

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Climate Change Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Wednesday 20 May 2026 at 2.00 pm.

Present:

Mrs S Atkin

Mr M Baird

Dr C Birt

Mr R Cross (substitute)

Ms C Gillies (remote)

Dr M Gregson

Mr P Logue

Mrs T Robertson (substitute)

Mr K Rosie (Vice Chair) (remote)

Ms K Willis (Chair)

Non-Members also present:

Mr S Kennedy

Mrs A MacLean

Mr D Macpherson

In attendance:

Mr N Osborne, Climate Change and Energy Team Manager

Ms F Daschofsky, Net Zero Programme Manager

Mr R Macdonald, Energy Manager

Ms F Conti, Strategic Procurement Manager

Mr S Miller, Project Manager

Ms C Weaver, Climate Change Co-ordinator (Adaptations)

Mr A Fraser, Principal Engineer, Project Design Unit (remote)

Ms M Murray, Principal Committee Officer

Ms K Arnott, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Mr R Lockett, Lockett Agri-Environmental

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

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, Mr J Bruce, Mr S Coghill, Mr J Grafton, Mr A Graham and Ms L Niven.

2. Declarations of Interest/Transparency Statement

Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt/ Aithris Fhollaiseachd

There were no Declarations of Interest.

The Committee **NOTED** the following Transparency Statement:-

Item 5iii: Ms C Gillies

3. **Good News** **Naidheachdan Matha**

The Chair summarised the good news that had been circulated, and a video was presented reflecting on the impact of the Caol mixed-tenure retrofit project nearly one year after completion.

The project and the associated videos, which Members were advised were available on SharePoint, were commended, and the Committee **NOTED** the good news as circulated.

4. **Presentation: Re-meandering the River Peffery** **Taisbeanadh: Ag ath-lùbadh Abhainn Pheofharain**

Richard Lockett of Lockett Agri-Environmental gave a presentation on the River Peffery Catchment Restoration Project, showcasing a catchment-scale, nature-based approach to climate resilience and nature recovery. The project had built on earlier restoration at Fodderty, combining large-scale river re-meandering with peatland restoration in the upper catchment on Ben Wyvis National Nature Reserve to restore natural river processes, enhance biodiversity, and reduce flood risk to Dingwall Business Park.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Local Members outlined the background to the partnership project and expressed thanks to former MSP Kate Forbes for her role in bringing stakeholders together, and to Richard Lockett, who was involved in a number of community organisations and was a trusted figure locally, for proposing a cost-effective solution and for his efforts in moving the project forward. The project was a good news story which, in addition to enabling the Business Park to re-open, had delivered benefits in terms of nature restoration, and Members were encouraged to visit the site to view the results;
- information was sought, and provided, on a number of matters including the duration of the previous flooding issues at Dingwall Business Park; the costs and timescales associated with the restoration project; the impact of the interventions on the river catchment; whether nearby forestry operations were expected to effect the completed works; the effects of re-meandering on peatland; and whether any further measures could be put in place to reduce run-off from Blackmuir Woods into Strathpeffer;
- the reduced flood risk as a result of the project not only benefited Dingwall Business Park but would also provide reassurance to nearby residents;
- Members welcomed the presentation, particularly the use of Enlightenment era mapping to illustrate the historical context in contrast to the modern-day position;
- the partnership work undertaken to identify and implement an affordable solution that had resulted in real change was commended;
- the nature-based approach and its biodiversity benefits were commended, and it was hoped that the project would serve as an example to others; and
- it was queried whether any action could be taken in relation to the banks to the rear of Burns Crescent in Dingwall.

The Committee otherwise **NOTED** the presentation.

5. 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/05/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- in response to a question, it was explained that the strategic Climate Change, Energy and Community Resilience report to the Council on 26 March 2026 represented the first step in addressing silo working, and that a further report was in development looking at the structure required to ensure effective cross-cluster working. It was added that the Highland Youth Parliament's presentation to the Climate Change Committee in January 2026 had opened conversations with the Education Service, which was a positive development;
- with reference to the waste audit undertaken at Inverness Royal Academy, it was suggested that similar audits could be carried out in all secondary schools, and that a comparative chart could be developed to introduce an element of competition. Reference was also made to Kingussie High School where, as part of the reuseable lunch packaging pilot, pupils had been requested to eat in the dining hall. This appeared to have supported a reduction in waste, and the need for culture change was emphasised. It having been queried whether dining arrangements and waste considerations formed part of the design process for new schools being brought forward under the Highland Investment Plan (HIP), and whether there were links between the design team and the Climate Change and Energy Team, the Net Zero Programme Manager explained that the Net Zero Strategy Group had been collaborating on the HIP, and that Net Zero and Sustainability Design Guidance was currently under development, which would include how to embed circular economy and waste principles in buildings, and would apply to all projects;
- as indicated in Appendix 1 of the report, food production and consumption accounted for around a third of global greenhouse gas emissions. The importance of reducing food waste was emphasised and, with reference to the emissions associated with beef production, it was queried when food production, procurement and consumption would be considered in a more holistic manner. Other Members supported the points raised and suggested that greater emphasis should be placed on plant sources of protein in food production. The Net Zero Programme Manager explained that the Council was currently involved in a number of projects relating to food and food procurement, including the Members' Catering project and the Food in Schools project. In addition, it was confirmed that the first officer working group regarding the Highland Good Food Nation Plan was scheduled to take place the following week, and this was welcomed by Members;
- greening of Highland towns and the city of Inverness was a priority. It was suggested that consideration be given to how nature networks could be supported across Highland, not only in the obviously greener areas, and reassurance was sought that the Forestry and Woodland Strategy currently under development would include urban areas. The Net Zero Programme Manager undertook to feed

