

CABINET

15 December 2004

ENVIRONMENT STRATEGY 2004-2008

REPORT OF CHIEF EXECUTIVE

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RECENT REFERENCES:

CAB 835 - High Quality Environment Best Value Review – Final Report - 17 March 2004

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The creation of an Environment Strategy was a recommendation from the final report of the High Quality Environment Best Value Review. The strategy aims to draw together work undertaken by the City Council and its partnerships for the District's environment and provide a focus for this work.

Following a period of consultation with various groups, this report presents the final draft of the Environment Strategy for Cabinet's approval.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1 That Cabinet approves the proposed Environment Strategy 2004-2008
- 2 That Cabinet recommend a lead Member with responsibility for Street Scene and a lead Member with responsibility for Countryside issues

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DETAIL:

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The final report of the High Quality Environment Best Value Review (CAB 835) recommended that an Environment Strategy should be developed setting out clear aims for the Council's work on the environment, and an agreed action plan to deliver these.
- 1.2 The Best Value Review considered that there was a lack of an overarching vision to co-ordinate work undertaken by the Council for the District's environment. The Environment Strategy sets out to address this by providing this vision, and by drawing together work that is both planned and currently undertaken into one cross-cutting strategy.
- 1.3 The strategy also seeks to address weaknesses highlighted by the CPA inspection in 2003. The inspectors' final report indicated a weakness in protecting and sustaining the rural countryside in the District, and stated that the City Council did not respond effectively to the needs of the community in relation to the maintenance of the local environment.
- 1.4 The strategy has been developed since June 2004 with the input of Members, Corporate Management Team and relevant officers.
- 1.5 Members were also invited to a workshop on 26 August 2004 to discuss the proposed visions and aims for the Environment Strategy, and issues of concern for the environment.

2 Strategy Chapters

- 2.1 The Environment Strategy contains six chapters: Open Spaces, Street Scene, Countryside, Biodiversity, Trees and Hedgerows and Environmental Protection. These chapter headings were discussed by Corporate Management Team and the Best Value Review Team.
- 2.2 It is recognised that the environment encompasses many elements, and affects a great deal of the work that the City Council undertakes. It was therefore decided to limit the strategy to the six aspects in paragraph 2.1 to ensure that it did not become too large or lack focus.

3 Consultation

- 3.1 The draft Environment Strategy was sent out for consultation between 8 October and 15 November 2004.

- 3.2 The following groups were invited to comment on the strategy: Winchester City Council Members, all Parish Councils, statutory organisations including English Nature, Environment Agency and Countryside Agency, voluntary organisations including Hampshire Wildlife Trust and British Trust for Conservation Volunteers, relevant officers at Hampshire County Council, relevant officers at Winchester City Council and Corporate Management Team.
- 3.3 Thirty-two responses were received from a variety of consultees to which copies of the strategy were sent. Appendix 1 lists the twenty organisations external to the City Council which responded to the consultation. The other respondents were Members and officers. All their comments have been considered in revising the final version of the Environment Strategy.
- 3.4 In the consultation some comments related to specific issues which have been passed on to the relevant services.
- 3.5 The following points were the principal issues raised in common from the consultation responses:
- Ability of open space policies to provide sufficient and appropriate open space
 - Need to include an action to reduce street furniture and signage clutter
 - Reduction in amount of countryside due to planning policies and Planning Policy Guidance 3
 - Need to address the safety and maintenance of trees as well as their preservation
 - Need for stronger reference to the work undertaken by Parish Councils and community groups
 - Concern about the City Council's stance on the proposed South Down's National Park
 - Need to include a clearer distinction between rural and urban aspects of the environment throughout the strategy
 - Need to include reference to the South East Plan and sub-regional strategies superseding the County Structure Plan
 - Concern about the City Council's resources for fulfilling aims in the 'Countryside' and 'Biodiversity' chapter
- 3.6 Copies of the consultation responses and the consultation draft including changes made to it following the consultation period are held on file in the Chief Executive's Department.
- 4 Timescale of Strategy and Review of Progress
- 4.1 It is proposed that the strategy cover a rolling four year period. This will allow it to reflect the annual review of corporate priorities which the City Council undertakes and any change in circumstance and budgetary situation.

- 4.2 As the strategy has principally drawn actions from business plans, some will have already started. These, though, will be ongoing and have affects and implications which will need to be monitored through the strategy.
- 4.3 Responsibility for monitoring and reviewing the Environment Strategy will remain with the Chief Executive's Department, pending the finalisation of department restructuring. The strategy, with the relevant Portfolio Holders, will be reviewed quarterly to take account of corporate priorities, new initiatives and opportunities and the budgetary situation.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

5 CORPORATE STRATEGY (RELEVANCE TO):

- 5.1 The Environment Strategy will help the City Council address its key priorities *to provide affordable homes in safe and pleasant environments for all sectors of our community, and to minimise pollution and waste and to make efficient use of resources.*

6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- 6.1 As the strategy aims to draw together existing and planned actions, resources to undertake these will already have been accounted for in business plans.
- 6.2 The resources for the strategy will need to be reconsidered next year when the action plan is reviewed as to what new actions are considered necessary.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

Responses from Winchester Council Members, Parish Councils and other organisations to the consultation draft Environment Strategy as held on file in the Chief Executive's Department

APPENDICES:

Appendix 1 – List of organisations which responded to the Environment Strategy consultation

Appendix 2 - Environment Strategy 2004 - 2008

Appendix 1

List of organisations who responded to the Environment Strategy ConsultationParish Councils

Droxford Parish Council
Bramdean and Hinton Ampner Parish Council
Itchen Valley Parish Council
Swanmore Parish Council
Corhampton and Meonstoke Parish Council
Boarhunt Parish Council
Soberton Parish Council
Old Alresford Parish Council
Sparsholt Parish Council
Cheriton Parish Council
Denmead Parish Council
Kingsworthy Parish Council
Micheldever Parish Council
Wonston Parish Council
Oliver's Battery Parish Council

External Agencies

Environment Agency
East Hants Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Joint Advisory Committee
Hampshire County Council
Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre
Hampshire Wildlife Trust