

Highland Community Planning Board

Board Meeting of Thursday 30th June 2016

Highlight Report in relation to delivery of SOA Environmental Outcomes Delivery Plan for the period from February 2016 to June 2016

In general progress is being made in delivery across the range of identified environmental outcomes. However the effect of voluntary severance/budget cuts has had an immediate impact on the Council's ability to lead on, support others and deliver the biodiversity actions within the HBAP and the SOA. HC and SNH have agreed to extend the HEF administration and co-ordination contract for a further year (to 31st May 2017) to support the work of the BAP steering group. This will enable priority actions to be taken forward and identification of key actions which could be delivered either directly through the wider partners or with the support from this post.

More positively, many Board members will be aware of the major four part BBC series "Highlands – Scotland's Wild Heart" that was screened in May. This showcased the wildlife, habitats and landscapes of the Highlands through the seasons. Filming locations for the series included the Cairngorms, the northern seascapes, the ancient Caledonian pine forests, the Flow Country, the granite cliffs of Handa Island, Loch Ness and the Moray Firth.

During this highlight reporting period a public consultation to designate the Inner Hebrides and the Minches as a Special Area of Conservation for harbour porpoise was carried out. The consultation is now closed and all responses will be carefully considered and the results presented in a publicly available report.

In terms of specific highlights on the environmental outcomes:

The environment will be managed sustainably in order to optimise economic, health, natural heritage and learning benefits

- The status of natural features on designated sites within the Highland area that are in favourable or recovering condition is *unchanged at 80.6%*.
- The Highland PAW group is active and has had its first meeting. Stakeholder events are being planned jointly with Grampian and Tayside groups. Training and information sharing is being organised for key stakeholders such as the fishery board bailiffs and SEPA staff. Highland PAW is raising awareness of wildlife crime and encouraging the reporting of wildlife crime. In part this is being undertaken through increased, positive press coverage. A Corporate Wildlife Presentation will be launched in July and there will be a wildlife crime 'Sharing Good Practice' event in September.
- Following a significant fire in the Lochaber area in May, the importance of wildfire action plans, good land management and compliance with the muirburn code has been highlighted. The SFRS has written to landowners to raise awareness and ask for their continued support to avoid and deal with accidental fires, for example in areas where wild camping takes place or within popular picnic points. Local SFRS officers are forming links with landowners and their staff to map problem areas that will help to prevent/reduce the number of destructive wildfires.

The effects of climate change in the Highlands will be minimised and managed

- Work on Supplementary Guidance for Onshore Wind Energy continues, with revised Guidance due to be considered by Committee in August for adoption.

- As indicated in the Annual Report in September, consented capacity for renewable energy (as at 31 March 2015) well exceeds the Council's target, with contributions from a range of renewables types. The annual reporting on renewable energy targets as at 31 March 2016 is awaited.
- The first phase of the tidal scheme for the Inner Sound is under construction with some good progress continuing to be made, and the owners of that project have made announcements that are promising for the future, but it is increasingly challenging for three schemes to be delivered within the target timeframe.
- The Council has a partnering contract in place with E-On to provide ECO funding contribution to the Council's HEEP-ABS fund and to plan, manage and undertake all suitable works in connection with the programme. The funding is limited and there are eligibility criteria for householders to meet; with remote and rural off-gas properties being prioritised. During the years 2013 to 2016, 1,151 properties received external wall insulation (EWI) and 50 properties received cavity wall insulation. A further 246 properties are scheduled to receive EWI during 2016-17.
- On 31st March 2016, 91% of the Highland Council domestic housing stock passed the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS). The remaining stock was defined as in abeyance from SHQS (i.e. tenants had opted out of works). A 2016-17 Capital Programme has been approved which will target further energy efficiency measures in Council stock as part of Home Energy Scotland's commitment to improve houses in line with the Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing.
- A 'Green Homes Expo' took place on 18th June, an event organised by Scottish Provincial Press and sponsored by Home Energy Scotland. It showcased the latest technologies available in the world of energy saving, home improvements, renewables and sustainable transport. Inspiring Green Home owners living in Highland also took part, sharing their experience about how they have improved their home.
- Home Energy Scotland delivered a successful 'Keeping Warm in Older Homes' event aimed at people living in older properties in partnership with Inverness Civic Trust. The event was oversubscribed after 2 days promotion. It informed householders living in traditional buildings about a range of measures they can make to improve the warmth of their homes.

People will have greater outdoor access and volunteering opportunities across Highland

- The actions relating to access and ranger support in the 4 most deprived areas will need to be reviewed in light of budget saving and availability of ranger staff to implement actions. The reduction in ranger number inevitably means that workloads will need to be prioritised. The HC are keen to target effort to the deprived areas and they will look to redirect work accordingly.
- Due to Council budget cuts, the funding for the Community Health Co-ordinator posts was withdrawn in April 2016 and the NHS has now confirmed it will not be able to fund the roles either. This is a significant barrier to the delivery of green health outcomes in the SOA as well as projects being taken forward by Merkinch Network - which was led by the Community Health Co-ordinator.
- The green infrastructure project is a European funding stream that is seeking to deliver green infrastructure projects throughout Scotland, linked to areas of multiple deprivation. The Highland Council hope to submit an application for the Merkinch area of Inverness, however on-going changes to deadlines and requirements combined with budgetary issues have made this challenging. In order to support the Council in preparing the application, SNH, NHS and HIE have agreed to form a project group – still led by the Council – to deliver the

project. We hope that this collaborative approach will mean that we are able to proceed to the application submission stage.

- In April the first Highland Wildlife fair, organised under the auspices of the Highland Environment Forum, was held in Inverness College. The fair attracted a diverse audience of all ages, who came to look at the many information stalls run by wildlife organisations from across the Highlands and to listen to speakers describing their work with different Highland species and explaining how people can get involved. The feedback from the day, both anecdotally and on the evaluation forms, showed that the event was valued by visitors and contributors alike for the opportunities to network, and to gain new information about wildlife related activity across the Highlands. The hope is to run a similar event in 2017.
- From January to June 2016, Trees for Life offered 310 volunteering opportunities, of which 304 have been taken up by volunteers working on various outdoor projects in places like Glenmoriston, Glen Affric and Glen Strathfarrar. 16 of these places were used by people from deprived areas.
- Scottish Waterways Trust continues to run Nature Walks for Wellbeing every Thursday; these average 15 participants per event. Research is underway to evaluate the efficacy of this scheme. The canal college stage two work is well underway and the programme is now clearly defined and almost ready for final submission.

For further information or to discuss any issues raised in this highlight report please contact:

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