

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Climate Change Working Group** held in Committee Room 1, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday, 2 April 2009 at 2.00 p.m.

Present:

Dr M E M Foxley
Mrs J Urquhart
Dr D Alston

Mr W Fernie
Mr I Ross
Mr J Gray

In Attendance:

Mr A Dodds, Chief Executive
Mr S Barron, Director of Housing and Property Services
Mr N Gillies, Director of Transport, Technical and Community Services
Mrs C McDiarmid, Head of Policy and Performance – Chief Executive's Office
Mr N McLaughlin, Team Leader, Support and Development Team, Housing and Property
Mrs A Villegas, Sustainable Development Officer
Mr N McAllister, Policy Assistant, Sustainable Development, Chief Executive's Office
Ms M MacDonald, Travel Plan Co-ordinator, Chief Executive's Office
Mrs L Lee, Committee Administrator

Also in attendance:

Mrs I McCallum

Dr M E M Foxley in the Chair

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr S Park, Mr G Farlow, Mr D Chisholm, Mr J Laing, Mrs M Davidson, Mr D Hendry, and Mrs G Sinclair.

2. Minutes of Meeting of 29 January 2009

There had been circulated for information Minutes of Meeting of 29 January 2009 as previously approved by the Highland Council at its meeting on 5 March 2009.

3. Housing and Property Services – Service Climate Change Adaptation Issues and Priorities

A presentation was given by the Director of Housing and Property Services and the Team Leader of the Business Support Team on the Service's Climate Change Adaptation Issues and Priorities. Housing and Property Services was the third service on the Council's Service by Service adaptation planning approach.

Points drawn to Members' attention included:

Council Properties – future aims

- the Council owned around 14,000 houses and 2750 properties – this provided an opportunity to lead by example:
 - in the design and performance of houses and buildings

- in adaptations to climate change, such as Lochaber and Skye Housing Association's biomass heating system in Portree
- future buildings programmes, such as in the development of care homes, should take advantage of renewable technologies; however, if the Council was to make significant progress towards using renewable and preventative technologies, its capital programme needed to be geared towards achieving these aims
- innovative work carried out by the Council, such as Acharacle Primary School should be widely publicised and entered for awards – such achievements attracted staff and raised morale
- the requirements of the Scottish Housing Quality Standards relating to energy efficiency were challenging, but the Council was on course to meet these by 2015.

Council Properties – current actions

- when a property was void, the Housing and Property Service would take the opportunity to install additional loft insulation and low energy light bulbs, and assess the heating system
- it had been found that tenants did not always understand how to use their energy system economically, particularly systems which provided cheaper electricity outwith peak hours – ongoing input was required from Housing and Property to support tenants in this regard; fuel type and energy tariffs varied in availability geographically
- preparations were being made to cope with extreme climate events – SEPA flooding data had been used to identify properties at risk, and the Service was being proactive in targeting and encouraging tenants in these areas to take out appropriate insurance.

The Council's Advisory Role

- the Council had an important role as an advisor to other bodies - there was an opportunity to apply leverage through support and advice; however, to take this forward staff needed to be given the knowledge and tools to install and operate eco-friendly technologies, and to be adequately resourced to provide advice; there could be an opportunity for the Council to charge for the provision of training to other bodies.

Other

- medical research had shown that it was better to super-insulate houses rather than to upgrade heating systems – occupants of well insulated houses suffered less ill health, particularly respiratory problems; if a house was not well insulated, heat was simply lost; National Outcome 5 of the Single Outcome Agreement sought for “our children to have the best start in life” – warm, dry, damp free homes would go a long way to provide this
- a robust monitoring scheme was in place and it was possible for the Council to benchmark itself against other Local Authorities

In discussion, Members welcomed the Service's provision of energy advice and support to others, but commented that this role was now undertaken by Changeworks. It would be useful to find out whether there were any gaps in the service provided by Changeworks.

Members also supported the aim to work with partners towards warm, dry and damp-free homes, and stressed that the Service should continue to explain to tenants how to use off-peak energy systems economically.

In response to Members' comments on the problem of management and accreditation of installers of new technologies, the Director of Housing and Property concurred that this was a difficulty – the Portree scheme had been hindered because of a lack of qualified maintenance staff. The Director also concurred with Members' comments on the efficiencies that could be gained from standardising the Council's fuel systems as far as possible – maintenance of a large number of different heating systems was a less efficient use of resources.

Members suggested that an exemplar property demonstrating what could be achieved with new technologies, insulation etc, could be set up, with the tenants perhaps being offered a rent-free period in return for allowing visitors to see over the house.

