

Annual Report 2008/09

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1. Foreword

I have great pleasure in introducing the first annual report of the Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Development Planning Authority (SDPA).

The SDPA has a key role in setting out a clear vision for the future development of the area which takes into account the economic, social and environmental challenges we face over the next 25 years.

Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Councils took early decisions to embrace the reform of the planning system and, in particular, the opportunities offered by the formation of the SDPA. Since its designation by Scottish Ministers in June 2008 the SDPA's work has focused on the preparation of a new structure plan for the area, one which seeks to respond to the Scottish Government's aspiration for strategic development plans under the 2006 Act. This has meant a lot of work at the cutting edge of planning reform – effort for which both Councils should be justifiably proud.

Undoubtedly the high point of the year was the submission of a finalised structure plan to Scottish Ministers on 27 February 2009. This was the culmination of a lot of hard work and I would like to take this opportunity to thank the team, officers from both Councils and well as the Members of the SDPA for their dedication to the task. I would also like to thank all those who have engaged with us on this project over the last two years, including the members of the Key Stakeholder Reference Group.

We can learn a lot from the past year as we work towards the preparation of a strategic development plan under the new legislation. 2009/10 will bring with it new challenges as we move forward with partners on the implementation of the structure plan in an uncertain economic climate but I am confident that the SDPA has established a solid foundation in its first year upon which to build for the future.

I trust that you find this report of interest and commend it to you.

Councillor Scott Cassie
Chair, Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Development Planning Authority

2. Period covered by the Annual Report

This is the first annual report for the Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Development Planning Authority (SDPA). This report covers the period from 25 June 2008 (the designation of the SDPA) to the end of the financial year 2008/09.

Where necessary to providing context to the work of the SDPA, reference will be made to the period prior to 25 June 2008, when operating as the Aberdeen City & Shire Strategic Planning Committee (ACSSPC).

3. Local Context

Aberdeen City and Shire is an area of almost 6,500 square km in the north east of Scotland. Aberdeen, Scotland's third largest city is surrounded by Aberdeenshire, an area characterised by diverse landscapes, from rugged coastlines, magnificent castles, picturesque fishing villages, tranquil lochs, inspiring glens and the unique mountain landscape of the Cairngorms National Park.

The area is growing, with the combined population of Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire exceeding 450,000 in 2008 (8.7% of the population of Scotland). The population has grown by almost 16,000 over the last five years and this growth is forecast to continue. In terms of the four city regions in Scotland, this rate of growth is second only to the Edinburgh city region.

Living in the Aberdeen City and Shire region delivers the best quality of life in Scotland where town and country merge together creating an experience rich in contrast and offers an enviable range of leisure, recreational and cultural experiences. Studies have consistently shown that Aberdeen is rated as one of the most desirable cities in the UK in which to live and work and Aberdeenshire was recently ranked the top rural area for quality of life in Scotland.

The oil and gas industry has brought considerable wealth and opportunity to the area since the 1970s and as North Sea production starts to fall, renewable energy offers the potential to build on the considerable talent and economic dynamism of the area.

Aberdeen City and Shire has excellent transport links making it an easily accessible destination whatever the chosen mode of transport. Aberdeen Airport is one of the UK's fastest growing airports, with direct air links to airports all over the UK and the rest of Europe, and is located just 6 miles from the city centre. Aberdeen is only just over 60 flying minutes from London and less than 2.5 hours by car or train from Glasgow and Edinburgh.

Aberdeen City and Shire maintains consistently high education standards with 5 of the top 12 schools in Scotland, a range of learning centres and two universities which enjoy a reputation at the forefront of teaching and research excellence.

This provides a brief snapshot of some of the challenges and opportunities faced by the SDPA as it seeks to plan for the future of the city region.

4. Establishment of the Strategic Development Planning Authorities

Background

Since the abolition of Regional Councils in 1996, planning authorities in Scotland were required (either individually or jointly) to prepare structure plans – documents which set out a strategic framework for the use of land in an area. In the case of North East Scotland, Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Councils were required to jointly prepare a plan.

The Scottish Executive announced its intention to conduct a review of arrangements for strategic planning in November 2000 and in June 2001 the consultation paper *'Review of Strategic Planning'* was published. The aim of the review was to contribute to the wider modernisation and streamlining of the planning system and it highlighted a number of weaknesses in the system at that time:

- delays in plan preparation and approval;
- out-of-date plans that are not suitable to promote and control development;
- cumbersome procedures in contrast with other policy documents and investment strategies;
- inability / reluctance of plans to make adequate provision for development in the longer term;
- lack of clarity and certainty about where development will be allowed and where it will be restrained; and
- the tenuous relationship between plans and implementation.

