

1 BRIEFING PAPER: COUNTY AND CITY DEVELOPMENT BOARDS-ROLE AND COMPOSITION OF PROPOSED NEW ENVIRONMENT SUB-COMMITTEES

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Sean O'Riordain and Associates were commissioned by Comhar the National Sustainable Development Council to prepare a Briefing Paper on how best to integrate environment and sustainable development dimensions into the work of the County and City Development Boards, specifically through new environment sub-committees proposed by the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. The Sub-committee proposal followed publication of the Indecon Report on the strengthening and development of County/City Development Boards, and the OECD Review of the Public Service in Ireland. Both Reports acknowledge the central role which the Boards can have in regard to the coordination of public services at the local level and in providing the environment in which greater value for public expenditure can be derived.

1.2 PURPOSE OF THE BRIEFING PAPER

The objectives for the Briefing paper include:

- Examination of how the strengthened CDBs (in light of the decision by the Government to accept the recommendations of the Indecon Report) could help deliver the sustainable development agenda at local level.
- Preparation of Proposals on the composition of environment sub-committees and how they would most appropriately be integrated into the work programmes of the CDBs in the most efficient and effective manner and in a way which would complement the existing environment strategic policy committees (SPCs) which are in place in each County and City Council.
- Consideration of the need to avoid duplication in the respective roles of the Environment SPCs and the proposed environment sub-committees to ensure coherence between the plans of SPCs, local authorities and the CDBs.
- Consideration of a possible awareness raising role for environment sub-committees as part of the broader need to integrate sustainability into daily lifestyles.
- Consideration of which interest groups and others would most appropriately be represented on an environment sub-committee and how they might best input to the work of such a committee and the wider Board.

- The Briefing Paper also addresses the need for reporting and communication arrangements between the sub-committee and the Board, relevant agencies, the local authority and the environment SPC.
- The Briefing Paper also provides practical advice on the work programme of such a committee and offer practical advice on how the Committee should operate within the framework of existing Board Structures.

1.3 STRUCTURE OF THE BRIEFING DOCUMENT

This document is structured as follows:

- Section 1: Introduction and executive summary
- Section 2: Background to the CDB process
- Section 3: Overview of Consultation Process
- Section 4: Key Issues arising
- Section 5: Recommendations

1.4 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DEHLG) is undertaking a renewal of the National Sustainable Development Strategy. A key challenge will be the delivery of the local sustainability agenda in partnership with local communities;
- County and City Development Boards (CDB) were established in 2000 to address the challenge of improving the co-ordination of public services at local level. The 34 Boards, led by local government are also made up of representatives from the social partners, state agencies and local development agencies;
- Against the background of the *Indecon* Report on the strengthening and development of County/City Development Boards (CDBs), and the review of the National Sustainable Development Strategy, the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government asked that each CDB establish an environment sub-committee to facilitate integration of environmental and sustainable development dimensions into their work. This research was to examine how such committees would operate to ensure complementarity, and the avoidance of overlap, with the local authority Environment Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs).
- Comhar SDC, having regard for its role in supporting the implementation of sustainable development processes, is seeking to support the local implementation of the renewed National Strategy and recognises the role that the Boards can play;
- Environment Strategic Policy Committees were established in 1997 each County/City Council under the Local Government Modernisation Programme. The membership of these Committees includes County/City Councillors and representatives of the local

social partners. The SPCs contribute to the local authority environmental policy process and relevant policy is adopted, as appropriate, by the full body of elected representatives in each local authority.

Overview

- In 2002 the County/City Development Boards adopted Strategies for Economic, Social and Cultural Development in line with National Guidelines (*A Shared Vision for County/City Development Boards*) which were issued by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government;
- The Guidelines recommended an 8 step strategy making process based on the principles of sustainable development;
- The Guidelines suggested that the aim of each Strategy “*must be to improve the economic, social and cultural quality of life while ensuring a high quality environment.*”
- The Local Agenda 21 Guidelines, issued by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government in 2001 also acknowledged the role of the CDB Strategy in each County/City;
- All the Strategies adopted by the Boards place social inclusion and environmental sustainability at the core of their strategic objectives and underpin these objectives through a comprehensive series of actions on environmental and social issues¹;
- The challenge of social inclusion is seen in all the Strategies as a critical area for resolution;
- The environment is seen as a key strength in the Strategies adopted by the Boards but there is also an acknowledgement of the various threats facing the environment;
- In 2005, the CDBs undertook a review of their Strategies to prioritise actions over the following 3 years. This prioritisation included a greater focus on sustainability issues particularly in regard to social inclusion;
- This re-prioritisation was the focus for the Indecon Review² of the CDBs in 2008. This Review acknowledged the continuing targeting of social inclusion. Some 17.3% of actions proposed for the period 2006 to 2008 were of a social inclusion

¹ Review of County/City Development Board Strategies, Fitzpatrick Associates/ERM Ireland, Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government 2001.

