

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Net Zero, Environment and Transport Committee
DATE	3 September 2024
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Local Environmental Action Fund (LEAF)
REPORT NUMBER	CR&E/24/256
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR	Gale Beattie
CHIEF OFFICER	David Dunne
REPORT AUTHOR	Guy Bergman
TERMS OF REFERENCE	1,5,12

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Local Environmental Action Fund ('the Fund') Pilot and to note the intention to continue this funding model on an annual basis. Further information on the Fund can be found here: <https://www.nescan.org/leaf-funding-1>.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Committee:

- 2.1 Note that the Council's Climate and Environment Policy Service have an existing £44,000 annual budget for supporting community environmental improvements, historically directed to communities through a partnership with the now defunct Aberdeen Greenspace Trust. To maximise the benefits of this funding in empowering communities to act on the city's climate and nature commitments, different funding models have been explored by the Service.
- 2.2 Note the Local Environmental Action Fund Pilot summary (Section 3.15) which provides a summary of the project applications received for the recent Pilot with the registered charity NESCAN Hub Limited (North East Scotland Climate Action Network).
- 2.3 Approve £44,000 being allocated towards this funding model with NESCAN Hub Limited for 2024/25, which will be met through the existing budgets, and note that an additional one-off £14,000 underspend carried over from 2023/24 will give a £58,000 allocation in 2024/25.
- 2.4 Delegate authority to the Chief Officer – Strategic Place Planning to continue this funding model and agreement with NESCAN Hub Limited on a yearly basis, subject to the annual budget process, in consultation with the Chief Officer of Commercial and Procurement Services on the terms and conditions of the grant.

- 2.5 Instruct the Chief Officer – Strategic Place Planning to explore options to expand the size and impact of the Fund, e.g. through integrating the Fund with aspects of the Housing Revenue Account and / or other funds, as appropriate. Any such expansion will follow all due internal governance processes; and
- 2.6 Instruct the Chief Officer – Strategic Place Planning to include updates on the Fund and impacts thereof within the Council’s existing Annual Climate and Nature Reports, presented to this Committee each autumn.

3. CURRENT SITUATION

Background information

- 3.1 The Council’s Climate and Environment Policy Service have a £44,000 annual budget for supporting community environmental improvements. To maximise the benefits of this funding, different funding models have been explored by the Service.
- 3.2 In 2021/22 the Service worked with the Fairer Aberdeen Team to deliver [citywide environmental projects](#)¹, successfully supporting several projects in the city. The process was repeated in 2022/23 focusing on a single locality, however there were not enough applications through this model and the funding went unutilised.
- 3.3 This prompted identification of alternative funding models for 2023/24 through an Options Appraisal (Appendix 1). The Appraisal recommended that a community environmental improvement fund delivered through an external partnership with [NESCAN Hub Limited](#)² (NESCAN Hub) a registered charity was the option that would best deliver on the funding objectives.
- 3.4 The Fund was piloted under delegated powers and ended on 5th August 2024 (Section 3.15).

Business need

- 3.5 Aberdeen City Council is committed to responding to the global climate-nature emergency. In March 2023 the Council added its voice to the growing number of local authorities around the world by [declaring a climate and nature emergency](#).³ The Council is also signatory to the [Glasgow Food and Climate Declaration and the United Nations Race To Zero Campaign](#)⁴.
- 3.6 The Council cannot deliver on its obligations and ambitions acting alone. There is a need to empower communities to act on climate change and nature

¹ <https://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/news/community-projects-across-city-awarded-funding>

² <https://www.nescan.org/> a company limited by guarantee, and a charity registered in Scotland

³ <https://committees.aberdeencity.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=122&MIId=8658&Ver=4>

⁴ <https://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/services/environment/climate-change#:~:text=In%20October%202021%2C%20Aberdeen%20City,commit%20to%20inclusive%20climate%20action.>

recovery to ensure delivery of the above commitments alongside the [Council Climate Change Plan 2021 - 2025](#)⁵, [Aberdeen Adapts](#)⁶, the [Net Zero Aberdeen Routemap](#), [Empowerment Strategy](#)⁷ and [Natural Environment Strategy](#)⁸ as well as help to deliver place based outcomes in the [Local Outcome Improvement Plan 2016-2026](#)⁹.

