

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Climate Change Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday 7 November 2024 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Ms S Atkin	Mr P Logue
Mr J Bruce (remote)	Mr D Louden (remote)
Mrs I Campbell (remote)	Mr R MacKintosh
Ms S Fanet (Chair)	Ms L Niven (remote)
Mr J Grafton	Ms M Ross (remote)
Mr A Graham	Ms K Willis (Vice Chair)

Non-Members also present:

Mr M Baird (remote)	Mr S Coghill (remote)
Dr C Birt	Mr D Millar (remote)

In attendance:

Mr N Osborne, Climate Change and Energy Team Manager
Ms S Barrie, Service Lead – Design and Construction
Mr A Hunter, Service Lead – Transport and Logistics
Mr B Cameron, Strategic Lead – Housing and Building Maintenance
Mr R Macdonald, Energy Manager (remote)
Ms F Daschofsky, Net Zero Project Manager
Ms I MacMillan, Project Manager
Mr S Miller, Project Manager
Mr J Perry, Project Manager (remote)
Ms F Conti, Category Manager – Procurement (remote)
Mr A Fraser, Principal Engineer
Ms R Burbaite, Climate Change Coordinator
Mr A Morgan, Climate Change Coordinator
Ms C Weaver, Climate Change Co-ordinator
Ms M Murray, Principal Committee Officer
Mrs O Marsh, Committee Officer

An asterisk in the margin denotes a recommendation to the Council. All decisions with no marking in the margin are delegated to the Committee.

Ms S Fanet in the Chair

Business

1. Calling of the Roll and Apologies for Absence Gairm a' Chlàir agus Leisgeulan

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Dr M Gregson.

2. Declarations of Interest/Transparency Statement Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt/ Aithris Fhollaiseachd

There were no Declarations of Interest or Transparency Statements.

3. Good News Naidheachdan Matha

The Chair informed the Committee of the following items of good news:-

- the Scottish Government had approved the Energy Efficient Scotland: Area Based Scheme grant funding which would allow works to commence to privately owned and privately rented properties;
- the Energy Efficient Scotland: Area Based Scheme had been nominated at the National Energy Efficiency Awards for Multi-Measure Project of the Year, where the project had received Special Commendation;
- the Council's Energy Efficient Scotland: Area Based Scheme had been shortlisted as a finalist for The Scottish Green Energy Awards in two award categories: Outstanding Project Award and Carbon Reduction Award. The Awards would take place in December; and
- the Climate Change and Energy Team had been nominated for Best Local Authority EV Charging Scheme at the National Transport & Energy Awards to be held on 21 November. Climate Change and Energy Team Project Manager, Rachael Anderson, had also been nominated in the Rising Star category at the Awards for the project management work undertaken to deliver Highland Council's EV infrastructure network.

The Committee **NOTED** the good news.

4. Net Zero Programme Update Cunntas às Ùr mu Phrògram Neoni Lom

There had been circulated Report No CCC/19/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the importance of building the Net Zero agenda into everything the Council did was emphasised, and information was sought, and provided, as to whether the Net Zero, Energy Investment and Innovation Portfolio Board had been engaging with the Climate Change and Energy Team to progress embedding Net Zero into the Council's Capital Programme, and the implications of the delay in that regard in terms of developing next year's budget;
- in relation to the target of five proposed projects for inclusion in the Net Zero Programme being brought to each meeting of the Climate Change Committee for consideration, it was queried whether seven projects would be brought to the next meeting given only three had been presented to today's meeting;
- with regard to the Kingussie Flood Protection project, much of the downstream flooding related to what was happening in the upper catchment, and information was sought, and provided, as to whether there had been any discussions with the Estate regarding implementing nature-based solutions further upstream. Other Members voiced their support for the use of nature-based solutions, commenting

that when flooding took place people tended to look at “big pipe” solutions, but upstream solutions could be more sustainable. There were opportunities for woodland creation or management, as well as for Scottish Government funding for peatland restoration. The Climate Change and Energy Team Manager undertook to pick up the points raised with colleagues in the Planning, Land Use and Environment Team;

