

Written Ministerial Statement

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Regional Development

Rathlin Island

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The Minister for Regional Development

(Mr Murphy): I am pleased to inform Assembly members that the Executive has endorsed its Policy for Rathlin Island on 25 February 2010.

Public consultation on the draft Policy concluded on 18 September 2009 with a total of 14 responses received from organisations and individuals, including a combined response from the Islanders. The responses were supportive of the overall policy and its aims and objectives and also the proposed Forum and Action Plan.

Officials from my department held a very productive and successful consultation event on Rathlin Island on 7 October 2009. The event was attended by around two thirds of the Islanders who among other things expressed a desire for a healthy community with affordable housing and education all playing their part; better roads; help for farming and fishing industry; nursing cover and efforts to keep young people on the Island. There was also the suggestion that a Rathlin brand should be created, i.e. a green island with a neutral carbon footprint; to expand the use of renewable energy and recyclables; to maximise the use of local produce; to extend the attractions beyond the puffin season; and to establish an island of festivals.

The issue of post primary education provision was identified as an additional strategic objective and has been subsequently incorporated into the policy.

Copies of the final policy are available in the Assembly Library.

Work has now commenced on the development of an Action Plan designed to implement the

policy and officials from my Department are continuing to engage and work closely with the islanders, other government departments and bodies who are all participating in its development.

I am very conscious that we will be developing the Action Plan at a time of increasing pressure on our finances. The purpose of the Action Plan is to identify priorities for the island, to make progress in addressing the needs of the islanders but also to manage their expectations.

A Forum will be established to monitor progress chaired by myself and will include island representatives and senior officials from relevant government Departments and local bodies.

I intend to make a further statement when the draft action plan has been prepared.