the points raised into the group progressing the Strategy, and to report back to Councillor Gregson regarding the scope of the Strategy;

- information was sought on the location of the six Woodland Management Plans for Council woodlands referred to in Appendix 1 of the report. There was also a reference to a hydrological survey of Muir of Ord pond, and it was queried whether this related to a recent presentation regarding the Crested Newt at the Dingwall and Seaforth Ward Business Meeting. It was suggested that Local Members be consulted in advance of such projects as they might be able to assist in identifying additional suitable locations. The Net Zero Programme Manager undertook to feed back the points raised to the Environment Team, and to circulate the response regarding the location of the six Woodland Management Plans to all Members;
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that the intention was that there would be full alignment between the Council's Net Zero Strategy and the strategic paper on Climate Change, Energy and Community Resilience that had been presented to the Council on 26 March 2026, and this would be addressed as work progressed. In terms of how the asks of the Highland Youth Parliament (HYP) would be taken forward, it was explained that a meeting had taken place with Education Service representatives, and it was intended to liaise with the incoming Youth Convener and set up a direct discussion between Members and the HYP. Members emphasised that the Youth Convener's tenure was relatively short and that issues raised by them during that period should be carried forward. It was confirmed that there would be ongoing engagement with the Youth Convener; and
- the Chair confirmed that the previously proposed Member workshop in relation to Elected Member Travel remained an ongoing action.

The Committee:-

- i. scrutinised and **NOTED** progress of the Net Zero Programme as outlined in the report and Appendix 1 of the report;
- ii. **NOTED** that, following Council approval of the Climate Change, Energy and Community Resilience Strategic Paper, proposals relating to governance, performance reporting and long-term programme delivery would be brought to Council for consideration; and
- iii. **AGREED** that information on the location of the six Woodland Management Plans for Council woodlands referred to in the report be circulated to all Members.

ii. **Net Zero Thematic Group Update – Procurement & Community Wealth Building**
Cunntas às Ùr air Buidheann Chuspaireil Neoni Luim – Togail Saidhbheas Coimhearsnachd Solarachd 8

There had been circulated Report No CCC/06/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- support was expressed for the approach outlined in the report. However, it was questioned whether the proposed 12-month managed engagement with Eden Seven was long enough. In response, it was explained that the one-year period would allow for a clear assessment of the software's capabilities and enable comparison with existing manual processes. The intention would be to continue

using the software if it and the associated data met the Council's requirements, and it was confirmed that, following assessment of the data, further proposals would be brought forward for approval by the Council. Members added that it was essential that the Climate Change and Energy Team was satisfied with the transition period and the translation of the data into a standardised, more robust format, and that extending beyond one year might be appropriate if recommended;

- the report highlighted the need for a robust and consistent baseline of the Council's emissions to support carbon budgeting and decision-making. However, it also referred to current challenges relating to fragmented data sets and manual processes, and it was queried how confident Members could be in the accuracy of the baseline data being used. In response, it was explained that much of the Council's emissions data was underpinned by recognised emissions factors and standard methodologies which officers were required to apply as part of the annual Public Bodies Climate Change Duties report. It was added that the Council did not currently have a baseline for Scope 3 emissions and was among the first in Scotland to begin developing this;
- whilst the benefits of engaging with an external provider were recognised, reservations were expressed regarding reliance on a single company for a core element of the Council's evidence base, and it was queried how the risks associated with supplier dependency would be managed. In that regard, reassurance was provided that the governance and assurance of the pilot rested with the Council, and that the Council would retain ownership of its data;
- it was hoped that the new software would provide a strong foundation for progressing key aspects of work related to climate change and the Net Zero Programme;
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that Scope 3 emissions encompassed the whole supply chain, including the origin of materials, and that using Scope 3 data to inform procurement of goods and services supported Community Wealth Building and local economic growth; and
- the importance of the proposals in terms of reducing the Council's emissions going forward was emphasised, along with the need for effective cross-service working. In response to a question regarding the potential impact if the required engagement and cross-service collaboration were not achieved, it was explained that the data would identify which service areas required focus, and that failure to act would have cost implications for the Council as a whole, not just the service concerned. Strong stakeholder management and securing collective buy-in would be essential.

