

# STRATEGIC PLANNING GROUP

## MINUTES OF MEETING Thursday 5 October 2023 at 10.30am by Microsoft Teams

<b>ATTENDEES:</b>	
Alistair Beggs	Chief Planner & Director, DfI Regional Planning Policy & Casework
Kathryn McFerran	Acting Director, DfI Regional Planning Governance & Legislation
Scott Symington	Senior Principal, DfI Regional Planning Governance & Legislation
██████████	Director of Prosperity, Ards & North Down
██████████	Lead Planner, Fermanagh & Omagh
██████████	Planning Manager, Derry City & Strabane
██████████	Planning Manager, Causeway Coast & Glens
██████████	Planning Manager, Lisburn & Castlereagh
██████████	Planning Manager, Antrim & Newtownabbey
██████████	Service Manager, Mid Ulster
██████████	Planning Manager, Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon
██████████	NILGA
██████████	Planning Manager, Mid & East Antrim
<b>In Attendance:</b>	
Fiona McGrady	Principal, DfI Regional Planning Governance & Legislation
██████████	DfI Regional Planning Governance & Legislation (minutes)

<b>1.</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>Actions</b>
1.1	Alistair welcomed everyone to the meeting.	
<b>2.</b>	<b>Minutes and action points from the previous meeting</b>	
2.1	The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed. Alistair ran through the action points.	

	<p>Action point 1 – Meeting with the PAC on the policy approach to flood responses will be arranged shortly.</p> <p>Action point 2 – there has been no update yet from [REDACTED] [REDACTED] re the reservoir policy.</p> <p>Action point 3 – Kathryn had a constructive meeting with NIW and is meeting NIEA shortly. NIW keen to speak to councils and the Department will suggest to NIEA that they and NIW both attend next SPG in January.</p> <p>Action point 4 – nothing yet from local government on performance. [REDACTED] not in attendance.</p> <p>Action point 5 – RenewableNI are happy to facilitate a session on BESS to which DfI and council reps can be invited. The Department will set up a meeting.</p> <p>Apologies were received from [REDACTED], Susan Wilkin and [REDACTED] [REDACTED]</p>	<p>AP1</p> <p>AP2</p>
<b>3.</b>	<b>Local government issues</b>	
3.1	<p><b>Consultee delays</b></p> <p>There followed a discussion on consultee delays, mainly referring to NIEA and NIW. [REDACTED] welcomed DfI's engagement with both bodies. The issue of prioritisation needed to be raised with NIEA and the issues of delays and the use of negative conditions with NIW.</p> <p>[REDACTED] mentioned that NIEA delays are often caused by them waiting to respond as a group rather than sending individual responses which can then be acted upon sooner.</p> <p>[REDACTED] mentioned that councils may be forced to bring in consultants which would be expensive.</p> <p>Scott suggested that the issue of prioritisation should be raised again at the Planning Statutory Consultee Forum.</p> <p>While councils are free to contact NIEA directly, Kathryn undertook to raise the above issues with them directly.</p> <p>[REDACTED] advised that political parties have been taking an interest in how the planning system is working.</p>	
3.2	<p><b>Guidance/JMS for LG</b></p> <p>[REDACTED] raised the issue of a lack of guidance in relation to the joint ministerial statement (JMS) for local government. Alistair advised that the key principles of the JMS remain. [REDACTED] asked</p>	

	for clarification on withdrawal of the JMS or the issuing of guidance. Alistair advised that there is currently no intention to withdraw the JMS. He will consider the way forward.	<b>AP3</b>
3.3	<p><b>Environmental governance issues</b></p> <p>Kathryn advised that the Department has engaged with NIEA on the ammonia issue but had no update on timeframes.</p> <p>There followed a discussion about the letters pertaining to soil sampling and responsibilities for taking any action. This was on the agenda for SOLACE to discuss. Local government suggested that NIEA should be in the lead and should deal with the PSNI directly, rather than through the councils.</p> <p>██████████ requested an update from the Department in relation to the Teagasc investigation, which was being investigated by an "Investigation Oversight Group". He also asked why, when this approach has worked well for the Teagasc investigation, was a different approach being taken to the soil samples.</p> <p>Concern was expressed with regard to the recent NIAO document on planning fraud. ██████████ wanted it recorded that local government are not content with the document and asked that NIAO be written to and invited to a meeting with them. Alistair undertook to consider the issues and write to NIAO on their behalf.</p> <p>Scott advised that the Department's draft DMPN on screening for EIA should issue soon and it will have a section on 'transboundary' issues.</p>	<b>AP4</b>
<b>4.</b>	<b>Planning improvement programme</b>	
4.1	<p>Kathryn provided an update. The validation checklist is currently with DSO. The Commission has met 3 times and they are looking at their role and work programme. Scott has issued a paper on the 'late submission of information' action.</p> <p>Kathryn asked that the progress templates be completed and returned and that some workstreams still need leads added.</p>	
<b>5.</b>	<b>Planning Appeals Commission</b>	
5.1	There was a discussion on the issue of the PAC and resources. While the Department can appoint outside people, there were issues of resources and timescales. Alistair advised that nothing had been ruled out and he appreciated the comments made.	
<b>6.</b>	<b>AOB</b>	
6.1	Alistair mentioned the RTPPI questionnaire and encouraged participation.	

<b>7.</b>	<b>Date of next meeting</b>	
7.1	The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday 18 January 2024.	

### Summary of Action Points

<b>No.</b>	<b>Detail</b>	<b>Action Owner</b>
<b>AP1</b>	The Department will suggest to NIEA that they and NIW both attend next SPG in January.  <b>To be taken forward through the Planning Statutory Consultee Forum.</b>	<b>Dfl</b>
<b>AP2</b>	The Department will set up a meeting with LG and RenewableNI to discuss BESS.  <b>Workshop on BESS being set up.</b>	<b>Dfl</b>
<b>AP3</b>	The Department will consider the issues around the joint ministerial statement (JMS) for local government.  <b>Still under consideration.</b>	<b>Dfl</b>
<b>AP4</b>	Concern was expressed with regard to the recent NIAO document on planning fraud. Alistair undertook to consider the issues and write to NIAO.  <b>Complete. Letter sent to NIAO who have agreed to attend January SPG.</b>	<b>Dfl</b>