

The Highland Council

Agenda Item	8
Report No	CCC/16/26

Committee: Climate Change

Date: 12 August 2026

Report Title: Highland Adapts Update and Funding Request

Report By: Assistant Chief Executive - Place

1 Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides an update on the Highland Adapts Partnership since the previous report to Members in May 2025, sets out the Partnership Strategy for 2026/27 and seeks approval for continued Highland Council support.
- 1.2 A contribution of £15,000 is requested towards the Highland Adapts Partnership for 2026/27 to support continued delivery of regional climate adaptation and resilience activity across Highland.
- 1.3 The report highlights the increased focus on climate adaptation, resilience and preparedness within national policy, including Scotland's Climate Change Plan 2026-2040 and Scotland's National Adaptation Plan 2024-2029 (SNAP3). It also demonstrates how Highland Adapts supports delivery of the Council's strategic approach to Climate Change, Energy and Community Resilience approved by Council in March 2026.
- 1.4 Climate adaptation is becoming an increasingly significant national policy priority. As climate risks continue to increase across Highland, regional collaboration provides a more effective and cost-efficient approach than individual organisations acting independently. Highland Adapts provides the partnership, evidence base and coordination necessary to support informed investment decisions, improve resilience and maximise external funding opportunities.

2 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:-

- i. **Note** the progress made by the Highland Adapts Partnership since the previous report to Members in May 2025 and the planned priorities for 2026/27;
- ii. **Note** the increased focus on climate adaptation, resilience and preparedness within national policy, including Scotland's Climate Change Plan 2026–2040 and Scotland's National Adaptation Plan 2024-2029 (SNAP3);
- iii. **Note** the contribution of Highland Adapts to the delivery of the Council's strategic approach to Climate Change, Energy and Community Resilience; and
- iv. **Agree** to recommend to the Council the approval of £15,000 of funding towards the Highland Adapts Partnership for 2026/27 to support continued delivery of regional climate adaptation and resilience activity across Highland.

3 Implications

- 3.1 **Resource** - There are financial resource implications associated with this report in the request for a funding contribution of £15,000, alongside contributions from other partner organisations, to support Highland Adapts during financial year 2026/27. Continued participation in the partnership supports collaborative approaches to climate adaptation and resilience across Highland.
- 3.2 **Legal** - The Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 places climate change duties on public bodies, including local authorities, requiring them to contribute to emissions reduction targets, adapt to the impacts of climate change and act sustainably. Highland Adapts supports the Council's adaptation responsibilities through the provision of evidence, partnership working and regional collaboration.
- 3.3 **Risk** - Climate change presents increasing strategic risks for the Council, including risks to communities, infrastructure, public services, the natural environment and the regional economy. Highland Adapts supports the identification, assessment and management of climate-related risks through regional collaboration and the development of a shared evidence base, including the Highland Climate Change Risk and Opportunity Assessment
- 3.4 **Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)** – There are no direct health and safety implications arising from this report. However, the Highland Climate Change Risk and Opportunity Assessment identifies a range of climate-related risks that may affect public health, community wellbeing and the delivery of essential services, including risks associated with extreme weather, flooding, disruption to infrastructure and impacts on health and social care services. Strengthening resilience and adaptation planning can help reduce the impacts of these risks on communities, infrastructure and public services.
- 3.5 **Gaelic** – There are no 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 and Strategic Context

- 5.1 Scotland's Climate Change Plan 2026–2040 places greater emphasis on climate adaptation, resilience and preparedness, recognising that some climate impacts are already unavoidable and that adaptation must be progressed alongside emissions reduction. The Plan highlights the need to strengthen resilience to flooding, coastal change, severe weather events, biodiversity loss and pressures on infrastructure and public services, while promoting place-based approaches to delivery. These priorities align closely with Scotland's National Adaptation Plan (SNAP3), which promotes collaborative and place-based approaches to strengthening climate resilience and adaptation.
- 5.2 In March 2026, Highland Council approved its strategic approach to Climate Change, Energy and Community Resilience. The report recognised the need for a coordinated, place-based approach to climate adaptation, climate mitigation and energy transition activities, together with the wider housing, infrastructure and natural systems that support long-term resilience, sustainability and economic development.

The Strategic Paper was informed by evidence developed through Highland Adapts, including the Highland Climate Change Risk and Opportunity Assessment (HCCROA), and recognised Highland Adapts as a regional partnership supporting climate adaptation and resilience-building across the Highlands.

