

## ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

---

<b>COMMITTEE</b>	Staff Governance Committee
<b>DATE</b>	26 June 2023
<b>EXEMPT</b>	No
<b>CONFIDENTIAL</b>	No
<b>REPORT TITLE</b>	Aberdeen Scientific Services Lab Move
<b>REPORT NUMBER</b>	RES/23/184
<b>DIRECTOR</b>	Steven Whyte
<b>CHIEF OFFICER</b>	Mark Reilly
<b>REPORT AUTHOR</b>	Hazel Stevenson
<b>TERMS OF REFERENCE</b>	2.2

---

### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The report will give a high level summary of Aberdeen Scientific Services Labs' (ASSL) move to the James Hutton Institute and the benefits to staff and the service

### 2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 That the Committee note the progress and achievement of Aberdeen Scientific Services Labs' (ASSL) move to James Hutton Institute, the engagement with team members throughout this change and the benefits and opportunities realised for staff through this.

### 3. Background

- 3.1 Aberdeen Scientific Services Laboratory (ASSL) is one of only four Official Control Laboratories in Scotland (the others being Dundee, Edinburgh, and Glasgow). It provides essential statutory services to local authorities in the North of Scotland, offering a one-stop shop for chemical analysis, microbiological examination and other testing to councils, businesses, and individuals. Most testing is backed by accreditation to the ISO 17025 standard and its value enhanced by the impartial and authoritative opinion that adds unique value to the service provided.
- 3.2 ASSL provides analytical and scientific services to a wide range of local authority and private clients. It provides statutory functions under food and agriculture legislation. When at full complement, it is a team of 20 staff within Operations and Protective Services, consisting of 18 scientific and technical staff and 2 support staff. Among the staff are individuals who have the appropriate qualifications and experience to carry out the statutory functions of Public Analyst, Food Examiner and Agricultural Analyst which they do on behalf of Aberdeen City Council, Aberdeenshire Council and The Moray Council. The Feed (Transfer of Functions) (Miscellaneous Amendments) (Scotland) Regulations 2020 Act transferred competence for feed law functions from local authorities to Food Standards Scotland (FSS) resulting in one member of staff

being appointed as the Agricultural Analyst for FSS and one as Deputy Agricultural Analyst. Public Analyst and Agricultural Analyst appointments are also held for The City of York Council.

- 3.3 ASSL provides both chemical analysis and microbiological examination on a range of sample types, principally food, animal feeds, potable water, swimming pools, legionella monitoring, air monitoring and surface/ground waters and leachates from landfill site monitoring. It provides support for the Environmental Health services and plays an integral part in the process of protecting the health of the people of the Northeast of Scotland.
- 3.4 ASSL is an Official Feed and Food laboratory (OCL) jointly designated for Great Britain by FSS and the Food Standards Agency (FSA) under the Official Feed and Food Control Regulation (2017/625). Without this status, the laboratory would not be able to undertake any enforcement work and UKAS accreditation is a prerequisite for this.
- 3.5 ASSL has successfully maintained UKAS accreditation status since 1994.
- 3.6 The laboratories were located in part of an Edwardian school building off Dunbar Street. It had been apparent for some time that this accommodation was no longer fit for purpose, nor the alternative uses planned for the site. Officers had considered various alternatives, with co-locating with another scientific body being a preferred option. The James Hutton Institute (JHI) was the only local organisation with sufficient free space, and planning for adaptations to some of their laboratory accommodation on their Craigiebuckler site was well underway before the pandemic.

This work was put on hold due to the Covid emergency and the restrictions that were introduced. It resumed autumn 2021 with refurbishment works completed in April 2022, and a phased relocation of all laboratory staff and equipment undertaken between April and May 2022,

- 3.7 Funding for this relocation has been identified from within the existing Operations and Protective Services budget and the spend has been authorised under delegated powers.
- 3.8 Modern laboratory facilities will lead to improved service delivery as well as projecting an image appropriate to the excellent scientific services that ASSL offers. Co-location with other organisations on the site also provides a unique opportunity for ASSL to become part of a wider scientific campus, developing partnership working and creating new income generating opportunities.

## **4. Employee Experience**

### **4.1 Employee Engagement**

- 4.1.1 As the aforementioned move to James Hutton Institute was a major relocation of the service, it was ultimately important that staff were engaged with and kept updated on the progress of the project. This was achieved via regular face to face team meetings and update briefings. Staff were engaged with on all

aspects of the relocation, including inputting to the scoping exercise for a suitable location. All comments and views were taken on board and an open and transparent line of communication between staff and managers was maintained at all times.

- 4.1.2 Staff were also involved in the design layout and structure of the new labs; this was highly important as the staff are the day-to-day end users and the design needed to support and enhance their working environment.
- 4.1.3 Before the move commenced, site visits were arranged for team members, this allowed familiarisation of the new premises and also facilitated opportunities further feedback. Some examples of the feedback received from staff following the move include *'The move to JHI has been great, the lab is clean, bright and modern. The JHI staff have been helpful and welcoming. There is potential for working on projects in partnership with JHI staff.'*
- 4.1.4 Full engagement throughout the process ensured that there was a high level of buy-in by staff, they also felt engaged and valued throughout the process. This led to a smooth transition from the old to new premises.

