

ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL

SUSTAINABILITY COMMITTEE

VIRTUAL MEETING, 23 FEBRUARY, 2023

Present: Councillors S Dickinson (Chair), J Gifford (Vice-Chair), G Hall, P Johnston, F Joji, A Kloppert, G Owen (as substitute for Councillor S Payne) and I Taylor.

Apologies: Councillor S Payne.

Officers: Head of Environment and Sustainability, Team Leader (Environment and Sustainability), Roads and Landscapes Service Manager, Sustainable Development Officer, Greenspace Project Officers, all Environment and Infrastructure Services; Business Partner, Finance (Moira Beverly), Principal Solicitor (Arlene Gibbs) and Committee Officer (Kasia Balina), all Business Services.

INTRODUCTION

At the outset of the meeting the Chair recognised the work of 45 Aberdeenshire schools that had taken a proactive stance on climate and sustainability issues by successfully registering as Eco-Schools.

She also highlighted several important upcoming events with sustainability themes and all Members were asked to share awareness through their social media channels.

The first event - Fairtrade Fortnight, would take place from 27 February to 12 March, 2023 inclusive. The Aberdeenshire local communities and schools would be hosting a variety of fairtrade events to increase awareness of fairtrade products.

Climate Week North East taking place between 24 March and 2 April, 2023 would have events designed in a fun and interesting way to raise awareness of climate change and show what everyone could do to make a difference and reduce their carbon footprint, live sustainably and increase biodiversity.

The last event was the Keep Scotland Beautiful Spring Clean running from 17 March to 17 April, 2023. Members of local communities were to be encouraged to organise a litter pick and to help tidy up their villages, towns and shorelines.

1. DECLARATION OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

The Chair asked Members if they had any interests to declare, in terms of the Councillors' Code of Conduct. No interests were declared.

2. PUBLIC SECTOR EQUALITY DUTY

In making decisions on the following items of business, the Committee **agreed**, in terms of Section 148 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) to consider, where an integrated impact assessment has been provided, its contents and to take those into consideration when reaching a decision.

3. MINUTE OF MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE OF 30 NOVEMBER, 2022

On consideration of the circulated Minute of the Meeting of the Committee of 30 November, 2022, Members **agreed** to approve it as a correct record, subject to one amendment to the attendance list at the meeting, whereby Councillor Hall be included and Councillor Brown be removed from the attendance list.

4. OUTSTANDING BUSINESS

There was circulated a report by the Director of Environment and Infrastructure Services, which updated Members on the progress with actions agreed at previous meetings of the Committee held since 19 May, 2021.

The Environment and Sustainability Team Leader introduced the report and provided the Committee with an update on each of the 6 outstanding actions and confirmed that (1) Items 1, 3 and 6 were on target and would remain on the list, and (2) Items 2, 4, and 5 were complete and, if agreed, could be removed from the list.

Thereafter, the Committee **agreed**:-

- (1) to note the current position in respect of actions arising from previous meetings; and
- (2) that those actions which had been completed should be removed from the outstanding actions list.

5. UPDATE ON GREENSPACE PROJECTS -PRESENTATION

A presentation was made to the Committee on the Greenspace Projects by Elizabeth Stanyer and Tajana Telišman Šošić, Greenspace Project Officers, on the Council's greenspace projects and the important part they played in improving the variety of plants, animals and insect-life in Aberdeenshire.

The presentation covered aspects including information on: community partnerships; examples of current work with communities, groups and volunteers; planting events; greenspace project guidance; partnerships with Landscape Services, Countryside Rangers, Environmental Planners, Education and Children's Services, Housing and Social Services, Properties and Facilities, Transport, Area Teams and Sustainability

Champions; and also the strategy and plans for future direction and partnership building.

There followed a question and answer session during which Members made comments on the ongoing monitoring and maintenance regime; approaching the community groups; examples of local projects; educational aspects of green spaces maintenance; and the cooperation with Social Juice, a project initiated by Zero Waste Aberdeen. In addition, it was noted how changes in mowing habits and allowing plants to occasionally go through their life cycle could have had a hugely beneficial effect on butterflies and moths, with a positive anecdotal response to the butterfly population observed in Stonehaven.

Thereafter, the Committee concurred with the Chair in thanking Ms Stanyer and Ms Šošić for an excellent and informative presentation.

6. ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL ROUTE MAP TO 2030 AND BEYOND PROGRESS UPDATE

With reference to the Minute of Meeting of Aberdeenshire Council of 29 September, 2022 (Item 14), when approval had been given to the Aberdeenshire Council Route Map to 2030 and Beyond, there was circulated a report dated 8 February, 2023, by the Director of Environment and Infrastructure Services, which (1) provided an update on progress to date of the Aberdeenshire Council Route Map to 2030 and Beyond, (2) covered progress to date in the Council's emission reductions and future Carbon Budget targets, and (3) set up the 11 recommendations in the Route Map including how they were being prioritised, the estimated timeline for action and the activity required to complete the action.

Members were informed about the opportunities to reduce emissions from operational buildings, fleet and street lighting, as well as looking at additional energy efficiency and resource interventions and made comments on the heat management of the Council's building stock; the need for ongoing pace and focus on the targets; setting up the future carbon budgets to reach the targets; supply chain capacity and capability gap analysis; opportunities to generate Council's own renewable electricity through, for example, air-source heat pumps, additional solar panels, wind generation, solar farms, and battery storage for excess energy; and how the recommendation in the Route Map should be prioritised for action.

