

ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

Date: Wednesday 26 March 2003
Time: 9.15am to 12.00 pm
Venue: Committee Room 2, National Assembly Building

EFFECTIVENESS OF MAINSTREAMING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Report by Minister for Environment

Introduction

This paper aims to review how effective the efforts of mainstreaming SD have been over the past 3 years. The new Assembly government will be required to review the SD Scheme and this is clearly for them to take forward. However, it is appropriate, and suggested in the Assembly Co-ordinating Group on Sustainable Development, that Committees look back over the past 3 years, identify what has gone well, and make suggestions on how things might have been done differently.

As such, it complements my Report to this Committee meeting on achievements to date, and covers much of the same ground. The hope is that the Committee's discussion of this paper will inform the first statutory assessment of the Scheme's effectiveness, which must be the subject of a report to be prepared and published after the forthcoming election.

From my perspective as Lead Minister, and reporting to the lead Committee, I will identify below the points which have been crucial to mainstreaming SD in the Welsh Assembly Government. . These are core to our scheme but I am interested to hear the Committee's constructive views

Championing Sustainable Development (SD)

Structures

We have worked to ensure that appropriate structures are in place to take the agenda forward.

Internally, we have the Cabinet Sub-Committee and the Assembly Co-ordinating Group on Sustainable Development. Externally, we are supporting the new Sustainable Development Forum for Wales. The Sustainable Development Commission is also there for Wales as well as for the rest of the UK.

I believe that these are the key structures we need.

Policy review, development and integration

The fundamental commitment in the Scheme was to integrate Sustainable Development into the work of the Assembly, so that it is delivered through mainstream policies and programmes rather than ad hoc measures.

As Sustainable Development champion, I have sought to ensure, through my role in Cabinet, that the strategic policies and spending priorities that Ministers collectively pursue are calculated to deliver economic, environmental and social gains (and I regard promotion of social inclusion and equality of opportunity as integral to this).

To underpin this, we have developed a top-level integrated appraisal methodology, or Integration Tool for use in 'Sustainable Development-proofing' new policies at the developmental stage, so that officials are in a position to prepare proposals that reflect the priority Ministers place on Sustainable Development. It can also be used in reviewing policies.

The Wales Spatial Plan too will help delivery of sustainable development by providing a context in which long term decisions with spatial implications can reflect the Assembly's guiding principles. The first plan will be published for consultation in the summer of 2003.

We have reported honestly on what we do, so that we and others can learn from our experience in an evolving field.

Working with Others

We have consciously been building up work with our partners and agencies, to add value to our own efforts. In part a cultural change, this is very much in line with our statutory duties of partnership with the voluntary sector, with local government and with business.

Voluntary organisations are particularly good at making connections with people and communities, which is a vital part of sustainable development. Local authorities deliver crucial public services, so it is important that we have been able to agree with WLGA a Compact on co-operation to promote sustainable development. Business has a vital role to play, and we

have reflected sustainable development principles in 'A Winning Wales'. Since its publication, we have expanded these through the Business & Environment Action Plan that the Economic Development Minister launched in February.

The value of working together was particularly illustrated by Wales' preparations for and follow-up to the World Summit on Sustainable Development last year. We need to think about how to build on this.

International Perspective

We have sought – indeed created - opportunities to work with and learn from partners in other parts of the world, and I am particularly proud of how we have been able to play a leadership role in this.

We are now the designated lead region of a Pan-European network, and amongst the founder members of a global network. This puts us in a wonderful position to access new best practice world-wide, and keep ourselves at the cutting edge of new thinking about sustainable development. It helps us show ourselves as a nation intent on sustainable development. And of course it reflects the commitment in the Sustainable Development Scheme to contribute to sustainable development at a global level as well as a local.

There is the question of how best we can exploit the opportunities that are now opening up for us, while keeping to our commitments in the Action Plan.

Action

A fuller account of what has been done during 2002-03 to implement the Sustainable Development Scheme is given in the draft 'Sustainable Development 2002-03 Annual Report' being debated in plenary today.

Just to illustrate the range of actions we have been taking, often in partnership, and how we have tried to use imaginatively the powers we have, I would draw the Committee's attention to:

- working with communities in National Parks to find sustainable solutions as the Brecons' Solar Panel Club;
- in all, around 220 projects supported under the Sustainable Development Fund in the three Welsh National Park Authorities and the five Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, supporting projects within the main sustainable themes; sustainable transport; renewable energy; sustainable land management, recycling and green tourism;
- over 140 projects funded through Environment Wales, helping to deliver sustainable development, creating active communities and to develop partnership working.
- the Green Dragon initiative to recognise and award change, and mesh with our evolving

- procurement arrangements and our environmental support for businesses;
- the 'Waste Awareness Wales' campaign to promote waste reduction, re-use and recycling amongst all sectors of the community, co-ordinated by the Welsh Local Government Association and Keep Wales Tidy and funded by the Assembly;
 - concessionary bus passes – improving accessibility of services, boosting the well being of pass holders, improving their quality of life, increasing use of buses and, eventually, helping to safeguard and even extend existing services, enhancing service frequencies, and bringing environmental benefits;
 - sustainable transport projects funded through the Transport Grant to promote accessibility, support commercial activity, benefit the environment, aid urban regeneration and land reclamation, and benefit communities suffering high levels of deprivation or exclusion.
 - integrating Sustainable Development into the school curriculum for all ages, and guidance on education for sustainable development and global citizenship.

We have also given a lead in terms of our 'green house-keeping'.

Lastly, I have 'banged the drum' for sustainable development wherever and whenever I can, in which role I have been grateful for the help of members of this Committee. Taking this forward, I have recently commissioned proposals for a public awareness campaign, based around Wales' ecological footprint and the steps that ordinary people can take to reduce it.

There is more to be done, and the Committee's view on this would be very welcome, but we are starting to make a real difference.

Sue Essex

Minister for Environment