² Indecon Review of County/City Development Board Strategic Reviews and Proposals for Strengthening and developing the Boards. Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, 2008.

nature. 15.8% were of an environmental nature. 8% related to community development. Thus over 40% of actions related to the non-economic aspects of sustainable development;

- It would be appropriate to acknowledge that in the approach taken to date by all the Boards, in the adoption of the original Strategy and the Reviews completed in 2005/2006, all had applied the principles of sustainable development in line with the Aalborg Charter³
- The considerable progress in the area of social inclusion, and the central role played by the Boards, over the past three years should also be acknowledged;⁴
- The research undertaken for this Briefing Paper finds that, in general, environmental and sustainability issues within the local authority are dealt with by the Environment and Planning SPCs. In addition, a significant number of CDBs have also identified a range of environment and sustainability actions for implementation by their member agencies, including the local authority. A limited number of CDBs also have environment sub-committees in place. These committees have briefs which range from specific areas of policy concern through to having a full Local Agenda 21 programme.
- Given the range of structures already in place dealing with environment and sustainability issues, there is a risk of duplication if further parallel structures are to be established. In line with the Minister's requirement to avoid such duplication and to ensure complementarity with existing structures, there is merit in strengthening the linkages between existing structures i.e. CDBs and the Environment and Planning SPCs, rather than establishing new CDB environment sub-committees. Such strengthened linkages should have a key focus on the delivery of the sustainability agenda at local level and would therefore also meet the Minister's requirements in regard to better integration of sustainability issues locally
- The area most acknowledged to date for specific consideration by Boards and or their sub committee structures relates to energy management (for example Donegal County Development Board has produced guidelines on energy saving for local households).
- In a number of instances the Boards have identified Climate Change as a key priority for consideration. In these instances the relevant Environment SPCs are already, or are to be requested, to prepare a climate change strategy. (for example the Strategy Review Committee of the Cork County Development Board has agreed that the Environment SPC of the County Council will address a climate change strategy for both the internal management of Council services

³ The Aalborg Charter was adopted in the Danish City of Aalborg in 1994 at an EU Commission Sponsored conference to kick start the Local Agenda 21 process in the European Union. The Charter sets out the principles of sustainable development in regard to local government. A very useful reference site may be accessed at: <http://sustainablecities.dk/sustainability-charters>

⁴ Mapping Social Inclusion in Local Authorities, Combat Poverty Agency, 2007.

and the wider climate change issues affecting other local and state agencies operating in the County).

- In a number of instances the Boards have prepared a considerable amount of research on local environmental conditions. This research includes environmental profiling of the relevant city/county;

1.5

RECOMMENDATIONS

In line with the Minister's objectives there must be a focus by CDBs on clear sustainability principles and tangible actions to underpin more sustainable lifestyles. These must be set within the framework of the National Sustainable Development Strategy which is currently under review. The thematic focus of the National Sustainable Development Strategy should inform the work programme of the Boards.

Therefore this Briefing Paper recommends that the CDBs be encouraged to build upon existing local structures, most notably the Environment and Planning SPCs in each local authority. The Chairs of each (who already sit on the Boards) should be requested to present regular updates on the work programmes of the SPCs to the Boards.

Given the significance of climate change to the future socio-economic context at local level the Boards could consider this area as a focus for future consideration in line with any guidance from the DEHLG.

Those Boards which have a specific environment committee in place should review the need to continue with such a committee having regard to new priorities. Where Boards wish to continue with such a committee, they should be free to do so.

NGO Environment Groups are integrated into local policy structures through the Environment SPC. A separate strand for such groups should not be necessary within the Community and Voluntary Fora but could be established if considered appropriate at local level.

Specific Recommendations

- There should be no duplication of the work between the Environment SPCs and other existing environment based initiatives, including consultation mechanisms, of the CDBs.
- Rather than setting up new CDB environment sub-committees, the linkages between the CDBs and the Environment and Planning Strategic Policy Committees should be strengthened. This could be done, for example, through

appropriate reporting mechanisms on environment and sustainability issues, between the CDBs and SPCs. This could include annual reporting on relevant environmental matters and the work programme of the environment and planning SPCs to each CDB.

- Any existing Environment Committee/Local Agenda 21 Committee operating under the aegis of the CDB or under the remit of the local authority, should be continued, having regard to local circumstances and the current review of priorities by each CDB. However, as a matter of principle, no new committee structures should be put in place.
- Comhar SDC and the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government should examine the development of an appropriate training and education programme for local government officials and elected members in the context of the renewed National Sustainability Strategy. There should be ongoing liaison between the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and Comhar SDC in regard to supporting CDBs to integrate environment and sustainability issues into their work in the context of the strengthened linkages with SPCs and the renewed National Sustainability Strategy.
- The newly elected member training programme, for delivery following the forthcoming Local Elections, should include a sustainable development module based on the renewed national strategy.
- In the event of publication of the renewed National Sustainable Development Strategy, the CDBs should be given a specific task to underpin its implementation through local actions to be delivered on a multi-agency basis at the local level. Such actions could include:
 - Information seminars for the constituent members and their local organisations; This would be of particular importance in regard to the communication of the objectives of the renewed National Sustainable Development Strategy to the relevant pillars of each CDB;
 - Awareness raising and capacity building initiatives for the wider community, in collaboration with other agencies (e.g. local energy agencies, county and city partnerships), where appropriate. Such initiatives should address the thematic priorities in the renewed National Strategy, e.g. energy conservation/efficiency, sustainable consumption and climate change;
 - the undertaking of pilot/demonstration actions relating to implementation of the Strategy at the local level.

