

CITY OF PLYMOUTH



Plymouth City Council's Environmental Sustainability Programme - Review of Progress and Proposed Development

Community Well-being Scrutiny Committee

14th March, 2003

'Overview and scrutiny is potentially the most exciting and powerful element of the entire local Government modernisation process. It places members at the heart of policy-making and at the heart of the way in which Councils respond to the demands of modernisation. In addition, overview and scrutiny is the mechanism by which Councils can achieve active community leadership, good governance and by which Councillors can become powerful and influential politicians.'

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: 'The Development of Overview and Scrutiny in Local Government', September 2002

CITY OF PLYMOUTH

Report: Community Well-being Scrutiny Committee

Subject: Plymouth City Council's Environmental Sustainability Programme - Review of Progress and Proposed Development

Committee: Executive

Date: 21st March, 2003

Ref: 5/CWB/SC/KJ

Part: I

Executive Summary:

The purpose of this report is to inform the Executive of the outcome of the Committee's meeting on 14th March, 2003, which reviewed and scrutinised Plymouth City Council's Environmental Sustainability Programme - Review of Progress and Proposed Development.

Corporate Strategy:

The establishment of Scrutiny Committees forms part of the corporate strategy for implementation of that part of the modernisation agenda relative to new democratic arrangements.

Financial Implications:

The proposals for the sustainability programme at this stage do not have any identified financial implications; however there will be changes to find funding to carry out some of the projects. It is likely that these will be identified further in the six-monthly progress report.

Resolutions and Recommendations:

The Community Well-being Scrutiny Committee recommends that -

- (1) the report be welcomed and the proposed way forward be supported;
 - (2) every effort be made to support and assist the City Council's partners in attracting required levels of funding;
 - (3) the officers be thanked for the work undertaken in preparing and producing the report and for their contributions to this Committee;
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Resolutions and Recommendations Cont'd:

- (4) the Portfolio Holder and Chief Executive arrange appropriate publicity in partnership with the Department and Plymouth 2020 to raise awareness of environmental issues both internally and externally;
 - (5) the Environmental Sustainability programme be reviewed in July, 2003.
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Background papers:

- (1) Plymouth City Council's Environmental Sustainability Programme - Review of Progress and Proposed Development - Report to the Executive 21st March, 2003
 - (2) Briefing paper on the City Council's Environmental Achievements 1997 - 2002
 - (3) Working towards a more sustainable City - Sustainability Indicators Review 2001/2002 (unpublished)
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DECISION	RECORD OF DECLARATION OF INTEREST
REASONS FOR DECISION	
ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED	RECORD OF ANY DISPENSATIONS
REASONS FOR REJECTION OF ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS	RECORD OF PAPERS CONSIDERED

REPORT OF THE COMMUNITY WELL-BEING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

PLYMOUTH CITY COUNCIL'S ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY PROGRAMME - REVIEW OF PROGRESS AND PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

1.0 Background

- 1.1 The need for sustainable development, that is development that meets the needs of today without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs, is now recognised at both national and international levels. One of the outcomes of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit and implementation of Local Agenda 21 was that Local Authorities would take responsibility for environmental sustainability. The Agenda 21 Sustainability programme for Plymouth has been in place for a number of years and it is now time to review its future to bring it in line with other key strategic developments both in the City and on a national basis. Failure to review the programme would weaken its impact and influence.
- 1.2 The Scrutiny Commission at its meeting on 6th March, 2003, agreed that the Community Well-being Scrutiny Committee should consider as a matter of urgency the City Council's Environmental Sustainability Programme - Review of Progress and Proposed Development.
- 1.3 Through the new scrutiny arrangements a report will be submitted to the Executive at its meeting on 21st March, 2003, where a decision will have to be made in respect of the City Council's Environmental Sustainability Programme - Review of Progress and Proposed Development.

2.0 Committee Structure

Councillors (Committee Members)

Councillor Horler, in the Chair.

Councillor Rowe, Vice-Chairman.

Councillors Mrs. Banks (substitute for Councillor Mrs. Dawson), Mrs. Blackburn, Coleman, Lemin and Mrs. Purnell.

In Attendance

Nigel West	Assistant Head of Environment and Consumer Protection
Jackie Young	Environmental Development Officer
Caroline Marx	Environmental Sustainability Foundation Group and Co-ordinator Plymouth Environment Forum
Katey Johns	Democratic Support Officer

3.0 Objectives

- 3.1 The Community Well-being Scrutiny Committee consider the City Council's Environmental Sustainability Programme, including ensuring that –
 - (i) the Programme is properly and purposely scrutinised;

- (ii) the Committee's recommendations and concerns, if any, are submitted to the meeting of the Executive on 21st March, 2003.

