# UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

# SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

# MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 30 MAY 2023

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

**Apologies:** J Bjorkvist, D Dyker, M Haq, B Henderson, V Mabonso Nzolo, R Philp and A Speight.

**In Attendance:** R Lyne and A Stuart.

1. **MINUTES**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 9 March 2023 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 Communications Plan

The Committee was advised that discussions to showcase sustainability activities across the University were being taken forward in partnership with Heads of Schools, with initiatives in Biological Sciences and Business a key focus. Planning has also begun for a second Climate & Sustainability Assembly which will focus on laboratory-based sustainability.

2.1.2 Aberdeen 2040 Implementation Plan

The Committee was advised that a number of appointments of Interdisciplinary Fellows had taken place.

2.1.3 Staff Sustainability Training

The Committee was advised that work was ongoing to develop the e-learning module for inclusion in staff induction material and anticipated receiving further updates.

**Action: FL**

2.1.4 Student Travel

The Committee was advised that the travel survey results had informed some relatively minor methodology changes for future analyses e.g. assumptions around travel mode. The Committee also noted that an EAUC communication/dissemination tool had been launched which had been well received across the sector and would now be available for adaptation at local level.

**3. SUSTAINABILITY RISK REGISTER**

The Committee received and considered the Environmental Sustainability section of the University’s Strategic Risk Register. The Committee noted that revisions had been made to the Register following the recent institutional risk workshop and welcomed the inclusion of additional financial risks associated with net zero and other sustainability commitments. The Committee was also advised that Risks 3 and 4 had been amended following feedback received at the workshop to emphasise reputational and reporting risks.

The Committee agreed to endorse the Register subject to some minor amendments.

**4.** **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 ‘Shift!’ campaign, (ii) student bus travel, (iii) the bike hire scheme, (iv) the submission to NUS Green Impact, and (v) the establishment of a second-hand market.

The Committee noted the request that Transport and Travel be considered as a future topic for a Climate & Sustainability Assembly.

The Committee also noted the suggestion that the car parking charges system be reviewed, particularly with a view to considering whether increased parking revenue could enhance subsidies for active or public transport.

The Committee thanked Camilo Torres-Baragan for his valuable contributions during his period of office and anticipated welcoming Ainhoa Burgos Aguilera to the next meeting following her election as Vice-President Communities from 1 July 2023.

**5. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS UPDATE**

The Committee was advised that consideration was being given to the proportionality between the effort required to complete the THE Impact Rankings submission and the benefits derived from it. The Committee noted that initial data around the submission process had been collated and it was anticipated that the outcome of this review would be reported following the publication of the 2023 rankings which were anticipated shortly. Further consideration will also be given to better understand the QS rankings and how this system might evolve in future.

The Committee welcomed the positive feedback which had been received on the SDG Annual Report and recognised the benefits of continuing to engage with the publication process. It was noted that further discussions would take place around the development of an institutional SDG Strategy.

The Committee was advised that a communication would be issued following the publication of the Times Higher Impact results and anticipated receiving further updates on the ongoing discussions around (i) league tables, and (ii) an SDG Strategy.

**Action: HS**

**6. CLIMATE & SUSTAINABILITY ASSEMBLY**

The Committee welcomed the report detailing the outcomes of the inaugural Climate & Sustainability Assembly held on 15 March 2023 which had considered the topic “Becoming a Nature Positive University”. The Committee was advised that the event had received very positive feedback from the 53 delegates. The Committee noted that the event had explored the challenges nature is facing at both global and local levels, the University’s environmental impact and the role it can play in addressing these problems.

The Committee was advised that 5 key themes had emerged from the discussions during the first session of the Assembly: (i) common principles for a Nature Positive University, (ii) grounds, (iii) community relationships (staff, students and the public), (iv) buildings (including infrastructure renewal, master planning and the circular economy), and (v) research. The Committee also noted that detailed discussions had taken place around how a nature positive campus can support staff, students and institutional culture.

The Committee was advised that the second session had focussed on the practical actions that could be implemented across the campuses, with the following proposed interventions securing most support from delegates: (i) changing the management of traditional grass areas, (ii) SuDS Rain Gardens (to mitigate the impacts of heavy rainfall), (iii) wildlife habitat creation, and (iv) community food growing. The Committee noted that these actions had subsequently been collated into broader themes entitled Landscaping & Hard Infrastructure, Engagement & Food Growing, Supply Chain, and Transport/Energy & Wider Policy.

The Committee was advised that the Assembly had recommended that the development of a baseline understanding of biodiversity across the estate be taken forward as a key priority and that a Biodiversity Working Group should be established to develop a Biodiversity Policy and Action Plan. The Committee noted that the University would be in a position to make a pledge to join the global Nature Positive Universities Alliance.

The Committee was advised that the Sustainability team was developing a baseline sustainability e-learning module (including biodiversity topics) and that discussions were underway to provide opportunities for staff-led food growing activities on campus.