## **4.2 Employee and Service Benefits**

- 4.2.1 The co-location of ASSL and James Hutton has offered benefits for both the service and staff as a whole.
- 4.2.2 Team members have feedback via 1 to 1s and team meetings that the new modern environment has improved morale and feelings of wellbeing. It has created the opportunity for staff to have contact with similar professionals and create a wider scientific community. The shared communal facilities, such as the canteen, also allow integration and the opportunity for social networking. Examples of this include involvement in the many seminar series run by the institute, attendance at their annual research conference, alongside social groups involving crafting and sporting interests. All existing staff have remained with the service through the move, and this has allowed all ASSL existing knowledge and expertise to be carried over.
- 4.2.3 Furthermore, the ability to cross-train staff is enabling succession planning and building capacity and resilience into the service. With input from staff, the redesign of posts made vacant through natural retiral has placed further emphasis on this flexibility and resilience across the service- particularly important with the specialist skills which need to exist within the lab team.
- 4.2.4 As the labs are purpose-built to specification, this allows for opportunities to build in resilience and futureproof the service. The James Hutton Institute already has an extensive knowledge base which can be used to look at new techniques, equipment and analysis. This offers great professional development opportunities for staff as well as the possibility to expand business bringing in additional revenue. Future challenges and threats can now be approached with greater ease and assurance.

- 4.2.5 Whilst this move has amounted to a significant change for staff, through continued engagement throughout the process, it has nonetheless resulted in feedback from staff of boosted morale, a renewed pride in the workplace and a visibly dedicated, committed and enthusiastic team dynamic.
- 4.2.6 The above advantages that were hoped for, in scoping the project, have been realised and are already affording new, exciting landscapes to be explored and developed.
- 4.2.7 The relocation and associated redesign has allowed the laboratory to expand the scale of the work undertaken to include the provision of scientific analysis and Public Analyst services to The City of York and West Yorkshire, along with Public Analyst services to a number of additional local authorities within Scotland via improved links with Edinburgh Scientific Services. This service was previously provided by a private sector company based in Wales.

## 5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Following the relocation a number of additional revenue generating opportunities have been realised, all of which have been carried out collaboratively alongside the James Hutton Institute. This has resulted in an additional revenue of £20,700. The laboratory has also successfully tendered for and won a 3 year contract for the supply of water chemistry and microbiological analysis to a major oil and gas operator. This represents an extension to our existing water chemistry contract and generation of new work in relation to microbiological testing services. It is projected that these opportunities could result in a 10% increase in revenue over the coming financial year.

## 6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

## 7. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no direct environmental implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

## 8. 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?
<b>Strategic Risk</b>	Remaining at the current property had	Strategic partnership formed with James Hutton Institute	L	<b>Yes</b>

	limited opportunity to for strategic partnerships with other scientific bodies which allows ASSL to change and adapt to emerging and present risks and challenges.	allowing ASSL to access their already extensive scientific knowledge base		
<b>Compliance</b>	The current premises was outdated and not allowing room for improvement and expansion which may have impacted on over all capability to retain the required accreditations.		M	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Operational</b>	The current premises was outdated and had no option for expansion or improvement meaning that there was no opportunity to change and realign with advances in the scientific landscape	Move to new modern premises has allowed for a bespoke, purpose built lab which is future proofed	L	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Financial</b>	The current premises were outdated and old requiring structural repairs, also lack of	Move to new modern premises has allowed for a bespoke, purpose built lab which is future proofed allowing opportunities to expand and create	M	<b>Yes</b>

	opportunity to modernise ASSL created barrier to sourcing new and/or retaining business	new business opportunities.		
<b>Reputational</b>	In current premises there was a risk that ASSL would become outdated and not be able to keep up with advancements in the scientific field	Move to new modern premises has allowed for a bespoke, purpose-built lab which is future proofed	M	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Environment / Climate</b>	No significant risk identified			

## 9. OUTCOMES

<b><u>COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN 2023-2024</u></b>	
<b>Impact of Report</b>	
<b>Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement</b>  <a href="#"><u>Working in Partnership for Aberdeen</u></a>	The activity outlined in this report supports the ACC Policy Statement through protection of public health, provision of advice and support to local authorities and businesses.
<a href="#"><u>Aberdeen City Local Outcome Improvement Plan 2016-26</u></a>	
Prosperous Economy Stretch Outcomes	ASSL supports the Prosperous Economy element of the LOIP through the provision of a locally based UKAS accredited laboratory service which can be accessed by local businesses, both new and established.
Prosperous People Stretch Outcomes	By providing local businesses with access to an accredited laboratory, as well as sound advice, an opinion on the significance of results they are more likely to succeed and contribute to the local economy.

## 10. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Integrated Impact Assessment	Not required
Data Protection Impact Assessment	Not required
Other	Not required

## 11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

N/A

## 12. APPENDICES

N/A

## 13. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

<b>Name</b>	Hazel Stevenson
<b>Title</b>	Protective Services Manager
<b>Email Address</b>	hstevenson@aberdeencity.gov.uk
<b>Tel</b>	012224 523390