

# TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

## SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

14 SEPTEMBER 2004

### Report of the LA21 Review Group

#### Part 1- Public

#### **1 REVIEW OF LOCAL AGENDA 21 - RECOMMENDATIONS OF REVIEW GROUP**

**To consider the recommendations from the Grants Review Group on proposed arrangements for LA21 and to make recommendations to Cabinet on the review.**

#### **1.1 Background to the Review**

1.1.1 The Scrutiny review of Local Agenda 21 was scoped at a meeting of this Committee in June 2004. It was agreed that a review group be established to consider the following key issues:

- 1) How the LA21 programme can best contribute to improving quality of life/sustainability in accordance with the aspirations expressed in 'Serving you Better'.
- 2) How the focus on our LA21 programme can be improved.
- 3) An appropriate balance between initiatives focussed 'internally' on the Council's performance and those undertaken in the wider community.
- 4) How sustainability issues can be better 'mainstreamed' within the Council.
- 5) The main sustainability issues where we can hope to make worthwhile gains in our 'internal' performance. The following are suggested:
  - Green travel
  - Energy usage
  - Procurement
  - Waste minimisation and recycling
- 6) What lessons can be learned from the approaches adopted by other local authorities.

- 1.1.2 The Review Group, under the chairmanship of Cllr Mrs Geraldine Bowden, has met on two occasions and undertaken a site visit to Lewes District Council. A set of recommendations has been agreed. The review process has involved an initial meeting of the Group to provide Members with background information on sustainable development and LA21, together with information on how it is dealt with in Tonbridge & Malling.
- 1.1.3 The Working Group then undertook a visit to Lewes District Council to see its approach to environmental management and LA21. Lewes are one of only a handful of local authorities who have achieved accreditation under EMAS (Environmental Management and Audit Scheme), a rigorous, European scheme which requires wide ranging corporate commitments to many aspects of sustainability including waste management, transport, energy use and procurement.
- 1.1.4 A further meeting of the Review Group was held to discuss the main issues and options arising out of the site visit and initial meeting.
- 1.1.5 Members of Scrutiny Committee are invited to consider the issues and proposed recommendations arising out of these discussions and to endorse these for further consideration by the Cabinet.

## **1.2 Links between LA21 and the Community Strategy**

- 1.2.1 A matrix relating the current LA21 Action Plan to the themes in the Community Strategy can be found at Annex 1. This demonstrates those areas where LA21 makes a contribution to achieving the objectives set out in the Community Strategy. The social, economic and environmental objectives of LA21 are firmly embedded in the Community Strategy and an additional LA21 strategy was not believed to be necessary.
- 1.2.2 Members of the Review Group were of the opinion that the current work programme, set out at Annex 2, was making an good contribution to the community objectives as set out in the Strategy. The annual action plan will guide the work of the Sustainability Co-ordinator and should clearly show where links to the Community Strategy and/or corporate priorities exist.
- 1.2.3 The Review Group therefore recommends that:
- (i) an annual action plan be produced which responds to community objectives as set out in the Community Strategy and the Council's corporate priorities.

## **1.3 Improving the focus of LA21**

- 1.3.1 The Review Group believed that the current focus of LA21 was acceptable. However, it was agreed that while the action plan needed to contain a good degree of flexibility, limited resources should not be spread too thinly and the

focus should be in areas where the greatest impact could be made, particularly those areas which related to a borough council service such as waste management.

1.3.2 The work currently undertaken with local community groups was seen as a particularly important part of the LA21 programme and one that should continue to be a priority.

1.3.3 The Review Group recommends that:

- (i) the scope of the annual action plan should remain flexible, but consideration should be given to those initiatives where the greatest impact can be achieved and particularly where there are links to a borough council service;
- (ii) working with local community groups should remain a priority of the LA21 Action Plan.

#### **1.4 Balance between 'internal' initiatives and those undertaken in the wider community**

1.4.1 Approximately 90% of current LA21 initiatives are external. The Review Group believed that the primary focus should continue to be on projects which had visible benefits for residents of the borough.

1.4.2 The Group acknowledged that the council was increasingly asking local business to improve their environmental performance and therefore, the council must also be seen to be 'keeping its own house in order'.

1.4.3 While the long term aim is to continue to devote the majority of resources to external projects, it was agreed that in the short term, it would be necessary to increase internal initiatives in order to measure and improve internal sustainability performance.

