

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Climate Change Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Wednesday 12 August 2026 at 2.00 pm.

Present:

Mrs S Atkin

Mr M Baird

Dr C Birt

Mr R Cross (substitute)

Ms C Gillies (remote)

Mr A Graham

Dr M Gregson

Mr P Logue

Ms K MacLean (remote)

Ms K Willis (Chair)

Non-Members also present:

Ms L Johnston (remote)

Ms E Knox (remote)

Mr D Macpherson

Mr P Oldham (remote)

In attendance:

Mr N Osborne, Climate Change and Energy Team Manager

Ms F Daschofsky, Net Zero Programme Manager

Mr R Macdonald, Energy Manager

Mr I Braker, Strategic Lead – Waste Strategy and Operations

Ms I Percy-Bell, Principal Waste Management Officer

Ms N Wallace, Service Lead – Environment, Development and Transport Planning

Mr A Fraser, Principal Engineer

Ms M Maguire, Principal Planner (remote)

Ms C Weaver, Climate Change Coordinator

Ms M Murray, Principal Committee Officer

Mr C Ross, 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

Business

1. Calling of the Roll and Apologies for Absence

Gairm a' Chlàir agus Leisgeulan

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr J Bruce, Mr S Coghill, Mr J Grafton, Ms L Niven and Mr K Rosie.

2. Declarations of Interest/Transparency Statement

Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt/ Aithris Fhollaiseachd

There were no Declarations of Interest or Transparency Statements.

3. Recess Powers Cumhachdan Fosaìdh

The Committee **NOTED** that the recess powers granted by the Council at its meeting on 25 June 2026 had not been exercised in relation to the business of the Climate Change Committee.

4. Good News Naidheachdan Matha

The Committee **NOTED** the good news as circulated.

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/11/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In introducing the report, the Net Zero Programme Manager drew attention to section 7.4, which stated that the first stage of the proposed implementation framework for the strategic direction agreed by the Full Council on 26 March 2026 was scheduled to be presented to the Corporate Management Team (CMT) at the end of July 2026. It was explained that, following review by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place, further revisions were required and, as a result, presentation to the CMT was now expected by the end of August 2026.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- attention was drawn to section 3.3 of the report, which stated that failure to proactively address the climate and ecological emergency across all service areas carried significant reputational, operational and financial risk;
- in response to questions regarding progress with the milestones that had been RAG-rated Amber and the establishment of the governance and performance framework to support delivery of the strategic direction agreed by the Council, it was explained that work was ongoing on a number of areas, including resourcing and the proposed governance model, that would determine how carbon budgeting would be introduced across services. As highlighted in the introduction, a report was due to be considered by the CMT at the end of August, which was expected to progress matters. This would subsequently be presented to the Full Council. In terms of the 12-month managed engagement with Eden Seven, this had been approved by the Council. The next stage was to develop the contract and commence delivery, and the Committee would be updated on progress throughout the year;
- concern was expressed regarding the delay in submitting the report to the CMT, particularly in light of the important reports later on the agenda that would place further demands on the Council. In response, the Climate Change and Energy Team Manager explained that there had been a number of challenges in terms of how to integrate the strategic approach to climate change, energy and resilience across the Council and structure it in a sustainable way. However, the need for

urgency was acknowledged, and Members were assured that the matter remained a priority of the Council;