- 3.7 The Empowerment Strategy recognises that empowerment is crucial to achieving Routemap goals through the engagement, participation and capacity building of organisations and citizens.
- 3.8 The Fund will support the delivery of the Partnership's Agreement 'Working in Partnership for Aberdeen' to build a Greener and more Sustainable City: - *"Work with communities to ... develop a Community Environmental Improvement Fund, for communities to access, to implement their own small-scale local environmental improvements."*

Funding Model

- 3.9 Several funding models were explored to deliver the identified goals, objectives and business needs. The full Options Appraisal is outlined in Appendix 1.
- 3.10 Option 1 an external partnership with NESCAN Hub scored highest against the funding objectives and was therefore the recommended option and likely to deliver on all the objectives.
- 3.11 NESCAN Hub is the North East's primary resource on climate action. It provides a knowledge base and joined-up approach to action on climate and nature. NESCAN Hub has over 60 member organisations. Partnering to manage and deliver the Fund, they provide the capacity to best advise applicants to maximise the benefits of each project.
- 3.12 A Pilot Grant Agreement between NESCAN Hub and Aberdeen City Council sets out the terms and conditions for implementing the Fund and Reporting and Monitoring requirements. NESCAN HUB as the grantee will disburse individual grants to the final recipients for individual projects. This includes a Monitoring Report at the end of each financial year setting out how NESCAN has met the Fund purposes. The Grant Agreement will be reviewed as necessary.
- 3.13 The Climate and Environment Policy Service will monitor the Fund to ensure maximum impact, value for money and provide updates to this Committee within the Council's existing Annual Climate and Nature Reports.

⁵ [https://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2021-10/_Council Climate Change Plan 2021-25 Towards a Net Zero and Climate Resilient Council.pdf.pdf](https://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2021-10/_Council%20Climate%20Change%20Plan%202021-25%20Towards%20a%20Net%20Zero%20and%20Climate%20Resilient%20Council.pdf.pdf)

⁶ <https://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/net-zero-aberdeen/aberdeen-adapts>

⁷ [https://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2022-11/Empowerment Strategy.pdf](https://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2022-11/Empowerment%20Strategy.pdf)

⁸ [https://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2022-11/Natural Environment Strategy.pdf](https://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2022-11/Natural%20Environment%20Strategy.pdf)

⁹ https://communityplanningaberdeen.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/LOIP_16-26-April-2024.pdf

3.14 Further options to expand the size and impact of the Fund, e.g. through integrating with aspects of the Housing Revenue Account and / or other funds, as appropriate, will be explored. Any such expansion will follow all due internal governance processes.

Local Environmental Action Fund Pilot

3.15 Summary

The Local Environmental Action Fund Pilot closed on the 5th of August 2024 with £27,000 allocated to NESCAN Hub for community projects for the Pilot.

£3,000 was allocated to NESCAN Hub to facilitate the Fund and the associated community development and support mechanisms.

A total of 18 project applications were received with a total value of £41,489.

Demand for the Pilot Fund was high and the combined value of the applications received exceeded the available allocation by £14,489.

NESCAN Hub are currently processing project applications, however, due to the number of applications received exceeding the available allocation it will not be possible for all projects to be funded.

NESCAN Hub will provide ongoing support to applicants and help community groups develop their projects and maximise the benefits projects can deliver to meet the fund outcomes.

A summary of the project applications is outlined below:

Project Type	Organisation Type	Funding requested	Ward
Intergenerational gardening project (1) promoting biodiversity - working with local primary school	Community Council	£1,010	Airyhall / Broomhill / Garthdee
Intergenerational gardening project (2) food growing - partnership with local primary school	Allotment Association	£1,115	Airyhall / Broomhill / Garthdee
Environmental & biodiversity enhancement & food growing - equipment to support community garden / food growing volunteers	Ethnic Minority Support Group	£3,000	Citywide - Aberdeen
Working with children and young people - match funding for partnership schools project encouraging outdoor activities	Children and Young People Group	£3,000	Citywide - Aberdeen
Climate change & sustainability - documenting and sharing sustainability practices and skills	Ethnic Minority Group	£3,000	Citywide - Aberdeen

