

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Climate Change Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Wednesday 13 August 2025 at 2.00 pm.

Present:

Ms S Atkin	Mr R Gale
Mr J Bruce	Dr M Gregson (remote)
Mrs I Campbell (remote)	Mr P Logue
Mr S Coghill (remote)	Ms M Ross (remote)
Ms S Fanet (Vice Chair)	Ms K Willis (Chair)
Mr J Grafton	

Non-Members also present:

Dr C Birt	Mr R MacKintosh
Mr R Cross	Mrs T Robertson
Ms M Hutchison (remote)	Mr R Stewart

In attendance:

Mr N Osborne, Climate Change and Energy Team Manager
Ms F Daschofsky, Net Zero Programme Manager
Mr R Macdonald, Energy Manager
Mr A McKinnie, Strategic Lead – Waste Strategy and Operations
Ms I Percy-Bell, Principal Waste Management Officer
Ms N Wallace, Service Lead – Environment and Sustainable Transport
Ms J Bromham, Project Manager
Mr A Puls, Environment Manager
Ms S Veitch, Senior Engineer
Ms C Weaver, Climate Change Co-ordinator
Ms T Ratnam, Project Manager (Energy)
Mr J Bennett, Climate Change Co-ordinator (remote)
Ms S James-Gaukroger, Climate Change Co-ordinator (remote)
Ms L Laing, Climate Change Co-ordinator (remote)
Ms M Maguire, Principal Planner (remote)
Mr A Morgan, Climate Change Co-ordinator (remote)
Ms D Morris, Climate Change Co-ordinator (remote)
Ms M Murray, Principal Committee Officer
Ms K Arnott, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Ms R Andersen, UHI Professor of Peatland Science and Trustee of the Flow Country Partnership (remote)

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 K Willis in the Chair

Prior to the commencement of formal business, the Chair expressed thanks to her predecessor, Ms S Fanet, who she looked forward to continuing to work with.

Business

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

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Mr A Graham.

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

There were no Declarations of Interest or Transparency Statements.

3. Recess Powers Cumhachdan Fosaidh

The Committee **NOTED** that the recess powers granted by the Council at its meeting on 26 June 2025 had not been exercised in relation to the business of the Climate Change Committee.

4. Good News Naidheachdan Matha

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

Scottish Energy Efficiency Awards

The Council had received notable recognition at the Scottish Energy Efficiency Awards held in June. It had been named Regional Council or Local Authority Body of the Year and had also received a “highly commended” award in the category of Regional Housing Association or Landlord of the Year. The awards reflected the Climate Change and Energy Team’s commitment to delivering energy efficiency improvements across Highland and the strategic approach adopted by the team, which had resulted in securing over £15m in external funding for 2024/25.

D-C Project

Since securing £9.2m in private sector funding in January 2025, the Council had delivered approximately £5m worth of energy efficiency improvements across its housing stock. A total of 266 properties had been upgraded to date, demonstrating the swift and large-scale roll-out of the programme. These improvements would reduce carbon emissions, improve thermal comfort and lower energy bills for tenants.

School Heating Systems

An assessment of the status of school heating systems had been undertaken at the start of the summer holidays. It had been determined that a number of heating systems remained in operation despite the presence of the Council’s Heating Policy. The Climate Change and Energy Team, in conjunction with the Property Service, had undertaken an exercise to switch these heating systems off, which had been conservatively calculated to achieve an annual saving of £48k.

Workforce for the Future – paid placement pilot

As part of a pilot initiative under the Council's Workforce for the Future Portfolio, the Climate Change and Energy Team had hosted a four-week paid placement for a school pupil aged 16 or over. The placement participant had engaged with various teams across the Council to gain insight into the work being progressed towards achieving Net Zero. Their involvement had built on earlier work when they had volunteered to support the Waste Team in conducting a waste audit at their school, Inverness Royal Academy. Their early involvement in the audit had led to them contributing to discussions around the implementation of a pilot project aimed at reducing waste and increasing recycling rates in schools. Further information on the waste audit and pilot project had been detailed in the report in respect of item 6ii on today's agenda. The pilot project had been picked up in the national press and as far afield as Australia.

