

**Draft Programme for Government 2008-2011**

Economic Policy Unit

E5.22

Castle Buildings

Stormont Estate

Belfast BT4 3SR

3<sup>rd</sup> January 2008

Dear Sir / Madam

**ARC21 RESPONSE TO THE DRAFT PROGRAMME FOR GOVERNMENT  
2008-2011**

Arc21 welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Draft Programme for Government 2008-2011 and attached you will find the key points we would ask you to address in the final report which is to be approved by the Executive in January 2008

We would also like to take the opportunity to express sincere thanks to the Civil Servants in sponsoring Departments (DOE/SIB/DFP/PDSU) who have worked tirelessly for many months, with arc21 and the other Waste Management Groups, to achieve such a successful outcome.

If you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact me and in the meantime I look forward to receiving the final Programme for Government 2008-2011 as soon as it is available.

Yours faithfully



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JOHN QUINN  
Chief Executive

Encl./



**DRAFT PROGRAMME FOR GOVERNMENT 2008-2011**

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**ECONOMIC POLICY UNIT  
E5.22  
CASTLE BUILDINGS  
STORMONT ESTATE  
BELFAST BT4 3SR**

**ARC21 RESPONSE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

arc21 is a collaboration of 11 Councils in the Eastern Region of Northern Ireland, incorporated as a body corporate by the Local Government (Constituting a Joint Committee a Body Corporate) Order (Northern Ireland) 2004.

The organisation is established for the purposes of implementing the policies set out in the Waste Management Plan for the disposal and recovery of waste, in compliance with the EC Waste Framework Directive, the Waste and Contaminated Land (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 and the Northern Ireland Waste Management Strategy. This includes the procurement of critical waste infrastructure on behalf of the eleven Constituent Councils.

The eleven constituent Councils of arc21 are Antrim Borough Council, Ards Borough Council, Ballymena Borough Council, Belfast City Council, Castlereagh Borough Council, Carrickfergus Borough Council, Down District Council, Larne Borough Council, Lisburn City Council, Newtownabbey Borough Council and North Down Borough Council.

## COMMENTS ON THE CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

arc21 welcome the positive proposals outlined by Government in its first Draft Programme for Government 2008-11.

The approach adopted throughout the document is very positive with the key theme of a better future for all in Northern Ireland principally through growing a dynamic innovative economy, as we enter a new era in our history.

Waste Management will also significantly contribute to a better future. The large scale waste infrastructure, currently being proposed to treat municipal residual waste, is of a scale in value, and contract length, unprecedented in Northern Ireland and will generate significant economic benefits.

After many years of Local Government lobbying for the same degree of support for waste as that provided by Central Government in other Administrations, it is very encouraging to see the marked increase in the level of support now proposed. Given the significance of the funding package proposed we would recommend that reference is made to waste management infrastructure in the **“PRIORITY : INVEST TO BUILD OUR INFRASTRUCTURE”** section.

The key issue for Waste in Northern Ireland is Statutory Compliance, the cost of which is agreed by the key stakeholders to be substantial and beyond the resources of Councils. Indeed, this was formally recognised a number of years ago by the then Minister, Angela Smith, in a response to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, in which she stated that Councils alone did not have the capacity to meet the costs of compliance with the waste legislation.

We would now wish to take the opportunity to outline our main comments for your consideration.

## **KEY POINTS FOR CONSIDERATION**

- arc21 welcome the positive proposals outlined by Government, in its first Draft Programme for Government 2008-11, and in particular the commitment and support for Waste Management.
- We welcome the opportunity to build on the partnership with the Department over the next three years and beyond to ensure that the Northern Ireland Waste Strategy is successfully delivered.
- As Government has recognised, compliance with EC Directive and Northern Ireland regulations is compulsory, with substantial financial penalties being incurred for any non compliance and that time is of the essence if the Statutory Targets, particularly those that apply in 2010 and 2013, are to be met.
- We welcome that Government has recognised that the same significance needs to be placed on compliance within the Waste Sector, as has applied to the Water Sector.
- We welcome the introduction of the Programme Delivery Support Unit to assist the three Waste Management Groups in the delivery of the waste infrastructure, particularly during the CSR period.
- We welcome that Government has identified the substantial financial burden being borne by the District Rates and the unprecedented levels of costs involved in providing the large scale capital infrastructure required by the Waste Sector to meet the Statutory targets.
- We would make the point that the total funding package proposed, at around 50% of the capital cost, is still below the level of support provided to Local Government for waste in other UK Administrations and also below the level of other major infrastructure projects in Northern Ireland. Accordingly we would ask Government to consider confirming that the level of funding proposed for Waste Management, £233m, is the absolute minimum and also that every opportunity will be taken to bring the funding for the Waste Sector in Northern Ireland into line.
- We would recommend that Government sends out a clearer signal of support by committing funds to specifically identified capital projects, rather than a CSR period, subject to them progressing satisfactorily. This will avoid the Resource expenditure needed to prepare and present further Departmental Business Cases, if required, to secure funding beyond the CSR period. Crucially this will also avoid the risk of such a business case being unsuccessful with the obvious consequences.

