

# ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2001-2007



# MAP OF ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL'S ADMINISTRATIVE AREAS



## FOREWORD

I am pleased to present the new Economic Development Strategy for 2001 to 2007. More than ever before, economic development activity has to be reviewed and updated to take into account the new challenges, opportunities and threats which are inevitably raised in a climate of technological, political and environmental change.

It is therefore inevitable that this latest Strategy shows some significant changes of direction from its predecessors. There is now a greater emphasis on community economic development, and delivery of services at a local level.

The Council will also be putting more resources into addressing rural issues, and in particular supporting the fragile fishing and agricultural industries that still underpin the Aberdeenshire economy. In addition, an increasing proportion of Aberdeenshire Council economic development services and activities will be delivered through partnership working, enabling us to concentrate finite resources on where we can make most difference.

This Strategy is the result of extensive consultations with private sector businesses, partner economic development organisations, community groups and Aberdeenshire Councillors.

The Economic Development Strategy will integrate with the new Aberdeenshire Community Plan, which will guide and direct all activities of the Council and other public funded bodies in Aberdeenshire.

Research confirms that Aberdeenshire remains one of the country's most popular places in which to live and work - but we must recognise that infrastructure and economic constraints threaten the pace and sustainability of business development in the area. This new Strategy is designed to address and meet that particular challenge.

Councillor Alison McInnes  
Chair of Infrastructure Services Committee  
September 2001





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# 1. INTRODUCTION

The Aberdeenshire Council Economic Development Strategy will provide a framework for economic development activity within the Council. The last Economic Development Strategy of Aberdeenshire Council covered the three-year period 1997 - 2001. This Strategy will cover the six-year period 2001 - 2007 but will be reviewed after three years.

The Council recognises that it is one of several agencies carrying out economic development in Aberdeenshire. Therefore, as the resources within Aberdeenshire Council are limited the aim of the Strategy will be to work in partnership where possible and concentrate on those areas in which we can make the most difference.

At the national level the new Parliament in Edinburgh has taken its responsibility for economic development in Scotland very seriously. In 2000 a strategy entitled "Framework for Economic Development in Scotland" was produced, as were reviews of the enterprise network and the delivery of economic development services in Scotland. The major change from these reviews that affected the Councils in Scotland was the directive to set up Local Economic Forums to jointly handle business support.

Subsequently, a Local Economic Forum has been set up to enable the joint delivery of business support from development agencies in the North East. Aberdeenshire Council is committed to being a lead player in this partnership.

The work of these bodies will sit under the overarching framework of the Community Plan for Aberdeenshire, as will this Strategy and other important documents such as the Structure Plan and the Local Transport Strategy.

The document begins by stating our vision, outlining the strategic objectives of the new Strategy and describing how these strategic objectives will be achieved. Then the economic context will be considered and issues of the Aberdeenshire business infrastructure. The issues raised in these two chapters have been used, along with the results of widespread consultation, to draw up the strategic objectives. In the final section on resources we look at the tools that are needed to achieve our goals.





## 2. THE VISION AND STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

### THE VISION

The Council's vision for Aberdeenshire in 2007 is an economy in which **sustainable economic activity, steady growth, low unemployment, and a broadening and strengthening of the economic base are established.** This in turn will support a high quality of life for all those who live and work in Aberdeenshire.



This vision and the following strategic objectives are a direct result of extensive consultations with representatives of Aberdeenshire's key industries. Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats relating to a number of different industries have been identified and taken into account in this Strategy.

As well as sector studies, general business meetings were also held to gather generic views on Aberdeenshire as a place in which to develop businesses.

In addition to the private sector input, the views of Councillors and partner organisations have been sought and taken into account.

From all these sources, and drawing on statistical analyses and forecasts (see Section 4), the following strategic objectives have now been formalised and agreed.

The remainder of this Strategy sets out how the strategic objectives will be achieved.