- 5.3 Effective climate adaptation underpins the Council's wider ambitions for community resilience, economic development, housing, infrastructure investment and energy transition. It provides the evidence needed to ensure that long-term investment decisions remain resilient under future climate conditions.
- 5.4 Highland faces a distinct adaptation challenge because of its scale, geography and strategic importance to Scotland. The Highland region includes remote and island communities, an extensive coastline, nationally important natural assets, major transport corridors and significant energy infrastructure. Climate risks affecting communities, infrastructure and public services are already being experienced and are projected to increase in frequency, severity and complexity over the coming decades. Many of these risks are interconnected, with disruption affecting one sector often creating wider impacts across communities, infrastructure and essential services.
- 5.5 Highland Adapts supports a collaborative, place-based approach to climate adaptation across the region, helping organisations, communities and businesses respond to

shared climate risks and opportunities. This aligns closely with the emphasis placed within both SNAP3 and Scotland's Climate Change Plan on partnership working, place-based delivery and regional resilience.

6 Highland Adapts

- 6.1 Established in 2021, Highland Adapts is a place-based partnership bringing together communities, businesses, land managers and the public sector creating a climate-resilient Highland. The partnership has nine founding organisations: The Highland Council, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Zero Waste Scotland, Verture, NatureScot, Forestry and Land Scotland, The Highlands and Islands Climate Hub, Changeworks and NHS Highland. Its broader network extends across Scotland and beyond.
- 6.2 Highland Adapts has developed a range of evidence, engagement and partnership initiatives to support adaptation planning and resilience-building across the region, including:
 - 6.2.1 **Highland Climate Change Risk and Opportunity Assessment (HCCROA) (2026)** - the first regional assessment of climate risks and opportunities across Highland, examining impacts on the built environment, communities and economy, health and wellbeing, infrastructure, and land, nature and food. The assessment now provides the principal regional evidence base informing strategic planning, investment decisions, local development planning, and organisational adaptation planning across Highland.
 - 6.2.2 **Economic Assessment of Climate Change Impacts on the Highland Region (2024)** - the region's first assessment of the economic implications of climate change, examining potential impacts on communities, infrastructure and key sectors of the Highland economy. The assessment formed the economic component of the wider Highland Climate Change Risk and Opportunity Assessment.
 - 6.2.3 **Highland Weather and Climate Story Map (2024)** - an interactive resource bringing together local experiences of weather and climate impacts across Highland, helping communities and organisations better understand how climate change is affecting different parts of the region.
 - 6.2.4 **Circular Economy Practices in Climate Resilient Food and Drink Supply Chains (2025)** - research exploring how circular economy approaches can strengthen the resilience of Highland's food and drink sector, identifying opportunities to improve resource efficiency, reduce waste and support more sustainable and resilient supply chains.
 - 6.2.5 **Highland Charter for Climate, Nature and Health (relaunched 2024)** - a collaborative initiative encouraging organisations to place climate, nature and health at the centre of decision-making and action, recognising the links between environmental sustainability, public health and community wellbeing.

7 Partnership Strategy 2026/27

7.1 Overview

In June 2026, Highland Adapts published its Partnership Strategy for April 2026 to March 2027. The Strategy sets out a programme of work focused on supporting practical adaptation action, maintaining and developing the climate risk evidence base, strengthening adaptation in policy, planning and investment, facilitating information sharing and peer learning, and growing and sustaining an effective regional partnership. The Strategy recognises the increasing climate risks facing Highland communities, infrastructure, businesses and natural systems, and the need for collaborative, place-based action to strengthen resilience across the region.

7.2 Highland Resilience Fund

A key priority for 2026/27 is the development of a Highland Resilience Fund. The proposed fund is intended to support adaptation activity and help progress opportunities identified through the Highland Climate Change Risk and Opportunity Assessment (HCCROA). The Strategy also includes work to develop a co-investment framework and explore opportunities to mobilise investment for adaptation and resilience initiatives across the region.

7.3 Embedding climate risk into decision-making

The Strategy seeks to support organisations across Highland to incorporate climate risk and adaptation considerations into policy, planning and investment decisions. This includes promoting the use of the HCCROA evidence base and supporting its integration into policies, plans and strategies across the region.

7.4 Strengthening the regional partnership

A further priority is the continued development of Highland Adapts and its wider adaptation network. Planned activity includes expanding participation, supporting new partner organisations, strengthening collaboration across sectors and communities, and exploring opportunities to diversify partnership funding. This work aims to strengthen regional capacity for climate adaptation and resilience planning.

