

ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL

INFRASTRUCTURE SERVICES COMMITTEE

SKYPE MEETING, 1 OCTOBER, 2020

Present: Councillors P Argyle (Chair), J Cox (Vice Chair), W Agnew, D Aitchison, G Carr, A Fakley, J Ingram, P Johnston, J Latham, I Mollison, S Smith, I Taylor, B Topping (as substitute for Councillor G Reid), and R Withey.

Apologies: Councillor G Reid.

In Attendance: Councillor J Gifford (Item 5).

Officers: Director of Infrastructure Services, Head of Service (Planning & Environment), Head of Service (Transportation), Service Manager, Economic Development & Protective Services; Service Manager, Environmental Health & Trading Standards; Business Collaboration Manager, Transportation; Corporate Finance Manager; Principal Solicitor, Legal and Governance (L Cowie); Team Manager, Economic Development & Protective Services; Industry Support Executive, Economic Development & Protective Services; Strategic Transport Officer, Transportation; Marketing & Communications Officer (K Duncan); and Committee Officer (J McRobbie).

1. DECLARATION OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

The Chair asked Members if they had any interests to declare in terms of the Councillors' Code of Conduct and the following interests were intimated: –

- (1) Councillors Argyle, Aitchison, and Cox, (as substantive members) and Councillor Mollison, (as a substitute member) of NESTRANS, declared an interest in agenda **Item 8**. That interest had a specific exclusion, therefore, those members concluded that they would remain and participate when that item was being considered.
- (2) Councillor Fakley declared an interest in agenda Item 11, having recently met with a group applying for, or potentially applying for, Scottish Government Town Centre Funding. He concluded that the interest was significant and that he would leave the meeting and take no part in the discussion of the item.

2A. PUBLIC SECTOR EQUALITY DUTY

In making decisions on the following items of business, the Committee **agreed**, in terms of Section 149 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) where an Equality Impact Assessment is provided, to consider its contents and take those into account when reaching a decision.

2B. EXEMPT INFORMATION

The Committee **agreed that**, under Sections 50A (4) and (5) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, as amended, the public and media representatives be excluded from the meeting for Items 13 and 14 of the business on account of the likely disclosure of exempt information of the classes described in the relevant Paragraphs of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act.

3. MINUTE OF THE INFRASTRUCTURE SERVICES COMMITTEE MEETING OF 20 AUGUST, 2020

The Committee had before them, and **approved** as a correct record, the Minute of Meeting of 20 August, 2020.

The Minute would be signed, by the Chair, at a later date.

4. OUTSTANDING BUSINESS

There was circulated a list of outstanding actions from previous meetings of the Infrastructure Services Committee, along with new items which had been deferred to future meetings of the Committee, as at 20 August 2020.

Having considered the list of outstanding actions, the Committee **agreed to note** the current position in respect of actions arising at previous meetings.

5. NOTICE OF MOTION – COUNCILLOR GIFFORD

There had been circulated a Notice of Motion, from Councillor Gifford, requesting the consideration of writing to the Director of the Maritime UK, to endorse an open letter of representation to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, seeking support for the growth of the Maritime industry. The Chair, on behalf of the Committee, invited Councillor Gifford to address the meeting.

Councillor Gifford, thanking the Committee for considering his Notice of Motion, spoke of the critical importance of the maritime sector to Aberdeenshire, North East Scotland, and the wider United Kingdom and the opportunities which might be available, in the Chancellor's planned comprehensive spending review, to look for

additional financial support. He cited other authorities across Great Britain which had already endorsed the collective representation.

There was discussion of the need for a cover letter to better reflect the powers devolved to the Scottish Government at Holyrood; urge full engagement with, and a response appropriate to the differing economic climates across, all four nations of the United Kingdom; and highlight the critical importance of the North Sea Fishing Industry; and discussion of the ongoing need for clarification of specific decarbonation proposals.

The Committee **agreed:-**

- (1) to approve the signing of the collaborative letter as detailed in the Notice of Motion; and
- (2) to delegate to the Director, in consultation with the Chair, Vice-Chair and Opposition Spokesperson, the sending of a revised response as detailed in the above discussion.

6. CARBON BUDGET, SIX MONTHLY UPDATE AND COVID-19 SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE LESSONS LEARNED

With reference to the Minute of Meeting of Full Council of 18 March, 2020, (Item 10), there had been circulated a report dated 22 September, 2020 by the Director of Infrastructure Services, providing an update on the progress of the carbon budget projects relating to the service, and also reflecting on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on sustainability and climate change.

