

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE Enterprise, Planning and Infrastructure

DATE 31 January 2012

DIRECTOR Gordon McIntosh

TITLE OF REPORT Extending Service Level Agreement with the North East
Scotland Biological Records Centre (NESBReC)

REPORT NUMBER: EPI/12/034

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval to extend the Service Level Agreement (SLA) with the North East Scotland Biological Records Centre (NESBReC). The report includes the justification for the service and highlights the benefits it brings to the city as well as how it meets the Council's obligations under various legislation and international agreements.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

That the Committee:

1. Approve a three year, Council-wide, Service Level Agreement with NESBReC at a cost of £6,845 per annum from existing budgets.
2. Approve the NESBReC agreement between partners as set out in (Appendix 2)
3. Instruct officers to revise the existing service level agreement with legal and democratic services

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 The Council's current SLA will expire on 30 April 2012 and it is requested that the Committee approve its renewal.
- 3.2 The current SLA allows 67 days of NESBReC time per year at an annual charge of £10,000. This equates to £150 per day of work, which is a preferential rate. NESBReC charges non-partners and environmental consultancies a rate of £71 per hour which would be £514 for a full day and £28,140 per year. The present financial

arrangement has been in operation for the last 5 years and NESBReC would like to increase the preferential daily rate to £185. This would equate to 57 days of NESBReC time and annual contribution to £10,545.

- 3.3 However, the current financial situation has been regarded as a major consideration in reviewing this agreement and the present use of the services. The number of days has been reduced to 37 days looking at the current financial and working arrangements. The revised Service Level Agreement will cost £6,845 per annum for 37 days per year at a rate of £185 per day as set out in (Appendix 1). An allocation for £6,845 will be made available from the relevant budget within Enterprise, Planning and Infrastructure, Planning and Sustainable Development for 2012-2015. Allocations for 2012/13 and 2013/14 will be subject to the budget setting process and discussions with relevant services accessing the services of the agreement.
- 3.4 There are no legal and financial implications arising from the NESBReC partners agreement 2012-2017 agreed between the partners and Aberdeenshire Council. See Appendix 2.

4. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 This report presents no equipment, health and safety nor policy implications. The protection of species and habitats has direct links to encouraging outdoor activities, prevention of flooding and mitigating the impacts of climate change.
- 4.2 Access to NESBReC records will aid the Council in the development of new environmental projects such as conservation of biodiversity and open space management and improvements, helping the City to meet many social inclusion, sustainable development, regeneration, education and health targets, as well as tackling problems associated with climate change and habitat improvement.
- 4.3 A dedicated officer sits on the NESBReC Management Group which meets on quarterly basis and Steering group meeting twice a year. In addition Countryside Rangers provides a fair amount of their time in collating and submitting biological records. This is an in kind contribution to NESBReC and its users.

5. BACKGROUND/MAIN ISSUES

- 5.1 NESBReC is a partnership consisting of Aberdeen City Council, Aberdeenshire Council, Scottish Natural Heritage, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, The University of Aberdeen, Scottish Environment Protection Agency, The National Trust for Scotland, Forestry

Commission, The Scottish Wildlife Trust, Scottish Agricultural College (SAC), Scottish Government Rural Payments and Inspections Directorate (SGRPID), and The James Hutton Institute (formally known as Macaulay Land Use Research Institute). There are also representatives from the local voluntary recording community and from an Environmental Consultancy (Enviro Centre). This partnership is hosted at the University of Aberdeen. The Local Record Centre (LRC) is a focus for biodiversity information in North East Scotland. The LRC collates co-ordinates, disseminates and manages biological data for a range of organisations, groups and individuals.

