

## The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Climate Change Working Group** held REMOTELY on Friday, 28 May 2021 at 10.30am.

### Present:

Mr B Boyd	Mr A MacInnes
Mrs I Campbell	Mrs A MacLean
Mrs M Davidson	Mr D Macpherson
Mr C Fraser	Mr D Rixson
Mr J Gray	Mrs T Robertson
Mr D Louden	

### Officials in Attendance:

Mr M MacLeod, Executive Chief Officer, Infrastructure & Environment  
Mrs K Lackie, Executive Chief Officer, Performance & Governance  
Mr K Masson, Climate Change and Energy Team Manager  
Mr J Perry, Climate Change Coordinator  
Ms K Andrews, Climate Change Coordinator  
Mrs E Whitham, Principal Project Manager, Highland Adapts  
Mrs N Wallace, Environment Manager  
Mr R Bamborough, Senior Sustainability Officer  
Mr D Mackenzie, Corporate Communications  
Miss M Zavarella, Committee Officer

### Also in attendance:

Rachel Currie, Newcastle University student (observing)  
Martin Sherring, Highland Good Food Partnership  
Helen O'Keefe, Highland Good Food Partnership

### Mrs T Robertson in the Chair

#### 1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr J Bruce, Mr J Gordon, Mr S Mackie, Mr R MacWilliam and Mr B Thompson.

#### 2. Declarations of Interest

Members **NOTED** the following declarations of interest:-

Item 4-7 (Non-financial) – Mr D Rixson

#### 3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

Members **NOTED** the Minutes of the Climate Change Working Group held on 29 January 2021, which were approved by the Council on 25 March 2021.

#### 4. Climate Change Programme Alignment Report

**Declaration of Interest:** Mr D Rixson declared a non-financial interest in this item as the Council's representative to the Lochaber Environmental Group but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in discussion.

There had been circulated Report No. CCWG/3/21 dated 23 March 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer – Infrastructure & Environment.

During discussion, the following comments raised:-

- Members appreciated the comprehensive report;
- it was necessary to set a target date for Net Zero emissions from Council operations;
- there were a number of actions that had to be tackled which required a holistic approach across the Council looking at service provision;
- it was frustrating to see the position the Council was in regarding the distribution network as there was no prospect for the Council to decarbonise its own buildings using Solar PV;
- the Council should have a comprehensive land ownership record and should identify what the land was used for;
- regarding waste energy, a lot of carbon was being expended transporting waste to landfill and it would be prudent to have this managed locally as the sooner the funding expended on this could be reduced, the sooner it could be allocated to other areas of need;
- there was a tension between economic recovery and tourism as tourism necessitated travel;
- regarding the Highland Council Sphere of Influence diagram in the report, it was suggested that Community Council and Planning Partnerships be included;
- social care, education, health and other public services in rural environments required local answers not central ones;
- regarding social housing, the quality had to improve though it was unclear who would be responsible for funding;
- digital skills could not be underestimated and it was important to be smarter about how the wider Highland workforce could be empowered in this regard;
- information was sought, and provided, about a change in language in the Implications – Climate Change/Carbon Clever section of Committee Reports and it was explained that this section was not given the weight required at an Officer level and there was not a clear set of guidelines about how to complete it so the Climate Change and Energy Team was thinking about how to improve this moving forward;
- the projects in the report described as “low hanging fruit” had to be thought about carefully as they were sensitive areas and the public would be sensitive to them as well;
- regarding waste management, it was important that waste and food waste was reduced as a region;
- it would be important to advertise and promote remote-working in job specifications;

- information was sought, and provided, about district heating systems and explained that it was much more challenging to deliver viable district heating schemes in Highland compared to other areas and would take time and resource to map them out;
- the idea of mini forests was a great concept and it would be easier to persuade communities to take ownership;
- in response to a question about the tensions within the report, it was explained that the Climate Change Agenda was a highly complicated one in terms of the transition to Net Zero and the report set out that the Council had the best opportunities to put itself in firmer footing to Net Zero;
- regarding blue carbon and the marine environment, it was explained that the size and scale of blue carbon resources were vastly underestimated and until the scale could be formally understood it would remain on the periphery. It was highlighted that despite rising up the agenda, public and political awareness was approximately 10 years behind peatland;
- the clarity of action orientation in the report was commended;
- it would be important to source all contracts locally within Highland to build and develop capabilities for the long term, meaning it would be an economic development opportunity, bringing funds into the region; and
- measurable and monitorable Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) were necessary so services and Officers responsible could be held to account.