The Committee heard further from the Business Collaboration Manager that the report was the first of its kind, intended to assist Members to consider the various threads of carbon monitoring across Infrastructure Services, and of the increasing need to identify additional projects to both complete the allocation which had not been identified at the start of the financial year and to compensate for those areas where approved actions had not been able to progress as had been anticipated, partially because of the changes to services required by Covid where some actions had stopped, but others were being done differently.

There was discussion of the implications for the Council as a whole of the significantly reduced business mileage; the impact of remote meetings; the reporting of carbon costs in major capital projects; and the potential use of a common carbon assessment tool to facilitate understanding of choices in budget and service priority.

The Committee **agreed:-**

- (1) to acknowledge (a) that anticipated savings had not all been achieved because of Covid-related disruption and (b) the challenge in identifying new projects for the next 12-18 months to compensate for anticipated shortfalls;
- (2) to note the impact of new areas of activity and areas of reducing demands on the reported savings;
- (3) to commend the use of carbon abatement curve tools to provide clarity on projects detailed in Appendix 1 to the report;

- (4) that officers investigate, and confirm via Ward Pages, whether carbon calculations are embedded in capital projects such as new school build, or if assumed saving are calculated comparing running costs for old school buildings to a new build;
- (5) to request that the Sustainability Committee consider assessment tools for embedded carbon costs of capital programme works and potential need to amend Council policy on travel and mileage;
- (6) to note the ongoing responsibility of each Director to secure the targets set out in the Carbon Budget, and report on every six months to the relevant policy committees and the Sustainability Committee; and
- (7) in all other respects, to welcome the report and commend its style and format, noting that this may evolve over time.

7. HISTORIC ASSET MANAGEMENT PROJECT ANNUAL REPORT

There had been circulated a report dated 11 September, 2020 by the Director of Infrastructure Services, requesting Members' consideration of the annual update on the Historic Asset Management Project, reviewed in the light of the Council's financial position and the Covid-19 pandemic.

Having noted the areas of non-delivery on projects and the proposal to reschedule these to the 2021/22 financial year, that it was intended to apply for external funding for large projects and that any savings in Planning and Environment Services budgets would be directed to the necessary repairs for which the Council was legally liable, the Committee **agreed:-**

- (1) to endorse the proposed adapted approach to be taken by the Historic Asset Management Project in respect of Council-owned historic assets as detailed in the report;
- (2) to note the ongoing investigation of additional funding sources, including revenue for films and events and the consideration of use of in-house resources for appropriate repairs;
- (3) to welcome that underspends in other parts of Planning & Environmental Services budgets use to augment repairs required for Health and Safety reasons; and
- (4) to commend staff for their work within tight budget constraints.

8. NESTRANS REGIONAL TRANSPORT STRATEGY, CONSULTATION AND ABERDEEN CITY REGION DEAL, STRATEGIC TRANSPORT ASSESSMENT

There had been circulated a report dated 25 September, 2020 by the Director of Infrastructure Services, requesting Members' consideration of a new NESTRANS regional transport strategy and Aberdeen City Region Deal's consultation on a Strategic Transport Assessment (STAG1).

Having heard further from the Head of Transportation of the change in direction of the NESTRANS strategy, looking to build on existing infrastructure, without the need for additional lobbying for new, and having noted the comments from the six Area

Committees would also form part of the submissions made, there was discussion of the strategy and STAG appraisal, including the potential to consider distinct parts of various .

Having moved, but receiving no seconder, that NESTRANS be requested to discuss with the Scottish Government the consideration of major transport projects in terms of embedded carbon, and revise future progression of the various projects accordingly, Councillor Johnston requested, as provided for in Standing Order 5.2.4 that the terms of his Motion be recorded in the Minute.

