# UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

# SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

# MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 15 NOVEMBER 2022

**Present:** K Leydecker (Chair), J Bjorkvist, D Burslem, M Campbell, D Dyker, P Edwards, H Gannicliffe, B Henderson, J Huttich, F Lovie, R Philp, T Potts, A Price, L Rattray, K Sadler, R Slater, T Slaven H Sveinsdottir, R Taylor, C Torres-Baragan, M White, T Wolfe and H Crabb (Clerk).

**Apologies:** J Fernandes, H Gannicliffe, B Henderson, R Philp, V Mabonso Nzolo and A Speight

**In Attendance:** R Lyne (agenda item 11)

1. **MINUTES**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 24 August 2022 were approved as an accurate record.

2. **MATTERS ARISING**

2.1 Table of Actions

The Committee received the Table of Actions arising from the previous meeting and noted the following:

2.1.1 COP27

The Committee was advised that the University had been represented at the conference by 2 members of staff and 2 students and that a panel discussion to share reflections on the event would take place on 2 December. The Committee noted that COP28 would be hosted by the United Arab Emirates (Dubai Expo City) and it was suggested that the University’s engagement with this event could be included as a potential topic for a future Climate Assembly.

The Committee noted that the COP15 UN Convention on Biological Diversity would take place in December.

2.1.2 Ecosia

The Committee was advised that computers in PC classrooms and open access areas using the Microsoft Edge browser were set with Ecosia as the default search engine and that Google Chrome machines were set with Google. The Committee noted that instructions would be made available to staff wishing to use Ecosia on their managed and/or personal devices.

2.1.3 Guiding Principles of Sustainable Business Travel

The Committee welcomed the launch of the Guiding Principles of Sustainable Business Travel.

2.1.4 Sustainability Open Session Update

The Committee was advised that the University Catering Service would introduce the opportunity for customers to bottle their own water, thereby eliminating plastic bottles, by Session 2023/24. The Committee was also advised that due to recycling changes, cardboard take-away food containers would be introduced.

The Committee was advised that the suggestion to incorporate the *Too Good To Go* app into University sustainability signposting was not presently being implemented. However, the Catering Service was working closely with AUSA to divert food to students.

2.2 School Level Energy Data & Carbon Footprint Reporting

The Committee was advised that it would not be possible to provide a School-level energy use and carbon emissions profile due to multiple-occupancy buildings and current monitoring capabilities. However, the Sustainability Dashboard (currently under development) could be enhanced to include (i) a building-level energy and carbon emission profile, and (ii) a suite of building ‘rankings’ and energy benchmarks. Members were invited to submit further feedback and comments on the proposal directly to the Net Zero & Emissions Manager.

**Action: All**

The Committee agreed to recommend that the proposed changes are embedded within the development of the PowerBI dashboard and that the information is integrated into the data provided to Schools/Directorates as part of the annual Planning round.

**Action: HS/FL**

**3. REVISED TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The Committee received agreed to recommend to SMT that the proposed changes to its remit in relation to Commitment 18 (research) and the responsibilities of the University Research Committee (URC) be included within the Terms of Reference. The Committee also noted that the membership will be further reviewed in the context of wider recommendations following the conclusion of the review of Executive Committees.

**Action: Clerk**

**4.** **SUSTAINABILITY RISK REGISTER**

The Committee received and considered the Environmental Sustainability section of the University’s Strategic Risk Register. The Committee agreed to endorse the Register subject to:

* Inclusion of reference to the detailed financial planning and impact/mitigations that will be required to meet statutory reporting duties;
* Review the timescales currently set against actions.

**Action: FL/MW**

**5.** **UPDATE FROM THE DEAN FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY**

The Committee received and noted the update on the activities undertaken by the Dean for Environmental Sustainability between August and November 2022.

The Committee noted the key responsibilities of the Dean’s role and endorsed the underpinning themes which had been identified, including (i) ensuring close collaborative working with members of the Senior Management Team (and developing relationships with Heads of Schools), (ii) co-ordination and promotion of sustainability activities across the University, and (iii) partnership working with the Sustainability Team.

The Committee welcomed the ongoing sector-wide development work to build upon the Queen’s Jubilee Sustainability Initiative, particularly in relation to the development of a HE/FE Sector Policy Statement, which will support institutions in developing a sustainable off-setting strategy.