Members:-

- NOTED** the contents of this report; and
- AGREED** to support the arrangement of a Member workshop to present the outcomes of the Programme Alignment report, discuss options for the setting of a corporate net zero target date and then seek approval of a net zero target date at Full Council.

## 5. Highland Good Food Conference & Update on Food Growing Strategy

**Declaration of Interest: Mr D Rixson declared a non-financial interest in this item as the Council's representative to the Lochaber Environmental Group but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in discussion.**

A presentation had been undertaken at the meeting by Martin Sherring, Highland Good Food Partnership. An overview was provided on two projects relating to growing Mediterranean vegetables in Highland and the circular economy of food and food waste. Mr. Sherring also made a request to Members to take a position of leadership in making a declaration in the run up to COP26 to make food possibility sustainable and at the heart of the global climate emergency. Mr Sherring highlighted that there was an opportunity for Highland to sign a declaration and follow it up with action.

During discussion, the following comments were raised:-

- Member expressed appreciation for the interesting presentation;

- regarding the request for declaration it was explained that this would have to be put to full Council as a report or motion;
- it was important to look to Nordic countries, Finland was growing bananas and other tropical vegetables and the same could be produced in Highland though it would be important for landowners to be engaged in the process;
- regarding carbon reduction, one issue was food miles and anything that could be done to reduce food miles in Highland would be beneficial;
- clarification was sought, and provided, on whether the Highland Good Food Partnership (HGFP) partnered with distilleries to make use of wasted heat;
- information was sought, and provided, in relation to the use of biochar to enhance soil and improve crop growth;
- in response to a comment, it was explained that funding was only a minor factor, the support had to come from connecting the concepts of diet, climate, schools, waste, and seeing all as being interlinked and tackled from different angles with education being a key factor;
- in response to a question about the business plan for growing good food in Highland and support required from the Council, it was explained that the Council had to provide support with food policy, recognising that it was an imperative part of procurement and had to be integrated across service. Food procurement in schools was provided as an example. It was positive to see recruitment for the Community Growing Coordinator position as this would fill a need and it would be positive to see the team expanded.

Members **NOTED** the contents of the presentation.

## 6. Highland Adapts – A Place-based Approach to Climate Change Adaptation

There had been circulated Report No. CCWG/4/21 dated 23 March 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer – Infrastructure & Environment.

During discussion, the following comments were raised:-

- throughout the report there was reference to the need for strong community partnerships and the varied quality of Community Planning Partnerships had been raised as a subject of interest and a Member seminar arranged in this regard, it was queried whether these plans should be discussed at the seminar and it was explained that Highland Adapts were planning to build from the community up with action on the ground by understanding and speaking to the local communities in order to be able to build a proper risk profile across the region and were seeking to do so over three year initiative, focussing on building the vision for a climate ready Highland, understanding the needs and risk for local communities and building the action plan;
- regarding community led planning, it was important that there was a clear remit for who took responsibility when issues arose, or action required; and
- information was sought, and provided, on how the community lead approach would work in practice and explained that in all discussions with partners thus far there was a clear desire for strong and enthusiastic partnership working and an agreement that it had to be a community led initiative.

Members **NOTED** the contents of the report.

## 7. Just Transition – Implications & Opportunities for the Council

There had been circulated Report No. CCWG/5/21 dated 18 May 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer – Infrastructure & Environment.

During a presentation, Katherine Andrews, Climate Change Coordinator reviewed the background on the inclusive and supportive Just Transition, and what it meant for Highland focussing on the following areas; the energy system, the industrial base, buildings and how there were heated, transport system and how land was used and managed. Looking to the future, the following initiatives were highlighted; Highland Adapts, EV Infrastructure, Active Travel Networks and Community Wealth Building.