Having considered the issues raised in the Regional Transport Strategy and City Region Deal Strategic Transport Assessment, and the comments received from the Area Committees, the Committee **agreed:-**

- (1) to welcome the draft strategy's different approach, to approve in principle the broad response to Nestrans and the City Region Deal Joint Committee;
- (2) that the undernoted comments be added to those made by Area Committees on the Regional Transport Strategy and on the priorities identified in the Strategic Transport Assessment:
 - to recommend the pursuit of achievable sections of rail improvement where possible without needing the Aberdeen City tunnelling and dualling to station;
 - the inclusion of references to Coastal Paths as part of Active Travel;
 - the inclusion of the A947 under safety in addition to the route action plan; and
 - reinforcement of the economic need for transport connectivity, by road and, potentially rail, north of Ellon to the harbour towns of Peterhead and Fraserburgh;
- (3) to delegate the final submission of the consultation response to the Director of Infrastructure Services following consultation with the Chair, Vice Chair and Opposition spokesperson for Infrastructure Services Committee; and
- (4) that officers provide a briefing report on Greener Routes.

9. UPDATE ON NORTHERN ROADS COLLABORATION JOINT COMMITTEE

With reference to the Minute of Meeting of Full Council of 30 June, 2016, (Item 6), there had been circulated a report dated 18 September, 2020 by the Director of Infrastructure Services, containing the 2019/2020 Annual Report from the Northern Roads Collaboration Joint Committee and highlighting Aberdeenshire Council's continuing lead role for the Joint Committee.

The Committee heard further from the Head of Transportation that the Annual Report was in fact approved, not a draft as suggested by the watermark; that the Joint Committee had been a positive forum in times of constrained resources, in reacting collectively to the recent challenges of Covid-19, and would provide a really strong collaboration for future ventures; that the meeting of the Council on 23 September had approved the appointment of Councillor Gifford as a replacement for Councillor Argyle who had tendered his resignation from the Joint Committee; and that the Chairing of the Joint Committee had passed to Councillor Brenda Durno from Angus Council, from Councillor Morton of Argyll and Bute.

There was discussion of the progress made by the Northern Roads Collaboration Joint Committee, in the context where other national collaborations were less well developed.

The Committee **agreed:-**

- (1) welcome the Annual report from the Northern Roads Collaboration Joint Committee as attached at Appendix 1 to the report;
- (2) note that Aberdeenshire Council, on 23 September, 2020 had amended the appointment to the Joint Committee, following the resignation of Councillor Argyle, by the appointment of Councillor Gifford as substantive member; and
- (3) note the continued role of Aberdeenshire Council as the Lead Authority for the Joint Committee.

10. PARTNERSHIP REVIEW - EAST GRAMPIAN COASTAL PARTNERSHIP

There had been circulated a report dated 1 September, 2020 by the Director of Infrastructure Services, requesting Members' consideration of a review, undertaken in terms of the Council's Partnership Policy, of the East Grampian Coastal Partnership.

The Committee heard from Officers of the ongoing work of the Partnership, including recent plastic ties project, and their development of an online presence, developing a package for schools allowing them to deliver their own message, and a new initiative to facilitate the picking up of rubbish by single walkers by providing equipment to do so.

Members spoke of their own awareness, and appreciation, of the work of the Partnership in their wards, and, having considered the terms of the report, the Committee **agreed:-**

- (1) to endorse the partnership review of the East Grampian Coastal Partnership, as detailed in Appendices 1 and 2 of the report;
- (2) that the Council continue to participate in the partnership for a further two years; and
- (3) to commend the work of the Partnership, adapting to continue to engage with Aberdeenshire's communities in the context of Covid-19.

11. SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT TOWN CENTRE FUNDING

Councillor Fakley, having declared an interest in this item, left the meeting and took no part in the discussion.

There had been circulated a report dated 8 September, 2020 by the Director of Infrastructure Services, requesting Members' consideration of the criteria and proposed process for disbursement of a new funding allocation from the Scottish Government Town Centre Fund.

There was discussion as to the constrictions on the process by a 31 March, 2020 deadline for contracts to be in place or work begun on projects, and the attendant

impact on the timescale available for due governance processes, requiring the delegation of authority, and assurances were given that bids could be made for distinct phases of proposed works as long as these might be completed by September, 2021.

The Committee **agreed:-**

- (1) to approve the criteria to be used for the distribution of the Scottish Government Town Centre Fund 2020/2021, as detailed in paragraph 4.3 of the report;
- (2) the proposed process for the distribution of funds, as detailed in paragraph 4.6 of the report;
- (3) to delegate authority to the Director of Infrastructure Services to approve applications for funding from the Scottish Government Town Centre Funds 2020/21 following consultation with the Chair, Vice Chair, and Opposition Spokesperson of Infrastructure Services Committee, the Council Leader, and the Chief Executive; and
- (4) that the Director of Infrastructure Services report back to Committee with details of future applications approved under recommendation 3 above.