- In terms of the disbursement of the waste management funding it is important that a clear set of conditions are established in advance and presume towards equity and timely delivery.
- Furthermore, the Draft Investment Strategy document identifies match funding at the same levels as Executive funds and in the same timescale, but doesn't elaborate on the source or relationship to the Executive funding package. It is important that this issue is clarified. We would recommend that the opportunity be taken to clarify this issue in the final Programme for Government report.
- Sufficient End of Year Flexibility is essential to allow very large scale capital projects to be managed in accordance with the principles of Best Value and we would therefore ask that Government consider these types of projects, which include the waste infrastructure projects, to be treated as a special case, against a background of increasingly limited End of Year Flexibility.
- To facilitate the monitoring of the identified capital projects we would recommend a more formal Governance Structure be established to oversee the ISNI programme, with the necessary professional capacity to undertake the task effectively, provide regular updates to stakeholders and, crucially, be able assist the decision makers in regards to EYF matters.
- We welcome the Capital Realisations Taskforce initiative which will form a vital role in the overall funding of the ISNI programme and look forward to receiving further information in due course.
- We would recommend that the Waste Management Grant Scheme, due to come to an end in March 2008, be extended to continue providing Local Government with funding support, both Resource and Capital, in implementing their essential complementary waste infrastructure, which also plays a vital role in achieving the statutory targets.
- The Programme For Government recognises the need to develop private sector capacity but we need to create an environment which inspires investor confidence and mitigates risk. A key element of achieving best value to the public purse, involves providing assurance to private sector investors that the public sector element of the funding is secure for the life of the project, not just the CSR period. Accordingly, we would ask Government to consider providing greater clarity regarding the funding package.
- We welcome the proposals for a fundamental overhaul of the planning system and in particular that decisions on all large scale investment planning proposals will be made within 6 months, taking into account that the waste sector infrastructure programme is large scale in nature. In relation to the processing of large scale infrastructure planning applications, it would be useful to have the projects identified as quickly as possible and their progress through the process being made available to stakeholders.

- We welcome that Government recognises a lack of professional capacity to effectively implement the Investment Strategy and would point out our concerns in relation to capacity within the Department to be able to provide a greater level of expertise in waste matters. It is vital that the department have the expertise to grasp quickly the complex issues that will face the waste sector and, crucially, make timely decisions to overcome the many challenges that will be faced going forward.
- We would advise that Local Government Vires to deliver the best value solution remains a major concern to the Waste Sector and accordingly recommend that this issue is addressed urgently.
- We would recommend that the public relations and communications issues associated with the Incineration debate be brought more into the public domain so that the concerns and perceptions may be addressed as early as possible. We would recommend that this be achieved through inclusion within the final Programme for Government, Budget and Investment Strategy reports as well as being part of any future campaigns to promote better waste management – similar to the Wake Up to Waste campaign.

## CONCLUSION

Waste Management is now one of the most critical issues facing local government. It has been driven up the agenda through a step increase in environmental awareness accompanied by a plethora of targets via international protocols and EU regulations. In particular, the Waste Framework Directive, Landfill Directive and associated national government legislation dictate that local authorities must divert waste from landfill, on pain of hefty potential infraction fines for non-compliance.

The Programme For Government has identified a key theme of particular relevance to the waste sector;

- **“We are determined to seize this unprecedented opportunity to deliver a better and more sustainable future for all of our people supported by vibrant and dynamic economy”**

There will, no doubt, be problems along the way and it is essential that as much flexibility is provided to deal pragmatically with the issues as they arise to achieve maximum benefit from this theme.

Government is now presented with the unprecedented opportunity to demonstrate more clearly their vital commitment and leadership role, in an effective partnership with Local Government to;

- **drive the waste agenda forward,**
- **deal collectively with the many challenges and hurdles ahead and**
- **deliver success by achieving the Northern Ireland Strategic Objectives for landfill diversion and avoiding the substantial financial penalties which will be incurred through non compliance.**

arc21 very much look forward to continuing to work with our partners in Government, and the Private Sector, to build on the foundation of success achieved to date, and would hope that the concerns raised in this response receive due consideration in the final report to be published in January 2008.