2 BACKGROUND TO THE CDB PROCESS

2.1 OVERVIEW OF THE COUNTY/CITY STRATEGY PROCESS

The establishment of the County and City Development Boards in 2000 was underpinned by the principles of sustainable development and Local Agenda 21. Most notably, the *Guidelines for the Preparation of an Integrated Strategy for Economic, Social and Cultural Development*, issued by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government placed sustainable development at the core of the CDB strategy process. The Guidelines suggested that the aim of each Strategy “*must be to improve the economic, social and cultural quality of life while ensuring a high quality environment.*”

These Guidelines were further developed in the training programme provided by the Institute of Public Administration, for the newly appointed Directors of Community and Enterprise. The Programme specifically addressed, over two half-day modules, approaches to sustainable development and environment policy integration.

The Boards all adopted their Integrated Strategies within the time scale envisaged by the Department. Subsequent to a review of such strategies, carried out for the Department by ERM/Fitzpatrick Associates⁵, a further distillation of the strategies was prepared by each Board. The implementation of these revised strategies was the subject of the recent Indecon Review.⁶

In completing the initial round of strategies it became evident that a wide range of issues arose at local level and a large number of actions to address these concerns were incorporated into the individual Board's strategies. These ranged across the primary areas of concern for the Boards, and generally related to: social inclusion, local development and economic regeneration.

Environmental issues were also clearly defined albeit that they generally applied to actions being undertaken by the relevant Local Authorities. Much of what would have been of an environmental concern were, therefore, to be addressed within the environmental planning of the local authorities or, in some instances, within a Local Agenda 21 context managed by the relevant local authority. The Local Agenda 21 Guidelines, issued by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, acknowledge the role of the Strategy in each County/City but did place the relevant local authority at the centre of the Local Agenda 21 process given the central role played by the authorities at the local level and given their statutory role. The initial strategies therefore reflect this approach.

⁵ Review of County/City Development Board Strategies, Fitzpatrick Associates/ERM Ireland, Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government 2001.

⁶ Indecon Review of County/City Development Board Strategic Reviews and Proposals for Strengthening and developing the Boards. Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, 2008

This continued to be the case following completion of the renewed Priorities process by each Board in 2006. Notwithstanding the increased targeting by each Board on issues with a specifically social inclusion focus, there remained a clear recognition that sustainable development remained central to the work of the Boards for the period 2006-2008. The environment was seen as a key strength in the Strategies adopted by the Boards but there is also an acknowledgement of the various threats facing the environment and this is reflected in the approach to the distilled priorities of 2006-2008.

The Indecon Review acknowledged the continuing focus of the Boards on social inclusion. Some 17.3% of actions proposed for the period 2006 to 2008 were of a social inclusion nature. In addition, some 15.8% of actions were of an environmental nature while 8% related to community development. Thus over 40% of actions related to the non-economic aspects of sustainable development. This is also acknowledged in a report completed for the Combat Poverty Agency.⁷

It is therefore appropriate to acknowledge that the approach taken to date by all the Boards, in the adoption of the original Strategy and the Reviews completed in 2006, applied the principles of sustainable development in line with the Aalborg Process⁸. As is set out in the three reports referenced for this Briefing Paper, the process to date has been notable by the considerable level of prior consultation undertaken by the Boards across the social partnership framework at the local level.

A key question nonetheless is whether there is an opportunity to specifically address the need for a separate environmental strand to the consultation processes of the Boards and whether existing structures are suitable for addressing the expected challenges of environmental change at the local level.

In addition, an on-going concern for the County/City Development Board process has been to create the necessary mechanisms for dialogue between the local policy process and that at national level. This concern had been referred to in both the Fitzpatrick Associates/ERM Review and in the more recent Indecon Review. The Government has acknowledged this and, as a result, a national coordination group to guide the CDB process at the national level is now in place.

This approach provides an over arching framework for the Boards. It complements the approach taken, as discussed in the Combat Poverty Agency Report, in regard to the introduction of the Local Government Social Inclusion Steering Group. As such considerable progress has already been made in regard to putting in place the necessary coordinating structures at the national level to address many of the features of local sustainability.

⁷ Mapping Social Inclusion in Local Authorities, Combat Poverty Agency, 2007.

