

The Highland Council

Agenda Item	6ii
Report No	CCC/19/25

Committee: Climate Change

Date: 13 August 2025

Report Title: Net Zero Thematic Group Update – Waste

Report By: Assistant Chief Executive – Place

1 Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 The report provides an update on the work being progressed through the Waste Thematic Group.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to **consider** and **note** the progress of actions by the Waste Thematic Group.

3 Implications

- 3.1 **Resource** - Under current budgetary arrangements, the Council's Waste Service absorbs the full cost of collecting, disposing, and treating of waste generated by all Council services. This funding model does not help to incentivise behaviour change across services to reduce waste or improve recycling performance.

As previously reported to Members, funding awarded by the Scottish Government through the Recycling Improvement Fund has enabled significant enhancements to kerbside waste and recycling services across Highland. However, this funding did not extend to internal infrastructure within Council premises.

The paper outlines the staffing resource requirements associated with the various workstreams currently being led by the Waste Thematic Group. These workstreams span operational improvements, stakeholder engagement, and data monitoring, and will require coordinated input from multiple Council services to ensure successful delivery.

- 3.2 **Legal** - Since 2014, it has been a legal requirement for all organisations across Scotland to present paper, card, metals, plastic bottles and glass for recycling as set out in The Waste (Scotland) Regulations 2012.

The Circular Economy (Scotland) Act 2024 sets a framework to support Scotland's transition to a zero waste and circular economy. The circular economy is a sustainable system where waste is eliminated by keeping resources in use, by re-using, repairing and recycling creating economic, environmental and social benefits.

- 3.3 **Risk** - As the largest organisation and employer in the region, the Council is well placed to demonstrate best environmental practice managing waste, resources and recycling. Delivering measurable reductions in waste and improvements in recycling will require ongoing engagement and behaviour change across all Council services.

As outlined in the paper, early research indicates that the catering reusables trial at Kingussie may be one of the first of its kind in schools across Scotland. This initiative provides an opportunity for the Council to contribute to the development of more sustainable school catering practices and to share learning with other local authorities.

- 3.4 **Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)** – The effective management of waste is essential to the health and safety of all householders, staff and other service users.

- 3.5 **Gaelic** – There are no Gaelic implications arising from this report.

4 Impacts

- 4.1 In Highland, all policies, strategies or service changes are subject to an integrated screening for impact for Equalities, Poverty and Human Rights, Children's Rights and Wellbeing, Climate Change, Islands and Mainland Rural Communities, and Data Protection. Where identified as required, a full impact assessment will be undertaken.
- 4.2 Considering impacts is a core part of the decision-making process and needs to inform the decision-making process. When taking any decision, Members must give due regard to the findings of any assessment.
- 4.3 This is a monitoring and update report and therefore an impact assessment is not required.

5 Background

- 5.1 The Highland Council has approximately 300 premises where waste is generated, including offices, schools, care homes, leisure centres, depots, piers, harbours, cemeteries and storerooms. The amount and type of waste generated at each site varies dependent on the buildings purpose and use.

- 5.2 Waste from education premises accounts for the majority of the waste the Council produces internally, with food waste being a major component of waste from schools. Managing the waste from education premises is complex and there are many contributing factors which need to be considered including procurement, design of buildings, catering and school policies.
- 5.3 Current budgetary arrangements mean that Waste Services absorb the cost of waste collection and disposal services for the wheeled bin collections from all Council premises with no opportunity to recover the true cost of the service provided.
- 5.4 In 2012, recycling collections were introduced to the majority of the Council's premises. With the support of the then Sustainable Development Team, the Waste Services Team provided internal recycling containers throughout buildings and staff were informed of the changes through internal communication channels – desk side bins were also removed to help maximise recycling.
- 5.5 The Waste Services Team has rolled out a Highland-wide waste and recycling service change in phases since April 2024. Lochaber will be the final area to be switched over to the new twin stream recycling in October 2025. To improve the quality and quantity of the recyclable material collected at the kerbside from householders, businesses and organisations, paper and card are collected separately in blue bins and mixed plastic and metal containers are collected in green recycling bins.

6 Waste Audits

- 6.1 To date, there has been limited monitoring (due to lack of resource & undefined responsibilities) of how much waste is being generated by the organisation and how much of this waste is being recycled effectively.

