# UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

# SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

# MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 24 AUGUST 2022

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

**Apologies:** D Dyker, B Henderson, N Degama, V Mabonso Nzolo, R Philp, K Sadler, A Speight, and T Slaven.

The Committee welcomed Tavis Potts to his first meeting as Dean for Environmental Sustainability.

1. **MINUTES**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 25 May 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 COP26

The Committee was advised that the University had been allocated 4 Observer spaces for COP27 and that 2 students and 2 staff would participate. The Committee welcomed the progress which had been made in planning for COP27, including discussions around the engagement/communication strategy and the programme of events which would take place (both at the conference and in Aberdeen). The Committee anticipated receiving further updates and a detailed outline of the plans in due course.  **Action: LR**

2.1.2 Campus Energy/Heating Update

The Committee was advised that discussions were ongoing to identify whether and how data on energy use could be disaggregated to individual School/Directorate level and anticipated receiving further updates.

**Action: PE**

2.1.5 Sustainability Open Session Update

The Committee was advised that a review of the Campus Services’ sustainability statement was planned with a view to refreshing the actions and commitments outlined within it. The Committee recognised that progress towards eliminating plastic bottles had lagged in the post-pandemic period and anticipated that this trend would be reversed during Session 2022/23. The Committee was advised that actions in relation to the Too Good To Go app had been deferred pending the appointment of the Sustainable Development Officer.

The Committee anticipated receiving further updates on progress made in relation to the suggestions which had arisen during the Sustainability Open Session.

**Action: FL**

2.2 Update on Sustainability Structures

The Committee was advised that two new appointments had been made to the Sustainability team (Sustainable Development Officer and Net Zero & Emissions Manager) and that a recruitment process was planned for the Head of Sustainability role. The Committee also noted the important role the Dean for Environmental Sustainability would play in driving forward the sustainability agenda.

**3. ANNUAL REVIEW OF TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The Committee was advised that following the University Court’s approval of the Governance Effectiveness Review, the Sustainable Development Committee was now designated an ‘Executive Committee’ and would report to the Senior Management Team. The Committee noted that discussions around the implementation of the Governance Effectiveness Review remained ongoing and was advised that any further recommendations in relation to the operation/composition of all Executive Committees would be communicated for consideration in due course.

The Committee considered its remit in relation to Commitment 18 (research) and the responsibilities of the University Research Committee (URC). The Committee noted that the Interdisciplinary Director representative would play a key role in facilitating connections between the Committee and Centres/Schools across the University. The Committee agreed that further discussion should take place outwith the meeting to develop wording that appropriately reflected the responsibilities of both committees, taking account of (i) the requirement to develop institutional research policies that comply with funders’ expectations, (ii) the need to consult on, review and promote research policies, and (iii) opportunities for Sustainable Development Committee to contribute to research activities e.g. pilot projects.

**Action: Clerk/MC/LR/DB**

The Committee noted and endorsed the proposed revisions to the Terms of Reference, subject to the following amendments:

* Amend bullet point 4 to read “Scan the external horizon across the full remit of Aberdeen 2040 Sustainability Commitments (living and working sustainably, education, research and Net Zero) to ensure the University (i) continues to meet legislative/regulatory compliance requirements, and (ii) considers current best practice guidelines in relation to sustainability”;
* Include the Net Zero & Emissions Manager in the Committee’s membership on an ‘in attendance’ basis.

Committee members were invited to provide additional comments and suggestions on the Terms of Reference outwith the meeting.

**Action: All**

The Committee agreed that the agenda items for future meetings would (i) be structured in line with the Aberdeen 2040 Sustainability Commitments and (ii) include a Dean for Environmental Sustainability Update as a standing item.

**Action: All**

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

The Committee received and considered the Environmental Sustainability section of the University’s Strategic Risk Register. The Committee noted the timelines which had been included in the Register agreed to endorse it subject to the following amendments:

* Inclusion of reference to the importance of maintaining a research portfolio that develops and delivers solutions (Risk 3 – reputation), ensuring that there is appropriate balance of responsibilities/actions between Sustainable Development Committee and University Research Committee; and
* Inclusion of explicit reference to the Aberdeen 2040 Sustainability Commitments (16-19).

