

SUSTAINABILITY COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY, 15TH NOVEMBER, 2023

Present: Councillors S Dickinson (Chair), Y Chou Turvey (as substitute for G Hall), J Gifford, A Hassan (as substitute for I Taylor), P Johnston, F Joji, A Kloppert, and S Payne.

Apologies: Councillor G Hall and I Taylor.

Officers: Team Leader (Environment and Sustainability); Sustainability & Climate Change Officer (Tara Murray); Sustainable Development Officer (Yvonne D'Ambruoso); Business Partner, Finance (Tina Wight); Principal Solicitor (Arlene Gibbs); and Committee Officer (Nicole Chidester), all Business Services.

Also in attendance: Clare Wharmby, Climate Strategies Lead, Edinburgh Climate Change Institute; Judi Kilgallon, Climate Change Transformation Manager, Improvement Service; and Martin Auld, Chair of Uryside Riverside Park SCIO.

Prior to considering the formal business, the Chair highlighted the Council's commitment to Fairtrade. Since the August 2023 Committee meeting, an application for approval to the Fairtrade Foundation was submitted and Aberdeenshire Council was awarded fairtrade status for a further 3 years.

At the Scottish Fairtrade Awards 2023, Aberdeenshire had three entrants and all three were winners in their category, including: Huntly Ethical Trading Initiative who won the Innovation Award, Alford Fairtrade Group who won the Fairtrade and Sustainability Award, and Peter Bellerby from the Stonehaven Fairtrade Group, won a special Recognition Award for his outstanding and sustained efforts to promote fair trade to local businesses, faith establishments and the wider community, and for playing a key role in supporting Stonehaven to achieve fairtrade town status.

1 SEDERUNT AND 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 taking decisions on the undernoted items of business, the Committee **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 and 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
- (d) 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 THE MEETING OF 30 AUGUST, 2023

On consideration of the circulated Minute of Meeting of the Committee of 30 August, 2023, Members **agreed** to approve it as a correct record.

4 STATEMENT OF OUTSTANDING BUSINESS

A report by the Director of Environment and Infrastructure Services was circulated detailing the items of outstanding business as at 15 November 2023.

The Environment and Sustainability Team Leader introduced the report and provided the Committee with further details on the following outstanding actions:

Item 1: The Environmental Standards Scotland report had not been published. Discussions were still ongoing about proposed outcomes.

A report on 'How the Scottish government is set up to deliver climate change goals' had been presented to Committee on 30 August and that portion of the action could be removed from the outstanding business list.

Item 2: Due to resource capacity, a report would not be presented until the first half of 2024, as either part of an appendix or a full report.

Item 3: Business Services, Infrastructure Services and Education and Children's Services Committees had all considered their portion of the Carbon Budget 2023-24. All the To Be Determined items (TBDs) had been updated with calculated figures or marked as 'unknown'. Communities Committee would consider the Budget in December 2023, which contained projects from Live Life Aberdeenshire, Housing, and the Health and Social Care Partnership. It was unknown if all the TBDs within their portion of the budget would be resolved.

Thereafter, the Committee agreed to:-

- (1) note the current position in respect of actions arising from previous meetings;
- (2) add a further action under Item 2 to instruct officers to contact Zero Waste Scotland to establish if they had any information about carbon emissions and the impact on the Carbon Budget if the Deposit Return Scheme was (1) revived, (2) mothballed, or (3) completely removed, while officers continued to work on a report/appendix for Committee's consideration; and
- (3) add a further action under Item 3 to instruct officers to provide Committee with the updates to the Carbon Budget 2023-24 along with a formal guidance/timeline for the carbon budget process, following presentation of the budget to the Policy Committees, to help inform the Carbon Budget 2024-25.

5 URY RIVERSIDE PARK (PRESENTATION)

A presentation was made to the Committee on Ury Riverside Park, by Martin Auld, Chair of Uryside Riverside Park SCIO.

The presentation began with an explanation of Ury Riverside Park, including the location and boundaries. The Park covered 60 hectares of land with the River Ury flowing through it, in addition to wetlands and pools, a wildflower meadow and native woodlands, wildlife, a network of paths, interpretation panels, and benches. Mr Auld reviewed how the park had developed from arable farmland to a biodiverse park registered as a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO). The purposes of the SCIO included advancement of environmental protection/improvement, and providing/organising recreational activities and facilities to improve the conditions of life.

The park was designed to withstand flooding. Mr Auld reviewed species of wildflowers which had been planted in the wetlands and drier areas, as well as the types of trees planted by volunteers, which gave the community a sense of ownership. There were some areas of natural regeneration as well. The different animal, bird and insect species that lived in this area were highlighted, as well as the invasive species and their management.

He reviewed some of the amenities and uses/users of the space, including notice and information boards, dog walkers, commuters, benches, parkruns, and volunteers. The space had been recognised for its contribution to the community and had received various awards. The presentation concluded with brief review of future plans and thanks to those who supported the park and provided sponsorship/future funding.

Following the presentation, the Chair thanked the presenter, particularly for the wellbeing benefits the park provided. Members thanked those involved with the park and for the work being done to manage the nonnative species. Members queried the use of sheep to manage the nonnative species and the potential for ponies to graze to help as well. They wished the park many generations of success. Members asked how effective and reliable the solar panel lighting was, how the park interacted with different users of the park/if there was a 'friends of the park' group, how they managed continuity of funding, and if the carbon capturing was measured, and how well the sheep and dogs shared the park.

