Aberdeenshire COUNCIL **Education and Children's Services**

ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL – 13 JANUARY 2022

AREA WORKING

1   Executive Summary/Recommendations

1.1   To provide Full Council with an update on the progress with the agreed actions following the disestablishment of the Area Improvement Working Group. This decision was agreed at Full Council on 24 June 2021 and is set out in **Appendix 1**. The progress includes the ongoing meetings with Chairs of Policy and Area Committees and Chief Officers; Area Working being on Directorate Management Team agendas, progression with discussion on role of Area Managers relating to remit of regeneration and the role of Area Committees relating to the remit of Landscape Services. This report will also give an oversight of ongoing operational matters that are being taken forward by Officers. These matters include supporting the role of Area Committees in the development and review of council policy by ensuring that Area Committee comments are firstly collected timeously and secondly reported, considered, and responded to appropriately. The report also asks that Full Council acknowledges that further reports are scheduled for 30 June 2022 and 19 January 2023.

1.2   Full Council is recommended to:

1.2.1   Acknowledge the report and that further reports are scheduled for 30 June 2022 and 19 January 2023.

2   Decision Making Route

2.1   Full Council received a report on Area Working at its meeting on 24 June 2021 (item 4). The decision is set out in **Appendix 1**.

2.2   This report provides the update on the actions to implement the recommendations and for Full Council to agree the future reporting schedule.

3   Discussion

3.1   Area Working is essential to all services and each Council service has staff working, leading, and managing teams in every area and every manager and all teams within the Council are required to have a strong area focus. Whilst the work they carry out is aligned to Council policy, set through Policy Committees, Services will be delivering services locally. As such, the impact of decisions made at Policy Committees will have a bearing on each area, hence the need to ensure robust, respectful, and meaningful working arrangements and relationships between the Strategic Leadership Team, Services, Area Managers' Teams, Area Committees and Policy Committees.

3.2   As noted in the report to Full Council in June, Area Working and indeed area improvement should not be seen as a "one off" phenomenon but should rather be embedded into our existing approaches so we can ensure we are continuously striving for quality area focused service delivery and achieving best value.

3.3 The decision of Full Council is set out in **Appendix 1** and the following paragraphs provide the update and detail the progression made for the recommendations that require actions –

2(i) ***Quarterly meetings be held between the Chief Executive, Directors, Area Chairs, Leader of the Council and Area Managers***

This has been implemented. The first meeting of Chief Executive, Directors, Area Managers and Area Committee Chairs was held on 24 September 2021. An additional meeting to continue the discussion this quarter was held on 17 November 2021. It was also agreed that on a bi-annual basis the Policy Committee Chairs would be invited. The Leader of the Council is also invited to all four meetings, and he can choose to attend at his discretion. The first meeting that also included the Policy Committee Chairs was held on 10 December 2021. Due to this being in the aftermath of Storm Arwen, the meeting focused on the impact of the storm and collation of the members' feedback. The key role of the Area Managers' Teams in the response to Storm Arwen was discussed and noted.

The Terms of Reference for the meetings are currently in development and will be drawn up by a cross section of the group (2 x Directors, 2 x Area Chairs and 2 x Area Managers) and circulated for comment prior to the next meeting. The terms of reference are to consider; mainstreaming of area working across the organisation; keeping focus on the importance of area working; enhancing area status; consideration of delegated activities and budgets; being the forum to highlight any areas of concern or good practice and to ensure that the distinction from Area Manager/Area Chairs meetings is made.

These quarterly meetings will be scheduled for the coming year and agenda items requested from the Chairs and the Officers.

2(ii) ***Area Working be a standing item on Directorate Management Team agendas***

Area Working is now a standing item on all three Directorate Management Team (DMT) agendas. A DMT is made up of the Director, the Heads of Service and two Area Managers. There is a formal meeting approximately every six weeks but there are also more frequent shorter meetings so matters can be raised quickly. This gives the opportunity for all members of the DMT to raise matters about service areas and area working noting that it is not limited to the remit of the services within that directorate. All area matters can be raised and discussed and then decisions made on the action to be taken. This relationship works across each directorate with Area Managers sharing information and offering feedback from an area perspective.

