

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Climate Change Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Wednesday 5 November 2025 at 2.00 pm.

Present:

Ms S Atkin

Dr C Birt

Mr J Bruce (Remote)

Mr S Coghill (Remote)

Mr J Grafton

Mr A Graham

Dr M Gregson (Remote)

Ms M Ross (Vice Chair)

Ms K Willis (Chair)

Non-Members also present:

Mr C Ballance (Remote)

Ms C Gillies (Remote)

Mr R MacKintosh (Remote)

Mrs T Robertson (Remote)

In attendance:

Mr P Reid, Chief Officer – Facilities and Fleet Management

Mr N Osborne, Climate Change and Energy Team Manager

Ms F Daschofsky, Project Manager

Mr R Macdonald, Energy Manager

Mr G Ralph, Repairs Manager

Ms I MacMillan, Programme Manager

Ms R Burbaite, Project Manager

Mr A Morgan, Climate Change Co-ordinator

Mr J Bennett, Climate Change Co-ordinator

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 K Willis in the Chair

Prior to the commencement of formal business, the Chair congratulated Ms M Ross on her appointment as Vice Chair of the Committee, and expressed thanks to the outgoing former Vice Chair, Ms S Fanet.

Business

1. Calling of the Roll and Apologies for Absence

Gairm a' Chlàir agus Leisgeulan

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr B Boyd, Mrs I Campbell, Mr P Logue 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 Committee **NOTED** the good news as circulated.

4. 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/25/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In introducing the report, an update was provided on two of the milestones referred to in section 5.2 of the report, specifically, the development of carbon budgeting tools and the trial of lifecycle investment tools, which were key to embedding Net Zero into the Capital Programme. Onboarding with one provider to trial their whole life carbon assessment platform had been successfully completed on 30 October, and the carbon budgeting pilot had been extended and expanded to model long-term carbon impacts. This would include inputting data for projects within the Capital Programme trial.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- it was highlighted that the longer-term rent strategy referred to in Appendix 1 of the report would be the subject of consultation with tenants, the outcome of which would inform the decision on the rent strategy at the Housing and Property Committee in January 2026, and that the level of investment in energy efficiency measures would be dependent on the level of rental income;
- information was sought, and provided, as to whether the Key Performance Indicators referred to in section 5.2 of the report would be reported to Strategic Committees; and the anticipated carbon budget setting process. It was confirmed that further updates would be provided as carbon budgeting work progressed;
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that future reporting on Scope 3 emissions would include the purchasing of the food by the Council. Members commented that, worldwide, food production was the second biggest cause of emissions after energy production, and it might be the leading cause in Scotland given energy production in Scotland was now largely carbon-free;
- the authority had a responsibility to ensure its ambitious Net Zero targets were being met, and the need for culture change was emphasised;
- a report to the August meeting of the Committee had referred to a cross-service pilot project aiming to reduce waste in schools, and an update was sought in that regard and on the Food in Schools project. The Climate Change and Energy Team Manager explained that a report on the Food in Schools project had not been available at the time of publication of the Committee papers. The Chair referred to previous requests for a report and emphasised that the Climate Change Committee's remit was oversight of the Council's Net Zero transition. The Food in Schools project, which cut across many services, had a key role in that regard, and it was important that a report was brought to the Committee so Members could see how Net Zero was being embedded in the project;
- Members commended the retrofit works to housing stock in Caol and Balintore, and information was sought, and provided, as to when such works were likely to be rolled out more widely;

- in relation to recycling infrastructure improvements across the Council estate, it was saddening that challenges remained due to the lack of funding to support internal infrastructure for recycling within Council premises; and
- much of the slippage referred to in section 5.2 of the report appeared to relate to work that was required across services and, given the Council had undergone a restructure, it was queried whether the current Net Zero thematic groups needed reevaluating. It was added that many of the reports coming to the Committee were from the Place service cluster, and the Committee did not have oversight of how Net Zero was being embedded in activity in the Corporate and People clusters, and it was questioned whether there was a risk of siloed working rather than a whole-Council approach. In response, it was confirmed that all three service clusters had a key role to play in delivering on the Council's Net Zero Strategy, and the governance model needed to reflect that. Work was currently underway in terms of evaluating the governance model, and it was suggested a first step would be to review the membership and Terms of Reference of the Net Zero Strategy Group. It was highlighted that changes might also be required as a result of a report on Climate Change and Sustainability that was being presented to the next meeting of the Audit Committee. The Chair looked forward to further updates as work progressed.

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 Interim Update – Built Estate and Energy**
Cunntas às Ùr mu Bhuidheann Chuspaireil Neoni Luim - Oighreachd Thogte agus Lùth

There had been circulated Report No CCC/26/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- information was sought, and provided, on the cost implications in respect of the Market-wide Half-Hourly Settle programme;
- congratulations were expressed to officers in respect of the school heating savings that had been achieved, and the associated press coverage which had resonated with the public; and
- with reference to discussions regarding the Highland Investment Plan (HIP) at the recent Full Council meeting, clarification was sought, and provided, as to whether the Passivhaus standard was an energy efficiency standard or a Net Zero standard. In response to a question, it was confirmed that the Climate Change and Energy Team was currently on the project team for two out of approximately 18 to 20 HIP projects, and there had been partial engagement in respect of another two to three projects. Further discussion ensued, during which the need to embed Net Zero across all Council activities was reiterated, and the importance of the CCET being involved in a greater number of projects was emphasised. Officers added that there was a clear need to consider sustainability from the start of a project, rather than building it in at a later stage, and work was underway in that regard.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the contents of the report; and
- ii. that a detailed update on the work being progressed through the Built Estate and Energy Thematic Group would be presented to the Climate Change Committee in January 2026.