⁸ The Aalborg Charter was adopted in the Danish City of Aalborg in 1994 at an EU Commission Sponsored conference to kick start the Local Agenda 21 process in the European Union. The Charter sets out the principles of sustainable development in regard to local government. A very useful reference site may be accessed at: <http://sustainablecities.dk/sustainability-charters>

2.2

NATIONAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

A key issue to be considered in light of the progress in addressing the local-national policy interface is whether a similar structure to those outlined above would be necessary in regard to the implementation of the forthcoming renewal of the National Sustainable Development Strategy(NSDS), publication of which can be expected in 2009. Given the need to have a local mechanism for delivering implementation of the NSDS the DEHLG might provide the necessary guidance to the CDBs in regard to the NSDS. In doing so Comhar SDC should input, as appropriate, into this work. This would underpin the work of the Development Boards as well as complementing the existing clear recognition of sustainability as a central feature of each County/City Strategy.

3 CONSULTATION PROCESS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

A critical aspect to the research for this Briefing paper was the completion of a desk top review of Board Minutes, a review of existing Reports and the organisation of two consultation sessions with members of the Environment and Community and Enterprise Committees of the County and City Managers Association. In addition, a comprehensive questionnaire was forwarded to all thirty four Directors of Community and Enterprise. A copy of the questionnaire is attached in Annex A. A number of face to face meetings with relevant senior staff in the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and a number of individual Board Members also took place and discussions were also held with a number of national and international academic commentators. An overview of the points raised along with suggested recommendations are set out below.

3.2 OVERVIEW OF QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES

A total of twenty four (from a possible thirty four) completed questionnaires were returned for consideration in the research for this Briefing Paper. In broad terms they reflect a very high level of activity across the Country. What is clear however is that there is no single national approach to the environmental actions of the CDBs. In addition, it is evident that the availability of resources to undertake environmental actions is heavily influenced by the resource capacity within local government rather than the broader social and state partnership framework that might be expected given the make up of the Boards.

This is a matter for concern in light of expected economic conditions and the pressures arising on local government. It also is indicative of a perception among the state agency pillar on the Boards that sustainability issues remain a principle concern for the local government and local development pillars. This is borne out from discussions with a number of Board Members from that constituency. The consideration of sustainable development at the local level needs therefore to move from the internal policy process of local government to include the wider local development and state agency constituencies represented on the Boards.

Nonetheless, it is worth reflecting on the key findings of the questionnaire process given that it is based on a comprehensive response from the Directors of Community and Enterprise.

ADDRESSING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AS A PART OF ON-GOING CDB ACTIVITY

- The Principles of Sustainable Development⁹ as enumerated by both national and UNCED policies have been embedded into the Strategies of all the responding Boards.
- In general, specific issues in regard to sustainability are raised on a project basis at the meetings as required, of some Boards. For example, in County Carlow the Board recently considered the establishment of a sustainable energy forum whilst they are also working with the Carlow Kilkenny Energy Agency on preparing a climate change strategy.
- Alternatively, some Boards have an on-going reporting process for individual specific objectives, including sustainability. These reports are issued by a sub-committee of the relevant Board. Such committees have been specifically established to address implementation of the individual priorities of the relevant Boards.
- A number of Boards have identified specific environmental issues as priorities and have set up sub-committees to oversee implementation. In South Dublin, for example, the Board has established a Local Agenda 21 Group which addresses a range of environmental issues including the raising of awareness on sustainability in the wider local population. In Longford, the Board has established a 'Building Local Communities' Task Group which oversees implementation of village and town enhancement programmes, and networks environmental stakeholders. This task group reports back at each CDB meeting. In Dun Laoghaire Rathdown the Board proffers all proposed actions during its Review periods, for impact on sustainable development (i.e. quality of life of the next generation).
- A limited number of Boards do not have environmental sustainability matters as a regular feature on their agenda but such matters are raised from time to time.

CURRENT AWARENESS ROLE ON ENVIRONMENTAL MATTERS

- A number of Boards have a specific awareness raising role on environmental matters. These relate to awareness of a cross-agency nature and do not relate directly to informing the wider public. This approach provides a model that would be relevant across all Boards in regard to the local implementation of the renewed National Sustainable Development Strategy.
- In general, research to date suggests that the primary awareness role on environmental matters for the wider public should be through the relevant local authority. The CDB would however provide the ideal institutional setting for the Local Authority to raise issues of a multi-Agency nature.

⁹ Comhar SDC published Principles of Sustainable Development in 2001

- It is also important to note that, of all areas of focus for CDBs, the environment is the area that already has the greatest amount of statutory responsibility imposed on specific organisations, particularly local authorities. These organisations and the regulations that govern them incorporate significant consultation and participation processes into their activities already. The extent to which CDB input would add significantly to such processes is not clear. The CDB should only consider taking on an awareness role where there is a clear benefit from having all the relevant partners at Board level involved.
- A number of Boards (e.g. Limerick City) have prepared profiles which aid a shared understanding of the environmental conditions pertaining to the relevant County/City.