As a result, significant changes were proposed, including the removal of the two-tier system of development plans for all but the four largest city regions in Scotland.

The Scottish Executive White Paper *'Modernising the Planning System'* was published in June 2005 and identified Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire as comprising one of the city regions. Others were identified around Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow.

The Planning etc. (Scotland) Act 2006 then gave Scottish Ministers the power to create Strategic Development Planning Authorities (SDPAs) and on 25 June 2008, four designation orders came into force, one of which (No. 2) covered Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire.



The image shows the Table of Contents for the Planning etc. (Scotland) Act 2006. It is a document with a header that includes the title and page number (2006, asp 17). The table lists various sections of the act, such as 'National Planning Framework', 'Development plans', 'Planning etc. (Scotland) Act 2006', and 'Publicity for applications'. The table is organized into three parts: Part 1 (National Planning Framework), Part 2 (Development plans), and Part 3 (Planning etc. (Scotland) Act 2006). The table also includes a section for 'Publicity for applications' and a final section for 'Enacting and publication of Acts of Parliament'.

CONTENTS	
1	National Planning Framework
2	Development plans
3	Planning etc. (Scotland) Act 2006
4	Publicity for applications
5	Enacting and publication of Acts of Parliament

Housing markets, travel to work areas and access to services all operate on a large geographical basis, particularly around the main city regions. The principal purpose for the establishment of SDPAs was to provide a vital forum for planning authorities to jointly establish a common approach to matters that extend beyond an individual authority's boundaries. In particular, the 2006 Act places a duty on SDPAs to prepare and keep under review a strategic development plan.

Governance

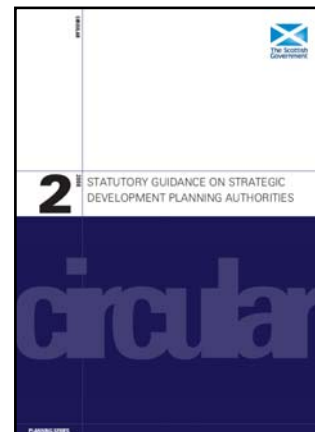
Scottish Government Circular 2/2008 (April 2008) sets out the Scottish Government's statutory guidance on SDPAs. Among other things it identified the need to establish a joint committee of members and a dedicated team of officers. The extracts below provide more detail on the expectations of the Scottish Government.

Joint Committee

"The preparation of up-to-date, relevant and achievable SDPs will require councillors to think beyond the boundaries of their own local authority and consider the best strategy for the whole city region. Membership of the joint committee should be on an equal basis, with the same number of councillors from each authority. Nomination by local authorities of councillor members to sit on the joint committee is entirely a matter for the respective councils, as is the appointment of a Chair who will have a key role in managing the business of the joint committee and ensuring decisions are made. There may also be scope for the joint committee to co-opt additional non-voting members to represent other interests or provide specialist expertise. The Government envisages that major decisions, for instance about the content of the Strategic Development Plan, will be ratified by the individual planning authorities. But authorities may conclude that delegating some more routine decisions, such as responding to consultations, to the joint committee may assist in the speed and efficiency of decision-making. It is expected that most decisions will be reached by consensus." (Circular 2/2008, paras 10 – 15)

Dedicated Team

"Strategic planning is a continuous process that requires a dedicated team of professional and support staff to manage effectively...dedicated teams represent the most effective way to deliver an effective plan for the city region. This ensures that no individual council has greater or lesser influence over the shape of the strategic development plan and that it truly reflects the best strategy for the area as a whole. SDPA teams are likely to be small in size, drawing in expertise from constituent authorities and beyond. A flexible approach may be adopted, allowing the team to expand and contract depending on the stage of plan preparation...A neutral location, separate from any of the individual councils' offices, would help to emphasise the city-region role of the team as would co-location with other city region wide functions." (Circular 2/2008, paras 16 & 17)



5. Aberdeen City & Shire Strategic Development Planning Authority

Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Councils moved quickly to implement the new arrangements for strategic planning in Scotland. In terms of the joint committee, this built upon the work previously carried out by the Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Planning Committee (ACSSPC), although a dedicated joint team was newly formed. The two Councils took these arrangements forward well in advance of formal designation to ensure that everything would be operational by the date of designation but also to ensure continuity with work on the emerging structure plan.

A minute of agreement between Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Councils and a set of standing orders currently govern the operation of the SDPA. These documents were agreed by Aberdeen City Councils Policy and Strategy Committee and Aberdeenshire Councils Infrastructure Services Committee in 2008. Appendix 1 sets out the aims and objectives of the SDPA.