Graduate interns

The Climate Change and Energy Team was currently hosting two interns as part of a two-month placement running to the end of August 2025. The interns were contributing to key areas of work including site identification for future renewable energy projects; development of a business case for the Highland Hydrogen Strategy; and exploration of opportunities to embed circular economy practices across Council operations.

The Committee **NOTED** the good news.

5. World Heritage Site Presentation Taisbeanadh Làrach Dualchas na Cruinne

Roxane Andersen, UHI Professor of Peatland Science and Trustee of the Flow Country Partnership, delivered a presentation about the Flow Country, the value and importance of peatlands in addressing the climate and ecological emergencies, inscription of the Flow Country as a World Heritage site and the Partnership's ambitions for the future. The Flow Country was the first peatland World Heritage Site, and Scotland's first World Heritage Site inscribed purely for natural criteria.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- thanks were expressed for the presentation, and congratulations were extended to all those involved in achieving World Heritage status for the Flow Country;
- it was welcomed that the presentation had highlighted that the protection afforded by World Heritage status brought with it potential opportunities;
- information was sought, and provided, on a number of points including whether World Heritage status was something that could be considered for other parts of Highland where there was land with high potential for carbon sequestration, or were there other ways of protecting such land; the potential to extend the World Heritage site in the future as more land was restored through the Peatland Restoration Programme; the impact of wind farms, or proposed wind farm sites, in close proximity to the Flow Country; a typical Flow Country project; the implications of World Heritage status in terms of the economic and social development of the area, particularly the potential for "slow tourism" allied to restoration work; whether there was anything that could be done, such as a moratorium on development near

the site boundary, to preserve the opportunity to extend the World Heritage site in the future; and the role of peatland restoration and land management practices such as muirburn in mitigating the extent and intensity of the increasing number of wildfires in Scotland. In relation to the latter, the need for education and communication was emphasised as most wildfires in Scotland were caused, accidentally or otherwise, by human activity; and

- it was questioned whether the protection World Heritage status afforded might impact on the enthusiasm of neighbouring landowners to join and extend the World Heritage site if it precluded them from the potentially lucrative opportunities associated with renewable energy.

The Committee otherwise **NOTED** the presentation.

6. Net Zero Programme Prògram Neoni Luim

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

There had been circulated Report No CCC/18/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In introducing the report, it was highlighted that, since the report had been written, progress had been made in respect of the key milestones set out in section 5.3. In respect of the milestone “Shared Procurement Service to evaluate and propose alternative carbon budgeting tools”, as indicated in the report, the Shared Procurement Service had requested further information from Oxygen to assess the robustness of the data provided. That information had now been received enabling the next stages of work to proceed. During August and September, the data would be mapped against service budgets using analysis and data skills with a view to producing a high-level carbon view by service. In Quarter 4 the analysis would be presented to services, and in Quarter 1 2026/27 the first version of a multi-stage multi-year programme would be developed to support collaboration with suppliers and services. This would prioritise actions based on analysis to support emissions reduction.

In respect of the milestone “Net zero embedded in Capital Programme”, delays in identifying projects for inclusion in the pilot, which had been scheduled to commence in July, had resulted in slippage. Three projects had now been identified, and the Climate Change and Energy Team was working closely with the Property Service to define timelines for the availability of key information required to run the pilot.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- information was sought, and provided, on the work and shared learning taking place in terms of developing a methodology for calculating Scope 3 emissions; whether any Kingussie Flood Protection works were scheduled to take place in 2025/26; the impact on the Net Zero Programme of the slippage in respect of the milestone “Shared Procurement Service to evaluate and propose alternative carbon budgeting tools”, and whether the matter was still considered to be a potential risk; and whether a mapping exercise had been carried out to identify areas along the River Ness that were at risk of flooding;

- in relation to communications, it was necessary to make the Net Zero agenda more real to people in their day-to-day life – for example, by emphasising the potential savings and income associated with Solar PV;
- officers were commended for their efforts, particularly in securing significant sums of external funding;
- in response to a question, it was explained that the Scottish Government was not considering nuclear energy as an option, and it was therefore not something the Council was in a position to explore; and
- with reference to the Minutes of the previous meeting of the Committee, the Chair confirmed she and officers would seek to ensure an update on the Food in Schools project could be provided at the next meeting. Steps would also be taken to progress the proposed workshop on Members' travel.

