

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Climate Change Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Wednesday 29 January 2025 at 2.00 pm.

Present:

Ms S Atkin	Mr P Logue
Mr J Bruce	Mr D Louden
Ms S Fanet (Chair)	Mr R MacKintosh
Mr J Grafton	Ms M Ross (remote)
Mr A Graham	Ms K Willis (Vice Chair)
Dr M Gregson	

Non-Members also present:

Mr M Baird (remote)	Ms E Knox (remote)
Mr C Ballance (remote)	Ms K MacLean (remote)
Dr C Birt	Mr D Macpherson (remote)
Mr B Boyd (remote)	Mr P Oldham (remote)
Mr S Coghill (remote)	Mrs T Robertson (remote)
Ms M Hutchison (remote)	Mr R Stewart

In attendance:

Mr N Osborne, Climate Change and Energy Team Manager
Ms F Daschofsky, Project Manager
Mr A McKinnie, Strategic Lead – Waste Strategy and Operations
Ms F Conti, Category Manager – Procurement
Mr R Macdonald, Energy Manager
Mr A Hunter, Service Lead – Transport and Logistics
Ms M Murray, Principal Committee Officer
Ms K Arnott, 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

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mrs I Campbell and Ms L Niven.

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 Council's Energy Efficient Scotland: Area Based Scheme had won the Outstanding Project Award at the Scottish Green Energy Awards which had taken place in December. The project had significantly reduced energy consumption through fabric improvements, ensuring homes were better insulated, warmer, and more efficient. The Council was committed to expanding on the success of the scheme and addressing the challenges Highland faced, with an estimated 33% of households currently experiencing fuel poverty;
- the Council had been named winner of the Best Local Authority EV Charging Scheme at the Transport and Energy Awards which had been held in November. There had been further success for the Council with Rachael Anderson from the Climate Change and Energy Team named the Rising Star in the clean transport and energy industry for the project management work undertaken to deliver the Council's EV infrastructure network;
- Diane Connolly-Philip had graduated with First-Class honours in Construction and the Built Environment. Diane had joined the Council in January 2020, following 16 years in the motor trade. Since joining the Council through the Graduate Apprenticeship scheme, she had been promoted twice and was currently a Project Officer delivering the Energy Efficient Scotland: Area Based Scheme supporting two projects in Caol and Balintore;
- following a successful recruitment campaign, a Programme Manager and three Project Managers had recently joined the Council, with the Climate Change and Energy Team now fully resourced to lead on the Investment and Innovation workstreams of the Net Zero, Energy, and Innovation Portfolio within the Council's Operational Delivery Plan;
- the Council, in collaboration with Raasay Development Trust, had been successful in obtaining funding from the Carbon Neutral Islands Fund for two projects:
 - 1) Transforming three vacant properties into affordable rental homes with zero direct emission heating systems; and
 - 2) Restoring habitats on the island through the removal of invasive species.

The projects would assist in the journey to Net Zero as well as capacity development.

The Committee **NOTED** the good news.