- 5.4 A report was submitted to the Environment and Infrastructure Committee on 1 September 2009 identifying the need to expand Aberdeen's existing Service Level Agreement (SLA) with the North East Scotland Biological Records Centre (NESBReC). On 14 February 2006 approval was given by the Policy & Strategy Committee to sign a Council wide service level agreement with NESBReC, in liaison with Legal and Democratic Services and other relevant services.
- 5.5 Access to NESBReC records enables Council officers to request a range of biological and ecological information drawn from the NESBReC database, including screening planning applications for priority species and habitats, as well as nationally and locally designated sites, full habitat maps and records of invasive species. This is essential information for the Development Plan and Planning Applications as well as being a useful source of information for the public.
- 5.6 Access to NESBReC records also helps in developing and delivering various strategies, policies, plans and European Projects. The Council is currently involved in five European projects and benefiting from services provided by NESBReC. In the future it is hoped to develop more projects which would increase NESBReC demand. The additional cost will be met through European Projects and will help the Council in reducing direct cost.
- 5.7 NESBReC is continually updating its database with species records which come from a range of sources: conservation organisations, professional surveyors, local wildlife groups, individuals living in Aberdeen, as well as updates from the City Rangers. This information is important for showing what is present in the City so that informed decisions can be made by planners and decision makers. In addition, the Service Level Agreement also helps contribute in providing information for the public about the wildlife that is present in Aberdeen by organising a number of free wildlife identification events to create awareness about biodiversity and generate public interests in biological recording. Over the last two years subjects have included: squirrels, hoverflies, invasive species, seaweeds, harvestmen and wildlife photography. These events stimulate interest in the local natural

environment and help people to contribute in a voluntary capacity to wildlife recording and the NESBReC database.

NESBReC was involved in the open space audit and the data held by NESBReC has been used to add a biodiversity value to the open spaces.

- 5.8 NESBReC has also been involved in carrying out a review of the District Wildlife Sites, during the last 18 months, such that it now holds data for the new inventory of Local Nature Conservation Sites (LNCS). Much of the work for this project was carried out within the SLA with Aberdeen City, demonstrating the range of services, skills and knowledge that NESBReC can offer.

6. IMPACT

- 6.1 The Service Level agreement will help meet the Five Year Business Plan and will link with the Vibrant, Dynamic and Forward Looking commitment to “adopt and implement policies which safeguard Aberdeen’s green belt and green wedges”. It will also assist the Council in delivering the Single Outcome Agreement’s National Outcome 12 - “We value and enjoy our built and natural environment and enhance it for future generations” and contributes to several other outcomes such as No. 6 – “We live longer, healthier lives”, No. 7 – “Tackling inequalities”, No. 10 – “We live in well-designed, sustainable places where we are able to access the amenities and services we need” and No. 11 – “Strong, resilient and supportive communities”.
- 6.2 The long standing partnership with NESBReC provides Aberdeen City Council with a lot of tangible and intangible benefits. Since 2004, NESBReC has provided biodiversity and natural heritage information which has been used by officers across the Council for developing the local plan, nature conservation and environment strategies, assessing planning applications, preparing management plans for designated and non designated sites, conducting strategic environmental assessments and developing policies.
- 6.3 NESBReC holds a large amount of local biological data – currently around 480,000 species records as well as numerous habitat datasets in the form of digitised maps for North East of Scotland. This data is frequently used by a variety of individuals, organisations, private business and local authorities.
- 6.4 If the Council decided to discontinue this SLA the biological information will still be required to inform and monitor the following pieces of work:
- Delivering Aberdeen’s Proposed Local Development Plan,
 - Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire’s Strategic Development Plan,
 - Aberdeen City Community Plan and Single Outcome Agreement ,

- The Council's current aims and objectives under the Nature Conservation Strategy,
 - Aberdeen City Open Space Strategy & proposed Tree and Woodland Strategy for Aberdeen City ,
 - Commitments under the North East of Scotland's Local Biodiversity Action Plan and,
 - Strategic Environmental Assessments & Habitat Regulation Assessments under the European Union Habitats Directive
- 6.5 The information that NESBReC holds will still be required and casual use of this service has the potential to create greater costs than the annual fixed cost of £6, 845 per annum.

7. BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. Environment and Infrastructure Committee 9 November 2004; Policy and Strategy Committee Paper 14 February
2. Enterprise Planning and Infrastructure Committee 1 September 2009
3. Scottish Sustainable Development Strategy (2005)
4. <http://www.nesbrec.org.uk/home.asp>
5. Scottish Planning Policy
6. Single Outcome Agreement

8. REPORT AUTHOR DETAILS

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APPENDICES

1. List of Services to be provided and performance targets
2. NESBReC partner's agreement