

Biodiversity Duty Report

2021 - 2023



Scottish Information
Commissioner

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Introduction

1. Under the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 (NCS Act), public bodies in Scotland have a duty to further the conservation of biodiversity when carrying out their responsibilities. This biodiversity duty is about taking care of nature all around us, not just in specific protected sites and for particular species.
2. As outlined in the Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011 (commonly known as the WANE Act), every public body in Scotland is required to produce a publicly available report on compliance with the Biodiversity Duty. This must be completed once every three years.
3. As an organisation, we strive, where we can, to minimise impact on the environment and to make sustainable choices.
4. The Scottish Information Commissioner (the Commissioner) is the independent public official responsible for promoting and enforcing Scotland's freedom of information (FOI) law, that is, the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 and the Environmental Information (Scotland) Regulations 2004 (the EIRs).
5. The Commissioner is appointed by His Majesty the King, on the nomination of the Scottish Parliament, and serves for a fixed term of six years. The Scottish Parliament meets the Commissioner's salary and provides funding for the Commissioner's office.
6. The Commissioner is supported by a small team and the office premises are based in St Andrews, Fife
7. Our main functions are:
 - investigating FOI appeals
 - promoting the public's right to know
 - promoting good FOI practice to public authorities
 - intervening when public authority practice is not compliant with FOI law.
8. The Commissioner and the Senior Management Team (SMT) are committed to improving efficiency in how we function as an organisation and in how the office is managed. This commitment extends to furthering the conservation of biodiversity in identifying and taking action where possible. The biodiversity duty is about connecting people with the environment and managing biodiversity in the wider environment all around us.
9. This report covers activities carried out in 2021 - 2023.

Actions to protect biodiversity and connect people with nature

10. During 2021 and the start of 2022 all staff were working remotely with essential office visits taking place when necessary.
11. Since May 2022, hybrid working has been in place.
12. Office based activities include:
 - herb garden maintained – herbs can be cut and used by staff and also attract bees and butterflies

- bird feeder replenished regularly which is visited and used by a number of small garden birds
 - energy use monitored carefully and radiators controlled by thermostats
 - staff who live locally cycle or walk to work when possible
 - sharing news of local recycling initiatives, for example - a project in St Andrews using recycled Christmas trees to stave off coastal erosion
 - condition survey reports carried out on 2 large sycamore trees in our garden, which are hosts to a variety of birds and insects, to identify remedial action needed to ensure ongoing management.
13. The total organisation CO2e for 2022-23 was 18.52 tonnes compared to 21.04 tonnes in 2021-22, This is significantly below our annual target of 40.5 CO2e - the 2023-24 figures will be calculated in April 2024.
14. Travel by air, train and car fell significantly, mainly due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic affecting our organisation as we changed our way of working from 2020.
15. These statistics are published in our Annual Reports and can be found [here](#).
16. We also:
- selected the most environmentally friendly products for cleaning
 - continued to recycle as much as possible, including recycling used toner cartridges, cardboard and tins
 - fitted a new gas boiler which has the capacity to convert to hydrogen if that becomes an option in the future. This has contributed to some of the 18.6% reduction of gas usage throughout the year as the newer model is more fuel efficient
 - wiped data from pcs that are no longer in use and then the hard drives are shredded and all components recycled where possible
 - ensured our office paper is responsibly sourced and printers are set to print double sided
 - implemented a no paper policy where possible, reducing paper usage throughout the office – we no longer create paper copies for our case files or meetings. This also means less paper needs to be recycled
 - send the Commissioner’s decisions via email where possible, which decreases paper use and printing and postage requirements (which will have had an impact in term of the associated travel emissions)
 - continued to operate a switch off policy for all electronic equipment which encourages staff to switch off monitors and other electrical equipment when not in use
17. Working remotely March 2021 – May 2022 and hybrid working from 2022- 2023, has resulted in a few additional positive environmental outcomes:
- decreased commuting resulting in petrol/diesel consumption and emissions being reduced

- heating maintained at off / low over the summer and autumn period
- staff have started feeding the birds in their own gardens
- new ways of working have been established which help to reduce our carbon footprint
- virtual meetings – this has reduced the need for non-essential person to person meetings.

Mainstreaming biodiversity

18. We have sought to incorporate biodiversity measures into our wider policies, plans and strategies that we have in place.

19. Our Strategic Plan 2020-24 states that:

“We will lead by example in the open and transparent delivery of our statutory functions and will be an efficiently run and effectively governed public sector body, keeping pace with recognised standards and requirements.”

20. Our Environmental Policy is directly linked to operating in a manner that supports and encourages biodiversity:

“Our aim is continually to improve our environmental performance and to protect the environment by reducing pollution and resource consumption and to operate in a manner that supports and encourages the natural diversity of plant and animal life.”