The Circular suggested a range of issues as set out in figure 1 below, along with the response taken by the SDPA:

Figure 1: Scottish Government Expectations and SDPA Delivery (Joint Committee)

Circular 2/2008	Aberdeen City and Shire
Equal representation of Councils.	Six Councillors from both Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Councils.
Councillors to think beyond the boundaries of their own local authority and consider the best strategy for the whole city region.	Continuity between the previous joint committee and the SDPA has facilitated this outlook.
Most decisions reached by consensus.	This was the case throughout the year, even with important decisions being taken on the structure plan.
Major decisions ratified by constituent councils but routine decisions delegated to the SDPA.	The delegation of most decisions to the SDPA is enshrined in the Minute of Agreement between the Councils.
Option of co-opting non-voting members.	Not taken up so far.

The Aberdeen City and Shire SDPA consists of 12 members, with six being appointed by each of Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Councils. This is in line with Circular 2/2008 and its recognition of the need for flexibility in the number of members from each planning authority. The Chair and Vice-Chair are from different Councils and they hold office for a period of two years. At the end of the Chair's term of office the Vice-Chair will automatically assume the role of Chair and a new Vice-Chair will be elected.

Meetings of the SDPA take place in public at least four times a year and more regularly when required. Meetings are held on an alternating basis at the Town House (Aberdeen City) and Woodhill House (Aberdeenshire) in Aberdeen and the administration and responsibility for clerking the meetings rotates accordingly.

Five meetings of the SDPA took place between 25 June 2008 and 31 March 2009 as follows:

- 18 September 2008
- 3 December 2008
- 23 January 2009
- 13 February 2009
- 27 March 2009

Two meetings of ACSSPC took place earlier in 2008 (on 23 May and 9 June), prior to the formation of the SDPA.

Membership

At the first meeting of the SDPA on 18 September 2008 the two Councils nominated Councillors as set out in figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Members Nominated to the SDPA at its first meeting

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL	ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL
Councillor Scott Cassie (Lib Dem)	Councillor Peter Argyle (Lib Dem)
Councillor Bill Cormie (SNP)	Councillor John Cox (Independent)
Councillor Kate Dean (Lib Dem)	Councillor Rob Merson (SNP)
Councillor James Hunter (Labour)	Councillor Stuart Pratt (SNP)
Councillor Muriel Jaffrey (SNP)	Councillor Debra Storr (Lib Dem)
Councillor Alan Milne (Conservative)	Councillor Jill Webster (Conservative)

At its first meeting the SDPA appointed Councillor Cassie to the post of Chair and Councillor Argyle to the post of Vice Chair.

In January 2009 Councillor Mike Sullivan (Lib Dem) replaced Councillor Debra Storr (Lib Dem) in one of the Aberdeenshire Council positions on the SDPA.

The membership of the SDPA represents considerable continuity with the previous membership of ACSSPC, with the only change being Councillor Jill Webster replacing Councillor Marcus Humphrey in May 2008 prior to the formation of the SDPA. Prior to the SDPA, Councillors Cassie and Argyle were joint chairs with Councillors Comrie and Webster as joint vice chairs of ACSSPC.

In addition to the twelve members of the Authority there are also twelve named substitute members as set out in figure 3 below:

Figure 3: Substitute Members of the SDPA (as at 31 March 2009)

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL	ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL
Councillor Alan Donnelly	Councillor Graeme Clark
Councillor Neil Fletcher	Councillor Bill Howatson
Councillor George Penny	Councillor Albert Howie
Councillor Wendy Stuart	Councillor Ron McKail
Councillor John West	Councillor Fiona McRae
Councillor Willie Young	Councillor Alastair Ross

Attendance at the meetings of the SDPA is set out in figure 4 below.

Figure 4: Member attendance at meetings of the SDPA in 2008/09

	18 September 2008	03 December 2008	23 January 2009	13 February 2009	27 March 2009	Total
Councillor Scott Cassie (Chair)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5
Councillor Peter Argyle (Vice Chair)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5
Councillor Bill Cormie		✓	✓			2
Councillor John Cox	✓	✓		✓	✓	4
Councillor Kate Dean			✓			1
Councillor James Hunter			✓	✓		2
Councillor Muriel Jaffrey		✓	✓	✓		3
Councillor Alan Milne	✓		Part	✓	✓	4
Councillor Rob Merson	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5
Councillor Stuart Pratt	✓		✓		✓	3
Councillor Debra Storr	✓					1
Councillor Mike Sullivan			✓	✓	✓	3
Councillor Jill Webster	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5
SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS						
Councillor Graeme Clark		✓		✓		2
Councillor Alan Donnelly		✓	Part			2
Councillor Neil Fletcher					✓	1
Councillor Bill Howatson						0
Councillor Albert Howie						0
Councillor Ron McKail						0
Councillor Fiona McRae						0
Councillor George Penny	✓			✓	✓	3
Councillor Alastair Ross		✓				1
Councillor Wendy Stuart	✓					1
Councillor John West	✓					1
Councillor Willie Young	✓					1
Total	12	10	11	11	10	