The Committee:-

- * i. **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to the Council approval of the proposed approach to strengthening the Council's carbon reporting, management and decision-support capability;
- * ii. **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** that the Council progresses a 12-month managed engagement with Eden Seven, as set out in Section 6 of the report, to support delivery of this approach; and
- iii. **NOTED** the role of procurement and the Social Value Charter in supporting emissions reduction and Community Wealth Building outcomes, particularly in relation to supply chain (Scope 3) emissions.

**iii. Net Zero Thematic Group Update – Capital Programme & Net Zero Funding
Cunntas às Ùr air Buidheann Chuspaireil Neoni Luim – Prògram Calpa &
Maoineachadh Neoni Luim**

Transparency Statement: Ms C Gillies declared a connection to this item as director of the anchor organisation in respect of the Carbon Neutral Islands Fund. However, having applied the objective test, she did not consider that she had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No CCC/07/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- thanks were expressed for the clear and helpful report;
- information was sought, and provided, on the future of Energy Company Obligation (ECO) funding, and the Warm Homes Plan. In relation to ECO funding, Members commented that energy companies continued to make significant profits and suggested that they should be required to continue funding energy efficiency measures, which were of utmost important to Council tenants and other householders;
- in relation to Salix funding, whilst the associated financial savings were significant, the resulting reduction in carbon emissions helped to make the benefits more tangible for people. The Project Manager undertook to revert to Councillor Atkin regarding the CO₂e (Carbon Dioxide equivalent) figures;
- innovations such as Carbon Credits made the Net Zero agenda relatable to people; and
- in response to a question regarding Climate Emergency Funding, it was explained that, while timescales were not yet known, projects had been identified for potential delivery through the fund. Based on the £1.3m allocation, Net Zero transition and energy efficiency works could be undertaken at five primary schools where surveys had been completed and measures evaluated and costed. The estimated outcomes were annual financial savings of £12,000 and total emissions reductions of approximately 80 tonnes of CO₂e. The Chair added that it was important to have shovel-ready projects in place as many funding opportunities had short application and delivery timeframes.

The Committee otherwise **NOTED** the progress of workstreams as outlined in the report.

**6. Highland Climate Change Risk and Opportunity Assessment
Measadh Chunnartan & Chothroman Atharrachadh Gnàth-shìde na
Gàidhealtachd**

There had been circulated Report No CCC/08/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

The Chair commended the work involved in the development of the Highland Climate Change Risk and Opportunity Assessment (HCCROA), as well as the launch event. She advised Members of a recent UK Government report on Global Biodiversity Loss, Ecosystem Collapse and National Security, as well as the National Emergency Briefing on Climate and Nature currently being screened across the country. Both

supported the ongoing work in Highland in relation to adaptation and the climate and nature crises, and she undertook to circulate the relevant links to Members following the meeting.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the contents of the report and its associated appendices; and
- * ii. **AGREED 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.

7. Just Transition Commission Final Report (2026): No Time to Lose Aithisg Coimisean an Eadar-ghluasaid Chothromaich: Chan Eil Ùine ri Chall

There had been circulated Report No CCC/09/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Members welcomed the realism of the Just Transition Commission report, particularly the references to deindustrialisation;
- it was necessary to deliver the transition at a pace that allowed sufficient time for people to adapt;
- the poor progress against peatland restoration targets was of concern;
- Members concurred with the view that local authorities should be afforded greater powers, and supported the mandating of community benefit as well as the introduction of a community right to shared ownership;
- the change needed would only be achieved through local action;
- strategic working on a regional basis, in collaboration with partners, was considered the way ahead; and
- the specific reference in the report to Gaelic-speaking communities in rural and island areas was welcomed, and the benefits of community-led, place-based approaches were highlighted.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the key findings of the Just Transition Commission final report and recognised their direct relevance to the Highland context;
- ii. that the Council would continue to develop a place-based, programme-led approach to climate, energy and resilience delivery, aligned with the March 2026 Council report;
- iii. that the Council would use the report to support engagement with Scottish and UK Government with a focus on securing increased capacity and funding for local authorities; and
- iv. that delivery of a just transition at regional level would require aligned investment, infrastructure planning and community wealth building. This would continue to be reflected in the Council's programme and investment approach.

8. Performance Monitoring Report – Q4 2025/26
Aithisg Sgrùdadh Coileanaidh – R4 2025/26

There had been circulated Report No CCC/10/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

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

The meeting concluded at 3.55 pm.