4.0 Hearings

- 4.1 The Committee met on Friday 14th March, 2003, to hear from witnesses and formulate a report with recommendations to the Executive on 21st March, 2003.

5.0 The Detail

- 5.1 The Head of Environmental Regulation's report reviews the current situation with the sustainability programme, provides an update on new developments and proposes a way forward for the City and the City Council. It advises that Plymouth has a well-developed programme of sustainability and environmental development which has been in place for a number of years.

- 5.2 There is extensive guidance to local authorities from central government on the integration of sustainability into the City Strategy and in the duty of well-being. There have been a number of important documents which have raised the need to review the current programme, remove duplication and integrate the programme into the wider city agenda. In particular, the Environmental Sustainability Foundation Group of the Plymouth 2020 partnership is taking a more proactive role in leading on environmental sustainability issues and there are now the new challenges of the climate change programme.

- 5.3 New techniques have emerged such as Eco-Footprinting, a groundbreaking way of assessing the environmental value and potential of an area, which would replace the current State of the Environment Report. The process takes a number of social, economic and environmental data sets and, once processed, enables a value to be placed on the impact of potential development and investment. It also enables a series of options for decision-making based on the best possible outcome for the city and its citizens. The footprint 'outcomes' would enable the monitoring and measurement of progress towards a more sustainable city using chosen sustainability indicators and would assist in developing continuity in the achievement of local targets for improvement.

A bid has been made by the Environmental Sustainability Foundation Group to the Environment Agency for £20,000 to kick start a six stage project of development in this field. So far £10,000 has been awarded and it is hoped that the success in this bid will encourage the provision of the remaining £100,000 from a variety of sources and that the project will build into a city-wide database.

- 5.4 The 'For Generations Ahead' programme encompasses a range of complementary actions that all contribute to ongoing sustainable development to which there are four key elements -

- The Local Agenda 21 Plan
- The Environmental Policy and Action Plan (EPAP)
- Plymouth's Sustainability Indicators - 39 in total
- Plymouth's State of the Environment Report

- 5.5 For Local Government a key factor has been the introduction of the Duty of well-being within the Local Government Act 2000 which places an emphasis on the delivery of locally applicable social, economic and environmental improvements to the quality of life. Increasing emphasis is being placed on the role of the community in local decision making and the role of local government within partnerships. The development of the Plymouth 2020 Partnership provides new opportunities for sustainable development and opens up a wealth of funding opportunities.

The following have been identified as significant to the development of the 'For Generations Ahead' programme in Plymouth and, together, bring about the need to review the actions taken -

- The City Strategy
- Plymouth 2020's Environmental Sustainability Foundation Group
- Sustainability Appraisal
- Strategic Choices
- Best Value
- Climate Change

- 5.6 One of the key drivers behind the review is a recognised need to consolidate the numerous actions undertaken across the City into a manageable programme that ensures value for money and a sustainable, measurable approach to environmental development. The Council's role in this is crucial and the following proposals which are contained within the overall Local Agenda 21 Programme are made to strengthen and clarify this role -

- A Citywide 'Environmental Framework' (Environmental Charter)
- An 'Eco Footprint' of the City
- Updated Targets for Environmental Development and Sustainability
- A Developing Programme of Environmental Awareness, Promotion and Training

- 5.7 Specific funding for the core development of sustainable development issues is not readily available from external sources and, invariably, where it has been available, it has been limited to the development of specific projects and not the Council's role in leading development in this important issue. Increasingly funding will be required to enable the Environmental Sustainability Foundation Group and others to develop the projects and initiatives supported by the City Strategy. It is likely that independent applications for funding and/or investment will be forthcoming through the Plymouth 2020 Partnership but, it is absolutely essential that the Council is still able to support such development. The proposed funding package for the Eco-footprint is one such example.

Similarly, the potential for investment through the development, application and delivery of LPSA targets has been identified as a potential source of funding for the Council but not necessarily for the Environmental Sustainability Programme.

6.0 The Committee's Findings

- 6.1 Having considered the information presented to them, the Committee raised a number of questions on areas of the Environmental Sustainability Programme, including partnerships, achievements, areas of conflict, climate change, raising and promoting awareness and, in particular, on the sustainability performance indicators 2001/2002.

