

ANGUS COUNCIL

COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE – 14 JANUARY 2020

TAYSIDE BIODIVERSITY PARTNERSHIP FUNDING UPDATE

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITIES

Abstract:

[Report 114/19](#) confirmed the council's commitment to the Tayside Biodiversity Partnership but authorised the Service Leader - Planning & Communities to work with colleagues at Perth & Kinross Council to investigate alternative arrangements for the resourcing of the Partnership for the period beyond March 2020. This report provides an update in relation to that matter and seeks approval to reduce the council's contribution towards the funding of the Partnership while continuing to provide staff resource to support the work of the Partnership and delivery of the Tayside Local Biodiversity Action Plan 2016-26.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Committee:

- (i) agrees to reduce the council's contribution towards funding of Partnership from £26000 to £6500 in 2020 – 2021, and to £1500 per annum thereafter, as a contribution to the administration of the Partnership website, media and communication costs and associated operating expenses;
- (ii) authorises the Service Leader - Planning & Communities, in conjunction with the Service Leader – Legal, to negotiate necessary amendments to the Tayside Biodiversity Partnership Memorandum of Agreement and Minute of Agreement with Perth & Kinross Council to allow continued operation of the Partnership reflecting the revised funding arrangements;
- (iii) authorises the Service Leader - Planning & Communities to continue work with colleagues at Perth & Kinross Council to investigate alternative arrangements for the future resourcing of the Partnership.

2. ALIGNMENT TO THE ANGUS LOCAL OUTCOMES IMPROVEMENT PLAN/CORPORATE PLAN

This report contributes to the following local outcome(s) contained within the Angus Local Outcomes Improvement Plan and Locality Plans:

ECONOMY

- A skilled and adaptable workforce

PEOPLE

- The best start in life for children
- More opportunities for people to achieve success
- Improved physical, mental and emotional health and well-being

PLACE

- Safe, secure, vibrant and sustainable communities
- A reduced carbon footprint
- An enhanced, protected and enjoyed natural and built environment

This report also aligns to the Council Plan 2017-2022 priority for the council to be effective and efficient, specifically for our services to represent best value and to be focused on the greatest need.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The council currently contributes £26,000 on an annual basis towards the costs of the Tayside Biodiversity Partnership through a formal agreement with Perth & Kinross Council. However, [Report 56/19](#), which was approved at the special meeting of Angus Council on 21 February 2019, identified that £26,000 contribution towards the Partnership as a financial saving in years 2020/21.
- 3.2 At its meeting on 16 April 2019 committee approved [Report 114/19](#). It noted the significant work and achievements of the Tayside Biodiversity Partnership (TBP) over its 20-year existence; reaffirmed the council's commitment to the work of the Partnership and to the delivery of the Tayside Local Biodiversity Action Plan (TLBAP) 2016-26; and authorised the Service Leader - Planning & Communities to work with colleagues at Perth & Kinross Council to investigate alternative arrangements for the resourcing of the Partnership for the period beyond March 2020. Committee should note that the council is required to provide six months written notice of any intention to withdraw from the Partnership funding agreement.
- 3.3 The day-to-day operation of the Partnership is the responsibility of a Management Group that comprises representatives from each of the local authority funding partners, the biodiversity coordinator and the chair of the Partnership. There is currently no chair of the Partnership. In terms of the current funding agreement withdrawal of all of the council's funding means it could no longer be a member of the Management Group.
- 3.4 Perth & Kinross Council and Angus Council are the two funding members of the Partnership with each council contributing £26,000 per year under the terms of a Minute of Agreement. The funding is used predominantly to meet the costs associated with the employment of a full-time biodiversity co-ordinator but is also used to pay for website/social media maintenance, volunteer expenses, annual seminars/training workshops, publicity materials and occasional newsletters. Other partner organisations including SNH, SEPA, SWT, Forestry & Land Scotland do not contribute to the funding of the Partnership. Angus Council does not need to be a funding partner to remain a member of the Partnership.
- 3.5 The Minute of Agreement confirms that Perth & Kinross Council is solely responsible for the employment and housing of the biodiversity co-ordinator and Angus Council has no responsibility or liability for the post. Notwithstanding, the agreement also confirms that in the event the funding for the co-ordinator post ceases and the post is terminated, any redundancy and associated costs shall be borne equally between the councils. The Partnership accounts currently hold reserves to deal with such an eventuality.