1.4.4 The Review Group therefore recommends:

- (i) That the long term focus of LA21 should remain with external initiatives which have visible benefits for borough residents;
- (ii) That in the short term, increased resources should be focused on internal initiatives in order to achieve improvements to the council's own organisational sustainability.

#### **1.5 'Mainstreaming' sustainability issues**

1.5.1 The Review Group agreed that Members had insufficient awareness of and input into the current LA21 annual programme. There was a need to formally report on progress and obtain approval for the annual action plan at

an appropriate Advisory Board before onward approval by Cabinet. The Group suggest that 6 monthly reports should be submitted.

- 1.5.2 The Review Group also identified a need for a simple policy statement on LA21. This should be submitted for approval to the designated Advisory Board and Cabinet.
- 1.5.3 The Group also wanted the profile of LA21 raised within the community. It was recognised that much had been achieved but with insufficient promotion leading to a lack of public awareness. Consideration should be given to the image of LA21 with a more systematic approach to publicity.
- 1.5.4 LA21 is a cross-cutting initiative with many services contributing to improving sustainability within the borough and the organisation. The Group was of the view that an officer steering group would enable all services within the authority to become involved in devising the annual action plan and raise awareness internally. This Group could drive forward and better co-ordinate the council's performance.
- 1.5.5 Consideration was also given to the current location of the Sustainability Co-ordinator. The post is currently located within Environmental Health & Housing Services but, due to the cross-cutting nature of the role, it could be located in other services or at the corporate centre. The Review Group agreed that this issue should be referred to Management Team for further consideration.
- 1.5.6 The Review Group therefore recommends that:
  - (i) a simple policy statement for LA21 be prepared and submitted, along with the annual action plan, to the Community Development Advisory Board for onward approval by Cabinet;
  - (ii) a 6 monthly report should be prepared outlining progress against the action plan and enabling Members to make contributions where appropriate;
  - (iii) consideration be given to the image of LA21 in the wider community with a more systematic approach to publicity and promotion of initiatives;
  - (iv) an officer steering group be formed to drive forward and better co-ordinate the council's LA21 performance;
  - (v) the location of the Sustainability Co-ordinator be referred to Management Team for further consideration.

## **1.6 Internal sustainability issues**

- 1.6.1 The Review Group agreed that green travel, energy usage, procurement and waste minimisation and recycling were all important when considering internal sustainability issues.
- 1.6.2 The Group agreed that the focus should be on areas where a real difference could be made without resulting in excessive resources being taken away from the general external focus of LA21
- 1.6.3 The Review Group therefore recommends that:
- (i) an audit of our current sustainability performance under the four headings of green travel, energy usage, procurement and waste minimisation and recycling be carried out in partnership with other borough officers as appropriate;
  - (ii) if necessary, an action plan for improving our performance under each of these headings be prepared for consideration by the Community Development Advisory Board.

## **1.7 Learning lessons from other Local Authorities**

- 1.7.1 The Review Group's visit to Lewes District Council enabled Officers and Members to find out more about the Environmental Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS) in place at Lewes and their approach to LA21.
- 1.7.2 Following the meeting, the Review Group considered whether EMAS would be a suitable scheme for Tonbridge & Malling. While the scheme is extremely comprehensive in ensuring sustainability issues are firmly embedded into corporate practice, much of the practical emphasis is on auditing. At Lewes, a full time member of staff is employed to deal solely with EMAS.
- 1.7.3 The Review Group agreed that EMAS was somewhat bureaucratic and very resource hungry and could potentially move resources away from achieving progress 'on the ground'. It was felt that the scheme was not appropriate at the current time, but that the key elements of improving internal sustainability performance should be incorporated into an action plan.
- 1.7.4 Other LA21 initiatives at Lewes were broadly similar to those undertaken at Tonbridge & Malling showing that the current range of work is not out of step with an authority with good performance on LA21.
- 1.7.5 The Review Group therefore recommends that:
- (i) EMAS is not pursued but that the key elements be incorporated into an action plan setting out improvements to internal sustainability.

