

## ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

**Date:** Wednesday 4 December 2002  
**Time:** 9.15 am to 12.00 pm  
**Venue:** Committee Room 3/4, National Assembly Building

### REVIEW OF BIODIVERSITY: ANALYSIS OF KEY ISSUES

#### Purpose

1. To seek the Committee's views on issues and recommendations for inclusion in its report on local biodiversity action.

#### Background

2. The review terms of reference are: "*to review current progress and ensure that Local Biodiversity Action Plans (LBAPs) are in place for all areas of Wales, and identify further action needed at the national and local levels to support LBAP implementation through partnerships.*"

3. On 23 October the Committee considered a report from the Secretariat outlining the main themes emerging from the consultation, which were discussed at the meeting on 6 November with local officers, voluntary sector partners and the Countryside Council for Wales (CCW), the Assembly's statutory adviser on biodiversity. There was broad consensus on the barriers to the successful implementation of LBAPs and actions needed at the national and local levels to support implementation through partnerships.

#### Key issues

4. The main barriers to implementation of local biodiversity actions identified during the review were seen as commitment, information and resources. **The Committee is invited to consider the following suggestions for addressing barriers to local delivery.**

*Political commitment to biodiversity at national and local level*

5. S.74 of The Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000 places duties on the Assembly in relation to biodiversity conservation. The Assembly must have regard to

biodiversity in the exercise of all its functions; and take, or promote the taking by others of, steps to enhance the conservation of habitats and species included on a list or lists published by the Assembly. A new Performance Indicator requires LBAPs to be in place for all local authority areas.

6. The review has highlighted significant calls for political commitment to deliver the Assembly's obligations for biodiversity, and for the Assembly to take the lead by integrating biodiversity into its own policies and priorities, and those of sponsored bodies. At a local level, strengthened commitment from local government is required, with some recommending that biodiversity become a statutory duty for local authorities. Others have suggested ways in which this can be achieved within existing legislation, for example by encouraging more Local Authorities to adopt LBAPs as supplementary planning guidance, and including biodiversity as an indicator in Community Plans.

7. Increased co-ordination between local and national strategies and improved communication between LBAP partnerships and UK BAP lead partners is also recommended, with a greater emphasis needed on local target setting. A strategy and guidance on monitoring and reporting could assist with the co-ordination of species and habitat monitoring at national and local level.

#### *Matching political commitment with resources*

8. To ensure that the commitment to biodiversity can be delivered locally, secure dedicated funding is needed, in particular to finance full-time LBAP officers. The Committee has also heard of the need to streamline funding sources, clarify match-funding requirements, and synchronise CCW's grant-aid funding cycle with the budget planning cycles of match-funding organisations. Members may wish to consider whether a mechanism for the specific funding of local biodiversity actions, possibly by direct funding of partnerships, should be considered.

#### *Delivering local actions through partnerships*

9. Political and financial commitment to biodiversity would enable local partnerships, supported by full-time LBAP officers, to focus on the delivery of local priorities. With increased support, partnerships would also wish to raise the profile of work locally, especially in urban areas, and involve more local people and diverse partners. Members have suggested the establishment of 'biodiversity awards' to highlight good conservation practice and encourage partnership working.

#### *Accessibility of information and expertise*

10. Target setting and monitoring are dependent on the availability of biodiversity data, and there is widespread support for the development of a nationally funded Local Records Centre network, building on the Powys pilot. Delivery of actions on the ground is facilitated by experts,

and there are calls for increasing expert support available locally and for harnessing the skills of volunteers. The review has also highlighted various ways of increasing the number of experts and reversing the decline in the skills base (both scientific and practical) through education. It has also been suggested that academic research be aligned to UK BAP research priorities.

### **Next steps**

11. Following discussion at today's meeting the Secretariat will prepare a draft report and recommendations for consideration on 18 December. The Committee's final report is scheduled for plenary debate on 25 February 2003.

### **Recommendation**

12. The Committee is asked for its views on the issues and recommendations to be included in its report.

### **Committee Secretariat**

November 2002