

**Environment Policy Development Group – 18 March 2004****ENVIRONMENT POLICY – SCOPING REPORT****Report of Chief Environment Development Officer**

**Statutory Powers:** Various including the Local Government Act 2000.

**Financial Implications:** None specifically linked to this report except staff time. The scope of a revised policy may have financial implications.

**Purpose:** The purpose of the report is to identify the scope of a revised Environment Policy, taking into account the Council's priorities and the range of existing environmental policies and strategies which are already in place. The role of the Environment Policy is to provide an overarching link between emerging and existing policies and strategies and the corporate priorities.

The report links to Council priorities CP3 and CP4 and all of the associated targets under these two priorities.

**Recommendation**

**That the Environment Policy Development Group comments on the scope of a possible revised Environment Policy, and makes RECOMMENDATIONS to the Executive.**

**Background**

1. The Council's existing Environment Policy is attached as Appendix A. This policy has never been formally adopted.
2. Since the preparation of this policy, the Council has reviewed its corporate priorities. In particular it has adopted CP3 'maintain the district's distinctive environment whilst enabling access and sensitive development' and CP4 'maintain a clean environment'. Supporting the priorities are associated measures and targets. Currently there is not always a clear link between the adopted measures and targets and an existing policy and strategy to ensure the delivery of the priority. This may in some cases be an issue of timetabling, because the policy was adopted prior to the adoption of the Council's priorities. Appendix B sets out the measures and targets under CP3 and CP4 as produced in the Performance Plan. A third column has been added which identifies the policies and strategies currently in place to deliver the target. In a number of areas there is not a clear link between the target and a specific Council policy. In some cases actions are specific and are identified through a Service Plan action rather than a policy or strategy. Appendix C provides an audit of all the Council's current environmental policies. The table also identifies a target date for the document's review. At the point of review the up-dated policy can be aligned with the priorities.
3. The Government has established a wide range of national performance indicators, some of which have an environmental dimension. These are set out in Appendix D. This information is currently in draft form. It will be up-dated and published in the Performance Plan in June 2004. These performance indicators

are used to compare different Council's however they do not necessarily reflect local priorities. A further problem is that the performance indicators regularly change and if they are incorporated into a long-term strategy they can become out of date. The appendix also includes local indicators with an environmental dimension. The Council has also committed itself to incorporating quality of life indicators into the balanced scorecard. Quality of life indicators are likely to have an environmental dimension, and could feed into the Community Strategy. The Community Strategy is a partnership designed to improve social, economic and environmental wellbeing. Currently the document does not have any established measures of progress to use when reporting to the South Hams Strategic Partnership. However, while recognising the need for targets to focus on outputs, it will be important not to add to the existing burden of collecting performance indicators, and try to achieve consistency across different agencies in terms of future environmental priorities. It may however take some time to develop an effective linkage between the various Council strategies and partner agencies. The development of new Environmental Policy could therefore be left to emerge from the Community Strategy and the LSP.

4. The Government is also focusing its attention on environmental issues, as evidenced through the CPA process. In particular the Government attaches great importance to tackling the issues around crime, anti-social behaviour and the physical environment at a local level. The Government's approach to these issues is set out in the publication 'Living Places; Cleaner, Safer, Greener'. Sometimes the phrase used by Government is 'liveability' to sum up the aim of their approach. While many of the issues are a particular challenge in areas suffering from multiple deprivation (e.g. crime reduction, poor local physical environment, a need for effective integrated area management, and developing constructive activities for children and young people), they are also issues within the South Hams.
5. It is important to ensure that as a result of updating the environment policy that the Council does not simply produce more policies and strategies supported by actions that the Council will not be in a position to resource. The challenge is to ensure that appropriate policies and strategies are in place to deliver the range of environmental targets that the Council has prioritised. It is also important to note that a revised Environment Policy can not address all issues, for example, matters such as crime reduction are covered in the Community Safety Strategy, while developing constructive activities for children and young people is partly covered in the Cultural Strategy and the Leisure and Recreation Strategy. It will also be part of the Social Inclusion Policy and Strategy. Responding to the needs of young people, as part of environmental management, is a particular requirement that the Council needs to address in view of the outcome of the Council's CPA inspection.
6. In terms of a broader agenda of sustainability, there is pressure on Council's to think globally and to act locally to address environmental issues which have a national or international dimension. Examples include responding to climate change, renewable energy, and genetically modified crops. Given the Council's limited resources, it is important for the Council to focus on those environmental matters that the Council has determined as the priorities. The officer judgement is that the Council should focus its limited resources on those areas where it can make a real difference to local people.

## Key Issues for Members

7. Members may wish to consider the following issues:-

- how will the revised strategy help deliver the Council's corporate objectives?
- what other strategies need to be linked to it?
- what are the priorities for action?
- who will be the key partners to help deliver the priority actions, and what needs to be established to develop the strategy?
- what emerging national legislation and guidance needs to be taken into account?
- how should the existing strategy be modified to meet the Council's requirements?
- is it felt that the Council has the resources to undertake the work involved?

## Options

8. A revised Environment Policy could take a number of forms. It could comprise of:-

- a) A short overarching policy document that sets out the Council's key priorities, explains why they have been established and links the priorities with established or emerging environmental policies and strategies. As existing environmental policies and Service Plans are reviewed they would need to demonstrate a link to this overarching document.
- b) The development of a new strategy document which focuses on the way the Council uses its assets (e.g. property, land, vehicles, and working practices) to make a contribution to the environmental agenda. This would result in an update of the Council's existing Environmental Policy, and for example could include the Council's approach to managing waste from its activities; reducing the use of energy and water; its approach to purchasing, in particular green purchasing; issues of transport; promoting bio-diversity on Council land; and securing staff awareness of their contribution to the environmental agenda. It may also be possible to use the development of a policy to more effectively integrate Council services in public spaces, for example, by aligning the district's public realm services with the public space activities of Devon County Council.
- c) The development of a range of new policies and strategies. This would involve a major area of work, for example, reducing pollution through managing public and private transportation, reducing public and private energy use, noise pollution, light pollution, improving health and responding to climate change. Such a range of policy development would involve significant staff resources and a future allocation of funding to implement actions emerging from the policies adopted. In some cases specific actions within existing policy contribute to reducing some of these problems, for example, planning policies, the two Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plans, and the Estuary Management Plans. Members may therefore feel that further policy development is not required.
- d) Taking no further action as the Council's environmental priorities are now established. As each policy and strategy is reviewed within the timescale agreed by the Programming Panel, the Environment Policy Development

Group would ensure that there are direct links from the corporate priority, targets and measures to the reviewed policy.

9. Before considering which approach to adopt, the Members need to be clear what it is they wish to achieve and how it will be resourced. The officer's view is that option a) is the most appropriate way forward.

### **Financial Considerations**

10. Members will be aware of the difficult budget situation, which was faced for 2004/05. It will be essential for the Council not to commit itself to a significant level of new policy development unless it is confident that any resulting actions can be resourced.

### **Risk Assessment**

11. The most significant risk is that the Council enthusiastically embraces a wide range of issues to address sustainability in a laudably comprehensive fashion, but finds the impact of its actions dissipated by spreading its resources too thinly.

### **Human Rights**

12. There are no specific Human Rights issues emerging from this report.

### **Conclusion**

13. This report provides background to facilitate a Member discussion about the scope of a review of the existing Environment Policy. Option a) in paragraph 8 is considered to be the most appropriate way forward.

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Environment Policy Development Group  
18 March 2004

### **Background Documents:**

Policy documents as identified in Appendix C.