

REPORT TO INFRASTRUCTURE SERVICES COMMITTEE – 20 JANUARY 2022

URBAN GULLS UPDATE

Executive Summary/Recommendations

- 1.1 This Report provides an update to Infrastructure Services Committee highlighting the progress that has been made by Protective Services on its review of the Council's response to community concerns regarding urban gulls.
- 1.2 **The Committee is recommended to:**
 - 1.2.1 **Note the progress that has been made since September 2021 on the review of the Council's response to community concerns regarding urban gulls.**
 - 1.2.2 **Agree that a further Report will be submitted to Infrastructure Services Committee in March 2022 setting out recommendations on how the Council will respond to community concerns regarding urban gulls.**

2 Decision-Making Route

- 2.1 A Report was submitted to Infrastructure Services Committee on 30 September 2021 ([Item 12](#)) advising that, Protective Services would be undertaking a review of the Council's response to these concerns, given community concerns regarding urban gulls.
- 2.2 The Report to Infrastructure Services Committee recommended that a further Report be submitted to Infrastructure Services Committee on 20 January 2022 providing details of the outcome of the review.

3 Discussion

- 3.1 It was the original intention to have completed a review of the Council's response to community concerns regarding urban gulls for submission to Infrastructure Services Committee in January 2022. Through engagement with a variety of stakeholders, however, it has become clear that this issue is extremely complex. In order for the development of an effective strategy to manage the interaction between urban gulls and local communities further information and consideration is required. There remains considerable doubt regarding previous strategies that have been tried in terms of their longer term effectiveness. Egg and nest removal for instance may provide immediate respite in a particular area however, gulls are very adaptable and there are concerns that this simply moves the problem into other urban areas.
- 3.2 Given the complexities of this issue Protective Services have sought to obtain advice and guidance from a variety of experts, stakeholders and community

representatives. In this regard, in September 2021 an Urban Gull Stakeholder Group was established to bring together those with expertise and experience in this area. Stakeholder Group meetings have been held in September, October, November and December. Stakeholders within this Group are as follows:

Aberdeenshire Council
Aberdeen City Council
British Trust For Ornithology
Joint Nature Conservation Committee
Moray Council
Nature Scotland
Presley Pest Control
Royal Society for Protection Of Birds
University of Aberdeen

- 3.3 As a result of the Stakeholder Group meetings and identification of other Authorities whose communities are similarly impacted by Urban Gulls requests for information have been sent to the following:

British Trust For Ornithology
Dumfries and Galloway Council
Eastdevon District Council
Fife Council
Joint Nature Conservation Committee
Moray Council
Nature Scotland
Presley Pest Control
Rediscover Peterhead
Royal Society for Protection Of Birds
Scarborough Borough Council
Scottish Government
Stonehaven Area Managers Office
University of Aberdeen

It is anticipated that this information will be received by the end of December 2021.

- 3.4 It became clear from initial discussions at the Stakeholder Group meetings that key to developing an effective strategy for responding to communities concerns regarding urban gulls was to have a better understanding of gull behaviour and the drivers that are causing gulls to move from traditional habitats to urban settings. In this regard Officers met with the University of Aberdeen to discuss options for obtaining further information regarding gull behaviour. Initial recommendations from the University of Aberdeen were to build an interdisciplinary research team which prioritised integrating ecology, psychology, and social science research which would prioritise the following research questions:

- Understand current spatiotemporal patterns of gull distribution and connectivity between different colonies (where and when are the gulls? From where and to where are they moving?).
- Understand current spatiotemporal patterns of gull behavior (what are the gulls doing?).
- Understand current spatiotemporal patterns of conflicts (what, where and when are the conflicts reported?).
- Understand drivers of conflict and identify opportunities for behavioral change or perception change among the local communities.
- Understand existing data on previous, ongoing, and future management implemented to control the gull populations (where has it been done? When? By who? How many individuals have been removed?).
- Understand existing data on gull populations (census, ringing schemes, etc) and make the best of already existing information to identify knowledge and data gaps.
- Explore how synergies with already existing behavioral data collection projects (such as The Eye Gull Project <https://five.epicollect.net/project/the-gulls-eye-project>) can help to collect useful information as well as build citizen science and outreach activities.
- Integrate the abovementioned information to identify priorities and to provide evidence-based adaptive management recommendations.

It was also recommended that a Steering Group be created that includes relevant stakeholders, policy makers and representatives from local communities to co-develop a scientific program. The need to develop long-term monitoring of gull populations to be able to inform management decisions was essential to any sustainable strategy for responding to community concerns regarding urban gulls.

The University of Aberdeen advised that there were a range of options for delivering a research project which included a 4 Year PHD or 1 Year Masters.

3.5 Members are advised that any such research project would involve costs, these include:

1 4y PhD Studentship 100% FTE
1 1y MRes Studentship 100% FTE
1 1y Research Fellow 100% FTE
10% of FTE of overseeing Doctor for 4 years.
Ringing Materials.
Ringing License Costs.
Travel costs to and from field sites.
Technical support.

Workshops and focus groups.

Development and implementation of a public engagement/outreach strategy.

GPS tracking (See <https://www.uva-bits.nl/availability-of-gps-trackers-for-scientific-research/> or <https://www.ornitela.com/> for indicative prices).

As part of the current request for information a more detailed breakdown of costs has been requested and it is intended to present this to Committee in the March 2022 Report together with possible options for funding such a research project. Options that will be explored will include joint funding with other similarly affected Authorities, Scottish Government, and specific Grants.

- 3.6 Legal & People is currently being consulted on regulatory controls that may be available to the Council as part of the overall strategy for addressing community concerns regarding urban gulls.
- 3.7 The next stage of the review will include: analysing the information that is returned with a view to recommending to Members in the Report to the March Committee both, short and longer term strategies, that can be implemented in order to respond to communities concerns regarding urban gulls.

4 Council Priorities, Implications and Risk

- 4.1 Specify which of the Council's Priorities are relevant to the report.

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. The relevant principles are: right people, right places, right time; responsible finances; human rights and public protection.

- 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 implications are that staff time continues to be required to carry out the review. The impact of this will be minimal as it will involve existing staff. Furthermore, the involvement of both Aberdeen City and Moray Councils' staff on the Stakeholder Group will help to spread the resource minimising the impact on Aberdeenshire Council staff.
- 4.4 With regard to financial implications of the Urban Gull Review, any proposed changes to existing gull interventions that cannot be absorbed from within current budget lines will be quantified and reported back to Infrastructure Services Committee in March 2022.
- 4.5 An Integrated Impact Assessment is not required because this Report is to provide an update to Committee. The screening section as part of Stage One of the Integrated Impact Assessment process has not identified the requirement for any further detailed assessments to be undertaken at this stage.
- 4.6 No Risks have been identified as relevant to this matter on a Corporate or Directorate Level.

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. They are satisfied that the Report complies with the Scheme of Governance and relevant legislation.
- 5.2 The Committee is able to consider and take a decision on this item in terms of Section F 1.1 b of the List of Committee Powers in Part 2A of the Scheme of Governance as this report relates to a policy and resource matter relating to Protective Services.

Alan Wood

Director of Environment & Infrastructure Services

Report prepared by Gordon Buchanan, Protective Services Manager
7 December 2021