All meetings of the SDPA were well attended in 2008/09, with between 10 and 12 Members attending each meeting. The average attendance rate for full members of the SDPA was 72%, with four Members attending all five meetings. In addition, 8 of the 12 substitute Members attended at least one of the meetings.

6. Strategic Development Plan Team

The Strategic Development Plan Team consists of five permanent members of staff and a temporary part-time clerical assistant.

Circular 2/2008 suggested three main issues as set out in figure 5 below, along with the response taken by the SDPA:

Figure 5: Scottish Government Expectations and SDPA Delivery (Joint Committee)

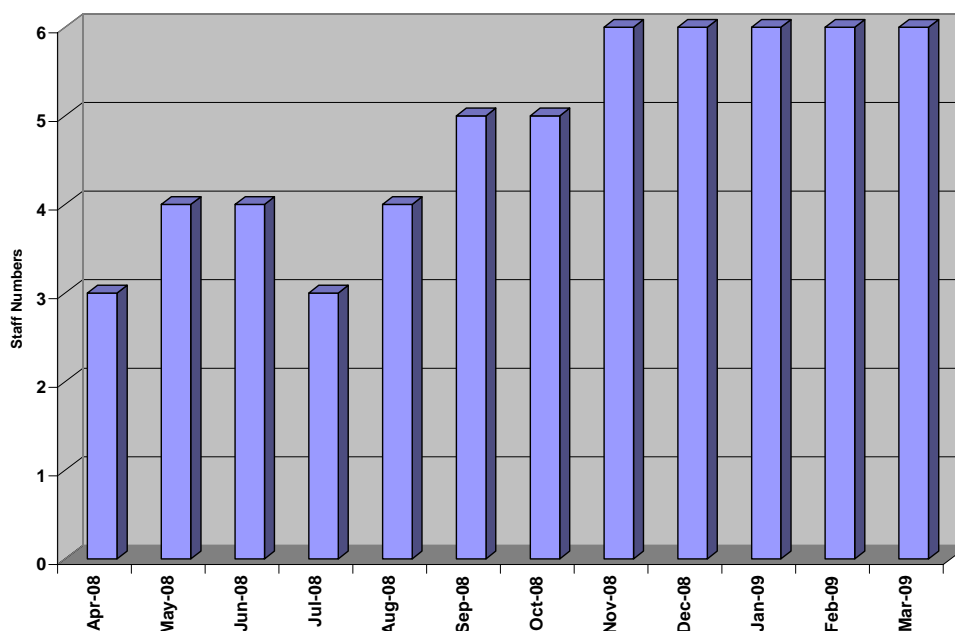
Circular 2/2008	Aberdeen City and Shire
Dedicated Team	Dedicated team established to service the SDPA.
Neutral Location	Team located separately from either Council.
Co-located with other functions	Located in the same building as Nestrans (the Regional Transport Partnership) and ACSEF (public/private economic development partnership).

The Head of Planning and Infrastructure (Aberdeen City Council), Head of Planning Policy and Environment (Aberdeenshire Council) and the Strategic Development Plan Manager form the Strategic Development Plan Management Group who meet on a regular basis to prepare and monitor work programmes as well as consider appropriate consultations and reports to be presented to the SDPA.

Aberdeenshire Council are the employing authority and with all being new posts they were advertised nationally.

Three posts were filled prior to formal designation of the SDPA on 25 June and three after this date (as shown in figure 6).

Figure 6: Staff compliment on Strategic Development Plan Team (2008/09)



An Interim Strategic Development Plan Manager was employed for a three month period from March – June 2008 while the permanent manager's position was filled. This interim appointment was provided by 'SOLACE', the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives.

The team was drawn from a varied backgrounds, providing a breadth of experience and interests. Staff have both public and private sector planning experience, as well as experience of work in development management, development planning and a research environment. Appointments were made from Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Councils as well as another planning authority, a house builder and a research organisation.