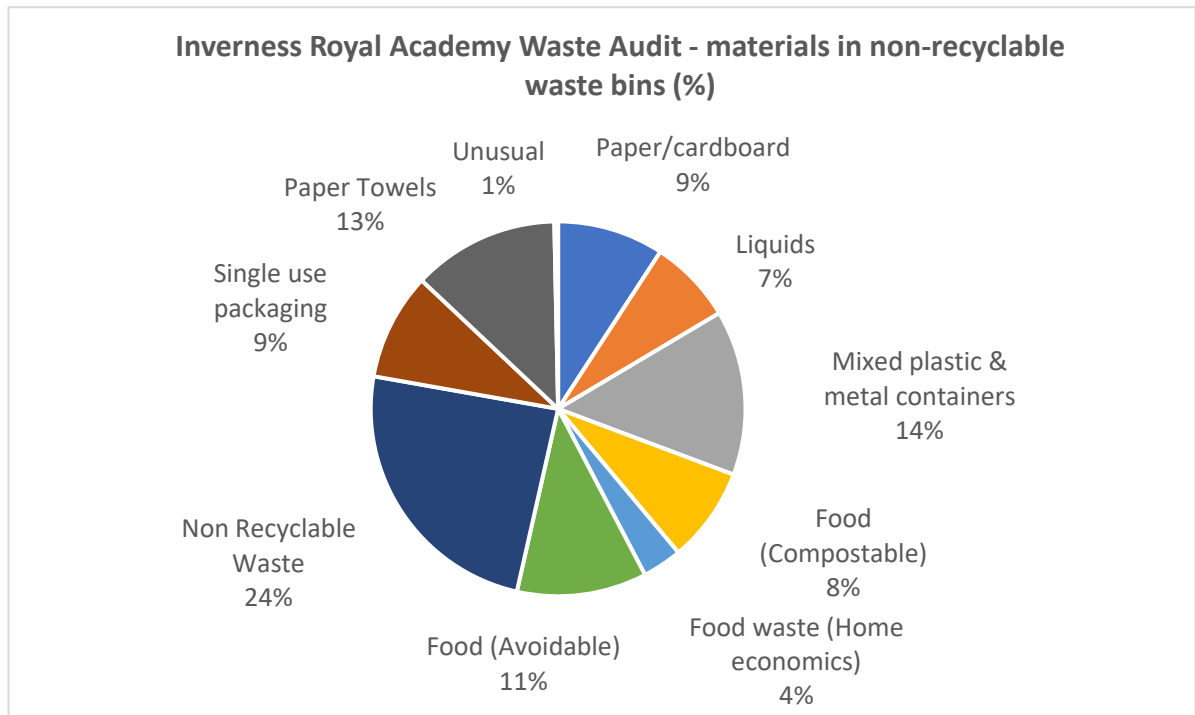
A project to establish a baseline for current waste generation and recycling rates from schools and large Council buildings is underway. Waste audits have been conducted at two secondary schools and Council Headquarters, Inverness. The results from the waste audits will be used to compare performance between schools across the region with similar pupil rolls to highlight best practice/innovation, improve waste management practices to increase recycling and reduce wastage.

6.2 Inverness Royal Academy

Inverness Royal Academy has approximately 1,300 pupils with a large number of pupils using external food outlets at lunchtime.

The Waste Audit, which was conducted in April 2025, involved sorting 12 x 1100 litre bins of non- recyclable waste (one week's worth of non-recyclable waste). The results are shown in Table 1.1 below.

Food accounted for 23% in the non-recyclable waste bin whilst mixed plastic and metal containers accounted for 14% and single use packaging from the canteen accounting for 9% of the waste found in non-recyclable bins. Estimated KG of non-recyclable waste per pupil per year is 13KG.



The school are working hard to recycle which is reflected in their current recycling capacity of 6 x 1100 litre bins for recycling and 3 x 140 l bins for food waste but there is limited recycling infrastructure in the canteen and high traffic areas to capture all the recycling. The Waste Team will work with the school management and pupils to maximise recycling rates by delivering workshops, engaging with all staff and trialling new recycling infrastructure located in the canteen, common room and playgrounds.