2 (iii) *Good quality area planning and performance reporting be achieved as part of the Best Value report actions*

The Best Value actions that directly relate to area planning and performance reporting have been completed. All Area Committees have approved the Area Performance Framework, Performance Indicators, and a performance reporting schedule. Area Plan Action Plan updates will be reported in December 2021 to February 2022. The Directorate Performance reporting and Directors' Informal Sessions will take place January to April 2022.

2 (iv) *Ongoing monitoring and review of Area Management Teams/Forums*

The review of Area Management Teams is ongoing. It has been discussed at DMTs and agreed that the operational arrangements in **Appendix 2** will be implemented early in 2022. The monitoring of the implementation will take place across the DMTs, at the regular Director/Area Manager meetings and at the meetings referred to in 2 (i) above. Area Forums are already held twice a year in each area in the form of the Joint Meetings between Area Committee members, Area Management Team and Local Community Planning Group members. Area Managers review the agenda for each meeting and extend specific invites to community/business groups and Third Sector organisations.

(v) *The role and reporting arrangements for Area Managers be considered as part of the Chief Officer Review*

The Chief Officer Review has concluded and as part of the review the role and reporting arrangements for Area Managers were considered. In terms of reporting, the current arrangements for line management will remain. In terms of role, there are ongoing discussions about devolving regeneration. An update will be provided on conclusion of these discussions; this should be in the next scheduled report to Full Council on 30 June 2022.

(vi) *That a bi-annual report on Area Working be presented to Full Council*

This report is the first general update and it asked that Full Council note that further reports are planned for the Full Council meetings on 30 June 2022 and 19 January 2023. The required consultation with elected members will take place at the meetings between Chief Executive, Directors, Area Managers and Policy/Area Committee Chairs.

4. *Instruct the Chief Executive to report to the Procedures Committee in respect of the proposals for the management and delivery of the regeneration programme and Landscape Services*

The required discussion on the proposals for the management and the delivery of the regeneration programme are ongoing. The Director of Environment and Infrastructure Services is leading on the production of a report detailing the recommendations relating to Area Committees and

Landscape Services. This report is currently scheduled for the meeting of Procedures Committee planned for February 2022.

Other Ongoing Area Working focused activity

3.4 Area Committees play a key role in the Council's Policy Development and Review. Consultation with area committees on new and reviewed policy is an essential element of the Policy Development and Review Framework that sits in Part 4B of the Scheme of Governance. Area Committees are also consulted on Council strategy and other decisions prior to a policy committee decision. During the meetings of the Area Improvement Working Group, the Area Committee Chairs made two particularly focused points on reports that ask for Area Committee comments and input to Policy Committees. These are -

3.4.1 One - It is a frequent occurrence that an area committee receives a report requesting its comments, however, those comments cannot be added to the report to policy committee. This is due to the policy committee report already being published. Therefore, comments are given verbally to the policy committee. The request from Area Committee Chairs is that this cannot continue as an acceptable practice and that Services must plan the reporting timetable well in advance. There are always situations that arise that may require a late report to an area committee so it can provide comments. However, this must be the exception to the rule with very good justification and mitigation.

3.4.2 Two - that it is not clear how comments from area committees are considered both by the Services or the Policy Committees. There is often no explanation or comment in the policy committee report in relation to the Area Committee comments.

3.4.3 The proposal to deal with 3.4.2 above is that when reporting area committee comments to a policy committee, all comments must be appended and officers must provide a response to all comments, including where amendments, changes or adaptations to the policy or strategy have been made. A standard template to capture area committee comments has been developed, with the intention of this being used for the policy reports, however a consistent approach has yet to be adopted. The Committee Officers and Governance Solicitors Group (COGS) and Governance Champions, will look at how this process can be improved to achieve that consistency across policy committees, building on the work already undertaken on the template. If comments are to the Service only then an update will be provided by briefing note. The COGS group will also consider and agree the process when there are exceptional circumstances and Area Committee comments are received after a policy committee report is published.

3.4.4 This also leads to the consideration as to whether a measurable Performance Indicator could be developed around the Area Committee comments on Policy and Strategy Papers to Policy Committees. Garioch Area Committee will be considering this as part of a self-evaluation process and development of committee performance indicators. This has arisen following a session on area performance and how, as a Council, could we measure "the difference made by the Area Committee".