- the Chair highlighted that the Committee's remit was to provide advice, guidance and critical challenge on the Council's climate and ecological agenda, oversee the Net Zero Strategy, Programme and Action Plan, and scrutinise and monitor the climate impact of Council policies. Given that the end of the current Council term was approaching, with only two further meetings of the Committee remaining, it was suggested that it was reasonable for the Committee to seek assurance that the strategic direction agreed by the Council in March 2026 was being converted into visible, coordinated and measurable activity across the organisation. The Chair therefore proposed three recommendations, as follows, in addition to the recommendation in the report:
 - ii. agree to recommend to the Council that, across the next two scheduled meetings of the Climate Change Committee, the senior officer leads for the Council's Place, People and Corporate service clusters be invited to present their respective plans for contributing to the Council's Net Zero targets and addressing the climate and ecological emergencies. These presentations should set out:
 - a. the actions, programmes and measurable outcomes being delivered or planned within each cluster;
 - b. how climate mitigation, adaptation, energy, ecological and community-resilience considerations are being integrated into service, financial, workforce, asset and investment planning;
 - c. the cluster's arrangements for engaging with the Climate Change and Energy Team and the relevant Net Zero thematic groups;
 - d. opportunities to secure external investment, generate savings and reinvest benefits in further delivery, including estate retrofit, fleet transition and other spend-to-save projects;
 - e. how the cluster's plans contribute to tackling fuel poverty, inequalities and the differing needs of Highland's rural, island and vulnerable communities;
 - f. the principal gaps, barriers and resource or specialist-support requirements affecting delivery; and
 - g. the arrangements for performance monitoring and future reporting to the Climate Change Committee;
 - iii. agree to recommend to the Council that the presentations include updates on the following areas of particular interest to the Committee:
 - a. the continuation and further development of collaboration between Housing and Property and the Climate Change and Energy Team, including opportunities arising from energy savings, identified underspends, external funding and further investment in housing and property projects;
 - b. opportunities to attract external investment and accelerate energy-efficiency and low-carbon retrofit across the Council's existing school and wider operational estate, alongside delivery of new facilities through the Highland Investment Plan;
 - c. the funding and delivery plan for the Council's fleet transition;
 - d. progress on sustainable food and school-meal activity previously requested by the Committee;
 - e. progress arising from Education's commitment to engage with the Scottish Youth Parliament following its presentation to the Committee; and

- f. the Council-wide response to increasing climate risks, including coastal change, flooding, extreme weather and wildfire; and
- iv. agree to recommend to the Council that, following consideration of the three cluster presentations, officers bring a consolidated report to the Committee identifying shared priorities, gaps in delivery, opportunities for greater integration and any matters requiring recommendation to Full Council or another strategic committee.

Further discussion took place, during which Members supported the proposed additional recommendations, commenting that it would be helpful to understand the overall picture of the work being undertaken across the Council to address climate change. Assurance having been sought that resourcing was sufficient to deliver the Council's strategic approach and meet the obligations set out in the national Climate Change Plan, it was explained that resourcing was under consideration and would form part of the report to the CMT.

The Committee:-

- i. scrutinised and **NOTED** progress of the Net Zero Programme as outlined in the report and Appendix 1 of the report;
- * ii. **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to the Council that, across the next two scheduled meetings of the Climate Change Committee, the senior officer leads for the Council's Place, People and Corporate service clusters be invited to present their respective plans for contributing to the Council's Net Zero targets and addressing the climate and ecological emergencies. These presentations should set out:
 - a. the actions, programmes and measurable outcomes being delivered or planned within each cluster;
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 - c. the cluster's arrangements for engaging with the Climate Change and Energy Team and the relevant Net Zero thematic groups;
 - d. opportunities to secure external investment, generate savings and reinvest benefits in further delivery, including estate retrofit, fleet transition and other spend-to-save projects;
 - e. how the cluster's plans contribute to tackling fuel poverty, inequalities and the differing needs of Highland's rural, island and vulnerable communities;
 - f. the principal gaps, barriers and resource or specialist-support requirements affecting delivery; and
 - g. the arrangements for performance monitoring and future reporting to the Climate Change Committee;
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 - a. the continuation and further development of collaboration between Housing and Property and the Climate Change and Energy Team, including opportunities arising from energy savings, identified underspends, external funding and further investment in housing and property projects;
 - b. opportunities to attract external investment and accelerate energy-efficiency and low-carbon retrofit across the Council's existing school and wider operational estate, alongside delivery of new facilities through the Highland Investment Plan;

- c. the funding and delivery plan for the Council's fleet transition;
 - d. progress on sustainable food and school-meal activity previously requested by the Committee;
 - e. progress arising from Education's commitment to engage with the Scottish Youth Parliament following its presentation to the Committee; and
 - f. the Council-wide response to increasing climate risks, including coastal change, flooding, extreme weather and wildfire; and
- * iv. **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to the Council that, following consideration of the three cluster presentations, officers bring a consolidated report to the Committee identifying shared priorities, gaps in delivery, opportunities for greater integration and any matters requiring recommendation to Full Council or another strategic committee.

ii. **Net Zero Thematic Group Update – Waste Cunntas às Ùr Buidheann Chuspaireil Neoni Luim – Sgudal**

