

## ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

---

COMMITTEE	Communities Housing and Infrastructure
DATE	19 May 2015
DIRECTOR	Pete Leonard
TITLE OF REPORT	Extending Service Level Agreement with the North East Scotland Biological Records Centre (NESBReC)
REPORT NUMBER:	CHI/ 15/172
CHECKLIST	YES

---

### 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), together with seeking approval of the expenditure. The report includes the justification for the Council utilising 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)

It is recommended that the Committee:

1. Approves a three year, Council-wide, Service Level Agreement (SLA) with NESBReC at a cost of £6,845 per annum from existing budgets.
2. Instructs officers to revise the existing SLA with legal services
3. Notes the NESBReC Terms of Reference between Advisory Group supporters as set out in Appendix 1.

### 3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 The Council's current SLA will expire on 30 April 2015 and it is requested that the Committee approve its renewal.
- 3.2 The current SLA allows 37 days of NESBReC time per year at an annual charge of £6,845. The present financial arrangement has been in operation for the last 3 years.
- 3.3 The revised SLA will cost £6,845 per annum for 37 days per year at a rate of £185 per day. An allocation for £6,845 will be made available from the relevant budget within Planning and Sustainable Development for 2015-2018.

- 3.4 A funding arrangement between NESBReC and Aberdeen City Council is dealt with by SLA for a period of three years. The revised agreement covers the period 2015-2018.

#### 4. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 This report presents no equipment, health and safety implications. The protection of species and habitats, enhancing biodiversity 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 making decisions on planning applications, 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 mitigation and adaptation.
- 4.3 Two Officers represents Aberdeen City Council on the Advisory Group. In addition to the Council representative on the Advisory Group, Countryside Rangers provide time in collating and submitting biological records. This is an in kind contribution to NESBReC and its users.
- 4.4 A report was submitted to the Environment and Infrastructure Committee on 31 January 2012 identifying the need to extend the existing SLA with (NESBReC). Approval was given by the Committee to sign a Council wide SLA with NESBReC, in liaison with Legal and Democratic Services and other relevant services. That is now due for renewal.

#### 5. BACKGROUND/MAIN ISSUES

- 5.1 Aberdeenshire Council as an employer of the NESBReC conducted a service review in 2013. The purpose of the review was to design a service structure and business model that will enable the best delivery of the NESBReC Service within a sustainable budget and provide best value and better management for the NESBReC supporters.
- 5.2 As result of the service review the Steering Group is renamed as Advisory Group and the NESBReC office and staff has been relocated from Aberdeen University premises at St. Machar Drive to Aberdeenshire Council headquarters at Woodhill House to provide better management to the staff and IT facilities including upgrading NESBReC website. There have been no major changes in the services provided by NESBReC since the Council entered into the current SLA in 30 April 2012.
- 5.3 The NESBReC Advisory Group meets twice a year (as agreed by the Group) with the aim of advising Aberdeenshire Council as an employer on the long term direction and development of NESBReC. The Group has an independent Chair and includes representatives from all organisations who provide funding

to and/or have service level agreements with NESBReC, including Aberdeen City Council.

- 5.4 NESBReC is a service provider that sits within the Specialist Services Team of Aberdeenshire Council, financially supported by Aberdeen City Council, Scottish Natural Heritage, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and Forestry Commission Scotland and the Caringorms National Park Authority. In addition to members from funding organisations the Group includes representatives from other relevant statutory and non-statutory bodies, the biological recording community and environmental consultancies. The Advisory Group's meetings are issue based with external experts drawn in as necessary for a particular discussion. Members of the wider NE Scotland biological recording community are welcome to come to these meetings and the Advisory Group will review its membership and look for new members as required. The Advisory Group does not require a formal constitution, since all NESBReC staffing, financial and legal matters are handled by Aberdeenshire Council and reported to the NESBReC Management Team.
- 5.5 NESBReC as a 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 and helps contribute towards promoting environmental initiatives such as Citizen Science.
- 5.6 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 essential information is used to develop Local Development Plan policies and allocations and in assessing planning applications.
- 5.7 Access to NESBReC records also helps in developing and delivering various strategies, policies, plans and projects at national and European level. More projects are proposed which would increase demand on NESBReC resources
- 5.8 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 and the rest of NE Scotland, including the City Countryside Rangers. This information is important for showing what is present in the City so that informed decisions can be made by planners and other policy makers. In addition, the SLA helps in providing information for the public about the wildlife that is present in Aberdeen by organising a number of free wildlife identification training events to create awareness about biodiversity and generate public interests in biological recording. Over the last two years subjects have included: squirrels, hoverflies, invasive plant species, harvestmen, small mammals, woodland plants, wildlife photography and a range of other subjects. 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.

- 5.9 NESBReC was involved in the Council's open space audit and the data held by NESBReC has been used to add biodiversity value to the open spaces. The review of the Open Space Audit is due this year and similar services will be used to conduct the Open Space Audit. In the revised Open Space Audit NESBReC services will be used to highlight the important ecosystems and the role they play in tackling emerging issues, such as climate change adaptation and mitigation. This could include quantifying, mapping and analysing ecosystem services for future urban developments.

## 6. IMPACT

- 6.1 The SLA will help meet the Five Year Business Plan and Smarter City vision to improve the knowledge and skills, together contributing to our success as a learning city, promote and improve opportunities for physical activity and sport to enable Aberdeen's citizens to lead more active, healthier lives, provide a clean, safe and attractive streetscape and promote biodiversity and nature conservation and encourage wider access to green space in our streets, parks and countryside. 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 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 development 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 over 1.2 million 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.

## 7. MANAGEMENT OF RISK

- 7.1 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

7.2 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 as NESBReC charges non-supporters and environmental consultancies a rate of £74 per hour, which would be £555 for a full day.

#### 8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. Environment and Infrastructure Committee Report 31 January 2012
2. Scottish Sustainable Development Strategy (2005)
3. <http://www.nesbrec.org.uk/home.asp>
4. Scottish Planning Policy
5. Single Outcome Agreement

#### 8. REPORT AUTHOR DETAILS

Aftab Majeed  
 Senior Environmental Planner (Acting)  
[amajeed@aberdeencity.gov.uk](mailto:amajeed@aberdeencity.gov.uk)  
 01224 523464

#### APPENDICES

1. NESBReC Advisory Group and Management Team Terms of Reference  
 April 2014