4. Net Zero Programme Prògram Neoni Lom

i. Net Zero Programme Update Fios às Ùr mu Phrògram Neoni Lom

There had been circulated Report No CCC/1/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- thanks were expressed to officers for the report and appendices, which included a lot of useful information;
- in relation to the Light Fleet – Optimal Utilisation project, it was possible that some light fleet vehicles were not being used as much as would have been expected. Equally, there might be instances of people using their own vehicles when there was a case for them having a light fleet vehicle. The project would provide a clear indication of the need, or otherwise, for light fleet vehicles, and Members looked forward to seeing the outcome. On the point being raised, it was confirmed that a high-level report could be brought to the Climate Change Committee in May 2025;
- information was sought, and provided, on the composition of the Net Zero, Energy Investment and Innovation Board;
- limitations in terms of staff resource was a common theme throughout the report, and it was important this issue was resolved. In relation to the Solar PV Council Estate project in particular, confirmation was sought that staffing was now back up to the required number;
- the progress being made on the Built Estate and Energy projects was welcomed;
- it would be good if the work taking place in Balintore in terms of retrofitting Council houses could be extended to cover areas such as Milnafua, which was a high SIMD (Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation) area, and it was hoped that officers would look again at any funding that might be available;
- with regard to the Waste Thematic Group, thanks were expressed to the Strategic Lead – Waste Strategy and Operations for his efforts and the scale of success he had had;
- in relation to Scope 3 emissions reporting, it was queried how many suppliers Oxygen were checking, and what impact the introduction of mandatory reporting for Local Authorities would have on the Climate Change and Energy Team;
- in response to a question, it was explained that the approach to embedding Net Zero in the Capital Programme had been the subject of a report to the Council in March 2024, and a copy of the report would be provided to Ms S Atkin;
- with reference to the Kingussie Flood Prevention project, the increasing number of extreme weather events and the vulnerability of Highland were highlighted;
- attention was drawn to the risk, set out in section 3.3 of the report, of severe widespread impacts if Scotland's Councils did not respond quickly enough to drastically reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increase resilience. Its inclusion in the report was welcomed and it was suggested it was necessary to increase the amount of emphasis placed on it as there was a danger of the Council focusing on economic objectives;
- community groups could benefit from office furniture or equipment no longer required by the Council, and it was queried whether they were informed, through Community Development Managers or Community Councils, when such items were available. It was confirmed this would be fed into the pilot project looking at the reuse of furniture;
- in relation to the introduction of twin-stream recycling systems across the Council estate, it was queried what steps were being taken in terms of education to convey the importance of recycling and how it worked;
- it was welcomed that the Net Zero Programme had been added to the Council's Corporate Risk Register. In response to a question, it was explained that the risk sat with the Climate Change and Energy Team Manager as a temporary measure until such time as a Chief Officer had been appointed;

- with regard to the Elected Member Travel project, the need for Member involvement was emphasised and it was queried how champions would be identified;
- reference was made to the significant number of skips across the Council's estate, and it was queried if information was available as to what was going into them, what was being reused and what was being sent to landfill. In response, it was explained that a cost analysis exercise was being carried out to understand what was happening in terms of skip hire across the organisation, and information in that regard could be circulated to Members or brought to the next meeting of the Committee;
- in response to a question, it was clarified that the Council had targets in respect of its own emissions but had not yet got targets for area-wide emissions;
- in relation to the Council's Ecology Strategy and the target of 10 Council estate greening projects delivered annually, it was queried whether the greening projects had been identified and suggested that consideration be given to a project in Inverness Central ward where there was very little green space. It was confirmed this would be fed back to the Environment team and a response would be circulated to Dr M Gregson;
- it having been queried what flood prevention work was envisaged in the vicinity of Ladies Walk, Inverness, it was confirmed this would be followed up with the Resilience team;
- disagreement was expressed in relation to earlier remarks regarding the risk in section 3.3 of the report, and it was commented that the UK contributed less than 1% to global emissions. The Council could spend its entire annual budget on reducing emissions and it would have a negligible impact on worldwide emissions, and it was necessary to be pragmatic. It was acknowledged there was a lot of good work that could be done in terms of improving amenity spaces and flood prevention and mitigation. The workstreams associated with waste recycling were driven by cost avoidance and should be done from a financial prudence perspective. Concern was expressed regarding some of risks set out in the project update in Appendix 1 of the report, and it was suggested it was necessary to consider how the Council could make a positive contribution to the lives of Highland residents whilst also taking cognisance of the significant and worsening budgetary challenge. In responding to the points raised, the Chair commented that looking at it from the perspective of the UK's contribution to global emissions was not how the Net Zero challenge should be faced. It was not only about emissions: economies were changing, and countries, regions and organisations that did not embrace the journey towards Net Zero would deprive themselves of funding and local investment;
- active travel was not possible for many people in remote and rural communities, and the active travel agenda perpetuated further rural-urban inequalities. It was suggested that references to implementing active travel should be moderated by stating "where possible"; and
- with regard to the conversion of fossil fuel heating systems, it was understood that air source heat pumps were not effective in low outside temperatures, and reference was made to complaints from tenants that air source systems were not adequate. It having been queried whether consideration had been given to ground source systems, it was confirmed that the options appraisals included an assessment of all available low carbon technologies, namely, air source, ground source and biomass.

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 the Council the approval of the project brief templates in Appendix 2 of the report for inclusion in the Council's Net Zero Programme.