## THE STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

- To work in **partnership** wherever possible to enhance the economy of Aberdeenshire.
- To move the Council to a position where a **Community Economic Development** solution to problems is considered before all others.
- To help create a **rural economy** that can adjust to the restructuring of rural industries and services.
- To be a leading partner in forming an efficient Local Economic Forum for the North East of Scotland that will offer **business support** to the Aberdeenshire commercial community.
- To create an efficient **lobbying mechanism** for the benefit of Aberdeenshire.
- To develop a strategy within the Council to **market sites and opportunities** in Aberdeenshire.
- To complete the action plans for the **Aberdeenshire Towns Partnership** along with the communities and our partners.
- To deliver the economic development actions in the Council's **Sustainable Development Charter**.
- To make information on the implementation of **e-business** available to all businesses in Aberdeenshire.





### 3. THE STRATEGY

To reach these strategic objectives the Council will carry out the following work. Most of this work will be carried out with other economic development agencies, businesses or community economic development groups.

#### STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1

To work in partnership wherever possible to enhance the economy of Aberdeenshire.

To achieve this the Council will:

- Continue to be a core member of the Local Economic Forum along with Aberdeen City Council, Scottish Enterprise Grampian and other development agencies.
- Participate in industry partnerships such as the Grampian Food Forum, the Export Partnership and the Aberdeen and Grampian Tourist Board.
- Work with the many European Partnerships to ensure that the area benefits from a voice in Europe and healthy draw down of European funds.
- Set up task forces with partners when major employment issues arise.
- Continue to act as enablers and honest brokers in co-operation with industry bodies, other development organisations and government to achieve economic stability and growth.

Working with Partners the Council was instrumental in getting the Scottish Food Standards Agency established in the North East.



The Council helped the community of Sandhaven to purchase the harbour so that they could develop it for the good of the town.



## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2

To move the Council to a position where a Community Economic Development solution to problems is considered before all others.

To achieve this the Council will:

- Through the Area Focus develop local arrangements for the delivery of CED solutions.
- Appoint a permanent member of staff to carry out CED throughout Aberdeenshire.
- Seek European funding to match finance from Aberdeenshire Council and Scottish Enterprise Grampian so that a two-year programme for support for existing community economic development groups and assistance for new groups can be secured.

Since 1996 Aberdeenshire Council has run an innovative Community Economic Development (CED) programme which has concentrated on developing the enterprise potential of the smaller communities in Aberdeenshire. The aim of the project was to give individuals in communities support, confidence, training, information and guidance so that they could take part in the economic regeneration of their communities. This was in essence the opposite of the top down approach to CED practised in so many other areas of Britain. This method creates more independent and therefore more sustainable community groups and leads to stronger projects. This policy has been seen to work as illustrated in the development of the Banffshire Partnership and the Buchan Partnership.

Until now the CED programme within Aberdeenshire Council has been concentrated in the north and west of Aberdeenshire as this programme was funded through the European Objective 5b Programme. It is now recognised that CED is too important an activity to support only in that part of Aberdeenshire and so it is intended that the programme be rolled out over the whole of Aberdeenshire. There will be one post to cover the whole of Aberdeenshire but in addition finance will still be obtained from the European Objective 2 funds for concentrated CED effort in the north and west of Aberdeenshire.

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3

To help create a rural economy that can adjust to the restructuring of rural industries and services.

To achieve this the Council will:

- Seek to fund a Rural Development Officer, with contributions from partner organisations to carry out the following actions;
  - Promote contact and closer co-operation with all related sectors involved in the vertical supply chain e.g. farmers, food and drink processors and retailers.
  - Work with the agricultural sector to establish Farmers Markets in Aberdeenshire.
  - Organise lobbying on behalf of rural/agricultural sector in the North East.
  - Establish emergency response teams as necessary when rural crises occur.
- Assist in the development, promotion and uptake of the Farm Business Development Scheme introduced by the Scottish Executive.
- Support the work of the Grampian Woodlands Company in training and marketing projects.
- Help to deliver the Area Tourism Strategy along with the other partners – Aberdeen and Grampian Tourist Board, Aberdeen City Council, The Moray Council, Scottish Enterprise Grampian and Moray Badenoch and Strathspey Enterprise.

The Council organises and hosts the North East Scotland Agricultural Advisory Group which includes representatives from the agricultural industry, the North East Councils and the academic community. This body, along with Aberdeenshire Council's own Rural Affairs Working Group, helps to set the agenda for the Council's work on rural issues.

