

SUSTAINABILITY COMMITTEE

WOODHILL HOUSE, ABERDEEN, 19 FEBRUARY, 2020

Present: Councillors C Pike (Chair), I Davidson (Vice-Chair), N Baillie, R Cassie, S Dickinson, J Hutchison (as substitute for Councillor I Taylor), and A Kloppert.

Apologies: Councillors M Ford, I Taylor, and A Wallace.

Officers: Head of Roads, Landscape Services and Waste Services; Strategic Finance Manager; Engineering Services Manager, Infrastructure Services; Team Leader (Sustainability and Climate Change), Infrastructure Services; Circular Economy Officer, Infrastructure Services; Climate Change and Sustainability Officer (T Murray), Infrastructure Services; Greenspace Project Officers (T Telisman Susic and M Watt), Infrastructure Services; Principal Solicitor (Democratic Services), Legal and Governance; Environmental Planner (J Davidson), Planning & Environment; and Committee Officer (J McRobbie), Legal and Governance.

1. DECLARATION OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

The Chair asked Members for declarations of interest in terms of the Councillors' Code of Conduct. No declarations were made.

2. PUBLIC SECTOR EQUALITY DUTY

In making decisions on the following items of business, the Committee **agreed**, in terms of Section 148 of the Equality Act 2010:-

- (1) to have due regard to the need to:-
 - (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, and victimisation;
 - (b) advance equality of opportunity between those who share a protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and
 - (c) foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and
- (2) to consider, where an equality impact assessment has been provided, its contents and to take those into consideration when reaching a decision.

3. MINUTE OF MEETING OF THE SUSTAINABILITY COMMITTEE OF 13 NOVEMBER, 2019

There had been circulated and was **approved** as a correct record, the Minute of Meeting of 13 November, 2019.

4. CLIMATE READY ABERDEENSHIRE – ORAL PRESENTATION BY CLIMATE CHANGE AND SUSTAINABILITY OFFICER

The Committee heard from the Climate Change and Sustainability Officer of ongoing progress in ensuring that Aberdeenshire Council was climate ready.

Ms Murray spoke of the need to adapt and to mitigate against the actions of climate change, including the greater awareness of the role which biodiversity had to play, and the specific challenges for Aberdeenshire which had a population growing above the national average.

There was a requirement for the Council, in partnership, to identify and prioritise actions using nationally established tools, and also to understand and mitigate against known local impacts, and so a Steering Group was to be created and local engagement undertaken. A database would collate what, and where, activity was already being demonstrated around the three priorities, with early data already identifying 61 mitigation, 19 adaptation, and 32 biodiversity priorities, covering all areas of Aberdeenshire. 26 funding stream opportunities had been identified.

There was discussion of the impacts on every Council service of weather extremes and the Council's current work on resilience building with groups in its towns and villages, and also with interest groups with no specific geographical location, which could be explored more closely; the difficulties in charting what was already established on the ground, with new groups emerging frequently and the role of Elected Members to be advise officers of any such groups in their area; the merits of having a standard proforma for the cataloguing of the groups for easier collation of information; and a potential role of Rural Partnerships as potential coordinators of local interest groups.

The Committee **agreed:**

- (1) that Officers consider proforma for community sign up use;
- (2) that officers contact the Resilience Officer may have local community resilience plans;
- (3) to stress role for each Elected Member to feedback information on community interest/ activities;
- (4) that Rural Partnerships be used as conduit to wide-ranging interest communities; and
- (5) to commend officers on the work undertaken to date and an informative presentation.

5. GREENSPACE PROJECT – ORAL PRESENTATION BY GREENSPACE PROJECTS OFFICER.

The Chair, on behalf of the Committee, welcomed Matthew Watt and Tajana Telisman Sobic, Greenspace Project Officers, to the meeting, which thereafter heard an update on the Greenspace Project.

In beginning his presentation, Mr Watt spoke of the connection of the Greenspace Project, with its bio-diversity aspects inputting to the actions taken in mitigation of climate change and towards being climate ready. The project's aim was to explore the benefits of green spaces, and in engagement with communities, to propose alternatives to traditional green space policies across Council ownership, with the intention of increasing bio-diversity and reduce carbon emissions. The project could deliver on Council priorities such as protecting the environment, linked to the pollinator action plan which would have a positive impact on carbon budgeting, and in some instances support Aberdeenshire's Natural Heritage strategy.

In the long term, there was an intention to use green space in a more efficient way, and various pilot initiatives were being tested to provide the evidence which would support future decision making and the use of assets in a better way. It was essential that the communities of Aberdeenshire be aware of, and involved in, the physical pilot projects and understand the information being provided on the new approach. If successful, a pooling of resources could be accomplished across council team expertise, including landscape officers, environmental planners and sustainability team, with that of the communities themselves in a long term sustainable agreement. In this way a short term project might have lasting benefits.

To date progress had focused on signposting to resources and information, and communications, partnership working through engagement, and internal and external training events.

A route map , based on experience to date, would be developed for progression of new sites, in order to be "shovel ready" in the event of funding becoming available, with the move in general away from large areas of cut grass to more trees, shrubs and wildflower meadows, with carbon savings in the reduced reliance on machines and travel between sites. The challenge would be in increasing the scale of developments to meet escalating demand.