The time taken to full the posts in the SDP Team has impacted on the expenditure of the SDPA in 2008/09 since salaries and associated costs make up a significant proportion of the cost base.

A full complement of staff has been in place since November 2008. At the end of the year, the team consists of six staff as set out in figure 7 below:

Figure 7: Strategic Development Plan Team

Position	
Strategic Development Plan Manager	David Jennings
Senior Planner	Laura Robertson
Senior Planner	Bruce Strachan
Planner	Alanna Lyle
Planner	Peter Shannon
Clerical Assistant (part time, temporary)	Morag Macdonald

The SDPA Team are located in offices at

Archibald Simpson House
27 – 29 King Street
Aberdeen
AB24 5AA

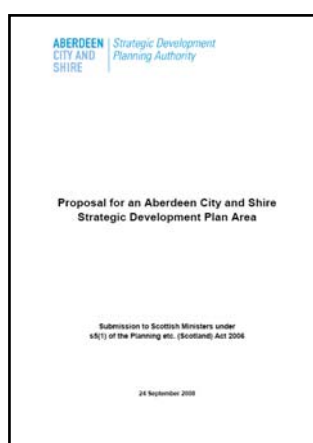
7. Review of the year

Although primarily established to prepare and keep under review a strategic development plan for the area, the SDPA was initially tasked with continuing work on a structure plan which had formally begun in February 2007. This task took up the majority of the efforts of both Members and officers during 2008/09.

A) SDP Area Determination

One of the first tasks of the SDPA (required by statute) was to propose boundaries for the strategic development plan area.

In accordance with Scottish Government guidance, a draft boundary and justification were agreed for consultation at the final meeting of ACCSPC in May 2008. The draft boundary included the area of Aberdeen City and



Aberdeenshire with the exception of that part of Aberdeenshire within the Cairngorms National Park. The proposed boundary was logical, straightforward to administer, allowed flexibility within the entire city region area, followed existing boundaries and excluded the Cairngorms National Park.

A six week consultation on the draft boundary commenced on 17 July 2008, with the SDPA required to make a submission to Scottish Ministers by 25 September 2008 (within 3 months of designation). In recognition of the importance of engagement with relevant interests in the determination of the boundary

the SDP Team made formal requests for responses from a range of key interest groups and advertising and website updates sought responses from the wider public.

A total of 12 responses were made to the consultation with no objections to the proposed boundary. The SDPA submitted its boundary proposal on 24 September 2008 and the determination on 11 November 2008 by Scottish Ministers matched the boundary proposed by the SDPA and is shown in figure 8 below.

Figure 8: Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Development Plan Area



B) Structure Plan

Work on the Aberdeen City and Shire Structure Plan formally commenced on 21 February 2007 with the publication of an Issues Report for consultation. Considerable engagement with both stakeholders and communities took place both before and after this consultation, helping to inform the plan preparation process. A key aspect of this was the formation of a 'Key Stakeholder Reference Group' which met throughout the process. Prior to 25 June 2008, work on the structure plan had been carried out under the auspices of the Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Planning Committee (ACSSPC). Detailed information on the plan preparation process is available from the SDPA website.

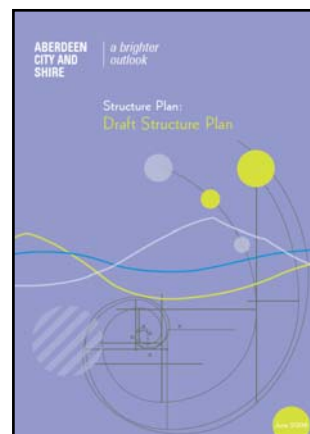
Draft Structure Plan

Approval for formal consultation of the draft structure plan was given at the meeting of ACSSPC in early June 2008. The draft plan marked a radical departure from previous structure plan documents in form and content and was intended to be accessible to a wide range of audiences. It also gained a crystal mark from the Plain English Campaign.

The aim was to create a clear, concise and accessible document that was strategic in its approach, focused on change, positive and action-orientated. The Scottish Government believes strongly in the value of forward-looking, visionary and ambitious plans and the draft plan was commended as representing the shift in thinking that the Scottish Government are looking for in the planning system.

On the 27 June a formal consultation period lasting 11 weeks began. The draft plan was widely circulated and was made available to view at public libraries and on the SDPA website. Three other documents were also published for consultation; the Strategic Environmental Assessment, Equalities and Human Rights Impact Assessment and Background Paper.

A series of 14 public events were undertaken with a wide range of stakeholders and communities invited, along with adverts published in newspapers across the north-east. These events were designed to assist in understanding and responding to the draft plan.