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 Cunntas às Ùr mu Bhuidheann Chuspaireil Neoni Luim – Sgudal

There had been circulated Report No CCC/19/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the work being undertaken to reduce waste and increase recycling rates in schools was welcomed. However, many children left school at lunchtime to visit local shops where they bought items such as takeaway food, packets of crisps and cans or bottles of sugary drinks, thereby still producing waste that the Council would have to deal with. In addition to the waste aspect, the detrimental impacts of such a diet on health and learning were emphasised, and it was commented that a change in food culture was needed. It was suggested that a strategy was required to keep children in school at lunchtime, and it was queried whether any discussions in that regard were taking place with relevant services such as Education and Health and Social Care. Officers undertook to feed Members' comments back to the Food in Schools project team;
- information was sought, and provided, on what the 16% of waste that was classed as "Unusual" in the Council Headquarters Waste Audit results consisted of; how much of the recyclable waste collected was of sufficient cleanliness/quality to actually be recycled; and how improved waste management practices would be rolled out to other secondary schools;
- a request was made that recyclable and non-recyclable waste bins in Council buildings be clearly labelled so people knew which type of waste each bin was for. It was added that it would be helpful to provide bins that corresponded with the colours of the waste and recycling bins people used at home, as well as education on food waste;

- the proposed trial of reusable lunch containers at Kingussie High School was welcomed, and it was hoped it would be successful and could be rolled out more widely;
- the initiative to offer surplus Council assets to external organisations and charities was commended, and further information was sought, and provided, on the process in that regard;
- the need for food waste collections in rural areas was highlighted. However, the associated challenges and costs were recognised;
- whilst support was expressed for the earlier suggestion that children should remain in school at lunchtime, it was emphasised that many schools, Culloden Academy being cited as an example, did not have enough space, and it was necessary to consider how to create social spaces in schools to encourage children to stay there. The Climate Change and Energy Team Manager confirmed this would be fed back to colleagues in Education and Property;
- improving recycling rates at Council Headquarters should be able to be achieved quickly by way of education/communication for staff and Members;
- the Chair commented that the discussion had highlighted the need for collaboration across various service areas including education, health, waste, property, catering and cleaning, and the cross-service aspect might be an opportunity to secure funding to support the rollout of the pilot projects. She looked forward to further updates at future meetings of the Committee.

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

iii. Net Zero Thematic Group Update – Planning, Land Use and Environment Cunntas às Ùr mu Bhuidheann Chuspaireil Neoni Luim – Planadh, Cleachdadh Fearainn agus Àrainneachd

There had been circulated Report No CCC/20/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Members welcomed the report, with particular reference to the partnership work taking place, the appointment of a new Senior Arboricultural Officer, the preparation of a revised Forest and Woodland Strategy, the greening of the Council Estate, urban tree planting, and the identification of local nature conservation sites. In relation to the latter, mention was made of Merkinch, Aultnaskiach, Culduthel and Inverness City Centre, which could see a lot more woodland of varying size and diversity;
- information was sought, and provided, on the Nature Restoration Fund 2025/26, including why this was being led by the Council rather than NatureScot; the current position regarding the recruitment of a new Biodiversity Officer; and, in relation to biodiversity, how much account was taken of the changing climate and its impact in terms of the spread of invasive species and the decline of native species;
- in relation to coastal adaptation/flood management in the Golspie area, a significant amount of money had been spent on plans and designs but, to date, nothing had been done. The need to expedite matters was emphasised, and information was provided on the current position. It was queried whether it would be possible to have a paper from the Flood Risk Management Team highlighting all the action taking place in terms of coastal adaptation, and officers confirmed that could be taken forward;

- Herriott-Watt University had published a paper about how natural marine habitats such as kelp forests and seagrass beds could play a vital role in preventing flooding and coastal erosion, and it was suggested it was necessary to follow the research, and the potential associated opportunities, very closely; and
- the Seaboard Villages were impacted by storm surges and waves, and the community were keen to know when the rock armour would be addressed. It was recognised that hard engineering was expensive, and it was suggested there might be alternative soft engineering solutions. Officers confirmed that the Seaboard Villages appeared in some of the flood studies undertaken and would be looked at in due course.