Background papers:

Nil

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**LA21 Initiatives – Links to Community Strategy Themes**

<b><u>Community Strategy Themes</u></b>	<b><u>Safer Place with Lower Levels of Crime</u></b>	<b><u>Cleaner, Smarter and Better Maintained</u></b>	<b><u>Responsive to Housing, Health and Social Needs</u></b>	<b><u>Protective of the Local Environment</u></b>	<b><u>Reduced Traffic Problems and well managed Car parking</u></b>	<b><u>Thriving Business and Shared Opportunity</u></b>
<b><u>LA21 Initiatives</u></b>						
<i><u>Working with community groups and schools on locally identified sustainability projects</u></i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
<i><u>Community Strategy: continued consultation and monitoring with partnership groups.</u></i>	✓		✓	✓		
<i><u>Sustainable TMBC: travel/procurement/recycling/energy</u></i>			✓	✓	✓	✓
<i><u>Farmers' Markets: Monitor programme of Farmers' Markets in Tonbridge and West Malling</u></i>			✓	✓		✓
<i><u>Energy Conservation: support with energy efficiency projects</u></i>			✓	✓		
<i><u>Transport Month Activities: school travel initiatives, staff travel, cycling</u></i>					✓	
<i><u>Waste: working with Waste Management (recycling) Officer and Environmental Projects co-ordinator on projects relating to Cleaner Borough Campaign.</u></i>		✓		✓		

<u><b>C.S.Themes</b></u>	<u><i>Safer Place with Lower Levels of Crime</i></u>	<u><i>Cleaner, Smarter and Better Maintained</i></u>	<u><i>Responsive to Housing, Health and Social Needs</i></u>	<u><i>Protective of the Local Environment</i></u>	<u><i>Reduced Traffic Problems and well managed Car parking</i></u>	<u><i>Thriving Business and Shared Opportunity</i></u>
<u><b>LA21 Initiatives</b></u>						
<u><i>Gardening for Wildlife Award Scheme: continued promotion of project in association with Kent Wildlife Trust</i></u>				✓		
<u><i>Wildlife &amp; Greener Gardening Seminars</i></u>				✓		
<u><i>Healthy Walks: with Leisure Services, Countryside Agency and PCT, implement a programme of health walks</i></u>			✓			
<u><i>Healthy Eating Initiative: Link with Government Initiative to promote healthier eating "5 a day" fruit and vegetable promotions</i></u>			✓			
<u><i>Youth: Continue to work with the Youth Officer Study Group, involving and meeting the needs of young people.</i></u>			✓			

## Local Agenda 21 Action Plan : 2004 - 05

### **Working With Communities**

Work with community groups and schools on locally identified sustainability projects to be continued and developed.

### **Community Strategy**

Involvement with the implementation of the borough's Community Strategy "Serving you Better" and Local Strategic Partnership. Continued consultation and monitoring with partnership groups involved with the implementation of the Community Strategy.

### **Sustainable TMBC**

Report on the current position relating to sustainability within the authority in relation to staff travel to work, procurement, recycling and energy use. Work with KCC Travel Co-ordinators to develop a travel plan suitable for TMBC staff. Develop and deliver LA21/Sustainability awareness pack for new staff induction. Use the Intranet to promote LA21 internally.

### **Farmers' Markets**

Monitor contract with Hughmark International and provide support where necessary.

### **Energy Conservation**

Support the work of the Energy Conservation Officer on projects that encourage improved energy efficiency and reduce energy consumption. Investigate potential use of sustainable energy sources such as wood fueled heating systems.

### **Transport Month Activities**

In partnership with KCC co-ordinate school travel initiative in the boroughs primary and secondary schools.

Promotion of cycle routes in the borough. Involve TMBC staff in National "Bike to work Week".

### **Waste**

Continue to support the work of the Waste Management (recycling) Officer, Environmental Projects Co-ordinator and Dog Warden in projects which increase waste awareness and litter and dog fouling abatement.

### **Gardening for Wildlife Awards Scheme**

Continued promotion of this project, in association with Kent Wildlife Trust.

**Wildlife and Greener Gardening Seminars**

Organisation of seminars on environmentally friendly gardening.

**Healthy Walks**

Working with Leisure Services, Countryside Agency and PCT implement a Healthy Walks Initiative.

**Healthy Eating Initiative**

Link with Government initiative to promote healthier eating '5 a day' fruit and vegetable promotions.

**Youth**

Continue to work with the Youth Officer Study Group, involving and meeting the needs of young people.