

**TO: EXECUTIVE – 8 MARCH 2004**

**SUBJECT: SCRUTINY OF ACTION 21**

**FROM: ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

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**1. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 1.1 The content of the report be noted;
- 1.2 A formal reporting procedure, be considered, to oblige members to formally report back any information on their work on outside bodies annually, to Council; and
- 1.3 All parties be congratulated on their efforts to make Action 21 the success that it is, especially the Sustainability Officer.
- 1.4 That whilst noting the budgetary constraints of the Council, opportunity for maintaining financial support should be expanded.

**2. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 To inform the Executive of the findings of the Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee in respect of their scrutiny of Action 21.

**3. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 3.1 The Committee considered a number of alternative options to help the Council in its commitment to Agenda 21, including taking on the work of Action 21 as a Council. However it was felt that the above recommendations were the best approach at this moment in time.

**4. POLICY AND BUDGET FRAMEWORK**

- 4.1 The report on the budget which was on the Agenda for the 9 February Executive assumed that the funding for Agenda 21 would fall out at the end of 2004/05 as originally planned. The potential increase in tax for 2005/06 is already in the order of 10% and to retain the support for Agenda 21 would add approximately another 1% to the Tax in 2005/06
- 4.2 This service helps the Council to achieve two of the seven key themes within the corporate strategy both now and into the future. These are “Improve our services to provide a cleaner and greener environment” and ”promote and contribute to a safer and healthier community”.

Jose Compton  
Chairman of Environment Overview Scrutiny Committee

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Environment Overview Scrutiny Committee, agenda & minutes, for 8 October, 2 December 2003 and 3 February 2004.

<b>Areas in District Affected:</b>	All
<b>Executive Portfolio Area and Holder:</b>	Councillor Mrs Begg, Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services
<b>Scrutiny Committee:</b>	Environment
<b>Key Decision:</b>	No
<b>Included in Forward Plan:</b>	No
<b>Method of consultation:</b>	N/A

**For further information about this report please contact:**

Contact Officer: Graham Leach  
Tel:(01926) 456102 (Direct Line)  
E-Mail:[graham.leach@warwickdc.gov.uk](mailto:graham.leach@warwickdc.gov.uk)

## 5. **BACKGROUND**

- 5.1 As part of its work plan for 2003/04 the Committee agreed to scrutinise the work of Action 21.
- 5.2 At the 8 October meeting the Committee agreed the following three areas for scrutiny at the 2 December meeting:
- Quarterly reports to the Council's Senior Officers on the work of Action 21;  
The Council's service level agreement with Action 21; and  
The Action 21 Budget.
- 5.3 At the December meeting the Committee considered a report from Action 21 providing them with the information requested at the 8 October meeting. In addition to the report, presentations were made by Action 21 members on how they felt Action 21 was performing in relation to its service level agreement and work in general.
- 5.4 Following the presentations the general discussions of the meeting highlighted a number of areas which needed to be addressed, some of which not only affected this project but were cutting across the Authority.
- 5.5 The Committee felt there was an issue with regards to the appointments to outside bodies. Although Councillors had received guidance with regard to the code of conduct when representing the Council on outside bodies, it was felt that there was a need to make a clearly defined reporting channel, to allow Councillors to report back, annually on their work on outside bodies both to officers and Councillors.
- 5.6 The Committee felt the quarterly reports to officers were a good idea and requested that they be circulated to all Councillors as they felt this was a good source of information which kept them up to date with the work of Action 21 and would help them to promote its work more effectively.
- 5.7 The Committee were in agreement that the Sustainability Officer had a tough role to act as a bridge between Action 21 and the Council, which was a lively group of independent minds, and it was hard to maintain their aspirations but keep them within the remit of Action 21, It was also considered that the role of sustainability officer in relation to their responsibilities of Action 21 should be careful to avoid unreasonable expectation, especially when they were acting as a critical friend of the Council as set out in the Service Level Agreement.
- 5.8 The Committee were appreciative of all of the work of Action 21 considering the financial restrictions on them. It was emphasised that the majority of its funding was received from outside bodies and partnership contributions. The total turnover was approximately £25,000 with a grant of £7,900 from the Council
- 5.9 There was considerable praise for the 300% increase in membership from June 2002 to November 2003, which was a significant achievement. Investigation was underway for promoting Action 21 in Kenilworth and Warwick, at the one stop shops, which it was hoped would bring additional membership from these Towns.

- 5.10 There was a need for a hot desk or working space within Riverside House for the use of Action 21 workers/board members and there was a need for greater support to Action 21 in general, which would need to be addressed soon if the workload of Action 21 members continued to increase at its current rate.
- 5.11 The appointment of the Allotment worker was also welcomed as they felt this would help to rejuvenate interest in allotments right across the district as they were a vital resource for the district and in some areas were suffering.
- 5.12 In conclusion the Committee were very pleased with the work of Action 21 and appreciated the high levels of commitment from all parties, considering the effort which was involved. They also felt that the budgetary commitment for Action 21 should be maintained and if possible increased, although the Committee appreciated the budgetary constraints on the Council, as they provided a vital service within the community which should be championed.

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