The Committee **NOTED** the progress of actions by the Planning, Land Use and Environment Thematic Group.

7. Climate Change Adaptation Strategy

Ro-innleachd Freagarrachaidh Chomhairle na Gàidhealtachd

There had been circulated Report No CCC/21/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- information was sought, and provided, on how planning laws could be changed to take climate change into account; and the predicted increase in sea levels by 2050;
- a local plan for addressing coastal erosion in Saltburn and Linear Park, Invergordon, would be welcomed;
- reference was made to flooding caused by heavy rain and flash floods, and the need for integration between the relevant Council teams to ensure roads and pavements were free of silt and drains were adequately clean to cope with such events was emphasised;
- concern was expressed regarding the increase in extreme weather events. Particular reference was made to increased wind speeds, which had a significant impact on how people lived their lives, and the opportunity to mitigate the impact by additional tree planting which, in addition to providing shelter, would capture carbon;
- tidal energy was predictable, and a plea was made that it be investigated with more commitment as the technology had evolved. Officers confirmed it could be looked at, possibly in partnership with the European Marine Energy Centre, Marine Scotland and Crown Estate Scotland. However, financial viability was a concern. It was added that wave energy was another possibility in Scotland;
- it was queried whether specific examples were available that Members could use to demonstrate to communities the importance of adaptation;
- the statement in the report that “for every £1 spent on protecting communities from flooding, around £9 in property damages and wider impacts can be avoided” demonstrated the importance of coastal defences and well-maintained land drains; and
- it was necessary to accept that, if the UK was Net Zero and the rest of the world was not, climate change would continue, and the need for a holistic approach to how to mitigate the various impacts was emphasised;

The Committee:-

- * i. **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to the Council the approval of the Climate Change Adaptation Strategy set out at Appendix 2 of the report; and
- ii. **NOTED** that the Climate Change Adaptation Action Plan would be brought to the Climate Change Committee for consideration prior to full Council approval and publication.

8. **Electric Vehicle (EV) Infrastructure Project Update** **Lorgair-slighe Bun-structair Charbadan-dealain – Ath Cheumannan**

There had been circulated Report No CCC/22/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the expansion of the EV network as electric vehicles increased in popularity was welcomed. However, it was suggested there was a need to review the charging tariff structure to bring it in line with other local authorities in Scotland, costs in Highland being approximately double those in some other areas. It was added that many charities used electric vehicles, and it was costly for them to do so in Highland. In response, Members were advised there was a procedure for setting tariffs which was carried out through the project's Steering Committee. An agreement had been reached on a standard tariff across the four participating local authorities, which was a commercial rate to ensure the sustainability of the network without government subsidies;
- concern was expressed regarding the reliability of charging units and the associated extensive repair times, as well as the reliability of the network as a whole. Assurances having been sought regarding the migration of the charging network, it was confirmed that the model of charger in Highland was compatible with the EasyGo platform. A pilot test was scheduled to take place in September, prior to rolling out migration to the rest of the network. In addition, strict Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) had been put in place which included a 99% reliability rate. Members added that it would be helpful to review performance against the KPIs in the future;
- information was sought, and provided, as to what EasyGo's commitment to the promotion of affordable EV access in rural and island communities meant in practice; and
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that ChargePlace Scotland (CPS) cards would not be valid after 2025. Work was underway in terms of distributing EasyGo tariff ID cards to drivers. However, it could not yet be confirmed whether the card would work throughout Scotland.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the current status of the EV Infrastructure project; and
- ii. scrutinised and **NOTED** the outcome of the Integrated Impact Assessment.

9. **Performance Monitoring Report - Q1 2025-26** **Aithisg Sgrùdadh Coileanaidh – R1 2025–26**

There had been circulated Report No CCC/23/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

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

**10. Delivery Plan Budget Monitoring and Progress Update Q1 2025-26 – Net Zero, Energy Investment and Innovation Portfolio – Net Zero Programme
Aithris Plana Lìbhrigidh – Cunntas às Ùr mu Adhartas R1 2025–26**

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

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

The meeting concluded at 4.35 pm.