

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Climate Change Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Wednesday 21 May 2025 at 2.00 pm.

Present:

Ms S Atkin (remote)
Mr S Coghill (remote)
Ms S Fanet (Chair)
Mr A Graham
Dr M Gregson

Mr P Logue
Mr D Loudon
Mrs M Ross (remote)
Ms K Willis (Vice Chair)

Non-Members also present:

Ms Marianne Hutchison (remote)
Ms K MacLean (remote)

Mrs T Robertson (remote)
Mr R Stewart (remote)

In attendance:

Mr N Osborne, Climate Change and Energy Team Manager
Ms F Daschofsky, Project Manager
Mr S Miller, Project Manager – Innovation Funding and Bid Writing
Mr A Hunter, Service Lead - Transport and Logistics
Mr A Morgan, Climate Change Coordinator (Data)
Ms C Weaver, Climate Change Coordinator (Adaptation)
Ms R Burbaite, Project Manager
Mr R Macdonald, Energy Manager
Mr B Cameron, Strategic Lead – Housing and Customer Services
Ms M Murray, Principal Committee Officer
Ms K Arnott, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Ms H Loonsk, Climate Resilience Manager, Highland Adapts

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 Mr J Bruce, Mrs I Campbell, Mr J Grafton 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 inspection programme for all existing Solar PV systems had been successfully completed on time and on budget. This set the foundation for ensuring all systems were compliant and back to generating renewable energy;
- on 15 May, the Council had agreed to proceed with the North of Scotland EV Infrastructure contract, in partnership with Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire and Moray. Contract award was expected by the end of May, with the transition of existing infrastructure and rollout of new charge points taking place through the rest of the year;
- a public consultation had launched on 20 May 2025 on the proposed lease of Inverness Common Good land at the Longman site for Storegga's green hydrogen project. The consultation would close in mid-July, with the outcome due to be reported to the Committee in November. The project could cut emissions by up to 45,000 tonnes of CO₂e a year and generate income for the Common Good Fund; and
- the Council had been nominated for *Landlord of the Year* and *Local Authority of the Year* in recognition of its work to tackle fuel poverty. This had been thanks to the energy efficiency programme led by Isla MacMillan, Project Manager, Climate Change and Energy Team, delivered through the Energy Efficient Homes Workstream of the Delivery Plan.

The Committee **NOTED** the good news.

4. **Net Zero Programme** **Prògram Neoni Luim**

i. **Net Zero Programme Update** **Cunntas às Ùr mun Phrògram Neoni Luim**

There had been circulated Report No CCC/9/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- it was good to see new projects coming forward, particularly in relation to reducing food waste;
- an update was sought, and provided, on the provision of mandatory climate training for the Council's Risk and Resilience Group;
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that the work taking place to develop Net Zero Design Standards would not impact on the progress of the Highland Investment Plan;
- it having been queried whether Members would see the results of the waste audit at Kingussie High School, it was confirmed that it was intended to provide an update from the Waste Thematic Group at the August meeting of the Committee;
- in response to questions regarding Solar PV, it was explained that the cost of remedial works to bring systems back into operation would be funded from the financial benefit of the electricity generated. Expansion of Solar PV would be

partially funded through external grants, if available, but the primary funding route would be the Salix Fund. The number of sites online prior to 1 April 2019 was difficult to determine. However, the Energy Manager undertook to see what information was available; and

- reference having been made to the request, at the January meeting, for an update on the Food in Schools project, the Climate Change and Energy Team Manager confirmed that discussions had taken place but unfortunately an update had not been available in time for today's meeting. He undertook to ensure an update would be provided at the next meeting of the Committee.