The Chair thanked Mr Auld for an excellent presentation, as well as praising the work around biodiversity and carbon capture.

6 CLIMATE INTELLIGENCE SERVICE (PRESENTATION)

A presentation was made to the Committee on the Climate Intelligence Service by Clare Wharmby, Climate Strategies Lead, Edinburgh Climate Change Institute, with Judi Kilgallon, Climate Change Transformation Manager, Improvement Service, assisting with questions raised following the presentation.

Ms Wharmby began by reviewing the Service which was a joint effort between Edinburgh Climate Change Institute, Improvement Service and Sustainable Scotland Network. She provided background of the Service which was jointly funded and co-designed with local government and other stakeholders.

She defined the challenges the Service would address, and reviewed Scotland's and Scotland's Council emission figures/where emissions came from. Although Councils reported on organisational emissions and were addressing this via carbon budgets, she emphasised that the area-wide emissions were more important to consider, but highly complex with different policies at national and local levels. It was noted that the supply chain emissions outwith Scotland, and aviation and international shipping were not included in the area-wide territorial footprint.

The Service would help support local authorities to implement changes to reach net zero targets. Various policies, strategies, and regulations would be needed. It was difficult to quantify work being done currently and that led to the creation of this Intelligence Service to capture what was happening and coordinate/collaborate efforts. Ms Wharmby recognised the potential for double-counting of carbon emissions but emphasised that double-counting would provide double attention/action to resolve. The presentation briefly reviewed levels of influence/control of emissions from direct/indirect, to high, medium, and low levels of influence.

Key points of the presentation included: area-wide emissions were not just large organisational footprints; there was a difference in control versus influence; a complex array of multi-level stakeholders and multiple co-benefits existed; this was a long term problem with short-term progress required and an action gap existed; and carbon reductions on area-wide footprint would take time to appear.

The philosophy for the Service included a commitment to be live and not static, to find consistency between local authorities and share practices/communicate more effectively with Scottish Government, and recognising that climate change was not a data problem, but rather a decision-making, financing, political and emotional problem. The Service would be designed with this in mind.

She reviewed the aims of the Service: (1) procure a platform for all local authorities, and populate it with area-wide data; (2) support local authorities and partners to identify and enter actions into platform/provide training to enable decision-makers; and (3) provide a service to local authorities to support decision-making through access to data, best practice sharing, help with difficult questions, and identifying common ground/solutions.

Timelines and engagement points were highlighted. The presentation concluded with a review of next steps.

The Chair thanked Ms Wharmby for her presentation and opened it up to a question and answer session. Members acknowledged the importance of this work, but recognised the resource constraints and queried when Central Government should be approached for assistance. They praised the creation of a library of evidence which would assist future requests for funding/support. Members also raised questions on how to stop carbon leaking out of Council/Scottish boundaries and not being accounted for, if there were routes for legislative changes with low financial implications, and about innovative financing, particularly for smaller scale projects. Although recognising the value of the Service, Members also expressed concerns about the amount of work required to populate the platform and queried if information would need to be provided in a specific format.

Following the discussions and questions, the Chair thanked the presenters for their work and what the Service will offer.

7 PUBLIC BODIES CLIMATE CHANGE DUTIES REPORT 2022-23

There was circulated a report dated 2 November 2023, by the Director of Environment and Infrastructure Services, that presented Committee with a draft of Aberdeenshire Council's Public Bodies Climate Change Duties Report for 2022-23 for consideration prior to submission to the Scottish Government by 30 November 2023.

Members were informed that Appendix 2 to the report outlined consumption and emission factors and compared them to previous levels. The most notable increase was in business travel (personal travel, trains, flights) due to the removal of covid restrictions. Home working emissions, which were previously calculated as an estimated percentage of who could work from home, were now calculated as the percentage of people working from home converted into hours.

Members commented on the national grid and discussed the best ways to update, respond to, and track progress on climate change and sustainability throughout the year, requesting a 6-monthly review of this report. Officers emphasised that they were provided a template spreadsheet each July that had the emission factors imbedded and that reporting on this mid-year would pose a resource challenge. However, the Route Map, which was updated 6 monthly contained much of the same information as this report and would enable progress tracking.

The Chair emphasised the role every Councillor had on Policy Committees to scrutinise carbon and financial budgets. Members asked if there were adequate staffing levels in place to meet budget targets. The Committee reviewed some cultural changes that had occurred, including Directorates taking responsibility and Sustainability Champions, and the need for sustainable thinking to be built into thinking and actions.

Members of the Opposition asked if there could be opportunity for additional engagement for them with the Sustainability Team, including at pre-meetings. It was **agreed** this would be considered and discussed outwith the meeting.

Thereafter the Committee **agreed** to:-

- (1) acknowledge Aberdeenshire Council's draft Public Bodies Climate Change Duties Report 2022-23 (Appendix 1 to the report); and
- (2) delegate authority to the Chief Executive to sign the declaration in Part 6e of the report once the final draft was completed and submit to Scottish Government before the 30 November 2023 deadline.