

# Natural Resources Wales

## Board Meeting

### 27 February 2012

<b>Paper Title</b>	<b>Sustainable Development Bill White Paper – NRW consultation Response</b>
<b>Paper Reference:</b>	Paper 6 (02/13) [E]
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<b>Purpose of Paper:</b>	<b>Discussion</b>
<b>Recommendation:</b>	

<p><b>Impact:</b> To note – all headings might not be applicable to the topic</p>	<p><b>Impact on the Environment:</b></p> <p>There will be significant impact on the environment - it will protect the environment by making sustainable development more central to the conduct of the Welsh Public Services.</p> <p><b>Impact on the Economy:</b></p> <p>The economy will be affected by migrating the responsibility for sustainable development to those organisations which do business with the WPS.</p> <p><b>Impact on Community:</b></p> <p>N/A</p> <p><b>Impact on Knowledge:</b></p> <p>By contributing to knowledge by adding an eighth principle of public life in Wales.</p>
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### **Issue**

1. Board to discuss the NRW response to the Welsh Government White Paper – A Sustainable Wales Better Choices for a Better Value.

### **Summary**

2. Board to discuss the response to be made by NRW, Annex A.

Link to Welsh Government Consultation:

<http://wales.gov.uk/consultations/sustainabledevelopment/sdwhitepaper/;jsessionid=21E60D697C554DAB4E0895A5D9DC961B?status=open&lang=en>

### **Risks**

3. Not applicable.

### **Financial Implications**

4. Not applicable.

### **Communications**

5. Not applicable.

## **Annex A**

### **THE RESPONSE OF NATURAL RESOURCES WALES TO THE WELSH GOVERNMENT WHITE PAPER A SUSTAINABLE WALES BETTER CHOICES FOR A BETTER FUTURE Consultation on proposals for a Sustainable Development Bill**

#### **General Comments**

1 Natural Resources Wales (NRW) welcomes the publication of the White Paper as a further step in the process of making Wales an exemplar in the governance and application of Sustainable Development.

2. NRW believes that it has a great deal to contribute towards the aims and objectives of the White Paper. Our purpose is defined as being to ensure that the environment and natural resources of Wales are sustainably maintained, used and enhanced. In this context sustainably means ... with a view to benefitting, and in a manner designed to benefit, the people, environment and economy of Wales in the present and in the future. The Board has affirmed that its focus will be on environment, but as an integral part of a much bigger picture. In managing the environment, we will use and build knowledge, take account of the needs of communities and the economy and be mindful of the impact of environmental management on the economy and communities. The connection is ecosystem services which will be our processes and activities.

3 We have already begun to think and plan for how we can operate according to sustainability principles, particularly in our governance arrangements and in how our decisions will lead to sustainable outcomes in the future.

#### **A Sustainable Development Duty**

4. NRW welcomes the proposals in the White Paper that the focus of Sustainable Development should be around:

- a long term perspective;
- social, economic and environmental well-being;
- shared outcomes;
- knowledge and best practice;
- acknowledgement that difficult decisions will have to be made; and
- prevention and early interventions.

5. NRW shares all these aspirations, and intends to build them into our policies and working practices. The conceptual framework upon which we will develop our thinking is based on four pillars - economy, environment, community and knowledge – delivered in balanced ways between ourselves and our partners. This is summarised in our direction of travel ... Creating a greener, wiser, wealthier, healthier Wales.

6. We will strive to be a sustainable management exemplar organisation. We therefore welcome the intention in the White Paper to place a duty on us to embed

sustainable development as our central organising principle. The key elements of sustainable development as a central organising principle are

- a clear focus on what the organisation is seeking to deliver in support of the future wellbeing of Wales, and
- ensuring decisions taken are fully informed by consideration of the effect on economic, social, environmental and long term wellbeing

7 We will, therefore, prioritise working with others, and support the White Paper's conclusion that "Government and the wider public service community cannot find solutions to the challenges faced alone: working in partnership with stakeholders is crucial and effective engagement is needed...." In order to do this effectively, we will adopt transparent and participative decision-making processes and will share its knowledge wherever possible.

8. NRW welcomes the proposals to use Local Service Boards to help plan for shared outcomes; however, we have some concerns that environmental outcomes are currently not among the priorities of all LSBs. We also question whether the current geographic bases for most LSBs are the most effective and we would favour a move to a more regional approach.

9. We would like to make some suggestions which might help to strengthen the achievement of the aspirations which the consultation Paper expresses:

a. It might help if the definition of sustainable development was strengthened to ensure that there is no doubt that it now embraces ongoing management as well as development per se;

**b. In order to add greater accountability into the personal delivery of the duty among public bodies would** be to add it to the Seven Principles of Public Life – for example, to add

*Holders of public office in Wales should promote and support the principles of sustainable development as defined in the Act.* The holders of Public Office would then be held accountable in the same ways as the other standards

**c. It** would be helpful if ways could be found to migrate the duty on the Welsh Public Bodies to embrace the organisations with whom they do business . It might be possible to embed a general duty of care in legal documents such as consents , licences , and contracts issued or entered into by the Bodies . The Act could impose a duty on Bodies specified in the Schedule in the Act to include a general duty of care to execute the functions which are the subject of any given legal instrument issued or entered into by the Bodies , in a way which is sustainable, as defined in the Act .

### **An Independent Sustainable Development Body**

10 We welcome the proposal to establish an Independent Sustainable Development Body for Wales, and look forward to working closely with it. There are considerable opportunities for complementarities and synergy. In particular, we would wish to work alongside the body in the areas of research and knowledge transfer.

## **Implementation**

11. NRW supports the proposal to enact the proposed duty at the beginning of the financial year. However, the case for phasing its introduction is not well made and may result in confusion; NRW suggests that the duty should apply to all public bodies from April 2015.

12. NRW believes that, there should be a single set of high level indicators, which should be based on the current Sustainable Development indicators.

## **Conclusion**

13. NRW looks forward to continuing to work with the Welsh Government and its partners on the development and implementation of the Sustainable Development Bill.