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 – Capital Programme and Net Zero Funding Strategy**
Cunntas às Ùr mu Bhuidheann Chuspaireil Neoni Luim – Prògram Calpa agus Ro-innleachd Maoineachaidh Neoni Luim

There had been circulated Report No CCC/10/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- thanks were expressed for the report and the good work taking place;
- information was sought, and provided, on the Verified Carbon Credits – Retrofit Credits Model and the associated process overview, including whether the acquiring of credits would enable further retrofitting to be carried out; whether any other local authorities in Scotland were using Local Climate Bonds; what the proposed pilot of Lifecycle Carbon Assessments within the Capital Programme decision-making process would consist of; what weighting would be given to carbon analysis, as opposed to other aspects such as build quality and cost, when assessing capital projects; and the steps being taken to source external funding streams.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the progress being made to identify alternative Net Zero funding options, including the potential use of Climate Bonds and Carbon Credits;
- ii. **NOTED** the launch of a pilot programme testing the Capital Sustainability Assurance Protocol as a decision-making tool within the Capital Programme; and
- iii. **AGREED** to support the principle of embedding lifecycle carbon analysis into the Council's Capital Gateway processes to enable data-led, sustainable investment decisions.

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

There had been circulated Report No CCC/11/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- in response to a question, it was confirmed that the estimated emissions in respect of Elected Member travel were based on average assumptions in terms of car and fuel type;
- reference was made to the very low percentages in terms of car sharing, active travel and Car Club use by Elected Members, and it was suggested that in the Inverness area, where a number of Members lived locally, the active travel percentage could be increased. It was queried how Members would be involved, going forward, in trying to change travel behaviour, and it was suggested that consideration be given to a workshop and nominating champions from within each political group. The Service Lead – Transport and Logistics confirmed that a Members' workshop looking at the different forms of travel and the availability of the Car Club could be brought forward;
- surprise was expressed at the high level of grey fleet use by both staff and Elected Members, and it was suggested lessons could be learned from organisations such as NatureScot which had a travel hierarchy and online booking system for vehicles. In addition, information was sought, and provided, as to whether there was a scheme to incentivise the use of low emission vehicles, and whether there was scope within the expenses claim system to capture vehicle registrations and thereby identify the type of vehicle and the emissions produced. In responding to the points raised, it was confirmed that the Council had a travel hierarchy that would be reviewed. With regard to expenses claims, any change to the process and the information captured would require approval. The Service Lead – Transport and Logistics confirmed that officers could liaise with Enterprise, who provided the Car Club, with a view to promoting lower emission vehicles first;
- Members and senior officers needed to lead the way in terms of behaviour change;
- there was a broader discussion to be had about the way the Council operated its meetings. There were some meetings that lent themselves to attendees being there in person but there were others that could, it was suggested, be wholly online. It was also necessary to consider the start and finish time of meetings to facilitate the use of public transport by attendees;
- in relation to staff travel, progress had been made in that the use of petrol vehicles had decreased and the use of hybrid vehicles had increased;
- Appendix 2 of the report indicated that 8% of light fleet vehicles had annual mileage of 2000 miles a year or less, and it was questioned whether those vehicles were needed. However, it was recognised this figure probably included vehicles such as school minibuses and snow ploughs that were not in use year round;
- it was emphasised that active travel and public transport were not always viable options for those living in some of the more remote and rural areas of Highland;
- Appendix 2 of the report, which set out car travel by account, indicated that the Car Club, hire cars and fleet cars were all more expensive than paying the

standard mileage rate of 45p per mile for grey fleet usage. It was questioned whether promoting the Car Club, for example, represented best value, which the Council had a duty to provide, when paying all the car travel mileage at the rate of 45p per mile would have saved approximately £0.75m. Particular reference was made to the cost of £1.20 per mile for a fleet car, and it was queried why the cost was so high and what type of vehicle that rate was being paid for. Attention was also drawn to the estimated 18,459 “days lost” travelling based on an average speed of 35mph. Based on an average speed of 20mph the number would be significantly higher, and the loss of productivity to the Council and the associated cost to the Highland taxpayer were emphasised. The Chair suggested that Councillor R Stewart liaise with the Service Lead – Transport and Logistics outwith the meeting regarding the questions raised.

