

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Housing and Environment
DATE	27 August 2013
DIRECTOR	Gordon McIntosh
TITLE OF REPORT	Environmental Policy Monitoring Group
REPORT NUMBER:	H&E/13/063

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of the report is to seek approval from the Housing and Environment Committee and the Enterprise, Planning and Infrastructure Committee for the establishment of an Environmental Policy Monitoring Group which will assist in overseeing and taking forward relevant cross-cutting Council environmental strategies, policies and plans.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

(i) That the Committee approves the establishment of the Monitoring Group and agrees that, in addition to officers and stakeholders, there should be three elected members drawn from the Housing and Environment Committee and the Enterprise, Planning and Infrastructure Committee and that the Group should be chaired by one of these elected members.

(ii) That this report is referred to the Enterprise, Planning and Infrastructure Committee for approval.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications from the setting up of the Monitoring Group though actions and projects that arise from the implementation of the various plans and strategies may require funding from Council budgets in due course. These would be subject to separate reports as and when required.

4. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Many of the environmental strategies, policies and plans will involve land in Council ownership.

5. BACKGROUND/MAIN ISSUES

5.1 The purpose of a Monitoring Group would be to ensure that the environmental policies and strategies developed by the Council are achieving the intended results and that specific actions identified in these policies and strategies are implemented. Such a group has

carried out this function in the past but it was agreed to suspend it in 2007, originally for two years, to allow many of those who sat on the group to concentrate on the Waste Management Strategy then being developed. Meetings of the original group did not resume.

- 5.2 Over the past few years the Council has approved and adopted both the Nature Conservation Strategy 2010-2015 and the Open Space Strategy 2011-2016. Both strategies identify a wide range of actions which require to be implemented by several Council services. These strategies also identify the need for setting up a group to assist in their implementation, monitoring and review. The Open Space Strategy, for example, contains an extensive action plan that covers every type of open space in and around the City and identifies a range of partners needed to lead on the delivery of projects to improve the quality and increase the use of these spaces. A Tree and Woodland Strategy is currently being developed and there is on-going policy work involving allotments, water catchment and the coastal and marine environment.
- 5.3 Rather than create separate groups for each individual strategy, policy or plan, where the same officers and stakeholders would be expected to participate, it is seen as more time efficient and cost effective to set up one over-arching group. The Monitoring Group would, however, only deal with the natural environment and not wider sustainability issues such as carbon and waste reduction. It is felt that there are already adequate monitoring mechanisms operating at local and national levels for these issues.
- 5.4 The aim would be for the Environmental Policy Monitoring Group to consist of both Council officers, elected members and relevant stakeholders. From the Council there will be representatives from Planning and Sustainable Development, Environmental Services and Communities, Culture and Sport. Opportunities would be sought to invite external stakeholder organisations such as Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH); Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA); Aberdeen Greenspace Trust, North East Scotland Local Biodiversity Action Plan (NELBAP); East Grampian Coastal Partnership (EGCP); plus, when appropriate, representatives from the emergency and health sectors.
- 5.5 It is suggested that the Group would operate at three levels:
 - Core - There would be a core group of individuals who attend the actual meetings. These would be those elected members plus officers or stakeholders who will be leading or involved in specific tasks.
 - Consultation - This level would consist of elected members plus officers and/or stakeholders who may attend meetings if necessary but normally would provide guidance or advice through consultation.
 - Communication - This level would be for communication only and would be informed of progress in the implementation, monitoring and review of the relevant strategies, policies and plans.

5.6 The benefits of establishing an Environmental Policy Monitoring Group would be:

- Improved coordination of strategies, policies or plans with similar or linked remits across Council services;
- Drawing on relevant expertise from within and outwith the Council;
- Keeping members, officers and stakeholders informed of the relevant work being undertaken by the Council;
- Providing opportunities to build on existing knowledge;
- Enabling members, officers and stakeholders to get involved in informing policy;
- Creating opportunities to link into officers and/or stakeholders own projects;
- Encouraging more partnership working;
- Inspiring creativity in terms of new projects; and
- Highlighting opportunities for funding.

5.7 It is suggested that the Environmental Policy Monitoring Group meets twice a year and in addition to officers and stakeholders there would be three elected members drawn from the EP&I Committee and the Housing and Environment Committee. The chair of the Group would be an elected member. This would ensure the Group can effectively assist both cross-services working and working with external stakeholders. The role of the Group would be to:

- Establish and agree who would be responsible for implementing each task or action;
- Monitor and review environmental strategy, policy and plan progress;
- Recommend changes to action or implementation plans where necessary;
- Identify feasible projects which can assist in the implementation of strategies , policies and plans; and
- Monitor the success of Council strategies, policies and plans.

6. IMPACT

The establishment of an Environmental Policy Monitoring Group would assist in the implementation of a range of Council strategies, policies and plans each of which will be furthering the high level priority for the smarter environment contained in the 5 year Corporate Business Plan: "we will promote biodiversity and nature conservation. We will encourage wider access to green spaces in our streets, parks and countryside."

7. MANAGEMENT OF RISK

The establishment of an Environmental Policy Monitoring Group reduces the risk of strategies, policies and plans not being implemented by increasing cross-service cooperation and cooperation between the Council and stakeholders. Though there would still be a

risk to the delivery of individual projects listed in action plans through lack of resources, the Monitoring Group may be able to identify alternative sources of funding or means of delivery.

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

9. REPORT AUTHOR DETAILS

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