The importance of raising awareness of the Assembly’s achievements and reports was highlighted and it was agreed that a light-touch, short-life working group (drawing on appropriate professional expertise as required) would be established to consider the next steps. The Committee noted that actions arising from the Assembly and recommendations from the working group would be considered through the institutional committee structures.

**Action: TP**

The Committee welcomed the report and recognised the effort and commitment from colleagues who had been involved in the development and delivery of the Assembly.

**7.** **EAST GRAMPIAN COASTAL PARTNERSHIP: VOLUNTEERING & FUNDING**

The Committee received and noted the update on the East Grampian Coastal Partnership (EGCP), a charitable conservation group which had been sponsored by the University since 2021.

The Committee agreed to endorse the proposal that the institutional sponsorship of the EGCP should continue for one final year at Bronze Level (£1,000). The Committee noted that should an institutional framework for considering such ad hoc charitable requests be established in future, the EGCP would be able to submit an application for consideration.

The Committee also agreed to endorse the proposal that a staff volunteering ‘beach clean’ event be taken forward with EGCP in late summer 2023. The Committee noted that full risk assessment processes would be implemented ahead of the event taking place.

The Committee was advised that the University’s Volunteering Policy provided for paid time off for staff to undertake corporate volunteering activities. It was agreed that some places would be reserved for staff paid at an hourly rate and that promotional activities would be undertaken to encourage their participation in the event.

**Action: FL & TS**

**8. 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 ongoing development of the options appraisal to inform the sustainable heating strategy, (ii) the establishment of the Hillhead Heating Network Project, and (iii) the approval of the project proposal and business case underpinning the Hillhead Electrical Infrastructure Project.

**9. NET ZERO UPDATE**

The Committee welcomed the progress which had been made across various Net Zero-related activities, including (i) the Net Zero Working Group, (ii) student travel to study emissions, (iii) the Travel Survey, (iv) embedding Adaptation Scotland framework and principles, (v) the Sustainability Power BI dashboard, (vi) ongoing heating projects, (vii) the AUDE Calculator to determine the cost of net zero in Further & Higher education, and (viii) the selection of a MSc Sustainability Transitions project on in-setting to analyse the potential for small-scale nature-based carbon sequestration on campus.

The Committee recognised the complexities associated with setting emissions targets and was advised that the current proposals from the Net Zero Working Group included establishing a Science Based Target (SBT) of an absolute reduction in Scope 1 & 2 emissions of 90% by 2040, with an absolute reduction in emissions of Scope 3 targets of 54% by 2040 (and a continuing reduction thereafter to 90% by 2050). The importance of ensuring clarity of understanding around targets was highlighted in view of the institutional Aberdeen 2040 commitment to achieve Net Zero before 2040. The Committee noted that these proposed targets reflected the relative immaturity of sector-wide consideration of Scope 3 emissions and the lack of sector-wide guidance.

The Committee was advised that minor methodological changes would be required for future reporting on student travel to study within the UK following detailed analysis of the Travel Survey. The Committee noted that had the revised methodology been applied to the 2021/22 data, it would have resulted in a small increase in total emissions (additional 106tCO2e = 1.02%).

The Committee welcomed the development of the PowerBI Sustainability Dashboard and it was positively received. Committee members were encouraged to provide additional feedback on the Dashboard to enable further refinements prior to publication. It was agreed that the Dashboard would be made available to AUSA representatives on the Committee.

**Action: All (feedback) / HS (development/publication/access)**

**10. 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, including the funding proposals submitted and/or in development, the ongoing international Science Diplomacy activities and the sustainability-related academic events which had taken place since March 2023.

The Committee noted in particular the UKRI Cross Research Council Responsive Mode Pilot Scheme which offered grants ranging from £200K to £1.2M to support new interdisciplinary ideas emerging from the research community outside current disciplinary boundaries. The Committee welcomed the establishment of a programme of activities which was being delivered in partnership between the Grants Academy, Schools and Interdisciplinary Centres to encourage the submission of ambitious and strategic University-led bids.

**11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

The Committee noted the launch of Aberdeen City Council’s Aberdeen Beachfront Development Framework Phase 2 (Citizen Space) consultation process and recognised that some members may wish to contribute, particularly in relation to the travel elements of the proposals.

The Committee was advised that data on the employability rates of students with sustainability- related degrees was held on a programme-by-programme basis, and that analysis of a collated set of data had not taken place.

Thanks were expressed to all members of the Committee for their efforts to advance the sustainability agenda during Session 2022/23. The sustainability-related achievements were recognised and welcomed and further progress was anticipated during Session 2023/24 and beyond.

**12.** **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of the Sustainable Development Committee will be held on Tuesday 22 August 2023 at 10.35am – 12.25pm via Microsoft Teams.