The Council will also:

- Assist the fish processing industry to seek new sources of supply and develop new markets.
- Investigate the possibilities of the development of aquaculture and inshore fisheries in Aberdeenshire.
- Help the fishing sector to diversify in terms of product and source.
- Assist in the restructuring and consolidation of the processing and catching sector in the North East.

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4

To be a leading partner in forming an efficient Local Economic Forum for the North East of Scotland that will offer business support to the Aberdeenshire commercial community.

To achieve this the Council will:

- Liaise with other members of the Local Economic Forum to create a package of business support for the commercial sector in Aberdeenshire.
- Administer a loans and grants scheme to assist businesses to develop and grow. These business developments must bring additional benefit to the economy of Aberdeenshire; must be viable proposals; will have to demonstrate the need for top-up finance; will not have a detrimental effect on local businesses and should show potential for additional employment.
- Work with partners to create industry bodies to help the development of those industries, such as the Grampian Food Forum, the North East Scotland Fisheries Development Partnership and the Partnership for Information and Communication Technologies.
- Continue to contribute to the Export Partnership so that it can offer export advice, information and access to markets through missions and exhibitions.
- Disseminate information on business support, missions and exhibitions to businesses in Aberdeenshire.

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 5

To create an efficient lobbying mechanism for the benefit of Aberdeenshire.

To achieve this the Council will:

- Use the democratic network and lobby local MPs, MSPs and MEPs individually or directly to Committees.
- Use the North Sea Commission groups and the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions to lobby for Aberdeenshire interests.
- Bring together experts for the different local industries to enable those industries to have an informed and effective voice at the various government levels. Examples of these groups are the North East Scotland Agricultural Advisory Group, the North East of Scotland Fisheries Development Partnership and the Rural Affairs Working Group.

The Council has established, and sourced funding for, the project which has successfully brought scientists and fishermen round the table to discuss and research issues to sustain the fisheries.



In the period April 2000 to March 2001 40 businesses were assisted with loans and/or grants from the Council's Support for Aberdeenshire Business Scheme.



## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 6

To develop a strategy within the Council to market and deliver sites and opportunities in Aberdeenshire.

To achieve this the Council will:

- Create a team which will be proactive in promoting the Council's commercial sites and properties in Aberdeenshire and record demand for such.
- Create a system so that all enquiries for property or opportunities in Aberdeenshire are not only dealt with but also monitored and followed up.
- Establish a policy for the targeted promotion of Aberdeenshire as a place to establish and develop business.
- Consider additional systems of property asset management and provision of commercial infrastructure to create development opportunities.

There is a recognition that Aberdeenshire cannot execute large promotional campaigns to attract investors to the area but more proactive selling of the area should take place where there is contact with potential investors. Aberdeenshire should be promoted at trade exhibitions, to existing Aberdeenshire businesses and to those who enquire about property in the area. Publications, advertising and electronic media will be used for this task.

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 7

To complete the action plans for the Aberdeenshire Towns Partnership along with the communities and our partners.

To achieve this the Council will:

- Ensure that it continues to play a major role in the delivery of the economic development projects emerging from the Aberdeenshire Towns Partnership (ATP) process.
- Allocate more staff to the Buchan and Banff and Buchan Areas so that the ATP groups in those Areas will be able to achieve the economic development goals set by the ATP strategies.

In 1998 Aberdeenshire Council, along with Scottish Homes and Scottish Enterprise Grampian, formed the Aberdeenshire Towns Partnership to create a framework for action in Aberdeenshire's towns. Through integrated economic, social and environmental improvements the Partnership aims to ensure that the special character of Aberdeenshire's towns is retained. The five towns earmarked for action in the first phase of this programme are Stonehaven, Inverurie, Ellon, Peterhead and Fraserburgh. Banff/Macduff has now also been added to the ATP towns. ATP activity is focused on economic development projects and the Council works with the Partners, industry and the Enterprise Trusts to deliver these. Projects that are successful in one town can then be carried out in other ATP towns.

Aberdeenshire Council won European Objective 2 funding status for the North of Aberdeenshire.