3.4.5 Area Committees spend significant amounts of time in meetings considering policy papers and providing comments to the policy committees, but currently do not receive consistent feedback on whether these comments were actioned or not.

3.4.6 Having a performance indicator of this nature could have several positive impacts –

1. to measure the degree to which Area Committee comments are taken on board and therefore the impact Area Committee is having on policy development/policy review/strategic decisions
2. improvement of the quality of comments to the Policy Committee, increasing the likelihood of them being actioned.
3. Supports the embedding and mainstreaming of the ethos of area working.

3.4.7 Garioch Area Committee's discussion and decision can be reported to Full Council as part of the requested future reports.

4   Council Priorities, Implications and Risk

4.1   All of the Council's strategic priorities are relevant to this report. Effective area working supports the delivery of the pillars, priorities, and key principles.

Pillar	Priority
Our People	Education Health & Wellbeing
Our Environment	Infrastructure Resilient Communities
Our Economy	Economy & Enterprise Estate Modernisation

Underpinning the Priorities are a number of key principles. They are right people, right places, right time; responsible finances; climate and sustainability; Community Planning Partnership Local Outcome Improvement Plans; human rights and public protection; tackling poverty and inequalities; digital infrastructure and economy.

4.2   The table below shows whether risks and implications apply if the recommendation(s) is (are) agreed.

Subject	Yes	No	N/A
Financial			**x**
Staffing			**x**
Equalities and Fairer Duty Scotland			x
Children and Young People's Rights and Wellbeing			x
Climate Change and Sustainability			x
Health and Wellbeing			x
Town Centre First			x

4.3   The staffing / financial implications will be managed within existing staffing arrangements and agreed budgets.

4.4   An integrated impact assessment is not required because this report is an update on the implementation of Full Council's recommendations. (IIA – 000313)

4.5   The following Risks have been identified as relevant to this matter on a Corporate Level:

- ACORP004 Business and organisational transformation (including ensuring governance structures support change; and, managing the pace of change), the mitigation of which is the reporting to Full Council Corporate Risk Register).

5   Scheme of Governance

5.1   The Head of Finance and Monitoring Officer within Business Services have been consulted in the preparation of this report and their comments are incorporated within the report and are satisfied that the report complies with the Scheme of Governance and relevant legislation.

5.2   Full Council is able to consider this item in terms of its general remit in the List of Committee Powers in Part 2A of the Scheme of Governance. Full Council has not delegated the matter to another committee and has instructed the submission of reports.

LAURENCE FINDLAY
DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Report prepared by Ann Overton, Garioch Area Manager
Date 16 December 2021

List of Appendices
Appendix 1 – Extract from the minute of the meeting of Full Council on 24 June 2021
Appendix 2 – Proposed Area Management Framework

Appendix 1 – Extract from the minute of the meeting of Full Council on 24 June 2021

4.   AREA WORKING

With reference to the Minute of Meeting of 26 September, 2019 (Item 13), there had been circulated a report dated 2 June, 2021 by the Director of Education and Children's Services on the future of the Area Improvement Working Group (AIWG) and ongoing activity required to enhance Area Working. The report (1) explained that the AIWG had originally been established in November, 2018 and had made a number of recommendations which formed the basis of an Action Plan developed in relation to the cultural and behavioural aspects of Area Working, (2) advised that the Council had approved the AIWG Action Plan on 26 September, 2019 and re-established the AIWG with a revised remit to monitor progress in terms of delivering the actions and to make recommendations where necessary to the Procedures Committee on any proposed improvements affecting the Scheme of Governance, (3) highlighted some of the key achievements and milestones reached since September, 2019, (4) outlined proposals to review responsibility for regeneration programmes and Landscape Services at a more local level, and (5) recommended that the AIWG be disestablished and improvement activity around area working be addressed through a number of mechanisms which would allow improvement activity to be more mainstreamed and not seen as a stand-alone activity.