The Committee heard from the Head of Roads, Landscaping, and Waste Services of the evolution of the project through the refreshed Open Space Strategy in 2010, with a target to increase biodiversity by 5% per annum, which had required a great deal of engagement with communities to explain the changes. Since then the requirement for the Council to develop a food growing strategy, by Spring 2020 had increased challenges, with unmet demand for allotment widespread across the Shire.

There was discussion of the potential uses for areas of grass land currently connecting housing developments, some pathways but many unused; barriers which restricted the use of such areas for fairs and other community gatherings; the increase in "factored" land in housing schemes, outwith Council control; the move in Educational spheres from structured play areas to informal play areas; the ability for space to have binary uses; future changes to land use which may require a very different open space to mitigate against flooding episodes; the potential role of Councillors to champion greenspace issues in their communities; the ongoing review of definition, and expectations of, Open Space Guidance in terms of the Council's Local Development Plan;

The Committee **agreed:-**

- (1) that six Elected Members be appointed as “Greenspace/ Biodiversity” Champions;
- (2) to welcome the evidence-based modelling for future strategy development;
- (3) to note the parallel review of the Open Space policy in the Local Development Plan; and
- (4) that officers report back on progress in due course.

6. ABERDEENSHIRE FAIRTRADE ZONE RENEWAL.

There had been circulated a report dated 20 January, 2020, by the Director of Infrastructure Services, requesting Members’ consideration of Aberdeenshire Council’s continued commitment to Fairtrade, specifically in supporting the requirements of the Council for Fairtrade Zone status and all other actions suggested within the Fairtrade Zone Renewal application.

Having heard further from officers of the Aberdeenshire wide commitment, beyond the Council itself, there was discussion of the need to increase representation and community and business participation in North Aberdeenshire; the challenges of Fairtrade in terms of the Aberdeenshire Building Change programme, in the context that not all goods might be sourced locally; and the barriers in getting community groups to enrol in the Fairtrade accreditation.

The Committee **agreed:-**

- (1) on behalf of Aberdeenshire Council, to commit the Council to its continued support of Fairtrade Zone status in Aberdeenshire, and the requirements of this commitment, as stated in Goal 1 within Appendix 1 to the report; and
- (2) that the undernoted comments be made on actions proposed under the goals required to renew the Aberdeenshire Fairtrade Zone application, due on 22 May, 2020 (as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report).

7. CARBON BUDGET 2019/2020 UPDATE

With reference to the Minute of Meeting of Aberdeenshire Council of 14 February, 2019 (Item 8), there had been circulated a report dated 20 January, 2020, by the Director of Infrastructure Services, setting out progress being made with the Carbon Budget for 2019/20 across each of the four Directorates, highlighting projects which had been completed, were ongoing, or had been changed.

The Committee heard from Officers of two actions in particular: the higher than expected online Warpit figures; and the change of focus in waste from segregation through skips to the roll out of LED lighting at Household Waste sites, which would now show as a project for 2020/21.

There was discussion of provision of the necessary infrastructure to support a greater reliance on electric cars; the impact of LED lighting as a replacement for high pressure sodium, being cheaper to run and requiring less maintenance; challenges

in encouraging the correct use of waste segregation bins in Council Offices and Academies; and further energy efficient proposals which may be considered by the Council in setting its carbon budget in March, 2020.

The Committee **agreed**:- to note the terms of the report.

8. UK STATE OF NATURE REPORT 2019

There had been circulated a report dated 23 January, 2020 by the Director of Infrastructure Services, requesting Members' consideration of the implications for the Council of the UK State of Nature Report 2019, in which over 70 wildlife organisations had joined with Government agencies to present the clearest picture possible of the state of UK species and habitats.

Having heard further from officers of the detail of the third report, used as a communication tool to highlight the continuing decline over 24% of populations, with Scottish statistics showing some species decreasing in recording by 50%, and others increasing by 28%, with 62% showing significant change, reflecting the flux of nature and environment. There had not yet been extinctions of species, but had evidences in a loss of bio-abundance, with the drivers of change being the management of land and sea, exacerbated by climate change. Aberdeenshire, as directly managing some landscape, and with input to education and planning, would have a clear role in considering mitigation of the impacts through ongoing biodiversity work, which would be reported to the next meeting of the Committee.

There was discussion of the impacts on specific species, with onshore the return of pine marten and red squirrels, but massive changes discernible with regard to seabird populations, reacting to a reduction of plankton and increasing sea surface temperatures, with kittiwake decline recorded nationally as 60-70% over 10 years; the decline in range of insects, evidenced by cleaner windscreens at the end of a journey, potentially linked to increasing use of insecticide; the impact of Brexit and replacement funding support to farmers and fishermen, which might include a more "resource management provision" element; and community culpability for the encouragement of herring gulls to seek food inland.

The Committee **agreed**:

- (1) to note that appropriate officers and committees would respond, as appropriate, to the implications as detailed in the report; and
- (2) to await further updates on progress.

9. SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT'S LOCAL ENERGY POLICY STATEMENT – CONSULTATION.

There had been circulated a report dated 13 January, 2020, by the Director of Business Services, informing Members of a response, submitted under Delegated Powers, and following consultation, to the Scottish Government consultation on Local Energy Policy Statement.

The Committee **acknowledged** the response sent, as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report.

Prior to the close of the meeting, the Chair, on behalf of the Committee expressed thanks and best wishes to Ms Cowie, Team Leader (Sustainability and Climate Change), who would soon leave on Maternity Leave. Her support for the Committee to date was much appreciated.