In response to questions raised, the Director undertook to (a) provide information on cross-authority benchmarking to those Members seeking this, (b) liaise with Highland Housing Fair on innovations which might be useful in Council properties, and (c) investigate whether there was anything the Council could do to encourage energy companies to make the Economy 18 tariff more widely available.

Members having been advised that the Cairngorm National Park Authority had already drawn up an action plan to develop the wood fuel industry, and that as the Council already had good links with Highland Birchwoods and the Forestry Commission, there was an excellent opportunity for the Council to work collaboratively to promote this fuel source, the Working Group **NOTED** the progress of adaptation planning in the Service and the information given and **AGREED**:

- i. that Members be emailed in order to elicit views as to how effectively Changeworks was operating, with a view to identifying any areas where there might be gaps in provision; and
- ii. the bulk purchase of mini energy monitors to measure home energy use be investigated, with a view to making these available at low cost to tenants – when people could see how much energy they were using, this acted as an encouragement to use less.

4. The Carbon Management Plan

There had been circulated Report No. CCWG2/09 dated 18 March 2009 by the Head of Policy and Performance presenting the revised Carbon Management Plan (CMP), its scope, timescales, targets and actions to 2012. The Draft Carbon Management Plan was also circulated. As costs of implementing the plan were still to be quantified at the time of writing, Members were asked to note the scope and content of the Plan at this time. The finalised plan would be produced for Resources Committee consideration in June 2009. The CMP had been developed with assistance from the Carbon Trust and through discussions with Service representatives.

The Sustainable Development Officer summarised the report, drawing attention to the main drivers for the Plan:

- legislation - Scotland's Climate Change Bill and the forthcoming Carbon Reduction Commitment (CRC)
- the Highland Council's commitments in the Council Programme

- budget pressures from energy costs
- the need to reduce dependency on fossil fuels
- the need to reduce emissions from transport
- the importance of embedding carbon management across all Council Services and procedures

and to the five strategic themes contained in the Plan:

- reduce carbon emissions from internal operations
- reduce energy costs
- explore new areas for action
- promote awareness and behavioural change
- lead by example.

During the base-line year of 2007/08, the Council's carbon emissions totalled around 64,696 tonnes. The aim was to reduce this by 7,796 tonnes by 2012, which would save the Council almost £1.8m against current energy costs, and could potentially save an additional £70,892, as the carbon allowance which the Council would be required to purchase under the CRC would reduce. These savings would require investment if they were to be achieved, and there would need to be further behavioural change.

The Council's current carbon reduction activities had been fed into the Carbon Trust's standard assessment matrix and a scoring of 25 out of a possible 35 had been obtained – the aim was to raise this to at least 33 by 2012, through the CMP. The Plan's monitoring mechanisms required to be robust and would need to include business travel. The plan would undergo a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and an Equalities Assessment.

In answer to questions raised, the Sustainable Development Officer confirmed that there was good buy-in across the Council into carbon reduction activities. However, not all activities (for example sustainable procurement) were measurable. Members commented that it was also difficult to capture activities such as partner collaboration in the figures.

In discussion, Members highlighted that the weighting given to carbon reduction within the Council's capital programme, as opposed to, say, health and safety, had yet to be determined. Projects within the capital programme had also to be prioritised.

Members also suggested that the Council appeared to be leading the way in the Highlands with regard to carbon reduction, and that it had developed intellectual property in this regard - the question of whether the Council charged other bodies for this should be considered. In response, the Head of Policy and Performance stressed that the Council was not in a position to consider such an arrangement, as it had yet to complete and implement its own action plans. The Chief Executive recommended that the current position, whereby the Council worked with others and kept them informed through the Community Planning Partnership, continue.

The Working Group **NOTED**:

- i. the revised draft Carbon Management Plan (CMP), its scope, timescales, targets and actions to 2012;

- ii. that since systems for implementing and monitoring the Carbon Management Plan needed to be in place on 1 April 2009 in order to meet the requirements of the Carbon Trust Standard:
 - monitoring arrangements could begin
 - actions which had no additional cost or were related to the communications plan could progress;
- iii. costs for other elements in implementing the Plan would be quantified and discussed with Services by the end of April 2009;
- iv. the final draft Plan could be considered by the Resources Committee in June 2009, with performance reports considered twice a year at that Committee;
- v. Members could feed additional comments in to the Sustainable Development Officer prior to the June Resources Committee
- vi. the Council had yet to agree, within the process of determining its spending priorities, the weighting it would give to reducing carbon emissions – this would then need to be written in to the CMP; and
- vii. the consultants Enviros would be invited to the CRC workshop to present their findings on (a) a methodology for engaging with stakeholders, and (b) some of the other outcomes from their work which related to the Council's carbon reporting.