21. The Environmental Policy also sets out a list of objectives to help us fulfil the above aim and states that we will:

- minimise carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions which result from energy use, through in-house energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy where possible
- reduce the consumption of resources, in particular office consumables and packaging
- minimise waste production by identifying ways to reduce, reuse and recycle materials
- purchase in an environmentally responsible manner
- reduce the impact of travel and transport to and from the office, by encouraging the use of more sustainable transport and reducing the need to travel where appropriate
- support and encourage a natural diversity of plant and animal life within our grounds and premises
- reduce our impact on local, national and global plant and animal life
- seek to positively influence those who use and visit the building through communication and by demonstrating good environmental practice
- identify and comply with legal and other requirements that relate to the environment
- promote best practice
- develop and implement management systems that will allow us to continually monitor and improve our performance with respect to the stated aims of this policy

22. When working with others:
- we always make reference to the importance we place on sustainability when procuring contracts for services and supplies
 - we try to use local suppliers where possible in order to actively lower our carbon footprint
 - we consider suppliers' accreditations:
 - our stationery supplier is ISO 9001: 2015 and ISO 14001: 2015 accredited and we minimise deliveries by carefully monitoring stock and buying in bulk where appropriate.
 - our PC recycling company is ISO 9001:2015, ISO 14001:2015, ISO 27001:2013 and ISO 45001:2018 accredited
23. We have published and promoted detailed guidance about the EIRs, which include specific provisions about publication of information about biodiversity.
24. We have promoted the importance of applying the EIRs when responding to environmental information throughout our enforcement work.

Nature-Based Solutions, Climate Change and Biodiversity

25. We are a small organisation and are limited in what we can do to integrate biodiversity into nature-based solutions. We look for ways to simultaneously benefit the environment and improve staff health and wellbeing, such as encouraging the greater use of green spaces near to the office and promote of our Health Living Initiative.
26. We have actively encouraged wildlife into the office garden by introducing a bird feeder, bug hotels and by having a variety of different plants to encourage butterflies and bees to visit and pollinate the local area.
27. All papers are destroyed securely by our shredding contractor and the contractor we use ensures that 100% of the paper which is shredded is recycled - this processed material is then turned into various different materials such as toilet paper.
28. Ecological cleaning products are used throughout the office and, where possible, purchased in bulk.
29. Re-usable spray bottles have been purchased to reduce plastic waste and we use a local supplier to help reduce our carbon footprint.
30. The tree survey completed every 2 years to assess the health of our sycamore trees in the office grounds can occasionally recommend branch removal to maintain the health of the tree and for health and safety reasons. As we are in a tree protection zone, permission to carry out the remedial work is sought from Fife Council. The work is done at the correct time of year and care is taken to prevent disturbance to wildlife in the trees. Cut branches have been used to make a 'bug hotel' for insects who are losing their natural habitat in towns and cities.

Workforce Development

31. All staff have been made aware of our policies on recycling and the use of re-cycled products.
32. Using flexible working arrangements, a member of staff was able to complete a horticulture course at Elmwood College which included a number of modules relating to biodiversity conservation including botany, plant nutrition plant production from seed, protected crop production, pot plants, plant husbandry and vegetative propagation.
33. A table and chairs are situated in the garden beside the kitchen garden and staff are encouraged to use the herbs which are grown in the garden at home which helps to cut down on shop packaged herbs and to reduce waste and carbon emissions. These actions help to highlight the importance of biodiversity and provides practical examples of the benefits of growing vegetables and herbs.
34. Staff are provided with wellbeing guidance and this has included guidance on how to stay connected with people and nature. For example, being active outside and listening to nature.

Research and Monitoring

35. In the last three years:
 - we have continued to monitor our carbon footprint with the aim of reducing it year on year
 - we have continued to report on sustainability.

Biodiversity highlights and challenges

36. Our key achievements may not be substantial when compared to larger organisations but we have taken actions to improve biodiversity as much as possible and sought to meet our strategic aim of being an efficiently run and effectively governed public sector body, keeping pace with recognised standards and requirements.
37. Highlights:
 - continuing to encourage more wildlife into the small areas of land by our office which has also provided a greener, more peaceful and relaxing place for staff to sit when not working
 - continuing to reduce emissions and we have been under the threshold for the past 6 years - our 22-23 statement on sustainable growth can be found [here](#)
 - hybrid working since 2022 has also made us think more about, and implement, alternative solutions to the way we work – especially in connection with travel, paper files and printing and this work will continue
 - staff are always willing to be involved in new initiatives
38. We have some challenges to being able to do more for biodiversity which include:
 - the size of the organisation, resource pressures and space pressures
 - seeking to prevent the loss of habitats and species
39. We will continue to improve our approach to further the conservation to biodiversity through the processes we follow and develop and the actions we take over the next three years.

Document control sheet

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