**ii. Net Zero Thematic Group Update – Waste
Fios às Ùr mu Bhuidheann Chuspaireil Neoni Lom – Sgudal**

There had been circulated Report No CCC/2/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- reference was made to the food waste associated with the provision of Members' catering for Committee meetings, and it was queried whether there was scope for a project in that regard whereby an ordering system could be implemented and Members could lead by example. The Strategic Lead – Waste Strategy and Operations confirmed that he would welcome the opportunity, in conjunction with relevant officers, to take forward such a project;
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that the Waste Aware team was feeding into the Net Zero Audit Surveys that were the subject of item 9 on the agenda;
- an update having been requested on the Food in Schools project, it was explained that this was now being reported to the Redesign Board. An update would be requested for circulation to Climate Change Committee Members or presentation to the next meeting;
- Members received a lot of requests from Community Councils for information, and it was queried whether educational content developed for schools could be incorporated into a presentation for Community Councils to raise awareness. The Strategic Lead – Waste Strategy and Operations confirmed that could be taken forward;
- the need for more education and clear communication with the public, whether on social media or by other means, was emphasised. It was necessary to go back to basics and clarify how, for example, Christmas wrapping paper and cardboard pizza boxes should be disposed of;
- information was sought, and provided, as to how Waste Transfer Stations contributed to waste, emission and travel reduction.

The Committee otherwise **NOTED** the progress of actions by the Waste Thematic Group.

**iii. Net Zero Thematic Group Update – Procurement and Community Wealth Building
Fios às Ùr mu Bhuidheann Chuspaireil Neoni Lom – Solarachadh agus
Togail Saidhbhreas Coimhearsnachd**

There had been circulated Report No CCC/3/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the work being progressed by the Procurement and Community Wealth Building Thematic Group was welcomed;
- the benefits of local procurement, not only in terms of reducing emissions but in terms of community wealth building, were emphasised;
- information was sought, and provided, on whether emission reductions and supporting the local economy would be given priority over cost in future procurement decisions; whether procurement rules and regulations needed to be changed to allow Scope 3 emissions to be considered in the procurement process; and whether there was currently enough good data to inform and monitor Scope 3 emissions going forward;
- venison was an environmentally friendly, sustainable and healthy meat, and there were many venison larders in Highland. Schools on Islay and Jura had become the first in the UK to include venison in their school meals, and it was queried whether there was scope to follow suit with some schools in Highland. The Category Manager – Procurement spoke to the framework and processes to be followed, and confirmed she would be happy to have a discussion with Ms K Willis as to how the matter could be progressed. The Project Manager added that discussions were at an early stage regarding a pilot project for the provision of venison to schools in the Cairngorms area, and looked forward to continuing the conversation outwith the meeting;
- surprise was expressed that the number of suppliers was so low, and it was suggested that was something that could be looked at in future;
- small contracts, eg for an individual school, should not be subject to the same rules as large contracts, and it was suggested a de minimis level should be put place;
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that sustainability requirements had formed part of the tendering process for a number of years; and
- in relation to food procurement, the importance of quality was emphasised. It was added that the latest dietary guidelines indicated that it was necessary to eat less meat, not only for climate change reasons but for health reasons.

The Committee **NOTED** the progress of actions by the Procurement and Community Wealth Building Thematic Group.

5. Energy Benchmarking of Property Estate A' Dèanamh Tomhas-measaidh air an Oighreachd Sheilbhe

There had been circulated Report No CCC/4/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- information was sought, and provided, on the reasons for the significant increase in water consumption and utility costs, and how unmetered usage was calculated. In relation to water consumption, the Energy Manager undertook to provide additional analysis, perhaps narrowing usage down to individual sites, and this was welcomed;
- the Council had an opportunity to produce electricity at a lower cost than it was currently being charged, and the faster that programme was accelerated the better the result would be for the Council's finances;
- facilities such as sports centres, which were not within the Council's control, appeared to be the most expensive in terms of heat and electricity usage, and it was questioned whether this needed to be explored with High Life Highland. In

particular, information was sought regarding the 78% increase in electricity consumption in respect of Sport Centre – Dry, and the Energy Manager undertook to revert to Dr M Gregson with an explanation;

- in response to a question, it was confirmed that two fiscal years of energy benchmarking data was currently available. Whilst there was some older data, and totals and trends could be provided, the fine detail was not available;
- in relation to the tables at sections 6.4 and 6.5 of the report, information was sought, and provided, on why and how the performance variations had occurred; what Industrial Type Activities and Shop referred to; and, with regard to heat performance, the reasons for the significant increase in respect of Recycling/Landfill Centre and Shop;
- it having been commented that it would be helpful, for scrutiny purposes, if there was a way of comparing like with like, it was explained that it was only possible to report absolute figures. However, there was a commentary box in the report card in the Energy Benchmarking Tool, and efforts had been made to provide context where there were any anomalies – for example, if a building had closed down partway through the year;
- the electricity usage in respect of Shop having been queried, the Energy Manager undertook to investigate and clarify the heating type and any other contributing factors; and
- clarification was sought, and provided, as to whether properties that had been the subject of a Community Asset Transfer were still included in the data.