During discussion, the following comments were raised:-

- Members expressed appreciation for the thought-provoking report;
- concern was raised and clarification sought, and provided, about reducing agricultural land;
- elaboration was sought regarding the carbon border tax and need to mitigate against offshore emissions and jobs and the Climate Change Coordinator agreed to gather further information in relation to this and liaise with the Member directly (Cllr D Rixson);
- the position of agriculture in Highland was queried and it was explained that there was a recommendation to the Scottish Government on how to ensure that the transition was equal and when reducing the amount of agricultural land, ensuring that farmers were being supported through the transition;
- it was important to improve climate change education in school, making it a focus of the curriculum;
- information was sought, and provided, about Gross Domestic Product (GDP) changes and it was explained that GDP would not be eliminated though there would be a move to make it more inclusive to involve social elements such as poverty and wellbeing;
- the unique position of Highland had not been fully considered in the report, climate change was an opportunity for Highland and many aspects of what the country required to meet targets were found in Highland such as capacity for sequestration and carbon storage, wind power, hydro, tidal power and it was important to recognise that the Highland economy had the potential to grow at the same time it adapted to climate change;
- regarding divestment, the amount of fossil fuel investment in the pension fund was relatively small though there was a possibility to divest from fossil fuel to more sustainable investment elements and this would be the responsibility of the sub-committee and Pensions Committee, there were opportunities to enhance carbon neutral elements and it would be timely;
- 20-minute neighbourhoods could work well in cities but in rural areas it would be much more difficult;
- regarding young people, it was commented that many youth work organisations linked to the Youth Network were based in the community and it was explained that the Science Skills Academy was embedding a lot of climate action into the curriculum; and

- information was sought, and provided about farm and land managers training and regional land use partnerships and it was explained that the focus at this stage was on partnership and governance rather than delivering the framework.

Members **NOTED** the contents of this report.

The meeting ended at 12:26pm.

## **The Highland Council**

Minutes of Meeting of the **Climate Change Working Group** held REMOTELY on Wednesday, 18 August 2021 at 10.30am.

### **Present:**

Mr B Boyd	Mrs A MacLean
Mrs I Campbell	Mr D Macpherson
Mrs M Davidson	Mr D Rixson
Mr C Fraser	Mrs T Robertson
Mr D Louden	Mr B Thompson
Mr A MacInnes	

### **Officials in Attendance:**

Mrs K Lackie, Executive Chief Officer, Performance & Governance  
Mr K Masson, Climate Change and Energy Team Manager  
Mr S Miller, Project Manager  
Mr S Andrews, World Heritage Project Coordinator  
Mr D Burns, Energy Engineer  
Mrs E Whitham, Principal Project Manager, Highland Adapts  
Mr J Perry, Climate Change Coordinator  
Ms K Andrews, Climate Change Coordinator  
Ms K Ellen, Food Growing Coordinator  
Mr R Bamborough, Senior Sustainability Officer  
Mr D Mackenzie, Corporate Communications  
Miss M Zavarella, Committee Officer

### **Also in attendance:**

Ms C Ferguson, Highland Good Food Partnership

### **Mrs T Robertson in the Chair**

Prior to the commencement of formal business, the Chair highlighted the release of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report which reinforced the stark challenges ahead in terms of climate change. In this regard, it was emphasised that it was the Council's legal and moral obligation to make every effort to achieve net zero emissions. Specifically, desist using fossil fuels to heat buildings and power fleet, invest in buildings to ensure efficiency and ensure that climate commitment was a critical component of the Capital Programme and procurement decisions. Beyond this, strong leadership was required around the climate change agenda to support communities and it was necessary that Member decision-making was aligned with climate commitments. The Chair encouraged all Members of the Working Group to undertake the Carbon Literacy training offered by the Scottish Cities Alliance.

### **1. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr J Bruce, Mr J Gordon, Mr J Gray, Mr S Mackie and Mr R MacWilliam.

