

## **Environment and Sustainability Committee E&S(4)-04-11 paper 2**

### **Minister for Environment and Sustainable Development - Welsh Government Priorities for the Environment and Sustainability**

#### **Overview**

Our overarching priority is to help ensure that Wales benefits from the very best, sustainable use of Wales' land and water in order to deliver health, jobs, environmental quality and strong communities. We want to develop a resilient and sustainable economy that is able to live within its environmental limits, stabilising, then reducing, its use of natural resources and reducing its contribution to climate change.

Our focus is on ensuring we have the right infrastructure needed for the next 50 years in water, flood, energy efficiency, renewables and waste and on engaging with the communities and businesses to encourage more sustainable actions.

The following areas outline some further key priorities in more detail:

#### **Sustainable Development**

Wales is one of only a small number of countries worldwide to have sustainable development as one of the core principles of its constitution. It is this distinctive legal duty that ensures we move forward in a way which reflects our environmental, social and economic needs.

We will legislate to embed sustainable development as the central organising principle in all our actions across government and public bodies and put in place a new independent sustainable development body for Wales.

#### **Climate Change**

We will continue to harness available resources and engage with every sector to contribute to the target of a 3 per cent cut in greenhouse gas emissions in devolved areas of competence from this year.

We will also ensure that Wales continues to play a part on the world stage, contributing to the global deal on climate change and acting as an exemplar to other smaller states and regions.

#### **Biodiversity and ecosystems**

We will continue the development of the Natural Environment Framework looking at managing the environment as a whole in ways which maximise the social, economic and environmental benefits the environment gives us. We aim to create a single new environmental body for Wales to deliver this, bringing together functions of our

sponsored bodies, the Environment Agency in Wales, the Countryside Council for Wales and the Forestry Commission Wales. We will be taking forward an Environment Bill during this term.

### **Energy efficiency and fuel poverty**

Rising fuel prices inevitably lead to a greater need to deal with those in fuel poverty. Through our groundbreaking Arbed energy efficiency programme we will continue to help those in need, reduce emissions and lever in further funding, promoting local businesses and jobs and developing skills.

Our new fuel poverty scheme, NEST, will focus on the needs of individual houses, providing measures for householders in hard to treat and off-gas properties.

### **Waste and resource efficiency**

The Welsh Government's recent strategy *Towards Zero Waste* commits to a 70% longer term recycling target to put Wales on a par with the best in Europe. We will continue the development and completion of the suite of Sector Plans that implement *Towards Zero Waste*.

### **Local Environmental Quality (LEQ)**

We will build on the success of the first phase of Tidy Towns and strengthen our support for community environmental improvement, linked to our anti-poverty work. I am also committed to bringing forward legislation on provision of allotments as well as seeing through the introduction of the carrier bag charge in October.

### **Planning**

Planning is a key delivery tool for many Welsh Government policies. Our focus is to work with both internal and external stakeholders to ensure the Welsh Government's planning policy is fit for purpose across all areas and to ensure planning arrangements are streamlined. We will be taking forward legislation on planning this term.

### **Energy**

The Welsh Government's Low Carbon Energy Statement sets out how we intend to maximise energy savings and energy efficiency, making the majority of the energy production we need in Wales from low carbon sources.

Our aim is that by 2025 up to twice as much renewable electricity is generated annually in Wales as today. By 2050 our aim is that almost all our local energy needs are met by low carbon electricity production.

### **Sustainable Buildings**

We will introduce higher construction standards in new housing as we move towards zero carbon building. We will work towards a 55 per cent improvement in building standards over 2006 levels by 2013.

### **Water**

We will work to help ensure access to safe drinking water, maintaining water and sewerage services at an affordable price. I will also focus on water affordability, working with the water companies, the regulator and consumer bodies to ensure that those that need help with their water bills receive it.

### **Flood and coastal erosion risk**

We will continue to invest significant funding in flood risk and coastal erosion management projects across Wales, prioritising the most at risk communities. This will reduce the impacts, raise awareness and provide an effective and sustained response to flooding and coastal erosion.

### **Marine**

We will develop marine plans to help achieve sustainable development in our marine and coastal areas. Marine Conservation Zones will support natural ecosystem functioning and enhance biodiversity.

### **Access to the Countryside**

The flagship Wales Coast Path is scheduled to be opened on 5 May 2012. We will be celebrating this major international landmark for Wales as well as consulting on future policy towards National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty in the light of the Natural Environment Framework. We are also looking to increase access to green space for urban communities.

### **Forestry**

We will continue to progress the Woodlands for Wales Strategy, increasing the number and the range of tree species in Welsh woodlands and bringing more existing broadleaf woodland into active management. We will be developing our approach to deliver the Welsh Government's intention to create a further 100,000 hectares of woodland in the next 20 years.

### **Animal Health and Welfare**

The key focus for the Welsh Government is to raise standards of animal health and welfare in Wales. This objective spans all policies, from disease prevention, control and eradication, preparedness for possible exotic disease outbreaks, to generally improving animal welfare standards.

We will focus on:

- Ensuring that legislation and mechanisms are in place to protect against the incursion and spread of notifiable animal disease.
- Maintaining a state of preparedness for an incursion of exotic animal disease
- Delivering a comprehensive and science informed programme to eradicate bovine TB
- Raising welfare standards for kept animal in Wales.
- Ensuring that policy delivery arrangements are fit for purpose.