The Committee scrutinised and **NOTED**:-

- i. the high-level data relating to Elected Member Travel as outlined in the report and presented in Appendix 1 of the report; and
- ii. the high-level data relating to Staff Business Travel as outlined in the report and presented in Appendix 2 of the report.

5. Highlands Adapts Update and Funding

Cunntas às Ùr agus Iartras Maoineachaidh dhan Ghàidhealtachd a’ Freagarrachadh

There had been circulated Report No CCC/12/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- a first draft of the Adaptation Strategy would be brought to the Climate Change Committee in August. Highland Adapts would support the Council in the production of the strategy and action plan, ensuring it was robust and comprehensive, reflected local risks, and aligned with national best practice;
- Members reiterated the significant cost of not adapting to climate change, referencing examples in section 6.1 of the report, including reductions in Gross Domestic Product (GDP), impacts on local industries such as salmon and whisky production, and flooding damage;
- Members expressed strong support for the Highland Adapts partnership, highlighting its long-term value;
- reference was made to the River Ness Flood Prevention Scheme webpage, which featured an outdated image of Prince Andrew. Members requested that the visual materials be reviewed and updated, and the Climate Change Coordinator (Adaptation) confirmed this would be undertaken. In addition, concern was raised regarding flood risk at the River Ness, and it was suggested that local risk management data be re-examined in light of observable seasonal changes in river levels. It was recognised that the partnership had a broad remit and this was just one risk, but it was an area where it was necessary to work proactively in advance of issues;
- questions were raised regarding the current membership of the Highland Adapts partnership. It was commented that farming representatives were not part of the governing group, and their inclusion was considered vital, particularly in relation to flooding and land management. In response, it was confirmed that Highland

Adapts was reviewing its governance structure, and that broader stakeholder engagement, including with the agricultural sector, would be considered as part of that process. It was further clarified that the governing partners represented only one part of the wider partnership network and, while the National Farmers Union was not a core partner, engagement with the organisation took place through other channels;

- in response to a question, it was confirmed that the first Highland Climate Risk and Opportunity Assessment, due to be completed by December 2025, would be made available to Members, who would also be given the opportunity to contribute to the Council's own corporate Climate Risk and Opportunity Assessment; and
- support was expressed for the funding request, with particular praise for the research being conducted on the circular economy. It was highlighted that the research concentrated on the food and drink sector, which would include farmers.

Before moving on to the next item, the Chair highlighted that May was Lyme Disease Awareness Month and spoke to the link between diseases and climate change, as outlined in the report. It was observed that rising temperatures could increase the prevalence of tick-borne illnesses, particularly in areas such as the Highlands. Personal experience was shared regarding the long-term effects of Lyme disease, including fatigue and reduced productivity, with reference made to the potential economic impact. An estimate from the Netherlands' National Institute for Public Health in 2017 had placed the annual cost of Lyme disease at €20m, with the current figure likely to be higher. Appreciation was expressed for the efforts of Councillor MacCallum in raising awareness locally.

Members endorsed the comments and shared further reflections, including reference to a recent presentation at the Housing and Property Committee by a tenant representative who had been disabled as a result of Lyme disease. The importance of public awareness and taking personal precautions during the spring and summer months was emphasised.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** progress to date, the current and planned activities, and the partnership's role in supporting the Highland Council's Climate Change Adaptation Strategy;
- NOTED** the national recognition of Highland Adapts' approach as a model for regional adaptation partnership; and
- * **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to the Council the approval of £15,000 of funding to support the Highland Adapts partnership during financial year 2025/26.