- information was sought, and provided, on whether all Learning Estate Investment Programme projects would be designed and built to Passivhaus Standard; progress in respect of the Solar PV Council Estate project; the impact of government grant funding on the Energy Efficient Homes programme of works; and the identification of responsible officers in respect of the thematic groups;
- the ongoing work in Balintore in terms of the Energy Efficient Homes projects was welcomed;
- in response to a question, it was explained that data on area-wide emissions was being collated by the Climate Intelligence Service, and a report in that regard would be presented to a future meeting of the Committee. It was estimated that local authority emissions accounted for 2-3% of emissions in Highland; and
- in relation to waste management, reference was made to reports of issues with paper and cardboard collections, and it was queried whether monitoring was taking place to enable changes to be made as the rollout of the new waste and recycling collection arrangements continued. In that regard, the Net Zero Project Manager undertook to liaise with Waste Management officers and circulate a response;

The Committee:-

- i. scrutinised and **NOTED** progress to date as outlined in the report and Appendix 1 of the report; and
- * ii. **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to Council the approval of the project brief templates in Appendix 2 of the report for inclusion in the Council’s Net Zero Action Plan.

5. Net Zero Thematic Group Update – Built Estate and Energy Cunntas às Ùr mu Bhuidheann Chuspaireil Neoni Lom – Oighreachd Thogte agus Lùth

There had been circulated Report No CCC/20/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- in response to questions, it was confirmed that Net Zero and energy surveys were underway across the Council’s non-domestic estate. There was a two-year programme in respect of the first 300 buildings, and it was intended to bring a report in that regard to the next meeting of the Committee;
- in relation to the options appraisals to be carried out at six properties to determine how the heating systems could be converted to fossil fuels, it was queried what non-fossil fuels were being considered. With regard to Fortrose Academy in particular, an assurance was sought, and provided, that the heating system would be factored into any future investment programme;
- in relation to the Heating Policy, information was sought, and provided, on the plans for wider communication going forward; and

- with reference to the Scottish Government’s consultation on “Building Regulations: Determining the principles for a Scottish equivalent to the Passivhaus Standard”, the need for a Scottish equivalent was questioned and further information was sought, and provided, on what was being proposed.

The Committee otherwise **NOTED** the progress of actions by the Built Estate and Energy Thematic Group.

6. Net Zero Thematic Group Update – Sustainable Business Travel Cunntas às Ùr mu Bhuidheann Chuspaireil Neoni Lom – Siubhal Gnothachais Seasmhach

There had been circulated Report No CP/20/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place, which had been considered by the Communities and Place Committee on 5 September 2024.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- it would be helpful to provide a breakdown of business travel emissions between staff and Elected Members. Much of the travel by Members was commuting to Committee meetings from around Highland, and it would be useful to know how much of it was being done in private vehicles, how many electric vehicles (EVs) were being used, was public transport being used etc, to try to implement behaviour change. It was also queried how many Members used Car Club. In response, it was confirmed that a breakdown could be provided and would be included in the next Sustainable Business Travel update. Officers would also look at Member input into the Sustainable Business Travel Thematic Group;
- in relation to Car Club, whilst mileage had decreased, emissions had gone up, and information was sought, and provided, as to the reasons and how it could be addressed;
- reference was made to the Hi-Bike e-bike schemes in Fort William and Inverness, and it was queried whether there could be a subsidy for staff and Members to encourage them to use the e-bikes to get around town rather than using a car. Officers undertook to link in with the Active Travel team in that regard, and it was confirmed that a proposal was being taken to the Sustainable Business Travel Thematic Group regarding the possibility of building the pool of e-bikes within the Council fleet;
- in relation to Council fleet replacement, the inclusion of both hydrogen and electric vehicles was welcomed, and information was sought, and provided, on what evaluation was taking place ahead of funding becoming available and whether the Council was looking at what other local authorities, such as Aberdeen City Council, were doing;
- it was queried whether consideration was being given to broadening public transport;
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that there was a Liftshare Scheme for both staff and Members, and officers would look at how it could be better promoted;
- there was a balance to be achieved between reducing business travel emissions and the need for Members to attend meetings and be out in their communities;
- clarification was sought, and provided, as to what the Pathfinder 2 project encompassed, and the expected outturn in terms of the cost for charging an EV;

