

Agenda Item	6
Report No	CCC/08/26

The Highland Council

Committee: Climate Change

Date: 20 May 2026

Report Title: Highland Climate Change Risk and Opportunity Assessment

Report By: Assistant Chief Executive - Place

1 Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 This report introduces the Highland Climate Change Risk and Opportunity Assessment (HCCROA) and summarises the outcomes of the Council's internal cross-service engagement, undertaken to apply the HCCROA from a Council service delivery perspective. It highlights areas of variance between the regional assessment and the Council's scoring and sets out how this evidence provides the foundation for the next stage of the Council's climate adaptation work.

2 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:-

- i. **Note** the contents of this report and its associated appendices; and
- ii. **Agree** to recommend to the Council that the Highland Climate Change Risk and Opportunity Assessment and the Council's internal cross-service engagement should be used to inform the next stage of the Council's climate adaptation work, including the development of the Corporate Climate Risk and Opportunity Assessment and the Climate Change Adaptation Action Plan.

3 Implications

3.1 **Resource** - Resource has been identified within the Climate Change and Energy Team to provide strategic coordination and leadership for the Council's climate change adaptation work. This includes supporting further engagement with Council services and translating the findings of the HCCROA into a Council-wide Climate Change Adaptation Action Plan.

In line with the strategic approach to climate change, energy and community resilience agreed by Council in March 2026, delivery of climate adaptation is a Council-wide undertaking. It will require coordinated input across services, with climate risk and resilience considerations increasingly embedded within service planning, asset management, capital investment and infrastructure programmes, rather than delivered through standalone activity.

The HCCROA provides a robust, evidence-based foundation to support this approach, enabling the Council to better understand how climate risks may translate into impacts on services, assets and financial exposure, and to prioritise action accordingly. Failure to prepare for and adapt to climate change would increase the risk of service disruption, unplanned expenditure and growing pressure on Council resources over time.

- 3.2 **Legal** - The Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 places a legal duty on the Council to adapt to the impacts of climate change. Climate-related risks also have implications for the delivery of the Council's wider statutory duties, including those relating to public health, resilience, equality and the protection of vulnerable people.
- 3.3 **Risk** – Climate change presents increasing strategic, operational and financial risks for the Council. Failure to adequately prepare for and adapt to these risks may result in service disruption, unplanned expenditure, impacts on vulnerable communities and reputational risk.
- 3.4 **Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)** – While this report does not in itself give rise to immediate operational Health and Safety actions, the HCCROA identifies a range of current and emerging health-related risks associated with climate change. These include risks to vulnerable adults and children, impacts on mental health and wellbeing, overheating in care settings, and disruption to health, social care and community services during extreme weather events.

These risks will be considered further through the development of the Council's Climate Change Adaptation Action Plan, including how climate-related health risks can be addressed through service planning, asset management and community resilience measures.

- 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 an information update report with no decision-making involved and therefore an impact assessment is not required. Any future proposals arising from the findings of the HCCROA, including the Corporate Climate Risk and Opportunity Assessment and the Council's Climate Change Adaptation Action Plan, will be subject to appropriate impact assessment at the relevant stage.

5 Background Information

5.1 In September 2024, Highland Adapts published the region's first [economic assessment](#) of climate change impacts, including sector-specific reports on energy, food and drink, and forestry and timber. Building on this work, the second phase of the Highland Climate Change Risk and Opportunity Assessment (HCCROA) expanded the scope to consider 50 climate-related risks and opportunities across five themes:-

- Built Environment;
- Health & Wellbeing;
- Infrastructure;
- Community & Economy; and
- Land, Nature & Food

The HCCROA provides a regional overview of climate risks and opportunities from the present day to the 2080s. It brings together scientific data, economic analysis, regional expertise, and lived experience to establish a shared understanding of where climate change is already having an impact, where risks are expected to increase, and where timely action can positively influence future outcomes.

The purpose of the HCCROA is to establish a robust, shared evidence base on the nature, scale and urgency of climate-related risks and opportunities affecting the Highlands, to support regional and local understanding and future decision-making.

5.2 With funding from the Scottish Government, Highland Adapts led the development of the HCCROA, supported by partner organisations and regional stakeholders. A region-wide workshop was held in December 2025 involving public, private and community stakeholders, utilising a decision-making framework to consider climate change risks and opportunities affecting the Highlands.

5.3 The HCCROA was published in March 2026 and formally launched at an in-person event on Wednesday 4 March 2026, attended by Members of the Climate Change Committee. The assessment is available online at:- <https://highlandadapts.scot/hccroa/>

5.4 On 13 August 2025, the Council's Climate Change Adaptation Strategy paper was presented to the Climate Change Committee and subsequently approved by Full Council on 18 September 2025. A key commitment within the Strategy was to identify and prioritise climate-related risks and opportunities across Council operations through the development of a Corporate Climate Risk and Opportunity Assessment.