There had been circulated Report No CCC/12/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- it was suggested that displaying graphics on bins showing the composition of the waste being collected would be an effective way of promoting recycling. In response, the Principal Waste Management Officer confirmed that consideration could be given to promoting recycling messages through social media;
- further information was sought, and provided, in relation to waste audits in schools;
- £120k to provide enhanced recycling infrastructure across the school estate was a relatively modest sum in the context of the Council's overall budget but could have a significant impact. Providing recycling infrastructure in schools would help to foster good recycling habits among young people, and it was suggested that the matter merited further consideration as part of the budget-setting process for the following year;
- the work being undertaken to reduce food waste in schools was commended. It was added that it would be helpful to gather evidence on which menu options generated the greatest volume of food waste and that school catering staff would be a valuable source of information in that regard;
- in relation to the rollout of twin-stream recycling, it was highlighted that the labels indicating what should be placed in each bin had, in many cases, worn off, and it was suggested that consideration be given to re-labelling the bins. It was further suggested that consideration be given to including a supplementary message advising that recyclable waste should be clean and placed in bins loose rather than bagged;
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that there was currently no Council service for the recycling of crisp packets. It was added that new regulations were due to come into force in 2027 requiring local authorities to collect soft plastics and film, although implementation had been delayed in England. Officers would continue to monitor the situation;
- congratulations were extended to the Waste Services Team on receiving the Gold Award in the Waste and Recycling category at the 2026 APSE Scotland Striving for Excellence Awards;

- appreciation was expressed to the Strategic Lead – Waste Strategy and Operations for attending a recent meeting of Hilton, Milton and Castle Heather Community Council to speak about the work of the Waste Service;
- information was sought, and provided, on the procedure to be followed and the responsibilities of the Waste Service where signage and cones were left on a pavement by a Council service or contractor following completion of works;
- the range of organisations involved in recycling and reuse, including ILM Highland, Inverness Tool Library and New Start Highland, was commended. It was fantastic to see the projects that had been funded through the Highland Reuse and Repair Fund, and it was hoped that more funding would be allocated in next year's budget to support further rounds of the Fund; and
- further to earlier comments, it was highlighted that the provision of recycling infrastructure in schools had been one of the key requests made by the Highland Youth Parliament when representatives had attended the Committee earlier in the year, and it was queried whether any discussions had taken place with the Youth Parliament on the matter. In response, it was explained that the focus so far had been on the waste audits and work associated with the Food in Schools project, but that there was potential to hold discussions with, and seek input from, the Youth Parliament. Members further suggested that the matter be raised with the Council's Property and Education Services as an investment in the school estate. The Chair added that the Youth Parliament had had four asks of the Council, which the Council had agreed to progress, and emphasised the need for ongoing discussion, involving youth representatives, across Council services.

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 Buidheann Chuspaireil Neoni Luim – Dealbhachadh, Cleachdadh Fearainn agus Àrainneachd

There had been circulated Report No CCC/13/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In introducing the report, the Strategic Lead – Environment, Development and Transport Planning drew attention to the letter at Appendix 2, from the Leader and Convener of the Council to the Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Rural Affairs, highlighting increasing concerns regarding climate risk in Highland. It was explained that, since the publication of the agenda and papers, a response had been received acknowledging the impacts of climate change in Highland, outlining the funding currently available and indicating a willingness to meet and discuss further ideas. It was confirmed that the response could be circulated to Members for comment following the meeting.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- thanks were expressed for the detailed report, and the good news within it, including the increased capacity within the Ecology Planning Team and the anticipated continuation of Nature Restoration Fund funding, was welcomed;
- Members commended the letter at Appendix 2 of the report, which conveyed Highland's vulnerability to climate risk and the particular circumstances facing the Council, and looked forward to receiving the response;

- it was helpful to see the wide range of projects that had been supported through the Nature Restoration Fund;
- in response to a question regarding how communities could become involved in the development of the Highland Local Development Plan (HLDP), it was confirmed that a Call for Ideas was currently underway, inviting views on land use and development preferences, including the protection of land. The Call for Ideas was open until 18 September 2026, although it was possible that the deadline might be extended due to anticipated delays in receiving feedback from the Scottish Government on the Gate Check process. Further discussion took place, during which Members referred to instances where communities had believed an area of land to be amenity land when, in planning terms, it had been identified for development, and it was queried how the HLDP process could be used to address such situations. In response, it was explained that communities could submit either place-based or policy-based proposals through the Call for Ideas exercise. Information was also sought, and provided, on the approach being taken to development that would require access to a car, during which it was explained that it was necessary to take a pragmatic and proportionate approach in an area such as Highland, which had a sizeable rural community and areas of depopulation that were fragile; and
- thanks were expressed for the Members' workshop which had provided an opportunity for Members to contribute to the draft Greenspace Biodiversity Management Strategy.