6.2 The Committee found that -

- (i) the Environmental Sustainability Foundation Group had been set up in November 2000 and had a large wide-ranging membership which included representatives from the following -
 - Environment Agency Bodmin
 - Regional Development Agency
 - Plymouth University - Centre for Climate Change and Environment Manager
 - ENCAM South West (the Government's green campaigns)
 - Derriford Hospital
 - Chamber of Commerce
 - Federation of Small Businesses
 - Plymouth Young Persons Agenda 21
 - Voice of Plymouth Students
 - Groundwork
- (ii) with regard to the Environmental Policy and Action Plan, the City Council was achieving many of its targets and performance indicators. There were, however, a range of issues which could be streamlined and the way in which the Plan was produced could address this. The Plan was initially reviewed annually but the lack of resources made it very difficult for the review to be given the proper time and attention it deserved. The last review was undertaken in 1999/2000 and many changes have not therefore been addressed as they should;
- (iii) under current legislation all major development proposals (of a certain size), whether commercial, industrial or residential, had to have environmental or strategic impact assessments carried out;
- (iv) there were some areas of work undertaken by the City Council which could potentially conflict with LA21, one of which was the installation of uPVC windows. This was currently being looked at in conjunction with Planning, Housing and energy conservation and work was ongoing with a number of agencies to see if a solution could be reached. All other areas of conflict would have to be identified, alternatives looked at and a better solution found but, again, resourcing these investigations would be a problem;
- (v) climate change could bring major problems to local authorities in a number of ways. One immediately obvious problem was increased occurrences of flooding which could, in many cases, simply be addressed by programming extra gully cleaning. However, there were other problems which had more serious implications such as the effects of climate change on mortar used in the building trade;
- (vi) on the issue of sustainability indicator outcomes, the department was working closely with the Allotments Officer to not only increase the take-up of vacant allotment sites but to promote and increase the use of plots already taken but often neglected;

- (vii) similar partnership arrangements provided 16 recorded otter sightings in Plymouth in 2000; a good indicator of a healthy environment as otters were very fussy about what they ate and water quality;
- (viii) on awareness raising, encouraging the public to become more involved in environmental issues was very difficult, particularly with such limited resources. Recycling and dog fouling were two areas which were very much within the control of the public and could only be improved upon by better education and awareness raising through publicity and promotion. Simply providing more bins was not the answer;
- (ix) the “Green Week” campaign which had, in the past, proved very successful had stopped because -
 - The expertise was no longer available in-house
 - There was no core funding to support the marketing and promotion of the event
 - The City Council was asking its partners to contribute more funding than it was

Officers were looking at the resources which were available and using them in a different way. The review should identify what more can be done and how;

- (x) on waste management, the nation was producing more and more waste year after year and a study was being undertaken to determine the best practical disposal solution, including looking at the viability of the waste to energy process. Piling waste into the ground is no longer the answer. The life-span of Chelson Meadow was coming to an end and the Council was facing a major headache in identifying an alternative site and possible major financial implications if a site is found outside of the City boundaries;
- (xi) as part of the Best Value Review process the University had carried out a study where they had monitored 2 refuse collections over a 6-month period on selected properties. The results had proved very interesting and were being used to identify the weaknesses so that the areas where the City Council needed to work on could be targeted;
- (xii) on sustainability indicators in general, some of the indicators appeared inconsistent as a result of there having been no national markers against which to score them. This has since been addressed, particularly in relation to child poverty, by the introduction of Neighbourhood Renewals teams who have collected a wealth of information from which statistics can be obtained and monitored;
- (xiii) the indicator on homelessness reflected a change in recording requirements whereby Local Authorities were now responsible for finding homes for 16-18 year olds with mental problems. It also reflected an increase in domestic violence which resulted in homes being found for people at risk;

- (xiv) the indicator on “homes judged unfit to live” in did not necessarily mean that the property was empty;
- (xv) with regard to (xiii) and (xiv) above, Officers were currently working on more up to date figures and these should be available shortly, possibly the end of this financial year;
- (xvi) on the issue of water consumption, sustainability-wise, it was better for people to be on a water meter as it was proven that those on meters did use less. Concerns were expressed that as more people had taken up the meter installation option than had been predicted, they were now subsidising those that hadn't.

8.0 Written Material

The Committee received the following documentation -

- (1) Plymouth City Council's Environmental Sustainability Programme - Review of Progress and Proposed Development - Report to the Executive 21st March, 2003
- (2) Briefing paper on the City Council's Environmental Achievements 1997 - 2002
- (3) Working towards a more sustainable City - Sustainability Indicators Review 2001/2002 (unpublished)

9.0 Resolutions and Recommendations

The Community Well-being Scrutiny Committee recommends that -

- (1) the report be welcomed and the proposed way forward be supported;
- (2) every effort be made to support and assist the City Council's partners in attracting required levels of funding;
- (3) the officers be thanked for the work undertaken in preparing and producing the report and for their contributions to this Committee;
- (4) the Portfolio Holder and Chief Executive arrange appropriate publicity in partnership with the Department and Plymouth 2020 to raise awareness of environmental issues both internally and externally;
- (5) the Environmental Sustainability programme be reviewed in July, 2003.

10.0 Chairman's Summary

- 10.1 The Chairman, on behalf of the Committee, would like to confirm that scrutiny of the City Council's Environmental Sustainability Programme - Review of Progress and Proposed Development has been considered with conscientious and serious application.