

From the Permanent Secretary
Katrina Godfrey



Our reference: SSUB-0371-2023

Natalie Prosser
Chief Executive
Office for Environmental Protection
Wildwood
Wildwood Drive
Worcester
WR5 2QT

Office of the Permanent Secretary
First Floor
Clare House
303 Airport Road West
Belfast
BT3 9ED
Telephone: 028 9052 4608
Email: perm.sec@daera-ni.gov.uk

4 January 2024

Dear Natalie

REVIEW OF DECISION TO DEFER PUBLICATION OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

In my letter of 11 September, I advised you of my decision to defer the publication of the draft Environment Strategy and its adoption as Northern Ireland's first Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP). I also gave a commitment that the matter would be kept under review and that the Department would formally review the decision within 3 months.

I am writing to advise that this process has now been completed and to let you know the outcome. I am conscious that I am doing so a month later than originally envisaged but I did want to take account of the possibility that ministers may have returned before Christmas and reached their own decisions.

As you know, the original decision to defer publication was a very difficult one and only reached after careful consideration of all the material facts and after giving careful regard to the provisions of the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc.) Act 2022 and its associated guidance.

The review that has been carried out considered all of the material factors that informed the original decision and again tested them against the principles for decision-making, with specific consideration of what, if anything, might have changed in the intervening period that might allow a decision to be taken rather than deferred.

Sustainability at the heart of a living, working, active landscape valued by everyone.

If you are deaf or have a hearing difficulty you can contact the Department via the Next Generation Text Relay Service by dialling 18001 + telephone number.



After careful consideration, the outcome of the review is that the conditions necessary to allow a new environment strategy to be approved and adopted as an EIP cannot be met at this time. In the absence of ministers, it remains my judgement that it is not appropriate for officials to introduce what would clearly be a new, major policy with significant new public expenditure commitments.

I would like to have been able to reach a different conclusion and remain firmly of the view that the public interest is best served by having an ambitious strategy for protecting and enhancing our environment, one that is rooted in and supported by a new Executive's Programme for Government and that has the necessary political support to ensure its resourcing and implementation.

I remain hopeful that we will be in a position to welcome ministers in the coming weeks and can assure you that officials here and across other relevant departments continue to work hard to ensure that we have ready for a new DAERA Minister's consideration and for presentation to a new Executive an ambitious, evidence-informed environment strategy. In the event that ministers are not in place, the decision to defer approval of a new strategy and its adoption as the EIP will be kept under review, with the next formal review completed at the end of March 2024 (or sooner if circumstances change). In the meantime, officials here will keep in close touch with the OEP to continue our constructive engagement on this and other relevant matters and to ensure that you receive reports on the environmental work programme we now have in place.

I remain grateful for the OEP's understanding of the challenging situation facing DAERA officials and those in and other NI departments as we continue to operate without ministers and am, of course, happy to discuss further the contents of this letter if helpful.

Yours sincerely



KATRINA GODFREY

Sustainability at the heart of a living, working, active landscape valued by everyone.

If you are deaf or have a hearing difficulty you can contact the Department via the Next Generation Text Relay Service by dialling 18001 + telephone number.