## 2. Declarations of Interest

Members **NOTED** the following declarations of interest:-

Item 3 (Financial) – Mrs M Davidson

Item 3 (Non-Financial) – Mr D Rixson

## 3. Energy Efficient Scotland: Area Based Scheme Update

**Declaration of Interest – Mrs M Davidson declared a financial interest in this item due to intent in applying for the schemes outlined in the report related to insulation and home improvement but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that her interest did not preclude her involvement in discussion.**

**Declaration of Interest – Mr D Rixson declared a non-financial interest in this item as the Council's representative to the Lochaber Environmental Group but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in discussion.**

There had been circulated Report No. CCWG/6/21 dated 21 July 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance.

During a verbal update, the Project Manager shared information about project targets, sources of funding, annual carbon savings, delivery challenges and next steps.

During discussion, the following comments were raised:-

- thanks were given to the Project Manager for the clarity of the report;
- the extraordinary efforts of the Climate Change and Energy Team more generally were highlighted;
- in response to a question about local training programs and skills upgrade, it was explained that the Council had well trained staff internally though the introduction of new legislation had caused a knowledge gap which was being addressed by the team in hopes of being able to provide in-house and external training in the future;
- clarification was sought, and provided, on the fixed amount of funding per household;
- in response to a question, it was explained that lobbying efforts with the Scottish Government had been undertaken previously to consider logistical impacts in Highland and future lobbying efforts would require increased evidence to justify additional funding. Gathering evidence was a priority of the team and this notion was supported by Members;
- reassurance was sought, and provided, that the impact of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry had resulted in the tightening of regulations in respect of plastic-based external wall insulation, and in addition, the Council team were ensuring due diligence in closely examining any potential implications before any decisions were made to move forward;



- information was sought on whether the Swedish Timber House program had resulted in reduced heating costs for owners and whether the external wall insulation design was being assessed as a fire risk and it was agreed that Councillor B Thompson would provide the specific example from his Ward directly to the Project Manager to allow for appropriate follow up out with the meeting;
- concern was shared for the low installation targets for Year 9 of the programme and it was explained that in order to increase the scope, evidence was first required to determine reasons for low uptake. It was highlighted that this was a priority of the team and Members were encouraged to reach out to their communities to assist in this regard;
- it was important to recognise that the additional cost to homeowners would be a barrier to uptake as not everyone had the disposable income required to participate;
- the number of listed buildings in Highland that had to be brought up to standard to ensure they were wind and water secure was a challenge as external insulation could not be utilised on listed buildings;
- there was concern shared among Members that Highland rural communities were being disadvantaged and discriminated against on the basis of the location of their residence and overall, there was inadequate funding from governments to support this;
- information was sought, and provided, on efforts to expand training to ensure a robust workforce of young people could be trained and deliver on insulation programs;
- it was crucial to understand the scope of the problem because making homes energy efficient was the best thing to do for the health and longevity of people and was of major importance in reducing the carbon footprint of Highland;
- clarification was sought, and provided, on what would be required to gather insight into the challenges for take-up of the program;
- in response to a suggestion around publicity, it was agreed that the Project Manager would prepare a briefing statement for Members that could be posted on social media networks and in community newsletters so the Scheme information could be disseminated through Highland communities;
- in response to a question about additional funding, it was highlighted that a new Equity Fund would be rolled out by the Scottish Government in the near future to assist those that could not make the necessary contributions;
- Highland had a Corporate Landlord model which had been assessing the suitability of houses to determine if the required improvements were too costly and if replacement properties that were up to standard were more suitable however, this was a challenging and time-consuming process;
- it was crucial to be communicating with all partners such as Highland Poverty Action Group, Community Planning Partnerships, Citizens Advice Bureau and others and the Project Manager shared the team's interest in speaking to Members in their wards and attending different forums to gather and share information; and
- it was suggested that assistance should be available to those who needed assistance filling out the Scheme forms through community services such as Citizens Advice Bureau.

Members **NOTED** the contents of the report.

#### 4. Flow Country World Heritage Site Update

There had been circulated Report No. CCWG/7/21 dated 14 July 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance.

During a verbal update, Dr. Steven Andrews, Project Coordinator reviewed the purpose of the report in providing background and an update on the World Heritage Site nomination process. In this regard, the steps that had to be undertaken were highlighted which involved; a nomination dossier, justification of the importance of the site, a plan to protect the area and a business management plan. It was commented that there was a plan for submission by the end of 2022 with a decision being made in mid-2024.

