

## **Highland Community Planning Partnership - Single Outcome Agreement Report on Environmental Outcomes for Year to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2016**

### **Annual Report**

The Board is invited to note the progress which has been made during the year to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2016 as set out in the table below. In general good progress has been made across the range of improvement/targets set out in the Single Outcome Agreement for the period to the end of March 2019. The Highland Environment Forum and a number of sub-groups continue to meet. A Highland Wildlife Fair was successfully held to pull together volunteers, projects, NGOs and others working on the environment together to exchange information and experience. This was a success and it is intended to hold this event again. 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 31<sup>st</sup> May 2017), in part to support the work of the BAP steering group. This will at least allow us to track progress with priority actions and encourage partners to continue to deliver.

Despite these challenges you will note that a number of the targets have been achieved or even surpassed. I would draw your attention to the following achievements/issues:

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

The percentage of features in designated sites in favourable condition has increased from 80.0% in 2014-15 to 80.6% in 2015-16. The number of Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Special Protection Areas (SPA), Ramsar sites and Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) has been maintained.

There has also been progress in identifying and designating new sites. SNH published a map of wild land areas in June 2014. Wild Land Areas are the most extensive areas of high wildness across Scotland. They are identified as nationally important in Scottish Planning Policy, but are not a statutory designation. 20 of the 42 Wild Land Areas are within Highland. Thirty Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) were designated in Scotland's seas in July 2014, 8 of these are within or are adjacent to the Highland area. A consultation on marine SPAs has just taken place including the Rum pSPA and Moray Firth pSPA. A consultation for a harbour porpoise SAC – Inner Hebrides and the Minches pSAC was undertaken during the summer of 2016 and this proposed designation has recently been submitted to Europe by the Scottish Government for formal designation.

A Strategy/Action Plan for combating wildlife crime 2016-2019 was launched at the Highland Council headquarters in March 2016. Highland Partnership Against Wildlife Crime (HPAW) partners issue proactive press releases on seasonally topical awareness raising issues and, requests for information. Partners meet quarterly and in between meetings they keep in touch over notable issues, liaise over press releases that are issued by HPAW and the group have developed a multi partner information/awareness raising power point presentation. Police Scotland confirmed

in March 2016 the full time Wildlife & Environmental Crime Co-ordinator post has been made a permanent post. In the meantime though wildlife crime continues to be a contentious issue in Highland as in the rest of Scotland.

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

The Highland Council's review of its planning guidance for onshore wind energy in response to new national policies is reaching conclusion. Comments received on the full draft Supplementary Guidance were considered by PDI Committee in August 2016 and revised supplementary guidance approved for adoption. Submission of the approved supplementary guidance to Scottish Ministers, seeking their clearance to adopt it as part of the Development Plan, is imminent. The guidance sets out how Highland Council will manage onshore wind energy development proposals by identifying areas where wind farms will not be acceptable, areas of significant protection and those with potential for wind farm development. Given the current pressures for development, Highland is carrying out a study to provide additional strategic consideration to identify sensitivities and potential capacity for windfarm development. Six areas have been selected; the Loch Ness area has been completed whilst the remaining areas are in progression and subject to consultation.

Highland Council has developed an energy efficiency programme of £4.3m for 2016-17 which will see renewable heating systems, gas heating upgrades and insulation measures attached to Highland Council stock. The carbon savings under the HEEP-ABS scheme in Highland from year 1 to year 3 amount to over 66,000 tonnes and the current year (year 4) is expecting to save in the region of 17,000 tonne. Highland Council has a partnering contract in place with E-On to provide Energy Company Obligation (ECO) contribution to the Council's HEEP-ABS fund and to plan, manage and undertake all suitable works in connection with the programme. Remote and rural areas with off-gas properties are being prioritised.

Information on the outcomes of the Warmer Homes Scotland scheme to date will shortly be published by the Scottish Government as part of their review of the scheme. In addition both the Fuel Poverty Strategic Working Group who monitor progress of funding programmes and inform future policy and the Rural Fuel Poverty Task Force are also due to publish reports later this year. Together these reports will provide much more detailed information on WHS and independent analysis of the HEEPS programme than is currently available.

### **People will have greater outdoor access and volunteering opportunities across Highland**

SNH and NHS Highland are progressing a natural health service action programme. This aims to develop a green health partnership to build on existing work at New Craigs and through the Active Highland Strategy. This will build up the contribution of the outdoors and contact with nature to health and well-being priorities in the Highlands. This work will be placed in the context of the emerging health and social care partnership in Highland, so that it is seen as something that is central to what is being achieved rather than an additional initiative.

The Conservation Volunteers (TCV) has been running Green Gyms and this work continues. This year TCV intend to deliver 50 Green Gym sessions to people from Inverness. These will deliver health and well-being outcomes under the auspices of environmental improvement activity. This project is separate to the wider Highland Green Gyms and has been supported via Highland Council's DAF monies. 4 new Green Gyms will be delivered in Caithness, Wester Ross, Inverness and Strathspey in 2016/17 resulting in 200 days of activity for volunteers to help improve their health and well-being whilst undertaking local environment improvement works. Volunteer days achieved are expected to exceed 1000 over the 15 month period of delivery. TCV are delivering a 3 year project within the Smithton and Culloden wards of Inverness to address issues of health inequalities within less advantaged communities, similar to the NHS funded post at Merkinch which recently ended due to lack of funds.

A 2 year environmental and employability focussed project in Caithness (Working for Caithness) has been established where greenspace improvements can act as a catalyst to help in delivering employability outcomes. Each year TCV are hoping to work with 64 participants on the Employability Green Gym; 20 participants on ASN school support (may be altered due to funding shortfalls in Education); 180 participants included within wider greenspace, health and well-being activity and an expected 8 greenspaces improved.

Following a successful pilot project called 'Woods, Waterways and Wellbeing', Scottish Waterways Trust managed to continue activity development and delivery and secured funding in late December 2015 to provide 45 'Nature Walks for Wellbeing' afternoon activities during 2016 (end of funding Dec 2016). This is currently one of the most subscribed activities at New Craigs hospital and attracts participants from halfway houses such as Aonach Mhor and people living in the wider community. Funds have now been found to maintain these walks during 2017 although additional funds are required to continue carrying this out at the current level. Research is showing a considerable positive effect and benefit to participants and has identified other incidental benefits that were not considered previously, such as NHS staff wellbeing through attendance and the relationship dynamic between staff and patients. Each week has an average of 15 participants during the reporting period.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion there is significant partnership activity underway to achieve the environmental outcomes set out in the Single Outcome Agreement. A number of the improvements/targets set out there have been achieved, most are on target for achievement and only a few are not progressing or will not be achieved. The latter in particular will be pursued during the 2016/17 year.

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