6. Climate Change Duties Reporting Consultation Co-chomhairleachadh mu Aithris Dhleastanasan Atharrachadh Gnàth-shìde

There had been circulated Report No CCC/13/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In introducing the report, the Climate Change and Energy Team Manager apologised for the reference in section 1.2 of the report to a Members' Workshop, which had been cancelled due to unforeseen circumstances after the paper had

been produced. Thanks were expressed to Members for their feedback following circulation of the draft response, and it was confirmed that the points raised were being incorporated into the final submission.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- thanks were expressed to officers for the significant work undertaken in compiling the response, with particular reference to the inclusion of climate justice and the challenges in terms of identifying groups most impacted by climate change;
- in response to a query regarding governance and cross-service alignment, it was explained that, following approval of the Council's Delivery Plan, six new Portfolio Boards had been established including the Net Zero, Energy Investment and Innovation Portfolio Board, which had oversight of the projects within that portfolio. There was also a Net Zero Strategy Group made up of senior members of staff from across the organisation. Furthermore, as the development of the Council's Adaptation Strategy, for example, progressed, consideration would be given to which additional members of staff needed to be involved in specific workstreams; and
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that the final consultation response was due for submission by close of business on Friday 23 May 2025, and that any further contributions would need to be received by the end of the day.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the statutory requirement for all public bodies to report annually under the Public Bodies Climate Change Duties; and
- ii. **AGREED** the Council's response to the draft statutory guidance consultation (attached as Appendix 1 of the report).

7. Heat Network Feasibility Report Aithisg Sho-dhèantachd an Lìonra Theasa

There had been circulated Report No CCC/14/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- thanks were expressed for the report, which set out the possibility of excellent carbon reductions as well as cost reductions, and Members commended officers for having pursued the initiative in a positive and professional way. The potential was highlighted for the Council and NHS Highland to see their heating bills come down, and families and businesses would also benefit from action being taken based on the report; and
- Members looked forward to the opportunity to attend more detailed briefings on individual projects; and
- information was sought, and provided, on whether there were opportunities for heat networks where there was existing heat available from industry. In that regard, reference was made to the distillery in Invergordon having excess heat which it would be willing to share.

The Committee **NOTED** progress to date.

8. Solar PV Non-Domestic Estate Update
Cunntas às Ùr mun Oighreachd Fotobholtaig Grèine Neo-dhachaigheil

There had been circulated Report No CCC/15/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- thanks were expressed to officers for the way in which they had responded to the challenge in terms of Solar PV, and for identifying firms to undertake the necessary work, the completion of which would lead to benefits in terms of carbon reduction, lower energy costs and income generation;
- information was sought, and provided, on a number of points including the proposed programme of maintenance to ensure availability of infrastructure was maintained; why there was such a large variation between secondary schools; whether there was scope to install solar panels on PFI (Private Finance Initiative) and PPP (Public-Private Partnership) schools; the position in respect of the sites where the operational status was “Isolated” as opposed to “Live”; the plans for the systems that had been removed; whether the latest technology was being utilised in terms of gathering generation capacity; and whether consideration was being given to innovative installations such as in car parks.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

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

9. Performance Monitoring Report – Q4 2024-25
Aithisg Sgrùdadh Coileanaidh – R4 2024–25

There had been circulated Report No CCC/16/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- an update on progress was requested in respect of the action to incorporate Just Transition principles into strategic planning and the Net Zero Strategy; and
- an update was sought, and provided, on progress with the delivery of Carbon Literacy Training, which was ragged Red and had been raised at previous meetings.

The Committee scrutinised and **NOTED** the Service’s performance information.

10. Delivery Plan Budget Monitoring & Progress Update Q4 2024-25
Sgrùdadh Buidseit & Cunntas Adhartais a’ Phlana Lìbhrigidh R4 2024–25

There had been circulated Report No CCC/17/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- information was sought, and provided, on what the issues were and how work was progressing in terms of embedding Net Zero in the Capital Programme and across all Council services; and
- with reference to the key risks set out in section 5.4 of the report, information was sought, and provided, as to how confident officers were that the revised end dates in respect of carbon budgeting and integrating Net Zero into financial decision-making frameworks would be met. In addition, it was commented that the restructuring of the Council would help foster cultural change and transformation.

The Committee scrutinised and **NOTED** progress to date as outlined in this report.

The meeting concluded at 4.10 pm.