

REVIEW OF THE REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Briefing Note on Sub-regional Workshops for Strategic Leadership Board

BACKGROUND

Published in 2001, the Regional Development Strategy (RDS) sets out an agreed blueprint for the spatial development of the region over the next 25 years. At its core is the link between where people live and work, and understanding the distinct function of places. The strategy seeks to influence the distribution of economic and social activities, and provide the spatial planning context for future development.

The Minister for Regional Development, Conor Murphy MP, MLA, has instigated a fundamental review of the RDS to ensure that it is fit for purpose and reflects the vision of the devolved administration. Work on the revised RDS is now well underway. The overall process and timeframe for the RDS review is set out in Annex 1. The first stage of the process is an assessment of regional and sub-regional performance, and involves assembling and analysing available information and commissioning consultancy support on matters requiring focused analysis. The research serves to strengthen our knowledge of the socio-economic context, spatial structure and functioning of the region, and ensures the revised strategy is underpinned by a solid evidence base. A parallel process of consultation is underway – a series of working groups have been established including a Ministerial sub-group, an Inter-departmental Steering Group, and an External Stakeholder Group.

KEY STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

The second stage in the process, scheduled to commence in November 2008, is intended to facilitate early public engagement on a sub-regional basis in order to capture views on the key issues, challenges, development potential and aspirations of our towns, cities and rural communities across the region.

A challenge for DRD has been to identify an appropriate aerial base for the work and a number of options exist - for example at a county (x6), health board (x4) or local authority (x26) level. The preferred option, as discussed with DOE Local Government Division, is to base the engagement around the 11 geographical areas agreed by the Executive as the basis of new local government organisation under the Review of Public Administration (RPA).

These areas provide an appropriate spatial and population base for the type of engagement envisaged, and also resonate with the enhanced powers envisaged for local authorities post 2011 (e.g. area planning and regeneration).

Consequently, DRD will organise a series of 11 sub-regional workshops – one workshop to be held at a suitable location in each new council area. Approximately 40 key stakeholders will be invited to each workshop, drawn from local government, wider public sector, private sector/business and voluntary/community sector. The objectives of the workshops are to:

- outline the purpose, context and parameters of the RDS review;
- present the emerging research findings including population dynamics, socio-economic characteristics, functions of settlements, and stock of current human, natural and physical assets (regional and local trends);
- provide an opportunity for stakeholders to articulate their views on the future vision for the region and more specifically their sub-region; the sub-region's distinctive characteristics; and the future growth potential of the sub-region;

The workshops will be held in November 2008 – specific dates yet to be agreed.

A report summarising the output from the 11 events will be submitted to the Minister in January 2009. The report will serve as a key input in developing the draft RDS to be issued for public consultation in April/May 2009.

ANNEX 1: Review of the Regional Development Strategy – Process