INTER-AGENCY LINKAGES ADDRESSING SUSTAINABILITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS

- In general, those Boards having a sub-committee structure addressing environmental matters have structured them to include broad inter-agency membership.
- Those Boards having a Local Agenda 21 process also provide for multi-agency membership.
- Several Boards are also seeking to include a sustainability approach to the work of other committees that are not directly addressing social inclusion or the environment.

CONSIDERATION OF LOCAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT ISSUES AT NATIONAL POLICY LEVEL

- There are mixed views in regard to local input into national policy development. In regard to particular projects the views suggest that there is scope to enter into dialogue with the Department.
- Opinions have been expressed that more work needs to be undertaken to highlight the importance and necessity of encouraging and facilitating sustainability at local and national level though the provision of guidelines for the local level.
- The establishment of the inter-departmental committee for the Development Boards is seen as an opportunity to improve dialogue on broader policy issues such as sustainable development.

COMMUNICATION OF NATIONAL POLICY INITIATIVES ON SUSTAINABILITY

- There is limited dialogue between the Department and the Boards on national policy matters relating to the environment. This gap could become an area for Comhar SDC to address having regard for the renewed National Sustainable Development Strategy.
- A number of Boards are kept informed through the relevant local authority in regard to sustainability/environmental matters. This should become a feature for all Boards through regular reporting by the Environment and Planning SPC Chairs in regard to progress on policy by those SPCs. Such an approach would also encourage better linkages and exchange of information between the two structures.
- A number of Boards have and will continue to prepare relevant policy submissions to the national authorities. The establishment of the Inter-departmental Committee should facilitate greater dialogue in this regard. Comhar should seek to input to the Inter-Departmental Committee as required.

LINKING OF ENVIRONMENT & PLANNING SPCs TO THE CDB

- The principal linkage between the Boards and the SPCs is via the Chairs of the Environment and Planning SPCs who sit on all Boards.
- In a limited number of instances the Director for Community and Enterprise also is responsible for environmental services in the relevant local authority.
- A number of SPCs have asked Boards to consider particular issues of concern e.g. in South Tipperary the Transport SPC is currently working with the LA21 Group to ascertain if an integrated public transport system can be rolled out for South Tipperary on a pilot basis.
- In considering the possible establishment of a sub committee the Boards should examine the possibility of using the Environment SPC as the basis for such a Committee.

AVOIDANCE OF DUPLICATION/OVERLAP WITH THE ENVIRONMENT SPC

- The establishment of an Environment Sub-committee should be a decision to be taken at local level.
- The mandate of the SPC should be to focus on policy applying directly to the statutory role of the local authority.
- The mandate for any possible environment sub committee must be set by the Board following direct consultation with the Environment SPC.

- The Environment SPC should be positioned to request a Board to address an environmental issue that would be inter-agency in nature.
- The Chair of the Environment SPC should be the Chair of the Environment sub-committee, if a decision is taken to have a separate committee.
- Minutes from both Committees, if relevant, should be shared.
- An annual work programme for the Committee should be agreed with the Environment SPC.

SPECIFIC SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT POLICY/STRATEGY

- As acknowledged above all the Strategies make specific reference to the issue of sustainability and all reviews undertaken to date suggest that the environment is a central pillar of the work of the Boards.
- The importance of the County Development Plan and other Statutory Documents is noted.
- There is the suggestion that the Boards would need to have an expanded role in the framing of policies on planning so if any committees are established they should be consulted in this regard.
- A number of Boards/Local Authorities have or are preparing Climate Change/Energy Strategies , for example Donegal County Development Board has produced guidelines on energy saving for local households;
- Internal implementation of sustainability actions in several local authorities are specifically provided for in their corporate/business planning. (e.g. in Mayo County Council the Corporate Plan and each of the operational plans of the Council are underpinned by a commitment to sustainable development, while in the Louth Local Authorities ISO 14001 Accreditation is implemented, supported and monitored by the Senior Management Team).

USE OF ENVIRONMENTAL INDICATORS BY THE BOARDS

- A number of Boards have environmental indicators in place. For example South Dublin County Council has established a Quality of life Mapping Project on an Inter-Agency basis which will result in relevant indicators being produced to track progress across a range of areas covering Sustainable Development issues. Fingal Development Board has developed the Data Hub, an internet-based data sharing mechanism which has been developed by the Board and which is currently being populated with Fingal specific data supplied by the member agencies. Fingal CDB also used the Comhar SDC Principles for Sustainable Development in developing its Integrated Strategy.

- A number of Boards have decided not to apply resources to the preparation of indicators and receive data from their members in regard to particular reporting on priorities.

Environmental NGOs

- A number of counties/cities have a specific forum for environmental issues. (For example in Cork City and County the Cork Environmental Forum) Others have an environment stream on the Community and Voluntary forum.
- A number of Boards operate a general membership approach to the Fora and have environmental NGOs represented.
- Several Boards have allocated a specific representation role for Environmental NGOs on their Committees.