Biodiversity enhancement - citizen science invertebrate monitoring	Conservation Group	£1,200	Dyce / Bucksburn / Danestone
Environmental & biodiversity enhancement - creation of new community garden	Community Garden Group	£3,000	George St / Harbour
Climate change - built environment / building retrofit & energy efficiency training	Ethnic Minority Group	£3,000	George St / Harbour
Environmental & biodiversity enhancement & food growing - creation of new community garden and habitat enhancements	Working with Young People	£2,750	Kingswells / Sheddocksley / Summerhill
Environmental & biodiversity enhancement & food growing - creation of new community garden	Community Centre / project	£872	Kingswells / Sheddocksley / Summerhill
Environmental & biodiversity enhancement - creation of new community space and making use of vacant space	Resident / Community Association	£2,500	Midstocket / Rosemount
Environmental enhancement - enhancing existing community garden	Community Centre / project	£600	Northfield / Mastrick North
Environmental enhancement - information / interpretation panels to help public identify and better understand and engage with wildlife	Resident / Community Association	£3,000	Tillydrone / Seaton / Old Aberdeen
Environmental enhancement - improving access and disabled access	Friends of Park Group	£2,112	Tillydrone / Seaton / Old Aberdeen
Environmental & biodiversity enhancement - enhancing community garden to support nature & mental health	Community Garden Group	£3,000	Tillydrone / Seaton / Old Aberdeen
Environmental & biodiversity enhancement - creation of new community garden	Community Garden Group	£2,330	Tillydrone / Seaton / Old Aberdeen
Climate change - Festival raising awareness, increase understanding, connection and engagement with the natural world and climate change issues	Community Garden Group	£3,000	Tillydrone / Seaton / Old Aberdeen
Environmental & biodiversity enhancement - creation of new community garden	Community Garden Group	£3,000	Torry / Ferryhill

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 £44,000 of funding for community environmental projects will be directed to this funding model. This will be met through existing Climate and Environment Policy Service budgets for this purpose. If not approved, then these funds will continue to be allocated for those purposes through other mechanisms.
- 4.2 £40,000 will be allocated to community projects and 10% / £4,000 will be allocated to NESCAN Hub to facilitate the Fund and the associated community development and support mechanisms.
- 4.3 An additional one-off £14,000 underspend to be carried over from 2023/24 will give a £58,000 allocation in 2024/25.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The Fund will help towards meeting our statutory biodiversity and climate duties.

Under the [Nature Conservation \(Scotland\) Act 2004](#)¹⁰, all public bodies in Scotland have a duty to further the conservation of biodiversity when carrying out their responsibilities.

Fulfilling our [Biodiversity Duty](#)¹¹ can help address wider outcomes such as helping Scotland halt biodiversity loss, address the climate emergency, and contributing to a green recovery and a net zero future.

The [Climate Change \(Scotland\) Act 2009](#)¹² (“the 2009 Act”) places specific climate change duties on public bodies. This includes reducing green house gas emissions, putting in place measures to adapt to a changing climate and to work in a sustainable way. A public body must, in exercising its functions, act in the way best calculated to contribute to the delivery of the targets set in or under Part 1 of the 2009 Act, act in the way best calculated to help deliver any programme laid before the Scottish Parliament under section 53 of the 2009 Act and in a way that it considers is most sustainable.

The Fund will help support the [Community Empowerment \(Scotland\) Act 2015](#)¹³ which aims to empower communities to act in their local areas.

The ‘Following the Public Pound’ requirements will be met in full during the allocation of grants to external bodies, including agreeing appropriate terms and conditions which will attach to the grant funding, and consideration of subsidy control rules.

¹⁰ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2004/6/contents>

¹¹ <https://www.nature.scot/scotlands-biodiversity/scottish-biodiversity-strategy-and-cop15/biodiversity-duty>

¹² <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2009/12/contents>

¹³ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2015/6/contents>

6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

Climate action, biodiversity, open space & trees

- 6.1 The purpose of the Fund is to empower communities to take positive action in the places and on things that matter to them, with a focus on climate change and nature recovery. The Fund will enable communities to support the delivery of Aberdeen Adapts, the Net Zero Aberdeen Routemap, underlying Aberdeen Empowerment Strategy and Natural Environment Strategy, as well as help to deliver the Local Outcome Improvement Plan 2016-2026.