4. UPDATE

- 4.1 Officers have provided informal intimation to the TBP Management Group that the council may withdraw some or all of its funding to the Partnership but formal written notice of withdrawal of funding and termination of the partnership funding agreement has not been submitted. Officers have also intimated that, notwithstanding the funding position, Angus Council remains committed to the work of the Partnership and intends to remain an active participant in the delivery of the TLBAP.
- 4.2 The TBP Management Group has discussed a number of options for future financing of the Partnership including the potential to operate as a social enterprise or charity and for Perth & Kinross Council to continue contributing towards the cost of the biodiversity coordinator. The full potential for the Partnership to operate as a social enterprise or charity has not been resolved but it could open up opportunities to bid for external funding that is not currently available. Similarly the potential for the biodiversity coordinators post to be funded solely by Perth & Kinross Council has not been fully explored. That option has financial implications for Perth & Kinross Council and would likely result in the biodiversity coordinators role in Angus being significantly reduced or withdrawn.
- 4.3 A TBP stakeholders' meeting was held in July 2019 and it was attended by representatives of 10 organisations, including two Angus specific organisations (East Haven Together and Murton Trust). Those in attendance were supportive of the TBP and were generally keen to see it continue with a funded biodiversity coordinator post. That meeting did not identify a solution for the ongoing funding of the Partnership but did suggest that Angus Council delay any withdrawal of funding until March 2021 to allow further consideration of funding options.

- 4.4 As matters stand an alternative means of funding the Partnership, and in particular the biodiversity coordinators post has not been identified.

5. DISCUSSION

- 5.1 The Partnership has been successful in promoting awareness of biodiversity and encouraging and facilitating the delivery of projects that protect and enhance the natural environment and species of Tayside. The TLBAP provides the framework that guides action and projects. This council remains committed to the work of the Partnership and to the delivery of the TLBAP irrespective of any decision that is taken in relation to funding. Withdrawal or reduction in funding may make it difficult for the Partnership to continue employing a full time biodiversity coordinator but the work of the Partnership is not dependent upon that funding.
- 5.2 The role of the biodiversity coordinator has been vital in promoting the activities of the Partnership and widening its membership. The coordinator has been effective in raising the profile of Tayside's biodiversity throughout the country, maintaining positive working relationships and securing external funding to assist in the delivery of projects. Recent years have seen expansion of use of social media as the main communication tool between the Partnership, the community and the wider stakeholder network and this has been developed and administered by the biodiversity coordinator. The success of the Partnership to date is in no small part due to the work of the coordinator.
- 5.3 Angus Council officers have also contributed significantly to the success of the Partnership. Officers had significant involvement in the production of the TLBAP; have taken lead roles in the management and activities of working groups delivering key TLBAP projects; and are heavily involved in monitoring outcomes. Through time biodiversity has become embedded in the work of the council, and council services are now delivering TLBAP outcomes in partnership with communities and stakeholders. A number of Angus councillors are species champions and work to support the activities of groups and projects that are delivering positive biodiversity outcomes. Council staff have become up-skilled in terms of biodiversity and are now in a better position to provide a degree of community education and support.
- 5.4 Council officers also take a lead role in the River South Esk Catchment Partnership. That Partnership also works to protect and enhance the natural environment and species but its activities are focused on the South Esk Catchment. That Partnership delivers landscape scale land use projects that contribute towards outcomes in the TLBAP. The council supports the work of that Partnership through the provision of staff resource and expertise but it does not make a separate financial contribution towards its activities. The work of that Partnership contributes towards the council's responsibilities in terms of flood risk and climate change adaptation as well as its biodiversity duties. It has been successful in attracting external funding for the delivery of significant projects that contribute towards protection and enhancement of biodiversity. It is an example of partnership working without the requirement for council funding.
- 5.5 The council is committed to delivering the TLBAP and recognises that the TBP, like the River South Esk Catchment Partnership, continues to have an important role to play in supporting delivery of projects that protect and enhance the natural environment and species. The council is committed to maintaining its membership of TBP and to supporting the work of that Partnership through staff resource and financial contribution towards website, communications, training events and volunteer costs. However, the council is obliged to review its expenses and to consider the most cost effective means of delivering services. The TBP has been successful in mainstreaming biodiversity in the work of this council and better equipping council officers with skills that allow them to support the delivery of biodiversity projects in Angus. It may take some time for that to become fully embedded in the work that council officers undertake but experience associated with the River South Esk Catchment Partnership suggests that it can be done effectively and efficiently. While it remains appropriate for the council to make financial contribution to the ongoing administration and support of the TBP website, media and communication, training events and volunteer costs, it cannot continue to make a financial contribution towards a dedicated Partnership staff resource.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The recommendations in this report contribute towards delivery of savings identified in Report 56/19. It delivers a saving of £19,500 in 2020/21 and a saving on £24,500 in each year

thereafter. Any other costs associated with the recommendation would be met from the Tayside Biodiversity Partnership budget which is administered by Perth & Kinross Council.

NOTE: No background papers, as detailed by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to a material extent in preparing the above report.

REPORT AUTHOR: STEWART BALL, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITIES

EMAIL DETAILS: Communities@angus.gov.uk