Aberdeenshire Council drew down £7.3 million of funds from the European Objective 5b Programme from 1994 to 1999.



## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 8

To deliver the economic development actions in the Council's Sustainable Development Charter.

To achieve this the Council will:

- Encourage the establishment of new "green" businesses such as recycling units or non fossil fuel energy production.
- Help businesses within Aberdeenshire to look at more efficient use of resources such as electricity, gas and water.

There are 21 actions on the Council's Sustainable Development Charter and economic development will assist in the delivery of these.

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 9

To make information on the implementation of e-business available to all businesses in Aberdeenshire.

To achieve this the Council will:

- Promote the development of e-business to enable small and medium sized enterprises to improve their business processes and opportunities, and to help them to compete in a global market.
- Enhance the business performance and competitiveness of businesses through encouraging the implementation of information and communication technologies.
- Provide access to technology, skills training, infrastructure and information.



## 4. ECONOMIC CONTEXT

To help draw up a relevant Economic Development Strategy we must look at the economic background in Aberdeenshire. The statistics and forecasts will help to establish where our main energies should be employed.

There are many statistics which demonstrate the high quality of life in Aberdeenshire.

Constituency	Banff and Buchan	Gordon	West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine	Scotland
<i>Average household income</i>	<i>£18,990</i>	<i>£21,450</i>	<i>£24,240</i>	<i>£18,200</i>
<i>Percentage with limiting long term illness</i>	<i>11.6%</i>	<i>9.0%</i>	<i>7.9%</i>	<i>13.7%</i>
<i>Percentage with <b>no</b> GCE qualifications</i>	<i>5.0%</i>	<i>3.0%</i>	<i>2.4%</i>	<i>6.6%</i>
<i>Percentage of households with <b>no</b> cars</i>	<i>32.3%</i>	<i>20.0%</i>	<i>16.3%</i>	<i>42.6%</i>
<i>Percentage of population under 5 years old</i>	<i>6.7%</i>	<i>6.8%</i>	<i>7.2%</i>	<i>6.3%</i>

Statistics on the quality of life in Aberdeenshire show that we have a young population with a higher than average household income and an educational attainment that is well above the national average. The health indicators are also above the Scottish average. The figures do however demonstrate that although the Banff and Buchan constituency shows that area to perform better than the Scottish average it is behind the rest of Aberdeenshire on most “health” statistics. This is why Aberdeenshire Council argued for, and won, Objective 2 European funding status for the Moray Coast area of Aberdeenshire. In addition the agriculturally dependent west Aberdeenshire gained “Transitional” Objective 2 European funding eligibility. Objective 2 funding is for economic regeneration projects.

#### UNEMPLOYMENT RATE

	Jun 1999		Jun 2000	
	No.	Rate	No.	Rate
Aberdeenshire	2,684	3.0%	2,810	3.2%
Scotland	133,745	5.5%	117,270	4.8%
UK	1,244,709	4.3%	1,077,229	3.7%

Source: ONS (NOMIS) \* Unadjusted rates

The chart above shows that unemployment in Aberdeenshire is below the Scottish average. However, there are pockets of high unemployment in Huntly and Peterhead. The forecasts indicate that by 2016 there will be over 4000 fewer jobs in Aberdeenshire despite the rise in the number of self-employed. Added to this we must realise that oil jobs lost in the city of Aberdeen will also affect Aberdeenshire residents. The loss in this sector is important as oil industry jobs tend to be at the higher end of the pay scale.

#### EMPLOYMENT

	1998	2016	% Change
Non Oil Employment	67,400	64,450	-4%
Oil Employment	4,000	2,000	-50%
Self Employment	13,800	14,500	+5%
Total Employment	85,200	80,950	-5%

Source: Structure Plan Area Forecasts 1999

Aberdeenshire does not have large pools of unemployed so large-scale inward investment programmes are not for this area at this time but schemes and projects to assist existing businesses are necessary. However, those expressing an interest to move to the area will be proactively encouraged. This fits with the new Scottish Executive policy on economic development where there will be less emphasis on bringing large-scale inward investment projects to Scotland.