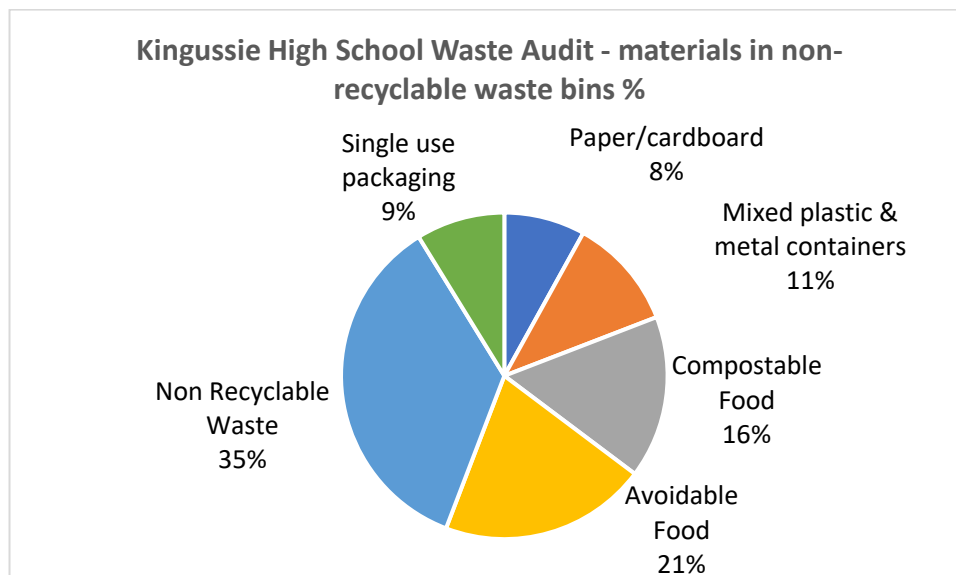
6.3 Kingussie High School

Kingussie High School has approximately 400 pupils with a large number of pupils using the canteen at lunchtime.

The Waste Audit, which was conducted in March 2025, involved sorting 5 x 1100 litre bins of non- recyclable waste (one week's worth of non-recyclable waste). The results are shown in Table 1.2 below.

Food waste accounted for 37% of the waste found in the non-recyclable bins. The Badenoch & Strathspey area is defined as 'rural' by the Scottish Government when specifying which Local Authority areas of Scotland are required to provide food waste collections. This means there is currently no statutory requirement for the Council to collect food separately from the school.

Single use packaging from the canteen accounted for 9% of the waste. Estimated KG of non-recyclable waste per pupil per year is 13KG which is comparable to Inverness Royal Academy and provides a baseline for improvement for secondary schools.



Good progress is being made with recycling 3 x 1100 litre bins of recycling per week at the school, however, as is the case in Inverness Royal Academy, there is no recycling infrastructure in the canteen, common areas or playgrounds.

6.4 **Kingussie Pilot**

A project team with representatives from the Waste Services Team; Catering, Cleaning, and Facilities Management (CCFM); Climate Change and Energy Team; and the school's management team are progressing a project to help the school reduce waste and carbon emissions whilst increasing recycling rates.

CCFM will trial serving food from the canteen in reusable lunch containers as an alternative to single use packaging. Research suggests that the trial of reusable lunch containers at the school is potentially a first of its kind within schools across Scotland.

The implementation of the trial will start in September 2025 at the school and will include the following:-