5.5 As a partner organisation and Board Member of Highland Adapts, the Council aligned its methodology and approach with the HCCROA to ensure consistency and continuity when assessing climate-related risks and opportunities across the Highlands.

- 5.6 Given the wide-ranging and cross-service nature of climate risks, a programme of bespoke workshops has been undertaken with Council services since January 2026. The purpose of this internal engagement has been to enable Council services to consider how climate-related risks and opportunities identified through the HCCROA affect their own service delivery, responsibilities and operational resilience, ensuring the Council's assessment reflects the practical realities of how services are delivered, using the HCCROA as the shared baseline. To date, 35 workshops involving 75 members of staff have been delivered, and the results of this work are included within **Appendix 2**.
- 5.7 The findings of the Highland Climate Change Risk and Opportunity Assessment provide a detailed, evidence-based foundation to support delivery of the Council's Climate Change Adaptation Strategy, approved by Council in September 2025, and the wider strategic approach to climate change, energy and community resilience agreed by Council in March 2026. The March 2026 Strategic Paper identified the Highland Climate Change Risk and Opportunity Assessment as a key evidence base for climate adaptation and resilience planning across Council services and investment programmes.

6 Summary of HCCROA Results and Council Variances

- 6.1 **Appendix 1** presents the results from the Highland Adapts regional workshop held in December 2025, while **Appendix 2** presents the results from the Council's cross-service workshops held to date.
- 6.2 Each risk and opportunity in the HCCROA has been scored in terms of its current and future level of risk, urgency, and whether it is considered a priority for regional collaboration.
- 6.3 The variances between the Highland Adapts regional scoring and the Council's internal scoring are set out within **Appendix 3**. The most notable differences relate to the following risks and opportunities:-
- B1 Risks to buildings from heat and fire
 - B6 Risks to facilities and outdoor spaces delivering public services, excluding health and social care
 - E2 Risks to physical assets of Highland businesses
 - E4 Risks to productivity and availability of labour
 - E7 Opportunities for Highland businesses
 - E8 Opportunities for household finances
 - I8 Risks to digital and communication systems

- 6.3 Highland Council scoring reflects the Council’s operational responsibilities, statutory duties and direct exposure through its assets, infrastructure and service delivery, whereas Highland Adapts scoring reflects a broader regional perspective across multiple sectors and partners.

As a result, differences in scoring are expected and do not indicate inconsistency or weakness in the assessment. Rather, they provide useful insight into where climate-related risks and opportunities have particular significance for Council operations compared to the wider regional context.

7 Next Steps

- 7.1 The Highland Climate Change Risk and Opportunity Assessment represents a significant step towards a corporate understanding of climate-related risks and opportunities affecting the Council. At the time of preparing this report, engagement with key Council services is ongoing. Accordingly, further Council-specific work is required to ensure that all relevant service areas are fully reflected within a Corporate Climate Risk and Opportunity Assessment.

In line with the Council’s Climate Change Adaptation Strategy and the strategic approach to climate change, energy and community resilience agreed by Council in March 2026, the HCCROA will support the development of a coherent, Council-wide Climate Change Adaptation Action Plan and is intended to inform prioritisation and investment decisions.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive - Place

Date: 20 April 2026

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Background Papers: Climate Change, Energy & Community Resilience [Report](#)

Appendices: Appendix 1 – HCCROA Highland Adapts scores
Appendix 2 – HCCROA Highland Council average scores
Appendix 3 – HCCROA Variances