5. Carbon Reduction Commitment

There had been circulated Report No. CCWG3/09 dated 18 March 2009 by the Head of Policy and Performance introducing the latest developments in the Carbon Reduction Commitment (CRC), and outlining the process and timescale for the consultation currently underway. The report recommended that Members of the Climate Change Working Group (CCWG) attend a future workshop to explore CRC in greater detail. This workshop would assist Highland Council to prepare for the introduction of the legislation.

The Head of Policy stressed that the implications for the Council of the CRC were extremely serious. There would be significant financial penalties for the Council should it:

- miss a deadline when submitting its bi-annual reports (estimated cost £24,000 per day)
- fail the audit of its energy calculation systems (£40 per tonne of CO²)

The Council's systems had to be audit-proof and reports accurate. The CRC was a complex scheme and it was proposed that a workshop take place to allow the full picture to be presented to Working Group Members. The workshop would also cover the costing of the Carbon Management Plan, weighting of carbon reduction within the capital plan, and feedback from the Council's consultants. Officers from Finance and legal would also attend the workshop.

In response to questions raised, the Head of Policy and Performance advised that the CRC audits would be carried out by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) on a random basis. The information required by SEPA was largely the same as that captured for the CMP, but excluded data on travel.

In discussion, Members questioned whether there were any real benefits gained through green electricity schemes. The Head of Policy and Performance commented that the Council received no credit under CRC for purchasing green

electricity, and that this seemed to be in conflict with Scottish Government encouragement for purchasing low carbon energy.

The Working Group **NOTED**:

- i. the latest developments in the Carbon Reduction Commitment (CRC), the process and the timescale for the consultation currently underway; and
- ii. the current guidance, and that officers would attend the national event and meet to identify the risks and issues for the Council, to enable a response to the Draft Order by 4 June 2009.

The Working Group **AGREED** that:

- i. a Member workshop take place at the end of May, the purpose of which would be to:
 - highlight cost implications for the Council
 - consider a draft project plan for implementing the CRC in the Council
 - discuss the future purchasing of green electricity
 - summarise Council concerns for inclusion in the consultation response to Defra;
- ii. comments made during discussion as to the lack of any benefit to the Council in buying green electricity, be fed into the consultation response; and
- iii. the workshop replace the CCWG meeting originally scheduled for June 2009.

6. Climate Change (Scotland) Bill – Call for Evidence Response

The Sustainable Development Officer gave a presentation on The Highland Council's response to the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee's recent call for written evidence on the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill, submitted by 27 February 2009. Given the shortness of designated timescales, as agreed by the Working Group at its last meeting, a draft response had been prepared by officers and circulated by email to Working Group Members for comment prior to submission ahead of the deadline and subsequent homologation by the Council. The finalised response was tabled for information.

The Sustainable Development Officer drew attention to where the Highland Council response was similar to that provided by COSLA, including:

- the need to: limit international credits; scope consumption data into the Bill; define budget periods; integrate mitigation and adaptation
- that aviation and shipping be included
- that a UK Committee on Climate Change be established.

The Highland Council had also sought for the Bill to promote partnership working, clarify who was responsible for reporting community emissions, and had stressed that the emphasis of the Bill should be on reduction rather than removal of CO², and that all duties introduced must carry with them the necessary funding to allow them to be implemented.

In general the Bill was to be supported, but there were some areas which it was felt would require clarification and monitoring. For example, the Bill allowed

Ministers to re-set target dates - this gave the potential for dates to slip back. Secondary legislation would be required if the ambitious targets were to be met, but insufficient detail was available at present, such as on the percentage emissions reduction anticipated through carbon removal. The Bill covered six greenhouse gases rather than just CO², including nitrous oxide, methane and hydro fluoro compounds. How these would be dealt with would also be included in the secondary legislation.

The Working Group **NOTED** the presentation and the finalised response, and **AGREED** that information on the responses to the Climate Change Bill made by those Local Authorities similar to Highland be included on the agenda for the next Convention (COSLA leaders' meeting).

7. Climate Change Stakeholder Workshop

There had been circulated Report No. CCWG4/09 dated 11 March 2009 by the Head of Policy and Performance providing feedback on a Climate Change Stakeholder Workshop in February. The event had been designed to build on the momentum generated from the partnership conference hosted by the Highland Council in June 2008 and the subsequent mapping exercise. The report updated Members on further actions arising from the session.

