

For Decision

Sustainable NI Request for Funding

Linkage to Council Strategy	
Strategic Priority	Protecting and enhancing our environments and assets
Objective	
Lead Officer	Stephen McMaw
Cost: (If applicable)	N/A

1.0 Background

- 1.1 A letter has been received from Prof Jim Kitchen, Executive Director, Sustainable NI, regarding a request for a financial contribution of £5k from the Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council (the Council) for the 2016-2017 financial year.
- 1.2 Sustainable NI is an organisation which was set up by Prof Kitchen to assist the 26 Councils to meet their obligations on sustainable development contained within the Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2006.
- 1.3 Prof Kitchen was originally engaged by Central Government to develop guidance for both Central and Local Government in relation to sustainable development legislation and to create a number of performance indicators that could be reported on annually. These indicators were presented within the Statutory Duty Guidance as a framework for compliance. They were not statutory but formed a framework to make it easier for Councils to illustrate compliance with the Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2006,
- 1.4 Having delivered this piece of work, Prof Kitchen set up Sustainable NI and a funding stream was created through the Local Government Environmental Officers Group arrangement which financially underpinned the organisation. Under the umbrella of Sustainable NI, Prof Kitchen set up a Sustainable Development Forum which met four times a year and at which there was representation from each of the 26 predecessor Councils. The purpose of the

Forum was to share knowledge and experiences across Local Government. A web site was also developed to share information and Sustainable NI assisted Councils in collating performance information against the performance indicators within the framework document that Prof Kitchen had developed.

- 1.5 With the convergence of the 26 Councils to the 11 Council model, the Environmental Officer Group structure no longer exists and therefore from 1st April 2016 no funding is in place as a contribution to Sustainable NI.

2.0 The Sustainable Development Statutory Duty.

- 2.1 The Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2006, Section 25 states

(1) A public Authority must, in exercising its functions, act in a way it considers best calculated to contribute to the achievement of sustainable Development in Northern Ireland, except to the extent that it considers that any such action is not reasonably practicable in all the circumstances of the case.

(2) For this purpose

- A Public Authority must have regard to any strategy or guidance relating to sustainable development issued by the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, and
- A Public Authority other than a Northern Ireland department must have regard to any guidance relating to sustainable development issued by a Northern Ireland department other than the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

- 2.2 In terms of the Sustainable Development Statutory Duty and the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) (the Act), the Duty remains in force however the context for Sustainable Development aligns with the Community Planning component of the Act as opposed to the framework set out in the guidance document that Councils had previously been referencing and reporting against.

- 2.3 This will mean henceforth, the Sustainable Development Statutory Duty placed on the 11 new Councils can be met through the performance improvement plan developed in each Council. Sustainability is also one of the seven prescribed performance objectives set out within the Act and Councils can choose this as one of their key performance objectives.

- 2.4 That said, the performance improvement process requires in house staff resources to identify, quantify, manage, co-ordinate and deliver improvements/projects. In terms of sustainability and the Duty on the Council, the same processes apply. The Council will need to consider the best way to deal with sustainability as a corporate function and how to resource it to ensure ultimately it meets its responsibility under the Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2006, Section 25.

3.0 Request from Sustainable NI

- 3.1 Sustainable NI has requested funding from the Council for the 2016-2017 financial year to the value of £5k. The request is being made to each of the 11 new Councils.
- 3.2 According to Prof Kitchen, Sustainable NI can continue to organise the Sustainable Development Forum, administer the web site and offer knowledge and support when required. There may also be a role in benchmarking in terms of performance improvement. There is a duty within the Act on Councils to seek benchmarking comparators in relation to performance improvement from 2017.
- 3.3 In terms of the Act, the onus is now on each Council to assess which sustainability performance improvements are most appropriate within the context of its Community Plan. As long as such sustainability improvements are part of the performance improvement plan the Council will meet its Statutory Sustainable Development Duty. In effect the previous framework used by the 26 Councils no longer applies.
- 3.4 In terms of information sharing and benchmarking, sustainability improvement targets will be Council specific in many instances so the opportunity to call upon Sustainable NI to carry out comparisons will be in all probability minimal. Comparison exercises can be undertaken as an in house exercise between Councils at no additional cost.

4.0 Summary

- 4.1 Sustainable NI is offering a service that can provide a degree of support in relation to the Council working towards meeting its Sustainable Development Duty. Having access to such support and expertise is very positive. In a more negative note the value to Council of the Sustainability Development Forum, the web site and benchmarking services are questionable at this time as future sustainability performance objectives will be Council specific and linked to emerging issues from the Community Plan. In terms of the expertise and knowledge that Sustainable NI can provide, this may be more appropriately sourced on a needs basis and if necessary a daily pay rate agreed.

5.0 Recommendation

- 5.1 **It is recommended** that the Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council does not provide funding to Sustainable NI for the 2016-2017 financial year.