The Committee was advised that work was underway to move away from the establishment of an over-arching Net Zero target towards multi-year and/or annual targets and anticipated receiving further details at the next meeting.

**Action: FL**

The Committee noted the scale of investment required to achieve the delivery of institutional Net Zero ambitions and welcomed the progress being made within the current budgetary allocation, particularly in relation to Scopes 1 and 2.

**5.** **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS UPDATE**

5.1 THE Impact Rankings Strategy

The Committee was advised that recent THE Impact Group activities had focussed on how to build sufficient capacity to achieve the longer-term changes required to deliver a real step-change in institutional results. The Committee welcomed the progress which had been made by this Group, including (i) the identification of key actions which could be implemented before November, (ii) the review of relevant institutional policies, (iii) the review of data capture processes (e.g. first-generation students, work placements etc.), (iv) the review of existing data which could enhance outcomes (e.g. financial aid for students, work with government etc.), and (v) the reporting of education metrics (particularly sub-metrics e.g. aquatics/land). The Committee noted that other Groups were also contributing to the consideration of how institutional performance could be enhanced e.g. League Table Working Group.

The Group was advised that the THE submissions portal would be open from mid-September to mid-November (no deadline announced yet), with results published in May 2023.

The Committee noted the importance of ensuring the engagement of the wider academic community in recording accurate and timely information in WorkTribe.

It was agreed that a copy of the previous submission would be circulated to the Committee for information and members were invited to provide comments and suggestions for enhancement to the Planning team.

**Action: HS/All**

**6. CLIMATE CHANGE**

6.1 Public Bodies Climate Change Duty Reporting 2022

The Committee was advised that guidance had been issued for the 2021/22 reporting year (submission deadline 30 November 2022), which highlighted changes required in relation to how (i) emissions are reported, (ii) targets and Net Zero ambitions are detailed, and (iii) adaptation plans are demonstrated.

The Committee noted that reporting requirements were becoming increasingly stringent and that there was a clear expectation that institutions provide an enhanced level of detail in relation to Net Zero planning for all emissions Scopes, alongside evidence of financial planning for Net Zero. The Committee also noted that institutions were being encouraged to improve Scope 3 data gathering and analytical methodologies (beyond the current spend analysis) and to set interim, granular emissions reductions targets (rather than generalised targets which do not highlight priority areas).

The Committee was advised that some Scottish universities were using or considering adopting a new CO2 analysis tool to support the analysis of Scope 3 emissions. The need to enhance understanding (at SMT level and in the wider community) of the importance of considering sustainable procurement practices, as well as analysing the total procurement spend, was highlighted.

6.2 Climate Assembly Update

The Committee was advised that planning for a Climate Assembly to take place in early 2023 was underway and anticipated receiving a proposal for consideration in due course. It was suggested that consideration could be given to inviting staff and student members of the COP26 delegation to participate in the planning process.

**Action: TP**

**7. NET ZERO**

7.1 Queen’s Jubilee Sustainability Challenge

The Committee welcomed the report on the Queen’s Platinum Jubilee (Sustainability) Challenge residential event which had taken place in June 2022. The Committee was advised that the aim of the Challenge had been to (i) identify sector-wide net zero emissions principles and the core elements of a decarbonisation roadmap, and (ii) review and test a new sector-wide Emissions Reporting Framework under development by EAUC.

The Committee was advised that the event had resulted in the following key outcomes:

* All participants were at different stages in regard to setting institutional Net Zero targets;
* There may be future opportunities to develop a co-ordinated approach to measuring Scope 3 emissions (which was viewed as both a major challenge and opportunity for universities);
* There was a range of views and variety of projects taken forward around how to report, incentivise and reduce business and student travel (with other participants expressing an interest in the University’s Guiding Principles of Sustainable Business Travel);
* Decarbonisation of campus estates was identified as one of the main challenges to climate action due to the cost implications, variable age of buildings in portfolios, existing infrastructure, contractual arrangements and a lack of certainty over the right mix of heating technologies e.g. gas, gas/hydrogen (blue/green), biomass, heat pumps, waste energy etc.;
* There is no sector-wide consensus on carbon offsetting – although it was viewed as a last resort, it was still considered necessary and should be developed in line with best practice principles e.g. those detailed by the COP26 Network and EAUC.