The Committee also noted ongoing work in relation to (i) the Travel Working Group, (ii) the THE Impact Ranking 2023 submission, and (iii) COP27 engagement activities. The Committee also received a summary of recent Universities’ Scotland reports and presentations on sustainability issues and noted in particular the publication of the UNEP *‘Little Book of Green Nudges: 40 Nudges to Spark Sustainable Behaviour on Campus’*.

The Committee was advised that feedback had been received from members of staff on the University’s ‘Cycle to Work’ salary sacrifice scheme, particularly in relation to the short window in which it is available (April – June). The Committee noted that discussions to explore options for extending the scheme were underway and anticipated receiving further updates.

**Action: TP/FL**

**6. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS UPDATE**

6.1 Times Higher Education Impact Rankings 2023

The Committee was advised that the institutional submission had been presented and the results would be announced in April 2023. The Committee noted that the approach adopted in compiling the submission had changed following attendance at a THE-led workshop and that as a result, the strongest evidence had been selected for inclusion (instead of a broader range of topics). The Committee recognised and welcomed the commitment from Schools and Directorates in compiling the submission.

The Committee discussed the merits of continuing to make an annual THE submission and noted the introduction of the new (less labour-intensive) QS World Rankings in this regard. The Committee was advised that consideration would be given to the proportionality between the effort required of making the THE submission and the benefits derived from it as part of the ongoing League Table discussions. The Committee highlighted the importance of ensuring that sustainability actions were taken forward in line with Aberdeen 2040 commitments and priorities rather than being driven by League Table considerations alone.

**Action: HS**

6.2 QS World Rankings: Sustainability 2023

The Committee received and noted the analysis on the outcomes from the first QS World Rankings: Sustainability 2023 framework. The Committee was advised that based on the two categories included in the framework – Environmental Impact and Social Impact - the University’s overall performance had been ranked 64th= (i.e. 17th in the UK and 3rd in Scotland). The Committee noted that the number of participating institutions was anticipated to grow rapidly from the current 700 listed and so the initial ranking was not a reliable indicator of future performance.

6.3 Sustainable Development Goals Report 2022

The Committee welcomed and endorsed the Sustainable Development Goals Report 2022. The contribution and commitment from colleagues across the University in compiling the report was welcomed.

The Committee recommended that a communication plan be developed to support the wider promotion of the Report amongst both internal and external stakeholders.

**Action: PE/JF/FL**

**7. ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL BIG ISSUE BIKES SCHEME**

The Committee was advised that following discussions with Aberdeen City Council regarding the proposed city-wide bike-hire scheme, a request had been received to host bikes on campus. The Committee noted that Big Issue Bikes had been awarded the Council contract to develop the pay-as-you-go scheme based on geo-fenced bike deposit/collection areas (i.e. designated spaces recognised by GPS tracking).

Concerns were raised that the current pricing of the bikes may be too high to encourage uptake from staff and students, particularly for shorter hires, and the Committee was advised that the scheme was anticipated to move to a subscription model in Spring 2023.

The Committee noted that the University would not be responsible for hosted bikes, that no signage was anticipated to be required and that there was no long-term commitment to continue to be a host site should operational issues (e.g. vandalism, abandoned bikes etc.) arise. The Committee agreed to endorse the proposal that 3 initial geo-fenced areas be allocated to the scheme at existing cycle store locations: (i) SDRL Academic Plaza in Old Aberdeen, (ii) IMS/Rowett at Foresterhill, and (iii) Central Building at Hillhead, with consideration to be given as to feasibility of CCTV cameras covering the areas chosen to deter vandalism.

**8. UPDATE FROM AUSA**

The Committee received and noted the update on sustainability activities which had been undertaken by AUSA since the previous meeting.

The Committee welcomed the progress which had been made including (i) the successful delivery of Freshers’ Week events, (ii) the ongoing delivery of SwapShop services, (iii) the expansion of the Food Share student volunteer programme, (iv) the Climate Injustice Decolonising Climate Change panel event, (v) the launch of the Occasion Wear Library, (vi) the planned applications to the Just Transition Fund and Energy Saving Trust to expand the current bike fleet to include electric and accessible bikes, (vii) contributions to the development of the Sustainable Development Goals 2022 report, (viii) the provision of energy saving advice to students, (ix) Be Well Week activities, and (x) the upgrading of water fountains in the Students’ Union building to supply free hot water.