Sustainability awareness on Boards

- Progress reports to Board meetings on the area of sustainable development in the relevant County/City by the Director for the Environment could be considered.
- Greater interaction and debate on influencing areas of emerging national policy would need to be facilitated by greater communication on such issues from the national level.
- A number of Boards invite external experts to brief them on environmental and other matters.
- A number of Boards organise site visits to sustainability projects.
- A number of Boards offer a programme of workshops to the internal staffs of member organisations.

NOMINATION PROCESSES TO COMMITTEES

- The precise nature/mandate of an environment sub-committee should determine the membership.
- It has been suggested that in the event of a sub-committee being established the membership should be drawn from those who can give actual effect to policy change and deliverable action at the local level.
- Possible establishment of an environment strand for the Community and Voluntary Forum may need to be considered.

EXISTING GOOD PRACTICE

- Wide range of existing good practice, e.g.:
 - Area based approach to socio-economic development in Cork County.
 - Forest link in Donegal.
 - Fingal Data Hub.
 - Laois Local agenda 21 Group.
 - Sustainable Communities Environmental Project Longford.
 - Mayo Community Futures.
 - Dun Laoghaire Rathdown Envirocom Awards.
- There is a need to provide more opportunities for learning and sharing experience on sustainability matters across the Boards. This will in part be facilitated in the forthcoming review process.

ACTIONS SUGGESTED BY THE DIRECTORS TO UNDERPIN THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT POLICY PROCESS AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

- Sharing of experience across Boards on innovative sustainability projects should be addressed.
- A Sustainability Challenge fund established under the Environment Fund at national level which could be applied for by Development Boards would be useful in progressing initiatives preferably providing funding on a multi-annual basis.
- At national level, senior political and senior management support is needed to support integrated working and coordinated policy responses.
- Guidance and direction on relevant environmental issues from the DEHLG to the Boards may be necessary. Comhar SDC could have a role in this regard.
- Development of best practice guidelines at national level on Sustainability [Environmental Issues] should be considered.
- Annual Conferences with national/ international speakers could be organised for Board members.
- A clear mandate for CDBs should be conferred in the Renewed National Sustainable Development Strategy. This should be quite specific on the role to

be played by CDBs in relation to other agencies. Such areas might include Climate Change Strategy, Bio-diversity, Public Transport, Education and Awareness.

ACTIONS TO UNDERPIN THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT POLICY PROCESS AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

- Provision of a training and awareness programme for the Boards to clarify and establish their role and to identify priorities in association with the members of the relevant SPCs.
- Introduction of Environmental proofing of actions (for example in Fingal Sustainability proofing has been suggested using the Sustainable Development Principles issued by Comhar).

3.3 OVERVIEW OF CONSULTATION MEETINGS

Meetings with the Environment and Community and Enterprise sub-committees of the County and City Managers Association were organised through the Office for Local Authority Management. The key messages from the two meetings include:

- There is an on-going need to underpin the SPCs including in relation to their work on environmental issues. Any recommendations in this Briefing Paper should acknowledge this and seek to avoid recommending any actions which would impede development of the SPC structures.
- There is a concern that there is a limited national appreciation of the range and extent of actions to underpin sustainable development at the local level.
- The demand for local government resources is an on-going challenge and this is likely to become more critical in current economic conditions. Many of the existing initiatives on sustainability are dependent on the limited discretionary resources of the authorities and are therefore more likely to be subject to restriction in the current economic environment.
- Clear direction from central government is required in regard to moving the state agencies and others into more sustainable practices at the local level. In addition, direction in regard to their role on the Boards is a necessary requirement if the Boards are to move forward on matters such as sustainability.
- Clear concern was expressed on the on-going expectations that the community and voluntary sector could continue to contribute to the local policy process given the resource constraints under which this sector operates. Moves to expand the

CDB role in regard to sustainability must recognise the existing level of participation demands being placed on this particular pillar.

- In light of these range of issues it may be more appropriate to use the Environment/Planning SPCs to address CDB sustainability priorities. However, a mechanism to allow for more input/response from the state agencies will be necessary if such an approach is adopted.

3.4 OVERVIEW OF FACE TO FACE MEETINGS

A series of face to face meetings with representatives of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government were organised during the research process. A limited number of meetings with actual members of individual Boards were also organised. The key messages from these meetings include:

- Need to ensure that any proposed CDB sub-committees would not in any way duplicate the work of the Environment and Planning SPCs.
- Need appropriate acknowledgement of the role of the new National CDB Co-ordination Group
- Need to acknowledge the current economic conditions and the recommendations of the Indecon Report and the OECD Report.
- There was an acknowledgement of the usefulness of the Board in underpinning local inter-agency work and there may be a need to further underpin this in regard to sustainable development.
- Need to explore the role of the Boards in the roll out of the renewed National Sustainable Development Strategy.
- The State Agencies at local level operate to a national/regional mandate. While there may be a willingness to engage in more inter-agency work at the local level (indeed the consultees indicated that there was a strong case for such an approach) they must operate to national agency requirements and business planning. Any approach to sustainability must therefore be signalled to them by their national Departments/Agencies.
- There are constant demands placed on local state agency representatives to sit on various local committees. The introduction of a CDB economic sub-committee will increase such demands and would be seen as unnecessarily increasing the burden on such agencies.