The high dependency on the troubled sectors of fishing and agriculture is cause for concern. Fraserburgh has an employment dependency on the fishing industry of over 30% and Peterhead 16%. There are also 8 wards in Aberdeenshire with a dependency on agriculture of over 19% (against a Scottish average of 1.98%).

It is an economic fact that dependency often goes hand-in-hand with market leadership, and we should continue to recognise the outstanding contribution that these sectors make to the Scottish economy. Aberdeenshire lands £110 million of fish per annum (38% of Scottish total) and produces £300 million of agricultural output (16% of Scotland’s total).

## PERCENTAGE EMPLOYMENT DEPENDENCY ON PRIMARY SECTORS

% Employment Dependency		
Fishing**	Fraserburgh	31.97
	Peterhead	15.99
	Banff	8.94
Agriculture*	8 Wards in Aberdeenshire have over 19% dependency on agriculture	
	Aberdeenshire	9.2
	Scotland	1.98

\*\* 1992 \* 1998

This high dependency points to a need for diversification programmes, job creation and start-up in the new industries.

Despite the low unemployment rate the Gross Domestic Product per head of population is just under £8,000 in Aberdeenshire as compared with over £10,000 per head of population for Scotland as a whole.

The Council has recorded a significant drop in the loss of rural facilities such as post offices

## and petrol stations in Aberdeenshire.

Facility	1981	1998	1999	1998/ 1999	1981/ 1999
Shop	826	638	639	+1	-187
Primary School	136	130	129	-1	-7
Post Office	138	107	106	-1	-32
Petrol Station	120	67	67	0	-53
Doctor's Surgery	41	41	41	0	0
Secondary School	9	7	7	0	-2
Bank	72	48	42	-6	-30
Chemist	26	24	30	+6	+4
Police	29	19	19	0	-10
Fire	15	15	15	0	0
Hall	129	118	119	+1	-10
Library	22	26	25	-1	+3
Church	188	166	172	+6	-16
MoT Garage	80	76	77	+1	-3
Licensed Premises	221	231	220	-11	-1
Smithy	*	*	20	*	*

## Rural Facilities

Excludes settlements with population >5,000  
Source: Aberdeenshire Rural Facilities Monitor 1999  
(published February 2000)

This low GDP reflects the poor state of the rural economy at present where there has been a certain shedding of jobs but also a significant drop in rural incomes. A concentrated effort is needed to assist the rural economy to readjust to the restructuring of rural industries and services.

## 5. BUSINESS INFRASTRUCTURE

In this chapter we set out the Council's work in creating an effective base from which businesses can profitably run their enterprises. Aberdeenshire Council has a critical role in North East business development, being responsible for much of the infrastructure including planning development, transportation, commercial land supply and provision of industrial sites and property.

In looking at the development of the commercial sector we must acknowledge the importance of two complementary studies – The Development Plan and the Modern Transport Strategy. The Council's Economic Development Strategy will fit closely with both of these plans.

### THE DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The Development Plan comprises two related elements: the Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire Structure Plan which sets out the broad guidance for new development in both Council areas, and the Local Plan which sets out detailed guidance for new development in Aberdeenshire.

It should be noted that the new Structure Plan will be more welcoming to appropriate commercial development in the countryside.

Constraints on obtaining planning permission for commercial development in the countryside was one of the main issues raised in discussions with industry groups.



### MODERN TRANSPORT STRATEGY

Aberdeenshire Council, Aberdeen City Council, Scottish Enterprise Grampian and Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce have jointly drawn up the Modern Transport System which is a visionary document for a future transport system in the North East. These agencies are committed to working together to create an integrated Modern Transport System.

Aberdeenshire Council has its own Local Transport Strategy which guides present work on transportation and incorporates new thinking on transportation matters.

The aim is to develop a transportation strategy that preserves and enhances environmental quality, while contributing to the development of an inclusive society and a strong economy.

The objectives of the Strategy are:

- To combat social exclusion by improving accessibility to services and employment.
- To promote sustainable development of the economy.
- To understand the contribution that transport planning can make to the reversal of local degradation of the environment.
- To ensure that transport planning takes account of all other relevant policies and total journey considerations to further the integration of transport.
- To improve safety in transport.

