

**MINUTES OF THE INTER DEPARTMENTAL STEERING GROUP MEETING  
REVIEW OF THE REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY  
WEDNESDAY 28 MAY 2008**

**Present:**

Minister Conor Murphy

Stephen McGlade	-	Special Advisor
Paul Priestly	-	Permanent Secretary - DRD
Jim Mackinnon	-	Scottish Executive
John Martin	-	Irish Government
June Ingram	-	DEL
David Ferguson	-	DSD
Ronnie Jordan	-	DARD
Alan Maitland	-	OFMDFM
Martin Spollen	-	SIB
Edgar Jardine	-	DCAL
Richard Pengelly	-	DFP
Paul Simpson	-	DOE
Cynthia Smith	-	DOE
Mark Pinkerton	-	DETI
John McGrath	-	DE
Mike Thompson	-	DRD
Ian Raphael	-	DRD
Jim Hetherington	-	DRD
Pauline McParland	-	Secretariat

**Guest Speakers:**

Jim Mackinnon	-	Scottish Executive
John Martin	-	Irish Government

**Apologies:**

Greg McConnell	-	DEL
John McMillan	-	OFMDFM
David Gavaghan	-	SIB
David Sterling	-	DETI

**1. Introduction and Apologies**

Minister Conor Murphy welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made. He thanked Jim Mackinnon and John Martin for attending to offer their experience and advice on the important exercise of the major review of the RDS.

## **2. Welcome by Minister**

The Minister emphasised the importance of the major review and how he and his Department are committed to producing a revised RDS which will take forward the spatial aspects of the Programme for Government and its key objective to promote economic development. It will also reflect key strategies such as the Sustainable Development Strategy and the Regional Economic Strategy and it will set the framework for the next generation of plans. It will also provide strategic guidance of relevance for the next Investment Strategy.

As it is an overarching strategic document its importance was recognised by all Ministers at an Executive meeting in April and an Executive Sub Group has been set up to take this work forward.

The RDS is not a DRD document as it deals with a range of issues which impact on all Departments. Implementation of the Strategy will therefore be important.

Paul Priestly supported the Minister's comments. He will normally chair the IDSG meetings and he looked forward to working with all Departments.

## **3. Presentation by Mike Thompson on Issues for Major Review of the RDS**

Mike Thompson presented an overview of what had and had not worked in the Strategy. He highlighted the changes that have taken place since the Strategy was first produced and trends in relation to demographics, housing, economy, employment, the environment, and transport. He identified issues that now needed to be taken account of, such as growing and changing population, regional balance, urban regeneration, education, health, RPA and better alignment of government programmes. He emphasised the importance of external linkages between the north and south of Ireland and between east and west.

## **4. Spatial Strategies in Scotland and the South of Ireland**

Jim Mackinnon explained the first National Planning Framework for Scotland was without any legal or statutory basis and it has no policies. It is quite a sharply focused document that unfortunately did not make much of an impact. National infrastructure developments, such as waste, rail lines, flood prevention etc were chosen carefully and given special status for planning purposes. Housing targets were excluded from the Framework as the intention was for Scotland to grow. The document is not an end in itself but a means to an end. In relation to 'rural issues' he advised to think more about what the RDS should be saying in relation to the spatial dimension of rural issues and not to just insert what is in the Rural White Paper.

The second Framework is now being prepared and it will be subject to Assembly scrutiny and approval. It is being driven by a Minister as political champion. This second Framework will be focussed on delivering economic

objectives, important infrastructure developments and meeting the needs of communities away from the Central Belt of Scotland. The second framework must now be taken into account by regional planning authorities preparing new plans.

John Martin explained the National Spatial Strategy was produced in 2002 and the whole of Government bought into it. He advised that the revised RDS should be strategic and high level and not prescriptive. Housing figures have not been set in the NSS. The Strategy is implemented through 7-8 Regional Planning Guidelines and these guidelines shape the planning process. The north/south dynamics is now being taken account of.

## **5. Discussion by Group**

The Group discussed a number of issues around the presentation and the points made by Jim Mackinnon and John Martin. In summary the discussion centred around the following –

- The RDS needs Ministerial commitment and support. It cannot be driven by officials
- The RDS should have a strategic focus and set a clear high-level vision for the North as a place
- The RDS should address how for example infrastructure development will be supported and delivered
- The RDS should have an implementation and delivery plan which is fully supported and agreed by all Departments
- The RDS needs to focus on developments of regional significance, including transport, environmental issues, telecommunications, energy and other infrastructure developments
- The RDS must make things happen – rather than act as a restraint on development.
- The RDS should avoid being overly directive or prescriptive. For example, in Scotland the spatial plan excluded housing figures, on the basis that no useful purpose would be served in setting artificial targets and limits.
- The RDS needs to respect the future role envisaged for Councils in producing Community Development Plans.
- The RDS should provide a clear strategic context for issues that are for Councils to consider and decide in their local development plans.
- The RDS must be effectively integrated with the Budget, Programme for Government and the Investment Strategy.
- The RDS should be subject to a process of Assembly scrutiny. Having been endorsed by the Executive and Assembly, it should not have to go through a public inquiry or other formal planning process. The National Planning Framework in Scotland and the National Spatial Strategy for Ireland were not subject to a public inquiry.

## **6. Any other business**

Discussion took place on the role of the Inter Departmental Steering Group as the major review process rolls forward. Concern was expressed at how much impact the Group would have and that buy in at official level depends on political lead.

Paul Priestly expressed the view that if the revised Strategy is going to be taken seriously it is important to win hearts and minds. While not everyone carries the same weight it is better to have all Departments represented at senior level in the group than being on the outside.

Minister Conor Murphy explained that the Executive had agreed a Ministerial Sub Group should be set up to oversee the review of the RDS. Some Sub-Groups operate better than others and Ministers have indicated they are keen to be involved. More money is being spent now than ever before and it is important to have joined up thinking and mature agreement.

In conclusion Paul Priestly thanked everyone for their constructive views. He also extended thanks to Jim Mackinnon and John Martin for their time and advice and he hoped to be able to engage with them further as the review of the Strategy progresses.

The date of the next meeting is to be arranged.

**PAULINE McPARLAND**  
**Secretariat**

**15 October 2008**