iii. Net Zero Thematic Group Update – Social Housing and Housing Revenue Account
Cunntas às Ùr mu Bhuidheann Chuspaireil Neoni Luim - Taigheadas
Sòisealta agus Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais

There had been circulated Report No CCC/27/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- thanks were expressed to officers for the retrofit works carried out in Caol and Balintore, which had transformed the properties and led to a significant reduction in electricity bills. Local Members welcomed the community benefits in respect of the Balintore project, which included fencing around the playpark, solar panels at the Scout Hut and more energy efficient lighting at the Seaboard Centre;
- information was sought, and provided, on the external wall insulation used in retrofit works, including what it was made of, how much it cost, and whether it was equally effective on all types and ages of houses; whether the Council was working with partners such as Cairn Housing Association and Albyn Housing Society regarding collaborative energy efficiency works; and, in relation to the Blar Mhor development in Fort William, whether the NHS Highland decision not to proceed with a heating network had any implications in terms of the Council's Net Zero plans, and whether there was any scope to implement a heating network retrospectively; and
- the significant amount of external funding that had been leveraged in respect of the Energy Efficient Homes projects was commended, and it was hoped this would demonstrate to other Council services the funding avenues that could be opened and what could be achieved if Net Zero was incorporated into projects at an early stage.

The Committee **NOTED** the progress of actions by the Social Housing and Housing Revenue Account Thematic Group.

5. Annual Report under the Public Bodies Climate Change Duties 2024/25
Aithisg Bhliadhnail fo Dhleastanasan Atharrachadh Gnàth-shìde nam
Buidhnean Poblach 2024/25

There had been circulated Report No CCC/28/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- information was sought, and provided, as to whether the Council's in-house bus service had had an impact on the emissions figures; and whether the revised annual emissions reduction figure of 13.8% was considered to be achievable;

- the use of hydrotreated vegetable oil as fuel was a good news story that would resonate with the public;
- views were sought regarding the extension of the landfill ban deadline;
- reducing food waste in schools would lead to considerable emissions reductions. In that regard, the need to work collaboratively across services and with partners such as NHS Highland was emphasised, as was the need to educate children and parents. In addition, reference was made to the findings of the recent EAT-Lancet Commission report on sustainability within the food system, and it was suggested it was necessary to think carefully about which guidelines to follow. The Chair added that the Council would be working with NHS Highland and others in the near future to develop the Good Food Nation Plan for Highland.

The Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** the Highland Council's draft Public Bodies Climate Change Duties Report 2024/25 as set out in Appendix 1 of the report;
- ii. **NOTED** progress against the organisation's emissions reductions targets; and
- * iii. **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to the Council that the current carbon reduction targets be maintained until the evaluation of the carbon budgeting and analysis tools was complete. This would ensure future targets were informed by robust, data-led evidence, accurately reflecting the full impact of operational activities and avoiding the risk of setting unrealistic targets that could undermine engagement and progress toward Net Zero.

6. Climate Change Impact Assessment Update Cunntas às Ùr mu Bhuaidh Atharrachadh Gnàth-shìde

There had been circulated Report No CCC/29/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- in response to a request, it was confirmed that officers could look at providing examples or case studies of proposals that had not progressed to a Full Impact Assessment that perhaps should have;
- some proposals would have more climate implications than others, and information was sought, and provided, as to whether it was possible to take a scale-based approach to impact assessments; and
- information was sought, and provided, as to how the impact assessment process might identify potential strategic or upstream impacts as opposed to downstream impacts; the level of awareness amongst contractors and those undertaking the day-to-day management of projects of climate resilience targets and the need for mitigation; and, with reference to the resource implications at section 3.1 of the report, what resources would be needed to implement the recommendations in the report, and was the reason many proposals were not progressing to Full Impact Assessments related to staffing.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the contents of the report; and
- * ii. **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to the Council the approval of the project brief template in Appendix 2 of the report for inclusion in the Council's Net Zero Programme.

7. Delivery Plan Budget Monitoring and Progress Update Q2 2025/26 – Net Zero, Energy Investment and Innovation Portfolio - Net Zero Delivery - Heat Networks
Sgrùdadh Buidseit agus Cunntas Adhartais Plana Libhrigidh R2 2025/26 – Neoni Lom, Tasgadh Lùtha agus Cùram-roinne Ùr-ghnàthachaidh – Lìbhrigeadh Neoni Luim – Lìonraidhean Teasa

There had been circulated Report No CCC/30/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

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

8. Energy Benchmarking of Non-Domestic Property Estate
A' Dèanamh Comharrachadh-measaidh air Lùth ann an Oighreachd Seilbhe Neo-Dhachaigheil

There had been circulated Report No CCC/31/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the Council met the energy costs for High Life Highland properties, which it was suggested might not encourage efforts to reduce consumption;
- information was sought, and provided, on the types of properties included within the “Miscellaneous” category;
- properties such as schools, libraries, museums and art galleries appeared to be becoming much more efficient in terms of their electricity use, which was commended, and information was sought, and provided, as to what the significant reductions could be attributed to; and
- with reference to the heat performance table at section 6.5 of the report, clarification was sought regarding the 282% increase in respect of Piers/Harbours. The Energy Manager explained it was possible it was a data issue, and he undertook to revert to the Chair in that regard.

The Committee **NOTED** the refreshed Energy Benchmarking Tool, which now incorporated 2024/25 data.

9. Performance Monitoring Report - Q2 2025/26
Aithisg Sgrùdadh Coileanaidh - R2 2025/26

There had been circulated Report No CCC/32/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

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

The meeting concluded at 3.25 pm.