

The Highland Council

Community Services Committee – 28 April 2016

Agenda Item	13
Report No	COM 22/16

Scottish Shared Scientific Services proposals

Report by Director of Community Services

Summary

This report details proposals for the creation of the Scottish Shared Scientific Services, and invites Members to agree in principle to further preparatory actions being undertaken.

1. Background

- 1.1 Currently, the majority of local authority (LA) public analyst services are provided by 4 laboratories operated by Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow councils. Jointly these labs are responsible for providing food safety, environmental, and trading standards related scientific services to the 32 Scottish local authorities.
- 1.2 At a Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) meeting in June 2012, it was agreed to assess the viability of a shared service for Public Analyst scientific services in Scotland. As a result an Outline Business Case was prepared with the support of the Improvement Service and support from Councils. The Outline Business case was approved by SOLACE in March 2014 and determined that there was a case for implementing a Shared Service Model to ensure the long term sustainability of a Public Analyst service in Scotland.
- 1.3 An update on the business case was presented to SOLACE in February 2016 and SOLACE agreed in principle to pursuing the proposals subject to approval from each Council.

2. Current position in the Highland Council

- 2.1 Environmental Health currently tender for analytical services and we use the Edinburgh Public Analyst services for most of our analysis work.
- 2.2 Current relevant contracts are described below:
 - a) microbiological food samples, contracted with Edinburgh Public Analyst. Approximately 400 samples submitted per year in response to investigations, complaints and as part of routine monitoring programmes;
 - b) chemical food samples, Trading Standards samples and general Public Analyst advice contracted with Edinburgh Public Analyst. Approximately 400 samples submitted per year in response to investigations, complaints and as part of routine monitoring programmes; and

- c) private water supply samples contracted with Scottish Water. Approximately 1500 samples submitted per year to meet statutory monitoring programmes and in response to investigations and complaints.
- 2.3 Other laboratories are used by Environmental Health and Trading Standards on occasion for highly specialist sampling e.g. air quality and contaminated land.
- 2.4 Other parts of the Council such as Property, Roads, Building or Housing services may use scientific services commissioned from other specialist laboratories.
- 2.5 Given the long term risk to Public Analyst services and the essential services they provide, Environmental Health have supported the review since it commenced in 2012. This included a shared contribution to the research stage of the project in 2013 of £3900 funded from the Environmental Health budget.

3. Draft Business Case for a single Scottish Shared Scientific Service

- 3.1 A draft Business Case for a single Scottish Shared Scientific Service has now been prepared, which provides a structure and business strategy for a single organisation that would deliver Public Analyst and other scientific services for the benefit of Scottish local authorities and public sector agencies.
- 3.2 The new organisation would be a partnership of Local Authority members and provide the framework to deliver cost savings back to its partners, with a strategy for growth through the development of strategic partnerships and service reform.
- 3.3 In addition to providing a sustainable public analyst service, the draft business case also highlights the following key benefits:
 - a) be wholly owned by, and accountable to its local authority partners;
 - b) deliver savings to its partners in the region of £1.4m over the first three years;
 - c) be committed to delivering best value analytical scientific services for its partners benefit;
 - d) deliver further efficiencies through service reform programme;
 - e) provide the opportunity for growth through generating additional business with public and private sector clients; and
 - f) develop partnerships with public sector organisations and academia to open up new markets for its services.
- 3.4 The Council is being asked to agree in principle to the following actions being undertaken by the Scottish Shared Scientific Services Project Board:
 - a) determining the full financial impact on each local authority partner;
 - b) developing a detailed Business Plan for the new service;
 - c) drafting and concluding all necessary legal agreements; and
 - d) continuing consultation with relevant staff, Trades Unions, and other stakeholders.

4. Conclusions

- 4.1 As one of the few Scottish Councils who tender for analytical services, our initial concern with this project is that we would face a significant increase in current charges. There are proposals to include a transition period of 2-3 years for Councils suffering an increase and the draft business case does argue that the project should produce saving for Councils in the long term. The next stage of the project will clarify the full financial impact for Councils.
- 4.2 Given the essential services provided by Public Analysts to the Council it is recommended that the Council agrees to go forward with this next stage.
- 4.3 Please note this agreement does not commit the Council to participation in the proposed Scottish Shared Scientific Service. There will be a further opportunity in the future to review the financial information and the detailed business case before making a final commitment to the project.

5. Implications

- 5.1 Resources
Although not mentioned in the report to SOLACE in February 2016 it is possible the project board may seek small contributions from all Councils to support the next stage. This is likely to be similar to the previous contribution of £3900 and can be accommodated from the Environmental Health budget.
- 3.2 Legal, Risk, Equality, Climate Change/Carbon Clever, Gaelic and Rural
There are no legal, risk, equality, climate change/Carbon Clever, Gaelic or rural implications arising from this report.

Recommendation

Members are invited to agree in principle to the following actions being undertaken by the Scottish Shared Scientific Services Project Board:

- a) determining the full financial impact on each local authority partner;
- b) developing a detailed Business Plan for the new service;
- c) drafting and concluding all necessary legal agreements; and
- d) continuing consultation with relevant staff, Trades Unions, and other stakeholders.

Designation: Director of Community Services

Date: 20 March 2016

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Background Papers:

Scottish Shared Scientific Services Project Board report to SOLACE (Scotland)
4/2/16