Appendix 1 - Highland Adapts Scores

		Highland Adapts - final scores			
Number	Title	Current level of risk (2025)	Future level of risk (2050s/2080s)	Urgency	Priority for regional collaboration?
B1	Risks to buildings from heat and fire	Medium	Medium	Yes	Yes
B2	Risks to buildings from flooding	High	High	Yes	Yes
B3	Risks to buildings from coastal change	Medium	High	Yes	Yes
B4	Risks to buildings from high wind, rain penetration, storms, freeze thaw, subsidence, damp	High	High	Yes	Yes
B5	Risks to cultural heritage built environment	Medium	High	Yes	Yes
B6	Risks to facilities and outdoor spaces delivering public services, excluding health and social care	Medium	High	Yes	Yes
E1	Risks to Highland economic performance and stability	High	High	Yes	Yes
E2	Risks to physical assets of Highland businesses	High	High	Yes	Yes
E3	Risks to Highland supply chains and resource inputs	High	High	Yes	Yes
E4	Risks to productivity and availability of labour	Medium	Medium	No	No
E5	Risks to public finances	High	High	Yes	Yes
E6	Risks to household finances	High	High	Yes	Yes
E7	Opportunities for Highland businesses	Medium	Medium	No	No
E8	Opportunities for household finances	Low	Medium	No	No
E9	Risks and opportunities for population movement	Medium	High	Yes	Yes
E10	Risks to viability of settlements	Medium	High	Yes	Yes
E11	Risks to cultural activities	Low	Medium	No	No
E12	Risks to households and businesses from limited access to finance and insurance	High	High	Yes	Yes
H1	Risks to people from heat	Medium	Medium	No	No
H2	Risks to people from extreme weather, excluding heat	High	High	Yes	Yes
H3	Risks to people from changes in indoor and outdoor air and environmental quality (humidity, temperature, smoke, toxins)	Medium	Medium	Yes	Yes
H4	Risks to people from reduced water availability and quality	Low	High	Yes	Yes

H5	Risks to people from climate-sensitive and vector-borne diseases	Medium	High	Yes	Yes
H6	Risks to food safety and nutrition	Medium	High	Yes	Yes
H7	Risks to health and social care delivery	High	High	Yes	Yes
H8	Risks to mental health and wellbeing	High	High	Yes	Yes
H9	Opportunities for health and wellbeing	Medium	High	Yes	Yes
I1	Risks of cascading failures for interdependent infrastructure networks	High	High	Yes	Yes
I2	Risks to electricity generation, transmission, and distribution	High	High	Yes	Yes
I3	Risks to fuel supply systems	High	High	Yes	Yes
I4	Risks to road transport systems and active travel	High	High	Yes	Yes
I5	Risks to rail transport systems	High	High	Yes	Yes
I6	Risks to aviation transport systems	Low	Medium	No	No
I7	Risks to water-based transport systems	Medium	High	Yes	Yes
I8	Risks to digital and communication systems	Medium	Medium	Yes	Yes
I9	Risks to water supply and wastewater systems	Medium	High	Yes	Yes
I10	Risks to waste management systems, excluding wastewater systems	Low	Medium	No	No
N1	Risks to terrestrial ecosystems	Medium	High	Yes	Yes
N2	Risks to coastal ecosystems	High	High	Yes	Yes
N3	Risks to freshwater ecosystems	High	High	Yes	Yes
N4	Risks to marine ecosystems	Medium	High	Yes	Yes
N5	Risks to soil ecosystems	Medium	High	Yes	Yes
N6	Risks to natural carbon stores and sequestration	Medium	High	Yes	Yes
N7	Opportunities for species and ecosystems	Medium	Medium	No	No
N8	Risks to natural heritage and landscape character	Medium	Medium	Yes	Yes
N9	Risks to agriculture	Medium	High	Yes	Yes
N10	Risks to fisheries and aquaculture	High	High	Yes	Yes
N11	Risks to forestry	Medium	Medium	Yes	Yes
N12	Opportunities for agriculture, fisheries, aquaculture, and forestry	Low	Medium	Yes	Yes
N13	Risks to food security	Medium	Medium	Yes	Yes

Appendix 2 - Highland Council Average Scores

		Highland Council average scores			
Number	Title	Current level of risk (2025)	Future level of risk (2050s/2080s)	Urgency	Priority for regional collaboration?
B1	Risks to buildings from heat and fire	Medium	High	Yes	Yes
B2	Risks to buildings from flooding	High	High	Yes	Yes
B3	Risks to buildings from coastal change	Medium	High	Yes	Yes
B4	Risks to buildings from high wind, rain penetration, storms, freeze thaw, subsidence, damp	High	High	Yes	Yes
B5	Risks to cultural heritage built environment	Medium/ High	High	Yes	Yes
B6	Risks to facilities and outdoor spaces delivering public services, excluding health and social care	High	High	Yes	Yes
E1	Risks to Highland economic performance and stability	High	High	Yes	Yes
E2	Risks to physical assets of Highland businesses	Medium	High	Yes	Yes
E3	Risks to Highland supply chains and resource inputs	High	High	Yes	Yes
E4	Risks to productivity and availability of labour	Medium	High	Yes	Yes
E5	Risks to public finances	High	High	Yes	Yes
E6	Risks to household finances	High	High	Yes	Yes
E7	Opportunities for Highland businesses	Medium	High	Yes	Yes
E8	Opportunities for household finances	Low	Medium	No/ Yes	Yes
E9	Risks and opportunities for population movement	Medium	High	Yes	Yes
E10	Risks to viability of settlements	Medium	High	Yes	Yes
E11	Risks to cultural activities	Low	Medium	No	No
E12	Risks to households and businesses from limited access to finance and insurance	High	High	Yes	Yes
H1	Risks to people from heat	Medium	Medium	No	No
H2	Risks to people from extreme weather, excluding heat	High	High	Yes	Yes
H3	Risks to people from changes in indoor and outdoor air and environmental quality (humidity, temperature, smoke, toxins)	Medium	Medium	Yes	Yes

