ENVIRONMENT POLICY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE - ANNUAL REPORT

1. Purpose

1.1 To review the work of the Environment Policy Development Committee (EPDC) for the current year and to look ahead to the coming year’s work programme.

2. The New Structure

2.1 This has been in place since the beginning of the 2004-05 Council year. The Committee is now able to focus on policy development work, although in this first year of the new structure there have been policy review issues carried over from the former Environment, Transport and Localities Overview Committee.

2.2 The clear functional role of Committees and Panels in the new structure has been a benefit in work programme planning terms with most issues finding a logical home. The Budget is still a policy framework document and Chairs decided that it was appropriate to consider it in the Policy Development Committees because of the retained Directorate links. However, in policy development terms Committees should bear in mind the medium term and not concentrate solely on the next year’s budget.

3. Review of Meetings

3.1 This year the Committee has met on eight occasions.

3.2 Major issues considered this year have included the Local Development Scheme, renewable and sustainable energy and the development of an Energy Strategy for the Council and community safety. While the Committee generally aims to help develop policy before issues become acute, it has also found time to consider matters of topical interest to the people of Milton Keynes, such as roadside shrines and the campaign for an artificial beach at Willen Lake.

3.3 EPDC has carried out research on renewable and sustainable energy outside the committee room by means of site visits to the Milton Keynes Energy Agency and Marsh Leys near Bedford.

3.4 Work programme management has been achieved through the Chair and Spokespersons working as a planning group. Input to the work programme planning process has been from the Council’s priorities, the Forward Plan, advice from Environment DMT and individual Members.
3.5 As a rule it has been possible to keep agenda to no more than 3 substantive items thus allowing reasonable time for issues to be properly debated.

3.6 One consequence of the greater number of scheduled meetings and the greater number of Committees/Panels in the new structure has been a reduced ability to support review group activity. For Environment Committee the support this past year has been centred on the Grid Roads Speed Limit Review Group.

4. **Achievements and Effectiveness**

4.1 The Committee approved the conclusion of the Taxi Delimitation Review Group’s work. The recommendations in the Group’s final report were endorsed by the Cabinet Member and passed on to the Licensing and Regulation Committee. All the recommendations were accepted.

4.2 EPDC was instrumental in bringing the issue of renewable and sustainable energy, and in particular the work of Woking Borough Council, to the Council’s attention. Acknowledging the far-reaching nature of the issue, the Committee made recommendations to the Waste Forum, the Milton Keynes Partnership Committee as well as to Cabinet. The Committee also received the Council’s Draft Climate Change Strategy in December and will be reviewing this as officers work on it with the Carbon Trust.

4.3 The Grid Roads Speed Limit Review Group, originally intended as a one-off meeting, has in fact met on several occasions through the year and made a detailed study to understand the circumstances leading to the current situation. The findings and the Review Group’s conclusions are presented in a final report elsewhere on the Committee’s agenda.

4.4 The Committee has shown flexibility in responding to policy issues which are topical. Two recent examples are the debate on roadside shrines and the concept of a beach for Milton Keynes. On both counts the debate in Committee has moved these issues forward and

4.5 This Committee, like the other Policy Development Committees, considered that part of the Budget relevant to its remit at two meetings, the Base Budget and the Directorate position in November and the Cabinet proposals in January. On both occasions, it attempted to look beyond the next year’s budget and consider the Medium Term Plan. In January, it acknowledged that a good settlement had been received and commended the Environment Directorate for progress made through the year.

5. **Implementation Tracking**

5.1 Although Overview and Scrutiny does monitor how many of its recommendations are accepted by Cabinet, this does not account for recommendations to other bodies and does not seek to discover whether they are subsequently implemented.
5.2 The **Annex** to this report shows the progress of the three recommendations made by Environment Policy Development Committee that require implementation by another body. In fact, only part of one of these is directed at Cabinet. The work of this Committee this year, while grounded in its proper remit, has sought to have influence wherever most appropriate, and not necessarily within the Council.

6. **Future Work Programme**

6.1 Because there are no local elections this year, there should be continuity within the Committee, which should allow effective following up of items suggested or already worked on in the year 2004-05.

6.2 This year, the Chair and Spokespersons have put forward the following items for future consideration by the Committee:

- Oakgrove Millennium Community
- Bletchley Park Master Plan
- Review of taxi driver licensing policy
- Milton Keynes expansion
- Regional and supplementary planning guidance
- Planning Gain Policies
- Graffiti Strategy

6.3 The Sustainable Integrated Transport Strategy is due to be reviewed in the next council year. It is a Policy Framework Document and should be considered by Environment Policy Development Committee.