Around 350 people in total attended the events organised throughout Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire. The closing date for responses was 12 September 2008 and approximately 480 were received.

Following the close of the consultation period the team distilled the responses into 2,500 comments, which were presented to the SDPA with draft responses to around half of the individual comments on 3 December 2008. The second installment was presented on 23 January 2009. On 13 February 2009 the SDPA met to agree responses to comments on the draft plan and to recommend to both Councils the submission of a Finalised Structure Plan to Scottish Ministers. As a result of the consultation on the draft plan, over 150 changes were made.

Finalised Structure Plan

With the secondary legislation introducing the new development plan system coming into force on 28 February 2009, there were procedural advantages in submitting the structure plan to Scottish Ministers before that date.

In tandem with the Finalised Plan, a number of associated documents were revised, updated and completed; an addendum to the Strategic Environmental Assessment; an Appropriate Assessment; a Publicity and Consultation Statement; an Equalities and Human Rights Impact Assessment and a Background Paper. The Finalised Plan also gained a crystal mark from the Plain English Campaign.



At special meetings of Full Council on 19 February 2009 in both Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire, councillors voted overwhelmingly in favour of submission of the Finalised Structure Plan to Scottish Ministers, which subsequently took place on 27 February 2009.

At the point the plan and associated documents were submitted to Scottish Ministers, the 8 week period for objection and representation commenced. Notices were placed in the Edinburgh Gazette, Press & Journal and weekly papers in Aberdeenshire as well as over 1,800 letters or emails sent to those who had been involved in plan preparation. The plan and associated documentation were made available at the main Council offices, public libraries and on the SDPA website. Copies of the plan were sent to all those who commented on the draft plan.

In total, 245 individuals and organisations made representations on the Finalised Structure Plan to Scottish Ministers by the closing date of 24 April 2008. At the time of publication of this annual report, the representations were with Scottish Ministers for consideration.

C) Development Plan Scheme

The publication of a development plan scheme is a statutory requirement placed on the SDPA by the Planning etc. (Scotland) Act 2006.

The development plan scheme sets out the authority's programme for preparing and reviewing its strategic development plan and what is likely to be involved at each stage. It also includes a participation statement, stating when, how and with whom consultation on the plan will take place, as well as the authority's proposals for public involvement in the plan preparation process. The scheme must be regularly monitored and reviewed at least annually.



The development plan scheme was agreed by the SDPA on 27 March 2009 and was the first statutory development plan scheme prepared by the SDPA (although two non-statutory versions had been prepared for the structure plan in February 2007 and May 2008). It was subsequently submitted to Scottish Ministers and published both electronically and in hard-copy.

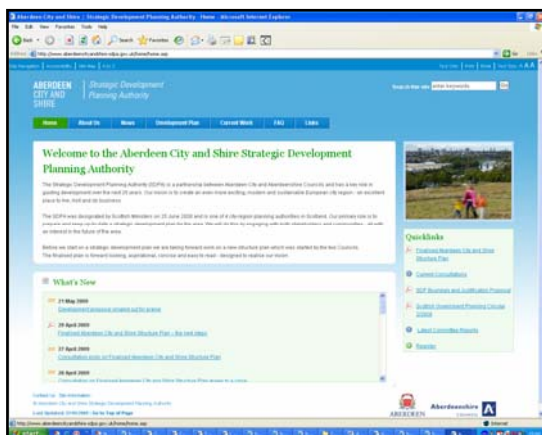
The development plan scheme sets out the following commitments on behalf of the SDPA to:

- Transparency and accountability;
- Plain English;
- Equalities and human rights; and
- Environmental responsibility.

Due to the stage reached in the development plan cycle, the indicative timetable suggests that work on a strategic development plan will not commence in earnest until 2010/11 with an estimated submission date to Scottish Ministers for the Proposed Strategic Development Plan of December 2012.

D) SDPA website

The designation of the SDPA on 25 June 2008 coincided with the commencement of the consultation period on the draft structure plan on 27 June 2008 (see below). This presented an important early opportunity to launch the identity of the SDPA and its website was therefore launched on 27 June 2008.



The Aberdeen City and Shire SDPA was the first of the four SDPAs in Scotland to launch its website. It draws on existing Aberdeen City and Shire regional branding, although this has been tailored to suit the needs of the SDPA. This 'interim' branding will

be amended during the course of 2009/10 to reflect a more permanent branding for the SDPA.

The ethos behind the website design was to make the site as informative, accessible and interactive as possible, while keeping the site simple. In concordance with the ethos, the site is regularly updated (including 15 news items during 2008/09) to make it an invaluable communication tool with stakeholders and the public which reflects e-government aspirations and increasing user expectations. The SDP Team maintains ownership and editing rights for the site.