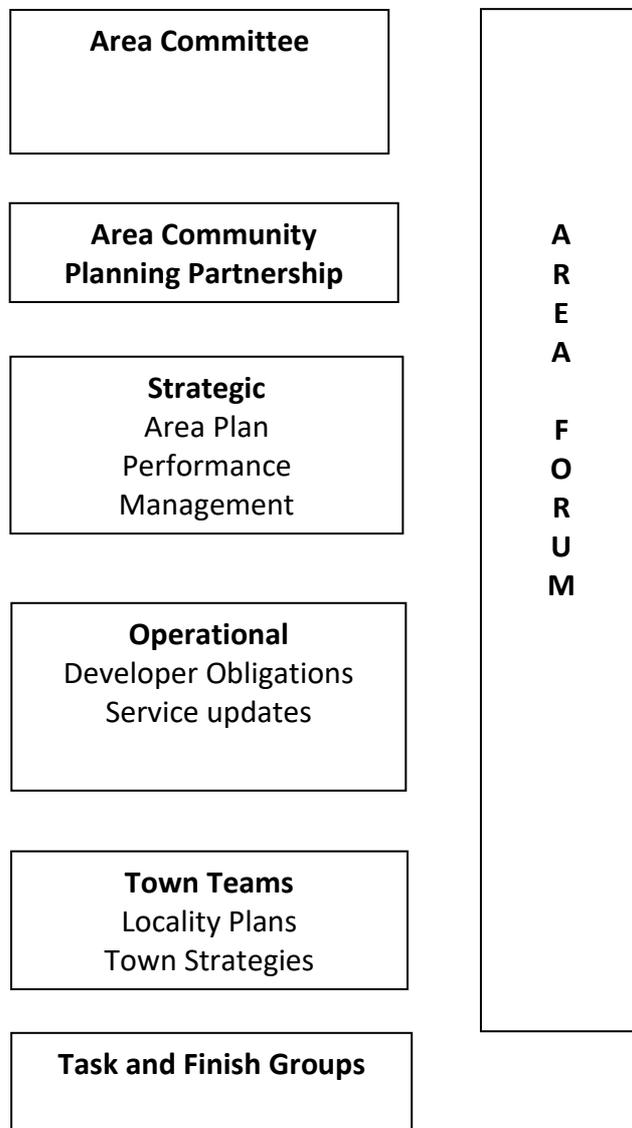*The Council heard from the Chief Executive and agreed to:*

(1)   acknowledge the progress made by the Area Improvement Working Group since 2019;

(2)   support the mainstreaming of ongoing area improvement activity and approved the following six recommendations from the Area Improvement Working Group;

> *(i)   quarterly meetings be held between the Chief Executive, Directors, Area Chairs, Leader of the Council and Area Managers;*
> *(ii)   Area Working be a standing item on Directorate Management Team agendas;*
> *(iii)   good quality area planning and performance reporting be achieved as part of the Best Value report actions;*
> *(iv)   ongoing monitoring and review of Area Management Teams/Forums;*
> *(v)   the role and reporting arrangements for Area Managers be considered as part of the Chief Officer Review; and*
> *(vi)   that a bi-annual report on Area Working be presented to Full Council.*

(3)   acknowledge the summary of positive examples of area working in Appendix 2 of the report which had emerged since 2019 and the positive contribution that Services working with Area Managers and their teams had made to this work aligned to the remit of the Area Improvement Working Group;

(4)   instruct the Chief Executive to report to the Procedures Committee in respect of the proposals for the management and delivery of the regeneration programme and Landscape Services; and

(5)   disestablish the Area Improvement Working Group.

Appendix 2

Area Management Framework

    1.   Purpose

    1.1   The Area Management Framework (AMF) is a structure which allows for cross service strategic and operational delivery across each administration area. The Framework will support delivery of Aberdeenshire Council Area Plans, performance reporting and monitoring and Area Community Plans.