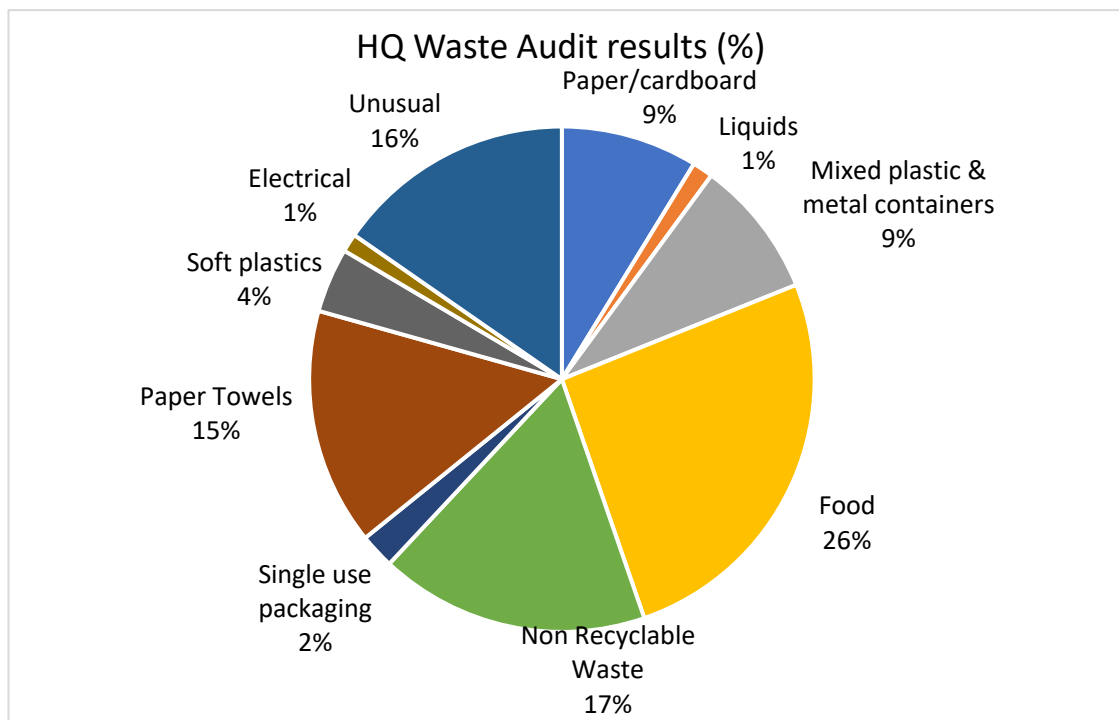
- new recycling infrastructure installed in the canteen, common rooms and playground area to maximise recycling;
- some menu items being served in reusable lunch containers from the canteen to reduce the amount of single use packaging;
- communicating the reasons and benefits of reducing waste, of the new recycling system and reusable lunch containers prior to start of the trial will be key to its success. The Waste Aware Team will deliver workshops and activity sessions to the pupils. They will also engage with teaching, catering and cleaning staff ahead of implementation; and
- monitoring the outputs from the trial including return rates for the reusable lunch containers, overall recycling rates, amount of single use packaging used, along with a further waste audit.

6.5 Highland Council, HQ, Inverness

Approximately 930 staff work from HQ which accounts for nearly 10% of the Council workforce.

The Waste Audit, which was conducted in April 2025, involved sorting 5 x 1100 litre bins of non- recyclable waste (one week's worth of non-recyclable waste). The results are shown in Table 1.3 below.

Current recycling capacity is 10 x 1100 Litre recycling bins; however, the waste audit identified paper/card and mixed plastic & metal containers were still being put into non-recyclable waste bins. Food waste accounted for 26% of the waste found in non-recyclable bins.



Waste Services Team, CCFM and the Climate Change and Energy team will prioritise a plan to improve internal processes and communications to achieve higher recycling rates from the building.

7 Next steps

7.1 ***Corporate waste strategy required for all Council premises***

A corporate approach is required to embed circular economy principles across the Council estate. This would deliver a reputational boost for the Council whilst also providing environmental and financial benefits.

7.2 Development of a plan which clearly defines how the Council will improve its waste management practices should include:-

- Ensuring all procurement is aligned with the [Joint Procurement Strategy](#) – Theme 4 - Climate Change, Net Zero & Circular Economy;
- Commitment to investment in recycling infrastructure;
- Defined roles and responsibilities;
- Lessons learnt from the Kingussie High School and Inverness Royal Academy recycling trials; and
- Staff engagement, communications and training

7.3 **Redistribution of Council Assets**

A cross-service team is currently developing an in-house portal to facilitate the redistribution of resources within the organisation. This includes items such as furniture, fixtures, fittings, school materials and office consumables. Storage and transport of assets remain key challenges. However, a dedicated storage solution has been established in Inverness to help address this issue.

In parallel, new processes are being designed to offer surplus assets, no longer required by the Council, to external organisations and charities. This initiative aims to reduce waste and prevent usable items from being sent for disposal.

7.4 **Members Catering**

Following the recess, a proposal will be presented to the Senior Leadership Group, outlining the key issues relating to food waste in relation to Members catering, and proposing recommendations aimed at reducing waste.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive - Place

Date: 14 July 2025

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Background Papers: None

Appendices: None