The Committee noted that the event had also identified biodiversity and social sustainability, local community engagement and securing financial support for sustainability initiatives/investment as key priority themes which institutions would need to address.

The Committee was advised that the draft EAUC Carbon Reporting Framework (included in the meeting papers as paper SDC22:50b and designated as not for wider circulation) was still under development and would be tested across the sector during 2022.

The Committee was advised that although the application for a student Challenge project had been unsuccessful, the ideas which had been developed were valuable and consideration was being given to taking forward aspects of the original proposal in partnership with AUSA.

7.2 Net Zero Update

The Committee welcomed the appointment of the Net Zero & Emissions Manager and noted that initial priorities included (i) enhancing statistical reporting and meeting reporting obligations, (ii) enhancing the visualisation of data, (iii) expanding reporting on emissions scopes, and (iv) establishing a Sustainability Project Register. The Committee anticipated receiving an update on key activities at the next meeting.

**Action: FL**

**8. ABERDEEN 2040 ACTION PLAN UPDATE**

The Committee received and endorsed the extract from the Aberdeen 2040 Action Plan in relation to Sustainability Commitments 16, 17 and 19. The Committee also endorsed the proposed KPIs for Commitment 17:

* Students – based on NSS Question Bank 16 (Environmental Sustainability); and
* Staff – percentage of staff undertaking some form of sustainability training, including online modules, carbon literacy etc.

**9. 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 “Very Good” certification which had been awarded by SOS-UK for the NUS Green Impact Students’ Union award. The Committee also noted other ongoing activities, including the Wellbeing and Sustainability-themed Freshers’ Fayre, the open meetings (led by the AUSA VP Communities and Sustainability Co-ordinator) and regular communication updates, the ongoing development of Carbon Literacy training and the work which had commenced to develop a recognition programme for volunteering and other sustainability-related student activities.

The Committee was advised that the launch of the City-wide e-bike scheme had been postponed and anticipated receiving further updates.

**Action: CO/JH**

The Committee was advised that initial consideration of the adoption of Ecosia as the default search engine on library and classroom pcs was underway, with mixed reviews being expressed by other adopters within the sector. The Committee anticipated receiving further updates.

**Action: BH/JH**

**10. UPDATE FROM INTERDISCIPLINARY CENTRES**

The Committee received and noted the report on new Interdisciplinary Centre grant income relating to sustainability which had been awarded since March 2022. The Committee welcomed the wide range of activities being undertaken and the interdisciplinary work which was going on across several Schools.

The Committee was advised that a range of sustainability-related external engagement activities across the Centres was ongoing, including (i) re-wilding initiatives, (ii) discussions with the James Hutton Institute (across multiple areas), (iii) discussions with the Centre for Excellence in Waters, and (iv) discussions with ONE (agri-food, health & nutrition). The Committee also noted that new internal networks were being developed around specific grant proposal calls and in relation to broader themes e.g. microbial network, data synthesis etc.

The Committee welcomed the plans to recruit 20 Interdisciplinary Fellows and 12 PhD students (funded via Development Trust) to expand the interdisciplinary staff base and noted that the positions would be advertised in September 2022.

The Committee was invited to propose topics for inclusion in future reports and the following areas were suggested:

* Trends in interdisciplinary grant income data;
* Number of staff engaging with the Centres;
* Distribution of funders;
* School engagement activities; and
* Analysis of key research areas engaging with the Centres.

The Committee welcomed the legacy which had been provided to the Cruickshank Botanic Gardens and was advised that early discussions were underway to consider the feasibility of establishing an environmental and outdoor education centre.

**11. CAMPUS ENERGY/HEATING UPDATE**

The Committee received and noted the Project Report from the Sustainable Heating Programme Board which had been endorsed by the Estates Committee at its meeting on 15 August 2022.

The Committee noted that a horizon scanning analysis report was in development, which would underpin the development of the Options Appraisal of potential sustainable heating systems. The Committee welcomed the involvement of Masters students in the project’s activities.

The Committee was advised that a response was being formulated in response to a request from Salix for more detailed information on how the £4M funding would be allocated following the change in the programme’s remit.

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

The next meeting of the Sustainable Development Committee will be held on Tuesday 15 November 2022 at 10.35am – 12.25pm via Microsoft Teams.