    1.2   The Framework also allows support to Locality Plans and Town Strategies.

    2.   **Framework diagram**

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┌──────────────────────────┐    ┌──────────┐
│     Area Committee        │    │          │
│                           │    │          │
└──────────────────────────┘    │    A     │
                                 │    R     │
┌──────────────────────────┐    │    E     │
│     Area Community        │    │    A     │
│  Planning Partnership     │    │          │
└──────────────────────────┘    │    F     │
                                 │    O     │
┌──────────────────────────┐    │    R     │
│       Strategic           │    │    U     │
│       Area Plan           │    │    M     │
│      Performance          │    │          │
│      Management           │    │          │
└──────────────────────────┘    │          │
                                 │          │
┌──────────────────────────┐    │          │
│      Operational          │    │          │
│  Developer Obligations    │    │          │
│    Service updates        │    │          │
│                           │    │          │
└──────────────────────────┘    │          │
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┌──────────────────────────┐    │          │
│       Town Teams          │    │          │
│      Locality Plans       │    │          │
│      Town Strategies      │    │          │
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│  Task and Finish Groups   │
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3. Framework

3.1 **Area Committee**. There are six Area Committees being Banff and Buchan, Buchan, Formartine, Garioch, Kincardine and Mearns and Marr. These committees determine matters which directly affect their areas and make recommendations to Policy Committees on strategic matters and Council policy.

The Area Committee considers the performance of Aberdeenshire Council Services as well as Police Scotland and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service for its Area and to make any necessary recommendations to the appropriate Policy Committee or governing body.

The Area Committee will also consider matters in relation to Planning, Licensing, Common Good, Community Councils and Community Planning.

Membership of an area committee includes Councillors from each council ward and it elects a chair and vice chair.

3.2 **Area Community Planning Partnership**. Within Aberdeenshire partners are working together to deliver the outcomes agreed in the Local Outcomes Improvement Plan 2017-2027 and locally working with communities to deliver plans such as Locality Plans, Local Community Plans and Community Action Plans. The Area Community Planning Partnership brings together representatives from the Community Planning Partners to identify and address the needs and concerns of those living in the area.

Membership includes -
- Aberdeenshire Council Councillors
- Aberdeenshire Council - Areas, CLD, (other services as required),
- Health & Social Care Partnership
- Police Scotland
- Scottish Fire & Rescue
- NHS Grampian
- Communities (Community Councils)
- Community Safety
- Rural Partnerships
- Third Sector

3.3 **Strategic**. The main purpose of the AMF at Strategic level is to develop and monitor each Area Plan. Each Director/ Head of Service will identify appropriate officers to form this group. It is anticipated that there would be one officer per Head of Service as a named contact for each Area. The group will meet twice per year to monitor and update the Area Plan. This level will also be responsible for preparing Performance Monitoring Reports submitted to each Area Committee on a quarterly (6 monthly) basis.
Membership includes;

- Business Services
- Infrastructure Services
- Education and Children Services
- Health & Social Care Partnership

3.4 **Operational**. This level within the framework will consider all operational matters including Developer Obligation spend and addressing issues where joint working is required. Service updates from all members will ensure better communication and prevent siloed working. Membership of the group will include officers who operate at an area level. The group will meet every 4-6 weeks.
Membership includes;
Roads, Waste, Landscape Services, Planning, Environment Planner, Housing, Economic Development, Estates, Legal & People, LLA, CLD. Education and HSCP

3.5 **Town teams**. This level will support delivery of Locality Plans and Town Strategies. Teams would normally meet every 4-6 weeks.
Membership includes;
Roads, Waste, Landscape services, Planning, Environment Planner, Housing, Economic Development, Estates, Legal & People, LLA, CLD.

3.6 **Task and finish groups** will be established to take forward particular projects and membership will include relevant services. The groups would meet as required to deliver the project and would end on completion.   Examples would include;

- Gadle Braes Bonfire
- Anderson & Woodman Trust
- Peterhead Community Facilities
- The Vinery Project
- Canal Park Common Good
- Fraserburgh CARS.
- Inverurie Town Hall Group
- Gartly School contamination
- Ballater Flood group
- Haughs Regeneration Group

4. Area Forum

The Area Forum is the place where each level of the Area Management Framework will come together; Area Committee, Aberdeenshire Council Services, Community Planning Partners, and any other relevant local representative as required The Forum will consider and discuss common themes within the Area and will meet twice yearly. It is also an opportunity to consider progress with the Area Plan and Area Community Plan in a workshop session.