The Head of Policy and Performance drew attention to a number of outcomes from the stakeholder workshop, including the desire to introduce a Climate Change Declaration for the Highland area. The majority of participants had also wanted to identify their carbon footprint. A proposal had been made that the Council host a partner show-casing event demonstrating good practice and identifying what more could be done, this event to include supermarkets. However, as the Highland Environment Forum had now been established, and comprised mainly the same groups, it was suggested that there might be scope for the Forum to take this proposal forward.

Following discussion, the Working Group **NOTED** feedback from the workshop and the actions taken, and **AGREED**:

- i. the view that the newly established Highland Environment Forum, within the Community Planning Partnership Framework, was the most appropriate body for actions associated with the partnership approach to climate change – this would reduce potential duplication of effort;
- ii. as part of taking forward the Council's climate change strategy and work plan, to enter into dialogue with the Highland Environment Forum regarding proposals that they host a partner driven showcasing event which would:
 - be run as an Environment Forum meeting in late summer 2009;
 - promote projects, funding streams and facilitate sharing of good practice and case studies in relation to climate change amongst stakeholders
 - include supermarkets
- iii. the Forum be requested to include further Third Sector membership representation; and
- iv. HITRANS be asked to provide information on the measures contained in the Regional Transport Strategy which would help to reduce carbon emissions.

8. Progress against the Work Plan

There had been circulated Report No. CCWG5/09 dated 13 March 2009 by the Head of Policy and Performance including the revised remit for the Group and outlining progress made against the Climate Change Working Group's Work Plan. Members were advised that the wording of paragraph 3.3 at bullet point 3 should be amended to read: "community benefit from renewable power generation", and that the extract from the Highland Council Programme on p.52 of the report should include reference to small scale flood prevention schemes.

The revisions to the remit would allow the Working Group to focus more closely on climate change related activities: reducing emissions from the Council's own estate and practices; reducing emissions in the wider Highlands; and adapting Council services to deal with the impact of climate change and extreme weather. The Work Plan would be aligned with the requirements of the Carbon Management Plan (CMP).

In answer to questions raised, Members were advised that energy labels had been sent to buildings managers with an instruction for these to be placed in a prominent position, along with energy performance certificates. Members were asked to speak to buildings managers and/or sustainability team officers if the labels and certificates were not displayed.

The Director of Transport, Environmental and Community Services having confirmed that the Council had a modern, fuel efficient fleet, Members raised concerns as to the standard of school transport provided by independent operators. The Working Group was of the view that, notwithstanding that any requirement by the Council for such vehicles to meet higher standards could result in higher costs, the feasibility of introducing more stringent standards should be investigated. School transport contracts were due for renewal in 2011, and, should a requirement for higher standards be agreed, operators should be notified as far in advance as possible.

Concerns were raised that the potential impact of climate change in real terms, such as rises in sea level, was not being fully understood and prepared for by communities at risk.

Members **NOTED** the report, the Group's revised remit and progress made against the Work Plan, and **AGREED**:

- i. that a report providing detail on progress with the Travel Plan be brought to a future meeting; and
- ii. that the following be investigated:
 - the feasibility of introducing a requirement for school transport to meet more stringent emissions and fuel efficiency targets with a view to building this into the next contract (2011); should this action be taken forward, existing operators to be made aware of the requirements as soon as possible
 - the potential to build in social causes to the Council's procurement policy
 - the feasibility of providing workshops for coastal communities to raise awareness of the potential impact of climate change, and measures that the communities could take to reduce foreseeable difficulties.

9. Report on the Royal Society of Edinburgh Inquiry – Facing up to Climate Change

There had been tabled Report No. CCWG6/09 dated 31 March 2009 by the Head of Policy and Performance summarising the scope of the Royal Society of Edinburgh inquiry, “Facing Up To Climate Change” and recommending that the Council support the Inquiry. The outcome of the Inquiry was expected to assist Councils to engage communities in the changes needed to tackle climate change.

Having been advised that the Inquiry was likely to commence in the summer of 2009, and that the Council would have the opportunity to feed into it, the Working Group **AGREED**:

- i. to support the Royal Society of Edinburgh Inquiry “Facing up to Climate Change”; and
- ii. to recommend to the Council that it contribute £7,000 towards the costs of the Inquiry, this to be met from the Chief Executive’s budget.

10. Association of Local Authorities across Europe – Energy Cities Award

The Head of Policy and Performance reported that the Highland Council had been shortlisted for an award under the Energy Cities scheme.

Having been advised that hotel and travel expenses would be met by the organisers, the Working Group **AGREED** that the Policy Assistant, Sustainable Development, represent the Council at the awards ceremony in Brussels on 22 and 23 April 2009.

The meeting ended at 4.05 p.m.