4.1**INTRODUCTION**

In broad terms the research suggests that there is a varied and substantial level of local activity on sustainable development issues. It must also be acknowledged that the CDB County/City Strategies already go a considerable distance to addressing sustainable development at the local level. This combination of local action and an agreed strategy provides a quality platform on which the embedding of sustainability into the local business planning of many of the local and state agencies can take place. The key issues that need to be addressed to underpin the progress to date are based on the research and as such inform the recommendations of this Briefing Paper. While it is very important to acknowledge the progress to date it is equally important to seek to identify gaps which can be addressed within existing institutional arrangements. These issues can be set within a local and a national context as follows.

4.2**LOCAL ISSUES**

- Need to address the inputs of the non local government pillars into local priorities set by the Boards.
- Need to build on existing local government structures i.e. Environment and Planning Strategic Policy Committees in each local authority.
- Need to address the level of resources available to underpin demonstration actions, pilot programmes and innovation in the area of sustainability.
- Need to communicate lessons across the local arena and between the various sectors making up the Boards.
- Need to underpin the role of the Community and Voluntary Forum in each city/county with the option of creating an environment strand to parallel the social disadvantage strand in each forum
- Need to establish more inter-action between the national and local levels regarding implementation of the renewed National Sustainable Development Strategy through the DEHLG and Comhar SDC.
- Need to underpin best local practice through information sharing and networking across CDBs.

- Need to ensure on-going liaison between the relevant sections of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government including, Environment, Planning and Local Government.
- Need to underpin the role of the Environment and Planning SPCs to allow for more interaction between the SPCs and the CDBs.

4.3

NATIONAL ISSUES

- Need to ensure that the scope for dialogue between Comhar SDC and the DEHLG is addressed in the context of the renewed National Sustainable Development Strategy.
- Need to set direction for the State and other agencies represented on the Boards in regard to the renewed National Sustainable Development Strategy.
- Need to underpin roll out of the renewed National Strategy through awareness and training for elected members and officials of local authorities and through the Boards for other non local government members.
- Need for DEHLG to provide direction on a needs basis as new policy is developed for implementation through local inter-agency processes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1

INTRODUCTION

In line with the Minister's objectives there must be a focus by CDBs on clear sustainability principles and tangible actions to underpin more sustainable lifestyles. These must be set within the framework of the forthcoming review of the National Sustainable Development Strategy. The thematic focus of the National Sustainable Development Strategy should inform the work programme of the Boards.

Therefore this Briefing Paper recommends that the CDBs be encouraged to build upon existing local structures, most notably the Environment and Planning SPCs in each local authority. The Chairs of each (who already sit on the Boards) should be requested to present regular updates on the work programmes of the SPCs to the Boards.

Given the significance of climate change to the future socio-economic context at local level the Boards could consider this area as a focus for future consideration in line with any guidance from the DEHLG. .

Those Boards which have a specific environment committee in place should review the need to continue with such a committee having regard to new priorities. Where Boards wish to continue with such a committee, they should be free to do so.

NGO Environment Groups are integrated into local policy structures through the Environment SPC. A separate strand for such groups should not be necessary within the Community and Voluntary Fora.

5.2

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

- There should be no duplication of the work between the Environment SPCs and other existing environment based initiatives, including consultation mechanisms, of the CDBs.
- Rather than setting up new CDB environment sub-committees, the linkages between the CDBs and the Environment and Planning Strategic Policy Committees should be strengthened. This could be done, for example, through appropriate reporting mechanisms on environment and sustainability issues, between the CDBs and SPCs. This could include annual reporting on relevant environmental matters and the work programme of the environment and planning SPCs to each CDB.

- Any existing Environment Committee/Local Agenda 21 Committee operating under the aegis of the CDB or under the remit of the local authority, should be continued, having regard to local circumstances and the current review of priorities by each CDB. However, as a matter of principle, no new committee structures should be put in place.
- Comhar SDC and the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government should examine the development of an appropriate training and education programme for local government officials and elected members in the context of the renewed National Sustainability Strategy. There should be ongoing liaison between the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and Comhar SDC in regard to supporting CDBs to integrate environment and sustainability issues into their work in the context of the strengthened linkages with SPCs and the renewed National Sustainability Strategy.
- The newly elected member training programme, for delivery following the forthcoming Local Elections, should include a sustainable development module based on the renewed national strategy.
- In the event of publication of the renewed National Sustainable Development Strategy, the CDBs should be given a specific task to underpin its implementation through local actions to be delivered on a multi-agency basis at the local level. Such actions could include:
 - Information seminars for the constituent members and their local organisations; this would be of particular importance in regard to the communication of the objectives of the renewed National Sustainable Development Strategy to the relevant pillars of each CDB;
 - Awareness raising and capacity building initiatives for the wider community, in collaboration with other agencies (e.g. local energy agencies, county and city partnerships), where appropriate. Such initiatives should address the thematic priorities in the renewed National Strategy, e.g. energy conservation/efficiency, sustainable consumption and climate change;
 - the undertaking of pilot/demonstration actions relating to implementation of the Strategy at the local level.

