

RURAL AFFAIRS WORKING GROUP

Wednesday 1 September 2021 at 2pm, by Teams

Present: Councillors S Duncan, M Ewenson (substitute for M Buchan), V Harper, J Ingram, A Simpson), G Owen (substitute for Provost Howatson), I Taylor and J Whyte

Apologies: Provost W Howatson, Cllr M Buchan

Officers: M Brebner, Team Manager, Economic Strategy and Policy, P Blaxter, Policy Team Leader, Planning & Environment, J Davidson, Environment Planner (South), D McDonald, Industry Support Executive (Rural and Maritime)

In attendance of: Steven Thomson, SRUC

1. MEETING CHAIR and DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

In the absence of Provost Howatson, Cllr Iain Taylor took the Chair. Members were asked if they had any interests to declare in terms of the Councillors' Code of Conduct. No interests were intimated.

2. PUBLIC SECTOR EQUALITY DUTY

In making decisions on the undernoted items of business, the Working Group 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.
- (2) where an Equality Impact Assessment was provided, to consider its contents and take those into account when reaching their decision.

3. MINUTE OF MEETING 10th March 2021

The Minute of Meeting of 10 March 2021 was circulated and **approved** as a correct record.

4. MATTERS ARISING

Derek McDonald advised that all action points were covered in the current agenda.

5. PRESENTATION: RECENT AGRICULTURAL POLICY DEVELOPMENTS by STEVEN THOMSON, SENIOR AGRICULTURAL ECONOMIST, SRUC

Mr Thomson returned to RAWG to present a further update on work underway to develop a new agricultural policy for Scotland. Members noted his highly detailed presentation which spanned new international trade deals between the UK and

Australia, the new CAP, UK subsidy control, the Common Framework and the UK Internal Market Bill, developments in England, and key policy drivers in Scotland, most notably climate and biodiversity. Mr Thomson presented an analysis of how Scotland's agri-budget was currently utilised - sectorally and geographically - and the steepening of the net zero challenge arising from change to how land-based carbon emissions are calculated. He noted Scottish Government's commitment to higher levels of conditional payments to farmers and how industry is being consulted as new policy develops (eg farmer-led groups and an implementation oversight board). Mr Thomson described how the transition to the new policy (taking effect in 2026) may play out and the potential role of various expert groups, concluding with a summary of strategic reports published by various bodies. Mr Thomson then answered numerous questions from members on a wide variety of topics ranging from international trade to peatland carbon, following which the Chair thanked Mr Thomson for his stimulating contribution to the meeting.

Action Point 1: Mr Thomson's presentation to be circulated to members

6. PRESENTATION: REVIEW OF THE ABERDEENSHIRE FOREST AND WOODLAND STRATEGY by PIERS BLAXTER, POLICY TEAM LEADER, PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT, ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL

Mr Blaxter explained that under Scottish Planning Policy, a Forest and Woodland Strategy (FWS) should be prepared as part of a Development Plan spatial strategy to promote economic activity and environmental protection, in which woodlands of high nature value are to be safeguarded and enhanced where possible, particularly in relation to future climate change resilience. A FWS was produced in 2017 as Supplementary Guidance to the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2017. Monitored over the subsequent five years, FWS 2017 forms the basis of FWS 2022, and follows consultation with partners to identify whether stated targets have been met. Monitoring reveals 21 actions have been met and 26 issues are progressing satisfactorily (considering the long-term nature of forestry). Only 2 issues were categorised as 'red': clarity on the extent of woodland cover in Aberdeenshire and a greater emphasis upon lowland deer management. The former is for the council to address while the latter is the responsibility of Forest and Land Scotland (formerly Forest Enterprise). Mr Blaxter advised that the review of FWS 2017 had concluded that it remained a robust strategy with meaningful objectives and that FWS 2022 required only relatively minor changes. Input from industry had been incorporated and performance monitoring would continue for a further five years. Following questions from the group, members noted the presentation and Mr Blaxter was thanked by the Chair.

7. PRESENTATION: LEADER PROGRAMMES by MARTIN BREBNER, TEAM MANAGER, ECONOMIC STRATEGY AND POLICY, ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL

Members noted a very comprehensive overview by Mr Brebner of the 2014-2020 EU-funded Leader programme, the projects it supported, and outputs delivered. The programme is now closed to new applications, but work continues to manage remaining projects through to conclusion. Films have been commissioned to capture the experience of project sponsors who received Leader support and to promote the benefits achieved. Mr Brebner went on to advise that Scottish Government has awarded £100,000 from the Rural Communities Testing Change programme to

deliver a joint North and South Aberdeenshire project, which will pilot new approaches to Community Led Local Development through place-based 'quick win' projects. Following questions from members, the Chair thanked Mr Brebner for his detailed presentation.

8. BULLETIN: RURAL LAND USE PARTNERSHIPS IN SCOTLAND

Members noted the bulletin. Further updates will follow.

Action Point 2: Update to be presented at next meeting of RAWG

9. BULLETIN: EU COURT OF AUDITORS REPORT ON THE COMMON AGRICULTURAL POLICY 2014-2020 AND CLIMATE

Members noted the bulletin.

10. VERBAL UPDATES

Members noted verbal updates on the Energy Efficiency (Private Rented Property) (Scotland) Regulations (delayed by the pandemic) and on 'lighter touch' arrangements for future RAWG meetings.

11.AOB

No other business was raised

12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING:

- 2pm on 8 December 2021 (by Microsoft Teams)

Action Point summary:

Action Point 1: Mr Thomson's presentation to be circulated to members

Action Point 2: RLUP update to be presented at next meeting of RAWG