Thereafter the Committee **agreed**:-

- (1) to acknowledge Aberdeenshire Council's progress towards its internal operational emission reduction targets and future Carbon Budgets required to meet a 75% reduction in emissions by 2030/2031 as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report;
- (2) to acknowledge Aberdeenshire Council's progress towards addressing the recommendations, as set out in the Route Map to 2030 and Beyond in Appendix 2 to the report; and
- (3) that the Head of Environment and Sustainability shall scope and arrange a workshop prior to summer recess which shall facilitate the Committee's

awareness and understanding of the programme of activity which underpins the Route Map to 2030.

7. RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION ON A 2035 HEAT NETWORKS TARGET

There was circulated a report dated 8 February, 2023, by the Director of Environment and Infrastructure Services, which detailed Aberdeenshire Council's draft response to the Scottish Government on the consultation on a proposal to introduce a 2035 target for the supply of thermal energy by heat networks in Scotland.

Members were informed that the consultation had been issued by the Scottish Government on 16 December, 2022, with a closing date of 11 March, 2023. A proposed response had been prepared which included feedback and views from officers within the Services of Environment and Sustainability, Housing and Building Standards, Property and Facilities and Planning and Economy.

Members made comments regarding the challenges with the delivery of the target for the combined supply of thermal energy from heat networks in rural areas and asked that the response reflect this. They also discussed the achievable target in Aberdeenshire; the cost of providing the consultation response and how best to fund those ambitions, as well as seeking clarification on what was included in the heat network.

Thereafter, the Committee **agreed** to:-

- (1) note the Aberdeenshire Council's draft response to the 2035 Heat Networks Target consultation, as presented in Appendix 2 to the report; and
- (2) delegate authority to the Director of Environment and Infrastructure Services, following consultation with the Chair, Vice Chair and Opposition Spokesperson, to submit the finalised response by 11 March, 2023.

8. THE ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND ITS CROSS-SECTORAL PARTNERS IN FINANCING AND DELIVERING A NET ZERO SCOTLAND

With reference to the Minute of Meeting of Aberdeenshire Council of 16 February, 2022 (Item 7), when Members had provided a comprehensive response, which demonstrated examples of good practice already in place but also the challenges facing local authorities in being able to fully support and embed the delivery of a Net Zero Scotland, there was circulated a report dated 8 February, 2023, by the Director of Environment and Infrastructure Services, which provided a summary of the recommendations within the report 'The role of local government and its cross-sectoral partners in financing and delivering a net-zero Scotland' prepared by the Scottish Parliament's Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee and published on 23 January 2023, for consideration and comment.

Members were informed that the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee of the Scottish Parliament had launched its first major inquiry of the new session on 24 November 2021. The inquiry looked into the role of local government and its cross-

sectoral partners in financing and delivering a net-zero Scotland. As part of that inquiry, a call for views had been launched and Aberdeenshire Council submitted a collective response by the closing date of 21 January, 2022.

The report recognised the importance and key roles of local government in delivering a Net Zero Scotland. The Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee was encouraged by the progress to date but also highlighted the challenges facing local government and the impact on resources and skills during a challenging financial period.

Members made comments on the substantial costs to Councils involved in responding to consultations; investment in the tools, resources, skills, development of datasets and networks at the national level that would enable the Council to determine the most effective interventions; the possibility of collaborative work between Councils to argue the case, especially for rural areas; how the Scottish Government would allocate additional resources through core funding to help Councils to contribute to net zero targets; carbon revenue credits allocated by the Scottish Government for local authorities for feasibility and planning; the need for building up the links with the Third Sector, social enterprises and local communities; the cost of borrowing on the capital investment requirement being challenging for future revenue budgets; and the capital and carbon revenue credits.

Thereafter, the Committee **agreed**:-

- (1) to note the Scottish Parliament's Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee's report and the summary of its recommendations, as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report, on the role of local government and its cross-sectoral partners in financing and delivering a net-zero Scotland, which was published on 23 January, 2023; and
- (2) that the Chair of the Sustainability Committee, following consultation with the Vice Chair and Opposition Spokesperson, write to COSLA acknowledging the recommendations within the Scottish Parliament's Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee's report and encourage COSLA to engage with Government to ensure appropriate action is taken.

9. ROAD VERGE MANAGEMENT

With reference to the Minute of the Meeting of the Committee of 15 June, 2022 (Item 10), when (1) approval had been given to the Aberdeenshire Council Pollinator Action Plan 2022-2027, and (2) officers had been instructed to provide a report on road verge maintenance, there was circulated a report dated 10 February, 2023, by the Director of Environment and Infrastructure Services, which provided background on the current Policy and outlined planned work to review and expand the policy scope.

Members were informed that the Council, as Roads Authority, had a statutory duty to maintain roadside verges. Although roadside trees and hedges were the responsibility of the landowner, the Council was allowed to serve notice on the landowner to cut these back where an obstruction might be caused and to ensure the safety of the road user. The previous policy on the current verge management regime had been approved by the Full Council in 2010. There was already a planned

piece of work to create a holistic policy which would also incorporate “Planting in the road verge”. The development of that Policy would follow the normal governance route with final approval via the Infrastructure Services Committee. That work was planned to be completed in 2023/24.

Members made comments on the reporting procedure and the need for better communication with members of the public through the website. They also queried the current arrangements for cutting the verges and removing the cut materials and the connection between the speed and limited visibility.

Thereafter, the Committee **agreed** to:-

- (1) note the existing Policy statement and provide comments, particularly in relation to the Aberdeenshire Council Pollinator Action Plan 2022/2027; and
- (2) instruct officers to bring back the additional information on the difference between the costs for cutting the verges and removing the cut material and leaving it on the verge.