

NORTH EAST SCOTLAND AGRICULTURE ADVISORY GROUP: 7 SEPTEMBER 2022

REPORT: ARRANGEMENTS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

1 Executive Summary/Recommendations

1.1 The reason for this report is to allow members to express a view on future meeting arrangements for the North East Scotland Agriculture Advisory Group (NESAAG).

2.1 NESAAG is recommended to consider two options for future meetings:

2.1.1 Whether the current virtual fully online format of NESAAG meetings should continue; or

2.1.2 Whether a 'hybrid' format would be preferred, with a mixture of in person attendees and virtual attendees using Microsoft Teams, subject to equipment, staff resources and room availability

3 Discussion

3.1 NESAAG last met 'in person' on 27 November 2019, at a special event hosted by the James Hutton Institute. The meeting scheduled for 22 April 2020 at Woodhill House was postponed due to the pandemic. Since 23 September 2020, NESAAG has continued to meet 'virtually' three times per year, with excellent member attendance, and the high level of active participation undimmed by the change in format. A significant number of members, most notably those from Angus Council and Moray Council, will have been spared travel time and associated costs as a result of the change of format. And despite occasional technical challenges, the virtual format has also facilitated the appearance of high profile speakers whose busy diaries might otherwise have precluded attendance in person. There are, clearly, some advantages to online meetings.

3.2 A feature of the in-person NESAAG meetings prior to the pandemic was that several members arrived very early to make time for private discussions with fellow members and indeed many stayed on well after NESAAG had concluded, taking the opportunity to engage with speakers, colleagues and others. The regionally dispersed nature of the rural economy is such that opportunities to meet up with useful contacts can otherwise be relatively infrequent.

3.3 As some in person meetings now start to resume, members are invited to discuss their preferred format for the next meeting of NESAAG on 23 November, 2022 and subsequent meetings. A 'hybrid' option, whereby some members attend in person and others join online could be 'the best of both worlds' - and should be technically feasible in Committee Room 5 in Woodhill House, but would be subject to equipment and room availability. It is essential to appreciate that, for this option, all in person attendees would be required to bring a laptop/device to the venue to allow a connection to those attending online.

- 3.4 In line with the principles agreed by Full Council in terms of the Choice Based Blended Model a virtual option must always be available at the meeting venue for those Members or officers who wish to attend virtually.

4 Council Priorities, Implications and Risk

- 4.1 This report is relevant to all of the following Council priorities:

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

- 4.2 The table below shows whether risks and implications apply if the recommendations 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

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 are satisfied that the report complies with the Scheme of Governance and relevant legislation.
- 5.2 NESAG is able to consider this item in terms of its remit to provide a NE Scotland focus to enable issues and concerns across the agricultural and related sectors to be addressed. This includes strengthening economic development links across the wider land-based sector and food industry, contributing to regional and local priorities, improving links between industry, the environment and biodiversity and contributing to policy development and consultations.

Alan Wood, Director of Environment & Infrastructure Services