The website was primarily designed to facilitate access to information about the SDPA and the emerging structure plan but also has the capability to allow for interactive features – enabling people to register online to be kept up to date on progress on plan preparation, ongoing work and wider SDPA matters in an efficient manner. 108 people registered on the website between the website launch date and the end of March 2009.

During consultation on the draft structure plan, an online consultation form enabled people to submit their comments on the draft plan which resulted in 55 forms being received in this way.

A review of the site has now commenced and will be complete by September 2009, with any amendments to the site made as soon as possible thereafter. This will include alterations to reflect the SDPA identity when it is established.

E) Raising our profile

The consultation on a draft structure plan within a few days of the designation of the SDPA enabled the new body to announce its creation to a wide audience of interested parties.

In addition to the public meetings organised during the draft plan consultation period, presentations were given at a number of events during 2008/09. These include meetings of the Aberdeenshire Community Health Partnership, The Aberdeen City Alliance, Aberdeenshire Housing Strategy Group and the Aberdeen Homes, Land Use and Environment Forums. Early meetings also took place with a number of stakeholders.

The publication of a front-page article in the 'Scottish Planner' by the Strategic Development Plan Manager on the formation of the SDPA and the draft structure plan in August 2008 provided an important early opportunity to showcase the approach being taken to the modernisation of strategic planning in the area.



F) Consultation Responses

Formal responses were made to a number of consultations during they year, including the Scottish Environment Protection Agency in relation to the River Basin Management Plan and to the Scottish Government on the review of Circular 12/1996 (planning agreements). A letter was also sent to the Scottish Parliament in response to the Local Government and Communities call for views on the publication of the National Planning Framework 2: Proposed Framework. The SDPA were also represented at a pre-consultation meeting for key stakeholders in February 2009 to support the preparation of the consultative draft Scottish Planning Policy (Part 3).

Considerable engagement also took place with the Scottish Government on the secondary legislation, circular and planning advice note relating to the implementation of the new development plan system.

8. Funding

Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Councils jointly fund the SDPA on a 50:50 basis. In 2008/09, this amounted to a total contribution of £336,000, with £168,000 coming from each Council. This covered the whole financial year, although the statement of accounts only covers the period following the formal designation of the SDPA by Scottish Ministers at the end of June 2008.

In October 2008 the Scottish Government announced that they would be making a grant available to the four SDPAs to cover start-up costs. In the case of the Aberdeen City and Shire SDPA, this amounted to £120,000. They identified four items of expenditure for which the money could be used:

- (1) Costs of setting up an office for the SDPA dedicated team;
- (2) Hardware and software for the SDPA dedicated team;
- (3) Communication and marketing costs for the new team identity, including early engagement with stakeholders on the new plans; and/or
- (4) Consultancy costs for studies into boundaries or baseline data for plan-making.

A full statement of accounts will be published separately later in the year. However, figure 9 shows a breakdown of costs for 2008/09 and clearly identifies the significance of staff costs and those associated with the consultation and engagement on the emerging structure plan.

Figure 9: SDPA Expenditure in 2008/09

Pie Chart

The budget agreed by the SDPA for 2009/10 is for a reduction of £20,000 from 2008/09 on the basis of the stage reached in the development plan cycle, the grant income from the Scottish Government and the budget pressures on both Councils. It was further agreed that a three-year financial plan would be prepared by September 2009 tied to a project plan for the first strategic development plan.

9. Monitoring Framework

It is important that monitoring takes place in relation to outcomes, outputs and impacts.

The Finalised Structure Plan establishes a monitoring framework in relation to outcomes and the first monitoring report is likely to be prepared in early 2010. This work will be supplemented by working towards the preparation of a Monitoring Statement required by the Planning etc. (Scotland) Act 2006.

However, separate indicators will be established and agreed by the SDPA during 2009/10 and reported in the next annual report. These will be focused on the outputs of the SDPA and also cover its performance against commitments to transparency, accountability, Plain English, equalities and human rights and environmental responsibility found in the development plan scheme. This will be supported by regular monitoring of the action programme to be prepared in 2009/10.

10. Next steps

While work in 2008/09 was largely focused on the preparation of a finalised structure plan for submission to Scottish Ministers, 2009/10 is likely to be a considerably more diverse year as far as the work of the SDPA is concerned.