During discussion, the following comments were raised:-

- thanks were provided to the Project Coordinator for the report;
- there was an important job to be done in terms of protection of the land particularly as it related to wildfires and this was not given the recognition it required;
- in response to a question, it was explained that there was no specific tipping point in terms of temperature, however peatland did become vulnerable when dry and focus had to be given to maintaining the peatlands in the best condition to keep the land as resilient as possible;
- community consultation at the onset of the project was successful and it was important to build on this moving forward;
- clarification was sought, and provided, on how additional carbon restoration should take place; and
- Members looked forward to updates on progress.

Members **NOTED** the contents of the report.

#### 5. SMART Cities – SMART Buildings Programme Update

There had been circulated Report No. CCWG/8/21 dated 28 July 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance.

During a verbal update, the Energy Engineer provided an overview of the goals of the SMART Cities Project and highlighted that the project aimed to improve on data collection and developing a single online platform with the ultimate goal of reducing energy waste in Estate buildings. The project comprised of two main elements; the Smart Energy Data Dashboard and the deployment of Internet of Things (IoT) sensors with specific details of these elements being outlined. The progress of the project thus far and next steps were highlighted.

During discussion, the following comments were raised:-

- thanks were given to the Officer for the interesting report and work undertaken thus far;
- it was hoped that this project would give an indication as to where heat was escaping buildings and where insulation was required;

- it had been a concern for a number of years that energy usage in individual buildings was unable to be monitored and would be very positive if this work would enable the Council to determine what buildings were leaking energy and costing far more to heat than they should;
- regarding rationalising Estate, it was important to determine if the more costly buildings could be brought to standard or be removed;
- one of the most simple, cost-effective measures in reducing energy use was reminder notices on light and heaters switches which encouraged personal responsibility;
- there was a balance between improving ventilation with Covid-19 and reducing energy waste during the pandemic; and
- it was important with the increase in data that focus be given to personal responsibility and education.

Members **NOTED** the contents of the report.

## **6. Glasgow Food & Climate Declaration – Next Steps**

There had been circulated Report No. CCWG/9/21 dated 14 July 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance.

During a verbal update, the Principal Project Manager reviewed the formation, purpose and aims of the Glasgow Food and Climate Declaration as well as the importance of tackling the food system given the Council's commitment to the climate emergency and national health crisis.

During discussion, the following comments were raised:-

- thanks were expressed to the Principal Project Manager for the report;
- the Council had been granted the Food for Life Bronze Award in some schools and it was disappointing that there was not more widespread rollout in other schools;
- transport of food to Highland was an issue, and it was necessary to decarbonise transport and determine how food miles could be reduced;
- if small farms in Highland could not be successful it meant a reliance on food from other areas;
- it was important to involve supermarkets in planning regarding buying local and reducing waste and food miles;
- reassurance was sought, and provided that the Planning Department was supportive and positive about community growing however, barriers remained in terms of regulations of allotment associations;
- there had been discussions with the Planning Department to encourage developers to provide the necessary infrastructure for allotments;
- access to water supply had proved to be a barrier to the success of allotments in the past;
- it would be useful to involve distilleries in discussions to determine if a mechanism could be put in place to utilise waste heat to assist community groups in growing food locally;
- it was important to develop community woodlands to grow produce;

- at the consumer level, it was important that attitudes changed regarding the shape, size and appearance of vegetables and fruit at the supermarket in order to reduce waste;
- information was sought, and provided, on the stage of development of the Regional Land Use Partnerships through the Scottish Government;
- community buy-in was a necessary factor for progress;
- in response to a question about procurement partnerships, it was explained that, as a Council, it was crucial to work collaboratively with community partners to tackle the climate emergency and highlighted that the Council was in the top quartile when it came to locally procured goods and had taken a proactive stance on this;
- regarding food miles, it was important to encourage schools, colleges, care homes and other partners to support local food producers; and
- there was a lot of work happening within communities and it was important to share what was going on.

Following the conclusion of the discussion, Ms K Ellen and Ms C Ferguson were welcomed to the team by the Chair and had the opportunity to introduce themselves to Members.

Members **NOTED** the contents of the report.

The meeting ended at 12:31pm.