr ddim data ar gael ar hyn o bryd. A ydych yn ceisio datblygu'r data drwy gynllun ymchwil a drwy gysylltu â sefydliadau eraill? Sut bydd y bobl sydd i fod i gyflawni'r strategaeth hon yn gallu gweld yn glir bod eu gweithgaredd yn cyfrannu tuag at weithredu'r strategaeth? Yr ydym wedi derbyn tystiolaeth gan RSPB Cymru, Asiantaeth yr Amgylchedd, a Chymdeithas Llywodraeth Leol Cymru ac y maent wedi dweud nad ydynt yn teimlo bod eglurder. Dyfynnaf eu tystiolaeth. Dywedodd RSPB Cymru:

Rhodri Glyn Thomas: I accept to a certain extent what the Minister says about indicators and the danger for us, as politicians, in overemphasising the importance of indicators, and going into too much detail on them, but these indicators are important. You have already said that this is the way in which we will identify long-term trends, and that this is the way in which we can assess progress in implementing the strategy. There are problems with indicators; as well as the five to which you have referred, which have been sent back to the reference group for consideration, because in your view they are impractical, there are some 30 indicators where there is hardly any data available at present. Are you trying to develop those data through a research programme and by contacting other organisations? How will those who are meant to implement this strategy be able to see clearly that their activities are contributing towards the implementation of the strategy? We have received evidence from RSPB Cymru, the Environment Agency, and the Welsh Local Government Association, and they have told us that they do not feel that there is clarity. I will quote the evidence. RSPB Cymru said:

[89] ‘To date, with an incomplete set of indicators and insufficient monitoring data it is unclear how the Welsh Assembly intends to measure progress against the full range of

outcomes it is committed to in the WES.’

[90] Dywedodd Asiantaeth yr The Environment Agency said that, Amgylchedd:

[91] ‘There needs to be a stronger focus on delivering and checking delivery Environment Strategy outcomes as well as on indicators and actions.’

[92] Dywed tystiolaeth CLILC: The evidence from the WLGA states that,

[93] ‘Therefore with no clear line of accountability to a specific delivery agent there is a danger that the strategy; or parts of it can fall between the cracks.’

[94] Mae hynny’n dystiolaeth eithaf clir That is pretty clear evidence from oddi wrth sefydliadau sy’n allweddol i organisations that are key to the success of lwyddiant y strategaeth. A dderbyniwch fod the strategy. Do you accept that there are problemau o ran monitro a bod angen problems in relation to monitoring and that eglurder o ran pwy yn union sy’n gyfrifol am clarity is needed regarding exactly who is beth? responsible for what?

[95] **Jane Davidson:** You have made a number of points. I would like to make it clear at the outset that it is not my assessment, as Minister, that the indicators are impractical; I defer to experts on this matter. The indicators working group is made up of external experts and Havard is the internal contact. The group has determined that there cannot be an appropriate proxy indicator. The group will report to me in due course about the action that we need to take on that area.

[96] As I said in response to Angela, for eight indicators, the methods of defining the indicators and data collection are currently being investigated. That work could take up to two years to complete. Any Minister would want to be confident that the indicators are as fit for purpose as they can be. In a sense, the test is whether the statisticians feel that the indicators are fit for purpose in that they comply with the requirements of the Office for National Statistics, but also that people from non-governmental organisations and others who want to support environmental monitoring feel that the indicators are the best available. I have not received any representations from environmental groups that suggest that the Assembly Government has chosen an indicator against the advice of an environmental group. That is absolutely not the case. We are working with everyone to find the best possible indicators to measure the outcomes that we have agreed jointly through the environment strategy. So, it is an iterative process.