The Committee **AGREED** the refreshed Energy Benchmarking Tool, which now incorporated 2023/24 data.

6. Solar PV Non-Domestic Estate Update **Fios às Ùr mu Oighreachd Neo-dhachaigheil PV Grèine**

There had been circulated Report No CCC/5/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- thanks were expressed for the report and the time spent and progress made in terms of rectifying issues and bringing Solar PV systems back into operation;
- in relation to battery storage systems, concern was raised regarding an apparent lack of awareness and detail about fire safety consequences and the type of gas used. Assurances were offered in that regard and it was confirmed that, as the Council looked to introduce further battery systems or other means of storing energy, specifications would be brought to Members for consideration;
- regarding section 7.3 of the report, it was queried if Inverness Common Good had been notified regarding the proposals for solar arrays at Longman Waste Transfer Station as they were the site owner, and whether consideration had been given to the installation of ground level Solar PV at the site. It was also queried if Torvean Quarry would be considered for Solar PV installation as it had been considered as a battery storage site and it would be advantageous to generate and store electricity at the same site. It was confirmed that officers were looking at the development of solar at the Longman and exploring options at Torvean Quarry, and Members' comments would be taken on board;
- regarding section 5.2 of the report, Members were keen to see the development of the 2025/26 maintenance, inspection and servicing programme to prevent

- equipment from going off-line without prior knowledge. It was also emphasised that adequate resources were required to support the maintenance programme; and
- regarding section 5.1 of the report, it was clarified that the 78% referred to the percentage of energy generation rather than the percentage of systems.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the current status of Solar PV generation assets on the Council's non-domestic estate; and
- ii. **AGREED** the proposed development of new and proposed installations.

7. Net Zero – Building Technical Standards Solar PV and Metering Neoni Lom – PV Grèine agus Meatairigeadh Inbhean Teicnigeach Thogalaichean

There had been circulated Report No CCC/6/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the technical specifications were important in terms of preventing some of the issues that had been experienced to date, and appreciation was expressed for the report;
- information was sought, and provided, as to whether there was any guidance on the appropriate orientation of solar panels on roofs, especially on listed buildings; and
- listed building rules had been relaxed, and it was hoped that some listed buildings in Highland that had previously not been eligible for permission to install solar panels might now be reconsidered.

The Committee **AGREED** the technical specifications set out in Appendices 1 and 2 of the report.

8. Performance Monitoring Report – Q3 2024/25 Aithisg Sgrùdadh Coileanaidh R3 Bliadhna Ionmhasail 2024/25

There had been circulated Report No CCC/7/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the importance of monitoring and reporting remedial and maintenance actions for renewable energy generation assets was emphasised;
- an update was sought on the red RAG rating in respect of Carbon Literacy training, including what the feedback had been from those who had participated and whether there had been a change in mindset. It was confirmed that the first online training modules were currently being evaluated by the Learning and Development Team. With regard to the training that had been delivered to the extended Corporate Management Team, evaluation was ongoing and an update could be provided at the next meeting of the Committee; and
- in response to a question regarding training for Members, it was confirmed that a series of workshops would be delivered throughout 2025/26. Members were

encouraged to get in touch with officers if there were any particular areas they wished to be included in the programme.

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

9. Net Zero Audit Surveys Update **Fios às Ùr mu Shuirbhidhean Sgrùdaidh Neoni Lom**

There had been circulated Report No CCC/8/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- in relation to behavioural change measures and developing projects in schools to get students and teachers on board, Members reiterated the need to tie in with other teams, such as the Waste Aware team;
- with regard to the formatting of the Audit Report, which showed the annual saving and capital costs, it would be useful to see the revenue cost of the capital;
- investing in new equipment could be advantageous in terms of reduced maintenance costs; and
- Members commended the positive and comprehensive Audit Report, and the practical and achievable measures contained therein, and expressed thanks to officers for the hard work taking place.

The Committee **NOTED** progress to date.

The meeting concluded at 16.40 pm.