- with reference to the high lease costs and rapid depreciation associated with EVs, information was sought, and provided, as to whether consideration had been given to purchasing used EVs;
- the importance of responsible use of EV chargers was emphasised, and reference was made to instances of Council vehicles being left plugged into a charger for a significant length of time. There was a reputational risk to the Council if staff were not setting an example in terms of how chargers were used, and information was sought, and provided, on what training was available to staff and who was responsible for ensuring Council vehicles were charged appropriately; and
- grey fleet miles were increasing since a low during the Covid pandemic, and information was sought, and provided, on whether there was a strategy for slowing the increase or had it been accepted that grey fleet usage would increase as Council fleet usage reduced.

The Committee otherwise **NOTED** the report.

7. Climate Change Performance Monitoring Report Q2 2024/25
Aithisg Sgrùdadh Coileanaidh Atharrachadh Gnàth-shìde R2 2024/25

There had been circulated Report No CCC/21/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, information was sought, and provided, on a number of points including whether the action to develop a vision and strategy to embed the circular economy into the Council's operations had been completed; Carbon Literacy training and how the red RAG rating could be improved; the actions that had been due to complete in the second quarter of 2024/25; and the actions relating to progressing live sustainability software to allow measuring of engagement, options appraisals for sites for energy saving interventions, and the development of solar panel installations performance data.

The Committee scrutinised and **NOTED** the performance information for the Climate Change function.

8. Annual Report under Public Bodies Climate Change Duties 2023/24
Aithisg Bhliadhnaile fo Dhleastanasan Atharrachadh Gnàth-shìde nam Buidhnean Poblach 2023/24

There had been circulated Report No CCC/22/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- information was sought, and provided, as to whether High Life Highland (HLH) building operations could be reported separately for additional scrutiny, and whether the Net Zero culture shift was being spread to all partner organisations;
- whilst the in-house bus service had been a success for the Council and local communities, it had increased overall Council emissions;
- in relation to reducing electricity-related emissions, it was questioned whether the methodology might have been altered if the trading model had been changed to a zonal or nodal model as opposed to one UK wholesale market for electricity. In

Highland, wind and hydro-electric were used most of the time and there were no emissions being generated;

- information was sought, and provided, on how the Council was going to start reducing the annual percentage reduction as it was still on an upward trajectory and becoming increasingly out of reach; and
- as the national targets had recently changed, and the interim targets of 2030 and 2040 no longer applied, it was queried what impact this would have on the Council's approach and profile of reductions.

The Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** the Highland Council's draft Public Bodies Climate Change Duties Report 2023/24 as set out in Appendix 1 of the report;
- ii. **AGREED** to delegate authority to the Assistant Chief Executive – Place to sign the declaration in Part 6e and submit the Report by 30 November 2024; and
- iii. **NOTED** progress against the organisation's emissions reductions targets.

9. Strategic Approach to Climate Change Adaptation Dòigh-obrach Ro-innleachdail a Thaobh Freagarrachadh do dh'Atharrachadh Gnàth-shìde

There had been circulated Report No CCC/23/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- thanks were expressed for the report and the work that was taking place;
- the recent tragic events in Spain due to climate change were a reminder that changes were coming and there was a need to adapt. The more adaptation was delayed the more costly it would be for future Councils and governments, and the need to increase awareness was emphasised;
- reference was made to the potential negative effects of energy installations, such as wind turbine blades shedding small amounts of plastic into the environment, and it was queried how broadly such installations were being looked at;
- in response to a question regarding the integrated impact assessment, it was explained that, whilst climate change itself had a negative impact, the Adaptation Strategy and Action Plan would have a positive impact on socio-economic disadvantage;
- whilst it was appreciated that adaptation was important, concern was expressed that it detracted from the need for mitigation and the reduction of emissions and gave people a false sense of security. It was also felt that wider consideration should be given to other impacts such as changes in the Gulf Stream, ocean sea levels and coastal erosion. With regards to coastal erosion, it was confirmed that a coastal change adaptation plan was being produced by the Council, which it was anticipated would be available in the new year and would feed into the overall Adaptation Strategy;
- the report cited a reduced need for wintertime heating as a positive climate change impact, but this was possibly inaccurate given Scotland was potentially going to become so cold it would be uninhabitable in the future;
- it was questioned how the cost figures in section 6.2 of the report had been calculated;