Councillor Fakley re-joined the meeting at this point.

12. PREPARING FOR EU EXIT AND SUPPORT FOR EXPORTING BUSINESSES.

There had been circulated a report dated 2 September, 2020, by the Director of Infrastructure Services providing an update on ongoing work to prepare for supporting businesses to export goods to the EU as the UK nears the end of the EU transition period on 1 January, 2021 and requesting the delegation of powers to the Head of Economic Development and Protective Services to revise the fee for Export Health Certificates.

There was discussion of the reasons for the proposed fee revision and the additional work and resource capacity which would be required by the Council, in addition to those nationally provided by a National Measures Food Hub, to provide the needed expert health certificates to meet demand from exporters. It was noted that the fees proposed would be at local discretion and look to minimize the costs for individual firms, whilst recovering costs. Concerns were expressed on the already challenging recruitment of Environmental Health staff and assurances given of the planned upskilling to certified support officers, and recruitment considerations made in the context of various scenario planning.

The Committee **agreed:-**

- (1) to delegate authority to the Head of Economic Development and Protective Services to adjust the fee for Export Health Certificates to companies exporting Products of Animal Origin for the period January to June 2021 following consultation with the Head of Finance, Chair, Vice Chair, and Opposition Spokesperson for Infrastructure Services Committee;
- (2) that the Head of Economic Development and Protective Services submit a further report to this Committee by the end of 2021 to set a revised fee to start from financial year 2022/23; and

- (3) to note and commend the work undertaken to date by officers to prepare for supporting businesses exporting to the EU.

13. EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND (ESF).

There had been circulated a report dated 3 September, 2020 by the Director of Infrastructure Services, requesting Members' consideration of proposed additional steps to close the Phase 1 Aberdeenshire European Social Fund (ESF) programme and providing an update on the Phase 2 programme.

Having heard from officers of the continuing issue, with some project sponsors failing to provide the documents required to conform with regulatory guidelines, it was noted with concern that this would impact on the Council's ability to reclaim the grant from the Scottish Government, and also impact on staff time as a resource.

The Committee **agreed:-**

- (1) to note the updated position on the closure of European Social Fund (ESF) projects;
- (2) that a deadline of 31 December, 2020 be set for project sponsors to provide all requested documentation and resolve any outstanding project issues;
- (3) to authorise the Head of Economic Development and Protective Services, as a last resort, and if deemed necessary and appropriate, to initiate decommitment procedures for any projects which do not meet the December, 2020 deadline; and
- (4) to note that, if decommitment is initiated as a last resort, the intent to have the process and Phase 1 closure completed by the end of March, 2021.

14. SUPPLEMENTARY INFRASTRUCTURE SERVICES PROCUREMENT PLAN

With reference to the Minute of Meeting of 12 March, 2020, (Item 23,) there had been circulated a report dated 17 September, 2020 by the Director of Infrastructure Services Committee seeking approval for the procurement of an automated barrier and number plate recognition system at the entrance to Household Recycling Centres (HRCs) in Aberdeenshire, to work in tandem with the booking system in place to ensure and improve social distancing within the centres, required by Covid-19.

The Committee heard from the Director of Infrastructure that no decision had as yet been made by officers as to whether to recommend the potential continuation of the booking system post-Covid, and there was discussion as to whether the recycling rates at HRCs had improved within the time of the introduction of the booking system and whether the booking system might be considered for other waste sites.

The Committee **agreed:-**

- (1) to approve the item on the Supplementary Infrastructure Service Procurement Plan in Appendix 1, to be added to the Infrastructure Services Directorate Procurement Plan 2020/21;

- (2) to approve the Procurement Approval Form as detailed in Appendix 2 to the report;
- (3) to note that the Head of Roads, Landscape & Waste Services has delegated authority to award the final contract as the item has a contract value less than £1,000,000; and
- (4) that officers report information on recycling figures pre- and post the introduction of the booking system at HRCs.

**A. MINUTE OF MEETING OF THE NORTHERN ROADS COLLABORATION
JOINT COMMITTEE OF 21 FEBRUARY, 2020**

There had been circulated and was **noted** the Minute of Meeting of the Northern Roads Collaboration Joint Committee of 21 February, 2020.