[97] On the point that you made about the WLGA, my understanding differs slightly from yours. Before plan rationalisation, the WLGA used to be required to produce its own local authority environment strategies, which would then have reflected the Assembly Government’s environment strategy. Since it is no longer required to produce environment strategies as part of that plan rationalisation, some of its responses to the environment strategy outcomes will be through different strategies and plans, depending on whether or not it has statutory responsibilities in these areas. So, it is a classic situation where officials in individual departments in local government would want the local authorities to be required to measure their activity against a national strategy. Members in local authorities, on the other hand, do not want to have officials tied up in responding to Government strategies when they are looking at local delivery.

[98] The Welsh Local Government Association sits on the external reference group, and we review frequently our relationship with local government, which is bound by its duty

under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. Wales is unique in the United Kingdom in having determined biodiversity champions at Cabinet level who are looking at the scrutiny committee process at the moment.

10.00 a.m.

[99] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Let us forget about the indicators—my figures are slightly different to yours in terms of the number of indicators where there is little or no data. Let us concentrate on outcomes. These organisations have said clearly in their evidence that there is a lack of monitoring, accountability and clarity in those areas, which could endanger practical outcomes from the strategy. Are you challenging that, or do you accept that there is an element of truth in what they are saying?

[100] **Jane Davidson:** I suppose that the question is: is there ever enough? What we have been able to demonstrate to you is that we are very engaged with issues around getting the right indicators. Simon and colleagues from other agencies, including non-governmental organisations, the business sector, local government and others, regularly review where we are in terms of the outcomes and the action plans. We have not just left the strategy on a shelf. The vast majority of organisations consider the strategy to be fit for purpose, and do not want the overarching strategy to be changed. We are very actively taking forward action plans agreed by our reference group partners.

[101] As the charts have showed, this is immensely complex. As the evidence that we have given today has showed, we are overlaying many elements on top of each other, but you would not expect a complex set of outcomes to be matched by a very simple set of actions. The critical challenge to all of us, particularly in the last year of this Government, prior to the Assembly election next year, is to retain a commitment to delivering action plans against the strategy so that Members can continue to scrutinise the effectiveness of the arrangements. This is an area where I do not see any party political differences—it is about how we deliver best outcomes and best fit. I know that the two officials who are present spend a lot of their working lives trying to achieve that.

[102] **Michael German:** We are running against the buffers of time because I know that you have to go, Minister. However, I would like to get Irene's final question in. If there is anything else that you want to say, you can always give us a note on the matter.

[103] **Irene James:** Good morning, Minister. It is quite a short question, but I am not sure that the answer will be that short. Do you think that the environment strategy, as it currently stands, is fit for purpose or does it need to be reviewed?

[104] **Jane Davidson:** No, I do not think that it needs to be reviewed. In fact, I tested that through the environment reference group. The Environment Agency is the only organisation that has suggested that we could do a light-touch review. Having re-read all the outcomes before this committee meeting, it is clear that the outcomes identified in 2006 remain important today. What needs to be under continual review is the action to deliver on the outcomes. That is why we went into the second action plan of 2008-11, as I described at the very beginning of this committee meeting, on the basis that it would outlast this existing Government. So, a new Government could be looking at the outcome of those actions and set its own actions. We think that it is really important that there is an iterative process for an action plan that operates both within an administration, and which crosses two administrations, in terms of ensuring that there is all-party buy-in to this agenda.

[105] **Michael German:** Thank you for your evidence this morning, Minister, and I also thank your colleagues for helping us through this complex matter. You will be sent a copy of the draft record to review, and you can send us a note if you think that there are further

explanations which might be helpful to the committee. Thank you for your evidence this morning.

[106] **Jane Davidson:** Thank you very much.

10.04 a.m.

**Cynnig Trefniadol
Procedural Motion**

[107] **Michael German:** I move that

the committee resolves to exclude the public from the remainder of the meeting in accordance with Standing Order No. 10.37(vi).

[108] I see that the committee is in agreement.

*Derbyniwyd y cynnig.
Motion agreed.*

*Daeth rhan gyhoeddus y cyfarfod i ben am 10.04 p.m.
The public part of the meeting ended at 10.04 p.m.*