The difficulty of getting goods to market has been regularly identified as a specific problem for many Aberdeenshire businesses.

## LAND SUPPLY

The Local Economic Forum partners have agreed to work together with the private sector to enhance information and understanding about the demands for the supply of property and land. This work will ensure that the provisions of the Council's Development Plan can be taken forward and take account of market changes.

To this end a framework has been established to ensure the range and provision of quality sites, regenerate existing industrial estates, investigate provision of purpose-built premises and secure a supportive planning framework.

Each partner has a particular role to play whether as a planning authority, servicing support or promotion provider.

The key objective is to make sure that Aberdeenshire can be viewed as offering a wide range of locations to accommodate the full spectrum of economic development opportunities.

There is a need for more serviced industrial land in many Aberdeenshire settlements, and solutions to this challenge will have to be addressed in the life of this Strategy.



## PROPERTY

The Council helps to provide factory units, industrial land and business centres where the private sector provision does not meet demand. This is especially important in a rural authority such as Aberdeenshire where it is difficult for the private sector to cover the costs of new developments.

Until now, the Council has been involved mainly in the development of industrial land, small industrial units and working with individual companies to help them achieve their particular property needs. A new area in recent years has been to work with the private sector to build and manage small office and workshop complexes.

Since Councils were first involved in developing property in 1976, much of the property now in possession of the Council is in need of renovation and revitalisation. In future, the aim will be the enhancement of existing industrial estates as well as the provision of new sites and premises.

Local Authority involvement in providing property has changed in recent years due to the lack of capital available for this type of development. Aberdeenshire Council has been innovative in maximising alternative sources of finance from a number of sources, including the private sector, European funds and using the power of guarantees to gain private sector involvement.

There is still a need for the public sector to provide industrial units in rural locations where there is not a realistic prospect of suitable commercial returns to attract private sector investment in providing such premises.

## 6. RESOURCES AND OUTPUTS

Our ability to implement the Strategy will be bound by the resources that are in place and can be gathered from other sources. Revenue funding for all economic development work has reduced every year since Aberdeenshire was formed. This has been compensated by working in partnership and raising finance from sources such as the Scottish Executive, European Union and private funds.

The table below gives an indication of the revenue funds that will be available each of the three years from 2001 to 2004.

	Revenue £ per annum
<i>Marketing, exhibitions, publications and events.</i>	125,000
<i>Community Economic Development</i>	50,000
<i>Support for Aberdeenshire Business grants</i>	207,000
<i>Projects</i>	40,000
<i>European organisations work</i>	29,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>451,000</b>

The Aberdeenshire Council average annual base budget for the development of industrial land and property is £500,000. In recent years this budget and the Council's power of taking head leases has been used to lever in funds from the private sector well in excess of the Council's contribution.

In terms of people resources there are 19 full time equivalent posts working in Economic Development in the Council. Four of these posts are co-funded with Council partners. There are 13 frontline posts with the support of four administration staff.

In addition to the above the following budgets are used for economic projects in Aberdeenshire.

On average the Council lends out £150,000 per annum through the Support for Aberdeenshire Business scheme.

The Council sets aside £25,000 annually from the capital budget for tourism work.

The Aberdeenshire Towns Partnership has a budget in 2001-2002 of £400,000 from the Aberdeenshire Council capital budget, £400,000 from Scottish Enterprise Grampian and £4 million from Scottish Homes.





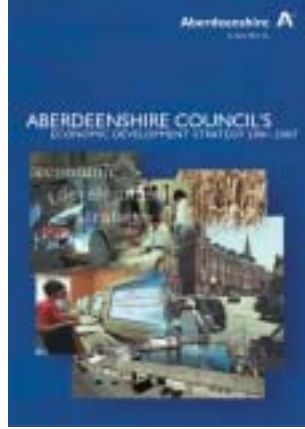
## 7. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Produced in conjunction with this strategy will be annual action plans. These plans will be monitored quarterly through the Transportation and Infrastructure Service Plan.

The action plans will set targets, time-scales and budgets.

This strategy will be reviewed after three years in 2004 when adjustments will be made according to the change in need by industry and the success or otherwise of implementing the action plans.





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