7.5 Delivery of the Partnership Strategy will support a transition from climate risk assessment towards practical adaptation delivery, enabling partners to identify investment priorities, strengthen resilience within communities and infrastructure, and improve coordination across organisations operating within Highland.

8 Supporting the Council's strategic approach to Climate Change, Energy and Community Resilience

- 8.1 The Council's strategic approach to Climate Change, Energy and Community Resilience recognises the need for a coordinated, place-based approach to climate change, energy and community resilience. Highland Adapts increasingly provides the regional evidence, relationships and coordination necessary to support the Council's wider strategic responsibilities. Much of this work would otherwise need to be undertaken independently by the Council at significantly greater cost and with reduced access to specialist expertise and partner organisations. Through regional partnership working and a shared evidence base, it provides a mechanism for coordination that would be difficult for individual organisations to deliver independently.
- 8.2 As highlighted in section 6, a key achievement of Highland Adapts has been the development of a robust regional evidence base through the HCCROA and associated economic analysis. The Council's Climate Change, Energy and Community Resilience Strategic Paper, approved by Members in March 2026, was informed by this evidence. This demonstrates how Highland Adapts is helping move climate adaptation from research and risk assessment into strategic decision-making and delivery.
- 8.3 Climate adaptation is not solely an environmental challenge. It is increasingly recognised as an economic necessity. Protecting jobs, sustaining rural economies, maintaining investor confidence and ensuring the resilience of nationally significant infrastructure all depend on the region's ability to adapt to changing climate conditions. Highland Adapts supports this by bringing together organisations, communities and businesses to develop shared evidence, strengthen understanding of climate risks and opportunities, and support coordinated adaptation activity across the region.
- 8.4 Highland Adapts supports a number of Council priorities and workstreams, including:-
- Informing the development of the Council's Corporate Climate Change Risk and Opportunity Assessment through the provision of evidence, regional data and partnership collaboration;
 - Supporting delivery of the Council's Climate Change Adaptation Strategy;
 - Supporting development of the Council's Climate Change Adaptation Action Plan;
 - Facilitating regional collaboration on climate adaptation and resilience; and
 - Contributing to the evidence base for the Highland Local Development Plan (HLDP) through the HCCROA, Economic Assessment and Circular Economy report, which are referenced within the [HLDP Evidence Report](#).

9 Funding request 2026/2027

- 9.1 The Highland Council has supported Highland Adapts as a core partner since its establishment. A breakdown of partnership income and expenditure for 2025/26 and 2026/27 is provided within **Appendices 1 and 2**.

Projected costs for 2026/27 are £102,495, of which £70,000 has already been secured through partner contributions and other funding sources.

A contribution of £15,000 is sought from The Highland Council for 2026/27 to support the continued operation and development of the partnership. This contribution would secure the Council's continued strategic leadership within the regional partnership and support the delivery of a collaborative programme of work with an estimated value of more than £100,000. The funding would leverage substantial partner and external investment, providing a cost-effective mechanism for delivering shared regional priorities that would be significantly more expensive for the Council to deliver independently.

- 9.2 Recent engagement with the Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Rural Affairs provided an opportunity to highlight Highland's distinct adaptation challenges, the growing importance of regional adaptation partnerships and the transition from climate risk assessment towards practical adaptation delivery. Discussions also highlighted the importance of securing greater certainty and continuity of support for place-based adaptation activity, recognising that adaptation is a long-term agenda requiring sustained collaboration, capability and investment.
- 9.3 Continued support for Highland Adapts represents a relatively modest investment that enables Highland Council to maintain strategic leadership within a nationally recognised regional adaptation partnership while leveraging significantly greater partner contributions and supporting delivery of the Council's statutory adaptation responsibilities.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive - Place

Date: 10 July 2026

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Background Papers: Highland Adapts Update & Funding Request [Report](#)
Climate Change, Energy & Community Resilience [Report](#)

Appendices: Appendix 1 – Highland Adapts Income and Expenditure 2026/27
Appendix 2 - Highland Adapts Income and Expenditure 2025/26