ANNEX A

COUNTY AND CITY DEVELOPMENT BOARDS: ROLE AND COMPOSITION OF PROPOSED NEW ENVIRONMENT SUB-COMMITTEES-PREPARATION OF BRIEFING PAPER AND GUIDELINES

Sean O’Riordain and Associates have been retained by Comhar SDC in conjunction with the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, to examine how the County and City Development Boards can help deliver the sustainable development agenda at the local level through the Boards’ proposed new environment sub-committees. The research work will include examination of the role and composition of the sub-committees... It will also address how these committees could best integrate with existing local arrangements including, in particular, the Environment Strategic Policy Committees in each county/city local authority, to ensure complementarity.

Sean O’Riordain and Associates will report to the Steering Group for the research project which includes representatives of Comhar SDC and the Department.

As part of this research a questionnaire has been prepared for completion by Directors of Service for Community and Enterprise. The objective of the questionnaire is to identify any particular concerns that will need to be addressed in any future guidance to be issued to the Directors in regard to the establishment of the proposed committees. In addition it will help the consultant to understand the existing arrangements in regard to sustainable development that may be in place.

In addition to the completion of this questionnaire, Directors are also requested to forward copies of the minutes of their last two Board meetings. **Sean O’Riordain and Associates** would be grateful to receive any documents Directors may consider to be relevant to the issue of sustainable development and which may have been prepared by/for their Board in the past number of years. As part of the consultation process, a representative group of Directors will be invited to attend a workshop in Tullamore on 1 October. Those invited, on the basis of nomination by the County and City Managers Association will receive further separate correspondence in this regard shortly.

A key aspect to the research to be completed will be to have regard for what can realistically be delivered through the Boards over the final period of the current county/city strategy i.e. to 2012. It is likely therefore that existing best practice will be a critical platform on which appropriate guidance can be based. In that regard it would be appreciated if you can point to any such practice.

The completed questionnaire should be returned by Monday 22nd September 2008 to Sean O’Riordain at the following address:

Email; SEAN.M.ORIORDAIN@nuim.ie

Any material to be forwarded through the postal service should be addressed to
Sean O’Riordain and Associates,
27 Seabury Park,
Malahide,
County Dublin

Many thanks
Sean O’Riordain

Name of person completing questionnaire:

Name of Development Board:

5.3

ADDRESSING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AS A PART OF ON-GOING CDB ACTIVITY

1. Please set out the Board’s approach to addressing Sustainable Development. e.g. Is it a regular agenda item?

2. Please identify the key positions within the local authority that have a responsibility for Sustainability/Environmental Policy Development;

3. Does the CDB have an environmental awareness raising role? If so, describe briefly the extent to which the Board embeds an understanding of sustainability into its constituent member organisations?

Yes

☐

No

☐

4. Please outline arrangements, if any, for inter-agency linkages addressing sustainability and specifically environmental awareness levels through the Board and its sub-committees?

5. Are you satisfied that local sustainable development issues feed into/are considered at national policy level?

Yes

☐

No

☐

If no, how can they be improved?

6. Are national policy initiatives on sustainability communicated to you for consideration by the Board?

Yes ☐

No ☐

If yes, describe briefly how this operates

7. Is the policy development process of the Environment SPC of the Local Authority linked with the work of the Board?

Yes ☐

No ☐

If yes, describe briefly how this operates

8. In what way could the CDB Environment sub-committee be best linked with the work of the Environment Strategic Policy Committee to avoid duplication/overlap?

9. Does your Local Authority or any of the constituent members of the Board have a specific sustainable development policy/strategy? If yes could this(ese) be enclosed with the returned questionnaire?

Yes ☐

No ☐

10. If the answer to the above question is yes could you describe briefly how the strategy is implemented e.g. are the strategic objectives of the strategy embedded into the operational planning of the Council?

11. Does the Board have specific indicators it uses to measure progress on dealing with Sustainable Development?

Yes ☐

No ☐

If yes, please describe these indicators

12. Is there a specific forum for Environmental NGOs in the county/city or are they one of a number represented on the Community and Voluntary Forum?

13. In your opinion what is required to raise awareness on sustainability among the member's organisations of the Board?

14. What areas of responsibility within the local authority, in your opinion would benefit from a direct sustainable development focus?

15. Who, in your opinion should be asked to nominate non governmental environment representatives onto a possible environment sub-committee?

16. Has the Board any examples of good practice in regard to addressing sustainable development at the local level?

5.4

ACTIONS TO UNDERPIN THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT POLICY PROCESS AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

1. What, if any, supports/resources/training do you think is required over the next three years to ensure that the local priorities identified by the Board, in regard to sustainability, can be met?

i) At the local level

ii) At the national level

Thank You.