7. RISK

Category	Risks	Primary Controls/Control Actions to achieve Target Risk Level	*Target Risk Level (L, M or H) *taking into account controls/control actions	*Does Target Risk Level Match Appetite Set?
Strategic Risk	Not empowering communities with the resources to deliver improvements would limit opportunities for people to contribute towards the Council's Climate Change Plan, Net Zero Aberdeen Routemap and Aberdeen Adapts.	A community environmental action fund is delivered.	L	Yes
Compliance	Failing to deliver a community environmental action fund would not contribute towards meeting the Council's statutory biodiversity and climate duties.	A community environmental action fund is delivered.	L	Yes
Operational	No significant risks identified		L	Yes
Financial	No significant risks identified		L	Yes
Reputational	Failing to deliver a community environmental action fund could lead to a reputational risk where climate and nature duties are not fully met because communities	A community environmental action fund is delivered.	L	Yes

	are not empowered to act to take action on climate change and nature recovery.			
Environment / Climate	Failing to deliver a community environmental action fund would limit community action on climate change and nature recovery.	A community environmental action fund is delivered.	L	Yes

8. OUTCOMES

<u>COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN 2023-2024</u>	
Impact of Report	
<p>Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement</p> <p><u>Working in Partnership for Aberdeen</u></p>	<p>The proposals within this report support the delivery of the following aspects of the policy statement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with communities to ... develop a Community Environmental Improvement Fund, for communities to access, to implement their own small-scale local environmental improvements. • Work with partners to deliver a just transition to net zero and plan to make Aberdeen a net-zero city.
<u>Local Outcome Improvement Plan</u>	
<p>Prosperous Economy Stretch Outcomes</p>	<p>The Fund supports the Prosperous Economy section of the LOIP. Improving natural, green and open spaces has multiple economic benefits:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving the image of a place • Attracting businesses and inward investors by creating attractive settings • Blue and green infrastructure delivers multiple functions including climate mitigation, flood prevention, and water management
<p>Prosperous People Stretch Outcomes</p>	<p>The Fund supports the Prosperous People section of the LOIP.</p> <p>Natural, green and open spaces provide opportunities for sport and recreation, helps to promote active and healthy lifestyles, and can improve mental health. There are multiple benefits to improving these spaces:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouraging exercise and physical activity by providing quality green spaces for walking, cycling, sports and play • Improving mental well-being by providing access to nature and attractive green spaces and breathing spaces

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing better opportunities for active travel and physical activity • Providing opportunities for growing food locally and healthy eating
Prosperous Place Stretch Outcomes	<p>The Fund supports the Prosperous Place stretch outcomes of the LOIP:</p> <p>13. Addressing climate change by reducing Aberdeen's carbon emissions by at least 61% by 2026 and adapting to the impacts of our changing climate.</p> <p>14. Increase sustainable travel: 38% of people walking and 5% of people cycling and wheeling as main mode of travel and a 5% reduction in car miles by 2026.</p> <p>15. 26% of Aberdeen's area will be protected and/or managed for nature and 60% of people report they feel that spaces and buildings are well cared for by 2026.</p> <p>Environmental projects help communities address or respond to climate change, including nature-based solutions.</p> <p>Improving natural, green and open spaces has multiple health and well-being, economic, and environmental protection benefits.</p> <p>They improve health and wellbeing while also giving us opportunities to connect with nature and people, tackle the global climate-nature crisis, promote nature recovery, and make positive environmental changes.</p>
Regional and City Strategies	The Fund supports objectives in a range of regional and city strategies including: Regional Economic Strategy, Aberdeen Adapts, the Net Zero Aberdeen Routemap, underlying Aberdeen Empowerment Strategy and Natural Environment Strategy, as well as helping to deliver the outcomes in the Local Outcome Improvement Plan 2016-2026.

9. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Integrated Impact Assessment	New Integrated Impact Assessment has been completed. The impacts are generally perceived as neutral or positive. The Fund's projects have the potential to have positive impacts on some individuals with protected characteristics and could also have positive socio-economic impacts and positive impacts on Children and Young People's Rights.
Data Protection Impact Assessment	Not required.
Other	N/A

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 N/A

11. APPENDICES

11.1 Appendix 1 – Funding Model Options Appraisal

12. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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