

EQUALITY COMMISSION FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

Final response to Department of the Environment Policy Paper Statement 21: sustainable development in the countryside

April 2009

1. Purpose of the paper

This paper updates Commissioners on the Commission's final submission to The Planning Service (Department of the Environment) on Planning Policy Statement 21: Sustainable Development in the Countryside (PPS 21).

2. Background

PPS 21 replaces PPS 14, relating to suitable and sustainable development of the rural environment in Northern Ireland. This policy response reiterates equality concerns relating to the rural landscape that the Commission has previously voiced. We consider that a balance in policy objectives is necessary for protecting and managing the natural environment for future generations, as well as for helping to provide people living in rural communities with appropriate access to services and quality of life. Generally, the response raises issues relating to the:

- Movement from consideration of economies of scale to a social return on investment,
- Importance of addressing equality of opportunity and good relations issues – with concerns for those providing childcare, rural transport, access to public facilities, and the isolation of older people.

Furthermore, the submission makes specific comments on key policies within PPS 21.

3. Action required by Commissioners

Commissioners are asked to note the final consultation response for information.

**Public Policy Team
20 April 2009**