- in response to a question, it was confirmed that the proposed Members' workshop would take place in the new year; and
- it was highlighted that in 2023 one Council ward had suffered four landslides which had closed roads, three on the same road on the same day, and concern was expressed that Highland would see more incidents like this in the future due to climate change.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- the contents of the report; and
- that the Climate Change Adaptation Strategy and Action Plan would be brought to the Climate Change Committee for consideration, prior to full Council approval and publication.

10. The Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategy (LHEES) Delivery Plan Update Cunntas às Ùr mu Phlana Lìbhrigidh na Ro-innleachd Teas agus Lùth-èifeachdais Ionadail

There had been circulated Report No CCC/24/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

Members welcomed the following initiatives and targets: community energy to increase by 100% in generation capacity by 2030; the aim to expand solar assets across the Council's non-domestic estate; and the exploration of opportunities to invest in utility-scale solar, battery energy, onshore and offshore wind energy. The indicative Heat Network zones and the fabric-first approach were also welcomed.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** progress to date;
- * **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** that the Council approve the draft LHEES Delivery Plan Strategic Approach set out at Appendix 1 of the report, and the draft Delivery Plan contained in Appendix 2 of the report.

11. Innovation Funding Maoineachadh Innleachdach

There had been circulated Report No CCC/25/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- it having been queried how much funding had been lost by exiting the European Union (EU), it was confirmed that, following a transitional period when the UK had not been eligible, the EU Horizon funding stream was now back online;
- congratulations were expressed to officers for securing the funding already brought in from successful bids, and it was queried what projects the funding would be used for and what the associated timescales were;
- clarification was sought, and provided, regarding the tables in section 5.2 of the report and the apparent dramatic reduction in available Net Zero funding; and

- information was sought, and provided, as to whether there would be a target approach to the amount of funds officers sought to bring in, and whether the proposed Project Officer would be on a time-limited contract.

- * The Committee **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** that the Council approve the proposal to develop a more focused and consistent approach to bid writing around the Net Zero agenda supported by the climate and energy team as part of the innovation and investment workstream in the Council's Our Future Highland Delivery Plan.

12. Delivery Plan Budget Monitoring and Progress Update – Heat Networks Project Cunntas às Ùr mu Sgrùdadh Buidseit & Adhartas a' Phlana Libhrigidh – Pròiseact Lìonraidhean Teasa

There had been circulated Report No CCC/26/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

Members expressed thanks for the report and looked forward to seeing how the project progressed. In addition, information was sought, and provided, on whether local consultants could be used in terms of the Scottish Government's approved scheme.

The Committee **NOTED** the update provided on the Heat Networks Project.

13. Ecology Strategy and Action Plan Ro-innleachd agus Plana-gnìomha Eag-eòlais

There had been circulated Report No CCC/27/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- thanks were expressed for the report and the two informative and productive Member workshops;
- the proposed inclusion of Gaelic headings in the Strategy was welcomed, and it was queried if the document would be provided in accessible formats such as signing interpretation and spoken book;
- it was questioned whether there was awareness of all the risks, from an environmental and ecological perspective, of the developments being considered for planning permission and licences, such as battery energy storage systems, and information was sought, and provided, on the role of the Ecology Strategy within the planning process;
- it was suggested that interested persons watch the film "Why Not Scotland?", produced by Scotland: The Big Picture, which looked at rewilding projects happening in Europe. Attention was also drawn to the Rewilding Nation Charter petition by the Rewilding Alliance, which was asking the Scottish Government to rewild 30% of land in Scotland; and
- when making decisions in the Chamber, such as on planning matters, there was a need for solid data on the ecological impacts on both land and water.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the content of the draft Ecology Strategy and the actions contained therein;

- ii. **NOTED** the response to the public consultation; and
- iii. **AGREED** to recommend that the Economy and Infrastructure Committee adopt the draft Ecology Strategy and Action Plan as detailed in Appendix 2 of the report.

The meeting concluded at 2.10 pm.