**9. UPDATE FROM VICE-PRINCIPAL (EDUCATION)**

The Committee was advised that work was ongoing to consider how sustainability could be embedded within the institutional Graduate Attributes & Skills and anticipated receiving more information as this project progressed.

The Committee congratulated those who had supported the winning bid to host the Higher Education Teaching & Learning Conference at TECA which would focus on the key Aberdeen 2040 themes (including sustainability). The Committee noted that a call for abstracts would be circulated in due course. The Committee welcomed the innovative approach to catering provision which was planned for the conference i.e. the meals would be centred around plant-based ingredients, with delegates wishing to eat meat required to actively specify this as a dietary preference.

10. **CLIMATE & SUSTAINABILITY ASSEMBLIES UPDATE**

The Committee welcomed the progress made in establishing a series of climate and sustainability assemblies to engage the University community in the development of key policies, initiatives and behaviours in support of the sustainability commitments outlined in Aberdeen 2040.

The Committee was advised that a successful bid had been made to the Just Transition Fund to support climate assemblies in the North-East of Scotland, including a summit which would take place in 2023 to collate the outputs from the region-wide activities that were planned.

The Committee was advised of the growing national trend towards the concept of ‘participatory budgeting’ and the opportunities presented by the internal and external Climate Assemblies to support the identification of priority areas for future investment in this regard were noted.

The Committee was advised that at least 2 internal assemblies will take place each year, with the first (‘Biodiversity on our Campuses’) provisionally scheduled to take place on 1 February 2023. Following discussion, the Committee endorsed the suggestion that the event takes place on an in-person basis with opportunities for wider participation via a follow-up/open session.

The Committee noted that the aim of the first assembly would be to inform and support the development of a Biodiversity Policy and was considered timely as it would take place shortly after the conclusion of COP15 of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity in December 2022.

The Committee was advised that it would receive a summary report from each assembly.

The Committee noted that subsequent Climate Assembly topics will be identified following consultation with the wider University community to identify areas of interest.

**11. UPDATE FROM INTERDISCIPLINARY CENTRES**

The Committee received and noted the report on sustainability-related activities within the Interdisciplinary Centres since the previous meeting. The Committee welcomed the wide range of activities being undertaken, the funding proposals submitted and/or in development, the news/media activities reported and the impact of the Centres’ activities on the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Committee agreed that a communications plan should be developed to showcase the sustainability activities being driven forward across the University by the Sustainability Team, the Interdisciplinary Centres, Schools/Directorates and AUSA.

**Action: FL/TP/DB/CTB/JF**

**12. NET ZERO UPDATE**

12.1Net Zero Update

The Committee welcomed the presentation from Rose Lyne, Net Zero & Emissions Manager, outlining the progress which has been made in relation to various strands of Net Zero activity, including the initial drafting of a strategy and associated action plan, the re-baselining of emissions data to include all emissions sources and the statutory data return for 2022.

12.2 Indicative Net Zero Strategy

The Committee received and noted the draft Net Zero Strategy framework.

12.3 Re-baselining of Emissions Data

The Committee noted that, in line with emerging sector best practice and guidance, the reported Scope 3 emissions boundaries would be expanded to include Procurement, Staff & Student Commuting and Student Travel. The Committee was advised that under previous reporting arrangements, Scope 1 (primarily natural gas use) and Scope 2 (grid electricity & steam use) were the largest emissions sources. However, as a result of the changed arrangements, Scope 3 now accounted for 71% of the University’s emissions.

The Committee was advised that the institutional emissions total for 2015/16 had been revised and updated to serve as the 2040 target reporting baseline and was reported as 84,908.66 tCO2e. Prior to the inclusion of additional Scope 3 (procurement) emissions, the total for 2015/16 had been 31,520 tCO2e. The Committee noted the significant rise in emissions totals but agreed to endorse the inclusion of Scope 3 in the re-baselined calculations which will be submitted to SMT for formal approval. It was agreed that the paper presenting the proposal to SMT should also include (i) the rationale behind the inclusion, (ii) recognised sector-wide best practice, (iii) a risk assessment, and (iv) a clear communications plan.  **Action: FL**

The Committee discussed the impact of including procurement emissions in the Scope 3 total, including the challenges around calculating the emissions precisely and the limitations around the current spend-based methodology. The Committee also noted the challenges that would be faced in gathering staff/student commuting data and was advised that consideration would be given to how the current methodology (based on the annual Travel Survey) could be enhanced ahead of the change being implemented.