H4	Risks to people from reduced water availability and quality	Low	High	Yes	Yes
H5	Risks to people from climate-sensitive and vector-borne diseases	Medium	High	Yes	Yes
H6	Risks to food safety and nutrition	Medium	High	Yes	Yes
H7	Risks to health and social care delivery	High	High	Yes	Yes
H8	Risks to mental health and wellbeing	High	High	Yes	Yes
H9	Opportunities for health and wellbeing	Medium	High	Yes	Yes
I1	Risks of cascading failures for interdependent infrastructure networks	High	High	Yes	Yes
I2	Risks to electricity generation, transmission, and distribution	High	High	Yes	Yes
I3	Risks to fuel supply systems	High	High	Yes	Yes
I4	Risks to road transport systems and active travel	High	High	Yes	Yes
I5	Risks to rail transport systems	High	High	Yes	Yes
I6	Risks to aviation transport systems	Low	Medium	No	No
I7	Risks to water-based transport systems	Medium	High	Yes	Yes
I8	Risks to digital and communication systems	High	High	Yes	Yes
I9	Risks to water supply and wastewater systems	Medium	High	Yes	Yes
I10	Risks to waste management systems, excluding wastewater systems	Low	Medium	No	No
N1	Risks to terrestrial ecosystems	Medium	High	Yes	Yes
N2	Risks to coastal ecosystems	High	High	Yes	Yes
N3	Risks to freshwater ecosystems	High	High	Yes	Yes
N4	Risks to marine ecosystems	Medium/ High	High	Yes	Yes
N5	Risks to soil ecosystems	Medium/ High	High	Yes	Yes
N6	Risks to natural carbon stores and sequestration	Medium/ High	High	Yes	Yes
N7	Opportunities for species and ecosystems	Low	Medium	No	No
N8	Risks to natural heritage and landscape character	Medium	Medium	Yes	Yes
N9	Risks to agriculture	Medium	High	Yes	Yes
N10	Risks to fisheries and aquaculture	High	High	Yes	Yes
N11	Risks to forestry	Medium	Medium	Yes	Yes
N12	Opportunities for agriculture, fisheries, aquaculture, and forestry	Low	Medium	Yes	Yes

N13	Risks to food security	Medium	Medium	Yes	Yes
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Where "No / Yes" is shown, responses were evenly split between "Yes" and "No", indicating no clear consensus on urgency.

Appendix 3 - Variances

Number	Title
B1	Risks to buildings from heat and fire
B5	Risks to cultural heritage built environment
B6	Risks to facilities and outdoor spaces delivering public services, excluding health and social care
E2	Risks to physical assets of Highland businesses
E4	Risks to productivity and availability of labour
E7	Opportunities for Highland businesses
E8	Opportunities for household finances
I8	Risks to digital and communication systems
N4	Risks to marine ecosystems
N5	Risks to soil ecosystems
N6	Risks to natural carbon stores and sequestration
N7	Opportunities for species and ecosystems

Highland Adapts - final scores			
Current level of risk (2025)	Future level of risk (2050s/2080s)	Urgency	Priority for regional collaboration?
Medium	Medium	Yes	Yes
Medium	High	Yes	Yes
Medium	High	Yes	Yes
High	High	Yes	Yes
Medium	Medium	No	No
Medium	Medium	No	No
Low	Medium	No	No
Medium	Medium	Yes	Yes
Medium	High	Yes	Yes
Medium	High	Yes	Yes
Medium	Medium	No	No

Highland Council - average scores			
Current level of risk (2025)	Future level of risk (2050s/2080s)	Urgency	Priority for regional collaboration?
Medium	High	Yes	Yes
Medium/High	High	Yes	Yes
High	High	Yes	Yes
Medium	High	Yes	Yes
Medium	High	Yes	Yes
Low	Medium	No/Yes	Yes
High	High	Yes	Yes
Medium/High	High	Yes	Yes
Medium/High	High	Yes	Yes
Medium/High	High	Yes	Yes
Low	Medium	No	No

Where "No / Yes" is shown, responses were evenly split between "Yes" and "No", indicating no clear consensus on urgency.