

POST-LEGISLATIVE SCRUTINY: BIODIVERSITY AND BIODIVERSITY REPORTING DUTIES NHS AYRSHIRE AND ARRAN RESPONSE

BACKGROUND

The Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee is seeking written views as part of its post-legislative scrutiny of the biodiversity and reporting duties placed on public bodies by the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 (the 2004 Act) and the Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011 (the 2011 Act).

The 2004 Act requires all public bodies to further the conservation of biodiversity when carrying out their functions. The 2011 Act amends the 2004 Act to require public bodies to provide a publicly available report, every three years, on the actions they have taken to meet the biodiversity duty.

This is not a full review of the legislation. The Committee is focusing on the extent to which the biodiversity and reporting duties placed on public bodies have been successful. Organisations and individuals are invited to make a written submission to the Committee setting out their views on the following questions:

- How well do you believe public bodies understand the biodiversity and reporting duties placed upon them?
- Do you believe that public bodies are adequately resourced to comply with the biodiversity and reporting duties?
- Do you think the requirement to report on the biodiversity duty leads to effective actions for improving and conserving biodiversity by public bodies?
- Are there any changes that could improve the actions taken by public bodies in respect of the biodiversity and reporting duties?

NHS AYRSHIRE & ARRAN RESPONSE

How well do you believe public bodies understand the biodiversity and reporting duties placed upon them?

There is a good understanding of the general requirement for biodiversity reporting in NHS Ayrshire & Arran. It is a key component of our policy and reporting requirements under NHS Scotland's Sustainability Policy CEL2012.

In NHS Ayrshire & Arran, the requirements of the Sustainability Policy are managed directly by a working group called the Sustainability Management Group.

(SMG). This Group's output is monitored and ratified by the overarching Estates, Environment and Sustainability Group (EESG) which comprises a number of senior managers and is chaired by the NHS Board's Sustainability Champion, the Director of Corporate Support Services.

All reporting requirements are discussed at the National Sustainability Steering Group which is hosted and chaired by Health Facilities Scotland. We are in the process of regionalising our sustainability management arrangements across West of Scotland Health Boards.

Do you believe that public bodies are adequately resourced to comply with the biodiversity and reporting duties?

The duty is written in the 2004 Act as a requirement to be considered as part of core business. However, NHS Ayrshire & Arran is not adequately resourced or equipped with the specialist knowledge to fully comply with the biodiversity duty.

Much of what we have achieved in recent years has been the result of our engagement in the Our Natural Health Service NHS Greenspace demonstration project at University Hospital Ayr/ Ailsa. This has allowed us to access external funding which has enabled us to attract local resource through our NHS Endowments fund. As a result, we have been able to proactively manage and promote access to previously underutilised woodland and meadowland; increase local species and native tree planting; explore how we can move from mowing regimes to richer meadow planting; and increase connectivity and green links with the wider community. We have benefited greatly from the expertise of partners such as Forestry Commission Scotland and Scottish Natural Heritage in this programme.

In the second phase of this work we have commissioned The Conservation Volunteers (TCV) to work with us to deliver the Green Gym and Branching Out programmes on site. In addition to their primary aims of improving the health of staff, patients and visitors, both have a focus on conservation. We have installed bird boxes and bug houses and are planning work this summer with the Scottish Wildlife Trust and Wildlife in Ayrshire to create a record of wildlife on site and become part of the Nectar Network.

We are currently rolling out the learning from this demonstration site to Ayrshire Central Hospital in North Ayrshire and have secured Woodlands In and Around Towns funding and further NHS Endowments funding, to open up a section of woodland on site with a view to enhancing local biodiversity and enabling access for staff, patients and local residents.

None of this, however, is considered to be core business or mainstream practice within the organisation and is being led by Public Health with the aim of maximising the role of the natural environment in improving population health.

It is recognised that capacity within Clinical Support Services to support this work is limited. Priorities and challenges within this service include reporting and compliance with cleaning standards, cleanliness and good management of waste. Although there are some excellent examples of garden spaces and planting across NHS sites and proactive consideration of useable greenspaces in the design of new buildings; on the whole, staff are not suitably trained, skilled or equipped to fully develop our green assets. In order to achieve this, the NHS in Scotland will require to provide further resources, training and support in addition to more creative partnership arrangements with the environment sector.

In terms of reporting, the Sustainability Management Group in NHS Ayrshire & Arran has a work programme which details each reporting requirement (including reporting on the

Biodiversity Duty), who is responsible for producing the report, and when the report is due. The Group oversees the management of the reporting requirements to ensure that deadlines are met and the NHS Board meets its obligations. Our most recent Biodiversity Report covers the period 2014-2017.

Do you think the requirement to report on the biodiversity duty leads to effective actions for improving and conserving biodiversity by public bodies?

The reporting requirement helps to raise awareness of the need to support and enhance biodiversity as part of good NHS estate management and promotes consideration of what can be done with limited resources.

Good Corporate Citizenship / Sustainable Health Self Assessments provide the NHS Board with an action plan to help protect and improve greenspace and biodiversity across our estate. The biodiversity report also features in the Board's Local Development Plan which feeds into any future planning and development actions that we take.

However, due to limited resources and expertise in the organisation, our action is primarily limited to externally funded projects, such as Our Natural Health Service / NHS Greenspace, which are currently limited to a small number of demonstration sites across Scotland. There requires to be a much greater commitment nationally to mainstreaming the learning from these programmes and resourcing NHS Boards accordingly, to transform the outdoor estate and fully meet the requirements of the biodiversity duty.

Are there any changes that could improve the actions taken by public bodies in respect of the biodiversity and reporting duties?

It may be helpful for biodiversity reports to set out the future plans of NHS Boards and other public bodies to improve biodiversity within their existing estate and future building plans. This may be a useful vehicle to gain approval and funding from external organisations.

Support would be welcomed to capture and report the impact of interventions on the natural environment.

It would also be useful to review and identify good practice across public bodies with a view to sharing learning and promoting collaboration between NHS Boards and other public bodies including the environment sector.

As highlighted above however, specialist advice and support and additional resources would be required to support public bodies to maximise their impact