Highland Adapts June 2026 Finance Update							
				YTD (1 April to 31 May)	Projected	Total	
Income	Core Income	25-26 Carry Over		£ 2,344	£ -	£ 2,344	
		Highlands and Islands Enterprise		£ -	£ -	£ -	
		Highlands and Islands Climate Hub		£ -	£ -	£ -	
		Highland Council		£ -	£ -	£ -	
		NHS Highland		£ 20,000	£ -	£ 20,000	
		Verture		£ -	£ -	£ -	
		Changeworks		£ -	£ -	£ -	
		Zero Waste Scotland		£ -	£ -	£ -	
		Forestry and Land Scotland		£ -	£ -	£ -	
		Scottish Government Climate Ready Regions Grant		£ -	£ 50,000	£ 50,000	
	Total		£ 22,344	£ 50,000	£ 72,344		
	Project Income			£ -	£ -	£ -	
				£ -	£ -	£ -	
Grand Total Income						£ 72,344	
Expenditure	Core Expenditure	Partnership Manager (Verture Project Lead) FTE April 2026 - March 2027	Payroll costs + 30% overheads + 10% contingency	£ 13,443	£ 67,216	£ 80,659	
		Additional Verture staffing (20 days)	Based on standard Verture day rates	£ -	£ 13,600	£ 13,600	
		Communications		£ -	£ 1,000	£ 1,000	
		Travel		£ 4	£ 996	£ 1,000	
		Accommodation		£ -	£ 250	£ 1,000	
		Website and other IT		£ 56	£ 944	£ 1,000	
		Meetings		£ -	£ 3,976	£ 3,976	
		Enabler function third party costs	Travel and subsidence	£ -	£ 260	£ 260	
		Total		£ 13,503	£ 88,242	£ 102,495	
	Project Expenditure			£ -	£ -	£ -	
				£ -	£ -	£ -	
		Total		£ -	£ -	£ -	
Grand Total Expenditure						£ 102,495	
	Balance						-£ 30,151
In-Kind	Representative Value of Partner Organisation Contributions Beyond Participation in Board, Advisory Panels and Events	Highlands and Islands Enterprise	An Lochran desk space for Partnership Manager	£ 500	£ 2,500	£ 3,000	

Highland Adapts FY 2025-2026 End of Year Finance Update

	Item	Notes	YTD (1 April 2025 to 31 Mar 2026)	Projected	TOTAL
Core Funding	24-25 Carry Over		£16,714.00		£16,714.00
	Highlands and Islands Enterprise		£26,309.00		£26,309.00
	Highlands and Islands Climate Hub		£6,500.00		£6,500.00
	Highland Council		£15,000.00		£15,000.00
	NHS Highland		£15,000.00		£15,000.00
	Forestry and Land Scotland		£15,000.00		£15,000.00
	Changeworks		£2,500.00		£2,500.00
	Account interest FY2025-2026		£463.38		£463.38
	Subtotal		£97,486.38		£97,486.38
Project Funding	Scottish Government Climate Ready Regions - HCCROA		£49,760.25	£0.00	£49,760.25
	Scottish Governemnt Climate Ready Regions - Future Finance Model		£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
	Subtotal		£49,760.25	£0.00	£49,760.25
	GRAND TOTAL INCOME		£147,246.63	£0.00	£147,246.63
Core Expenditure	Highland Adapts Project Lead	Payroll costs + 30% overheads +10% contingency	£80,658.86	£0.00	£80,658.86
	Additional Verture staffing: 20 days Regional and Leadership Programme Managers	Verture standard day rates	£12,326.00	£0.00	£12,326.00
	Communications		£34.80	£0.00	£34.80
	Travel		£141.40	£0.00	£141.40
	Accomodation		£254.88	£0.00	£254.88
	Website and other IT		£1,131.87	£0.00	£1,131.87
	Meetings (catering, room hire etc)		£594.72	£0.00	£594.72
	Subtotal		£95,142.53	£0.00	£95,142.53
Project Expenditure	Scottish Government Climate Ready Regions - HCCROA		£49,760.25	£0.00	£49,760.25
	Scottish Governemnt Climate Ready Regions - Future Finance Model		£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
	Subtotal		£49,760.25	£0.00	£49,760.25
	GRAND TOTAL EXPENDITURE		£144,902.78	£0.00	£144,902.78
	BALANCE				£2,343.85
Representative Value of Partner Organisation Contributions Beyond Participation in Board, Advisory Panel, and Events	Highlands and Islands Enteprise	An Lochran desk space for Partnership Manager	£3,000.00	£0.00	£3,000.00
		Future finance model/ funding diversification project delivery	£4,552.00	£0.00	£4,552.00
	Changeworks	Highland Vulnerability Map GIS support	£3,955	£0.00	£3,955
	NatureScot	HCCROA co-production	£3,512.00	£0.00	£3,512.00
	Highlands and Islands Climate Hub	Story Map promotion support	*	*	*
		Story Map promotion materials	*	*	*
	Total		£15,019.00	£0.00	£15,019.00

*These values are to be determined by the Hub.