Finalised Structure Plan

Priorities for 2009/10 will focus on taking the finalised structure plan to approval by Scottish Ministers. Depending on the route taken by Scottish Ministers, this could involve responding to a consultation on proposed modifications to the plan or participation in an examination in public. This represents considerable uncertainty for 2009/10 but greater clarity is likely to be available by the summer.

Structure Plan Action Programme

The preparation of an action programme to sit alongside the structure plan is also a key workstream for 2009/10. This will involve considerable engagement with the Scottish Government and other stakeholders to clearly identify and prioritise the actions which need to be taken by different parties to implement the plan. A number of these actions will fall on the SDPA itself, including liaison with the local development plan teams in the two Councils as they progress with the preparation of their plans.

Strategic Development Plan

During 2009/10 a detailed project plan will be drawn up for the preparation of the first strategic development plan for the area. While the first development plan scheme (see above) set out an indicative timetable, this will need to be refined as the detail of individual stages are fleshed out. The refined timetable will be published in the second development plan scheme which needs to be published by the end of March 2010.

The project plan will be prepared in close co-operation with both Nestrans (the Regional Transport Partnership) and ACSEF (the regional economic development partnership) to seek to maximise alignment between the various planning processes. This will benefit stakeholders and the public but should also benefit the plans and strategies themselves – further enhancing the alignment between them that already exists.

SDPA Liaison

The Strategic Development Plan Managers for the four SDPAs (along with the Scottish Government) will continue to meet on a quarterly basis to share challenges and experiences as well as co-operate in joint pieces of work where appropriate. This will continue to be an important forum for discussing the implementation of the new legislation and regulations on strategic development plans and sharing good practice.

Single Outcome Agreements

The structure plan is already recognised in both Council's Single Outcome Agreements with the Scottish Government as a key delivery tool. Work in 2009/10 will focus on ensuring consistent representation as well as improving linkages to target setting and monitoring.

Communications Strategy

Work is already underway on a review of the SDPA website, with a web questionnaire being used to gain invaluable user feedback. Considerable effort was put into keeping the site up-to-date during 2008/09 and this will continue into 2009/10. However, this will be taken further to look in detail at the potential for the development of a communications strategy for the SDPA, of which the website would form one part.

Governance

Early action will be required to revisit the minute of agreement between the two Councils to accord with the view expressed by Audit Scotland in early 2009 that they would need to audit the SDPA as a separate public body.

Since the end of 2008/09, the issue of Value Added Tax (VAT) has been resolved with HM Revenue and Customs and the SDPA will continue to be managed under Aberdeenshire Council's VAT registration.

Meetings of the SDPA

Four meetings of the SDPA have been agreed to date for 2009/10, although additional meetings could be inserted if necessary. At the current time, issues around the timing of any consultation on any proposed modifications to the finalised structure plan or any examination in public are those most likely to trigger the need for additional meetings.

SDPA Meetings 2009/10

- 17 June 2009
- 18 September 2009
- 4 December 2009
- 26 March 2010

Appendix 1: Aims and Objectives of the SDPA

1. To prepare a “strategic development plan” for an area known as a “strategic development plan area” and to keep under review the plan so prepared.
2. Prepare and keep under review a plan, for submission to Scottish Ministers, showing the boundary which the authority propose as the boundary of the strategic development plan area.
3. To complete the structure plan which is being prepared under the 1997 Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act pending the preparation of the “strategic development plan”.
4. Set out in the strategic development plan a vision statement, a spatial strategy, and an analysis of the relationship between the vision statement, the spatial strategy and general development land use proposals in the plan area.
5. To monitor changes in the principal physical, economic, social, and environmental characteristics of the strategic development plan area.
6. To monitor the principal purposes for which land is to be used in the area.
7. To monitor the size and distribution of the population of the area.
8. To monitor the infrastructure of the area (including communications, transport and drainage systems and systems for the supply of water and energy) and to monitor how that infrastructure is used.
9. To monitor the impact of the policies and proposals contained within the strategic development plan.
10. To comment on nationally and regionally significant planning applications.
11. To provide appropriate input to the Regional Transport Strategy, the Aberdeen City and Shire Economic Forum Strategies, the Local Development Plans and any other significant issues which may arise from time to time and have a bearing on the Strategic Development Plan.
12. To prepare an implementation programme for action.
13. Prepare such maps, diagrams, illustrations and descriptive matter as may be prescribed by Government or thought appropriate by the SDPA.
14. From time to time, and when main issues and other principal reports are prepared, publish a statement as to the carrying out of those documents and make such documents available by various means including electronic means such as by means of the internet.
15. Other matters as may be prescribed by Government
16. Any other matter which the SDPA consider it appropriate to include.