The Committee was advised that a review of the methodology for calculating carbon emissions from the consumption of NHS-supplied electricity had identified a historic over-reporting in this area. The Committee noted that the revised methodology would enable the University to report NHS grid emissions that more fully reflect how the sites and systems operate and would result in a significant reduction of Scope 2 emissions.

The Committee welcomed the establishment of an InternPlus project to support the research and development of a baseline emissions figure for student travel to study at the University. The Committee also welcomed progress which had been made towards developing a Sustainability PowerBI dashboard to provide monthly and annual data on several key areas, including carbon emissions, energy use, Net Zero progress, Net Zero projects, and building use/rankings.

The Committee endorsed the proposal to establish a Net Zero Strategies and Targets Working Group to drive forward the development of the strategy and inform the institutional approach to setting interim short, medium and long-term emissions targets, including considering how best to engage with the concept of Science-Based Targets and their adoption as part of the overall approach. The importance of communicating and promoting the strategy was highlighted.

12.3 Initial Net Zero Projects

The Committee received and endorsed the proposed list of priority Net Zero projects. The Committee was advised that a budget of £950K had been allocated and that a suite of business cases, including the rationale for each project, would be considered by Estates Committee.

The Committee was advised that work was ongoing to develop a comprehensive Net Zero Project Register which would detail capital interventions required to improve the extensive thermal and energy efficiencies required across campus. The Committee noted the significant budgetary implications of the journey to net zero (estimates across the sector range from £50M to between £200M and £300M for larger institutions) and was advised that further discussions around the University’s capacity, funding (internal and external) and structures for achieving net zero before 2040 would be required.

12.4 Draft Public Bodies Climate Change Duty Report 2021/22

The Committee received and endorsed the draft annual Public Bodies Climate Change Duty Report.

In noting that the University’s emissions profile had started to shift back towards the 2018/19 levels post-pandemic, the Committee recognised the impact of the return to on-campus activities and the reporting of Procurement emissions for the first time (see section 12.2) in the total figure.

The Committee recognised that the overall emissions profile will increase as future reporting will have to include new categories e.g. student travel, re-introduction of Crombie and Johnston buildings into the active estate portfolio etc. The Committee was advised that significant investment would be required in projects and initiatives to improve energy and thermal efficiency and encourage extensive behaviour change if the institutional Net Zero ambitions are to be achieved.

**13. CAMPUS ENERGY/HEATING UPDATE**

The Committee received and noted the report from the Sustainable Heating Programme Board which had been presented for information.

The Committee welcomed the progress which had been made, including (i) the partnership working with SSE, (ii) the completion of two Masters student projects, and (iii) the ongoing development of a longer-term heating strategy for the Hillhead and Old Aberdeen campuses.

The Committee was advised that a revised project proposal to re-prioritise the £4M SALIX/SFC loan originally secured in 2019/20 was due for submission on 22 November 2022. The Committee was advised that although the core project (to replace the Hillhead heat distribution network and upgrade the associated heat centres and plant rooms) remained unchanged, the decision on the final future heat source would be deferred to a later phase in the heating decarbonisation process. The Committee noted that the revised proposal would upgrade the heat distribution network at Hillhead by replacing all the existing failing pipework infrastructure and making fabric upgrades to the associated heat centres.

The Committee recognised the benefits which would be derived from the revised proposal and was advised that approval would be sought from the Senior Management Team, Estates Committee and Finance & Resourcing Committee prior to the submission deadline.

**14. GREEN GOWN AWARDS**

The Committee welcomed the recent successes at the Green Gown Awards and extended congratulations to staff across the University who had been involved in the projects/initiatives which had been recognised.

**15.** **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of the Sustainable Development Committee will be held on Tuesday 21 February 2023 at 10.35am – 12.25pm via Microsoft Teams.