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

1. **Scotland's Climate Change Plan 2026-2040** **Plana Atharrachadh Gnàth-shìde na h-Alba 2026–2040**

There had been circulated Report No CCC/14/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- it was queried whether, in future, the Carbon Dioxide equivalent impact of some of the Council's major challenges or projects could be quantified to enable a more targeted approach to decision-making. In response, it was explained that life-cycle carbon assessments were being undertaken for seven Highland Investment Plan projects as a first step towards viewing carbon as a commodity against a project. The intention was that, once a baseline had been established, the approach would be rolled out to other projects;
- the greater emphasis being placed on the adaptation and resilience aspect of climate change was welcomed;
- simple measures, such as more frequent clearing of drains and gullies, could make a significant difference in the event of flooding, helping to prevent costly damage to roads and pavements, and the importance of cross-service working was emphasised. It was added that staffing resources to undertake activities such as clearing drains had reduced over the years, and it was necessary to find ways to fund frontline resources to enable issues arising within communities to be addressed promptly;
- alignment between the national Climate Change Plan and the Council's priorities was key. However, as indicated in the report, a number of concerns and

uncertainties remained in that regard, particularly in relation to funding and long-term implementation. The ability to deliver on aspirations was questioned, and it was suggested that both national government and the Council needed to do more to deliver a transition that enabled communities to thrive, remain sustainable and be resilient to risks such as flooding and wildfires;

- attention was drawn to section 3.1 of the report, which stated that the publication of Scotland's Climate Change Plan reinforced the conclusions reached by the Council in March 2026 that the scale, complexity and crosscutting nature of climate change, energy transition and community resilience now required a more coordinated corporate approach to delivery. It was suggested that this indicated the Council had not achieved as much progress as it might have to date, despite the efforts of the Climate Change and Energy Team, and it was questioned whether climate change had been taken seriously enough. Reference was also made to the National Emergency Briefing documentary film, which it was recommended be promoted to Members, officers and the public. One of the key messages highlighted in the film was that, should the Gulf Stream stop within the next 50 years, it was likely that Scotland would be frozen for nine months of the year, which would have severe consequences for agriculture, whisky production and engineering linked to port infrastructure. In responding to the points raised, the Climate Change and Energy Team Manager explained that the Council was recognised externally as being one of the most advanced local authorities in terms of its thinking and the processes being put in place. However, funding was not at the level required to deliver the Council's aspirations, and this was an issue at a national level. Highland was a major contributor to UK energy security, and additional support was required, together with long-term funding strategies rather than the current annual funding arrangements;
 - reference was made to the Isle of Raasay's participation in the Carbon Neutral Islands Project and the associated Community Action Plan, and it was suggested that it was necessary to consider how similar action plans could be rolled out across Highland;
 - the Chair draw attention to section 7 of the report, which stated that the Council's call for long-term and predictable funding was only partially reflected in the Climate Change Plan in that, while the Plan provided additional information on investment requirements, costs and benefits, it did not introduce significant new funding commitments for local government. It was emphasised that the Council was a key delivery partner in meeting both local and national Net Zero targets and therefore required the necessary capacity and resources to fulfil that role. The Climate Change Plan was sadly lacking in detail on what support might be available and, as indicated in the report, uncertainty remained regarding delivery capacity, resourcing and the practical implementation of actions at local level. The Chair therefore proposed the following additional recommendation which, following further discussion regarding how this and the earlier additional recommendations would align with the Council's budget setting process, was accepted by the Committee:-
- iv. agree to recommend to the Council that, in light of the implications of Scotland's Climate Change Plan 2026–2040 and building on the Council's Net Zero Strategy and programme-led approach to climate change, energy and community resilience, a report be brought to Full Council no later than December 2026 setting out:
- a. how the national Climate Change Plan aligns with the Council's Net zero target and programme;

- b. any additional actions, responsibilities or delivery pressures arising for the Council;
- c. the implications for the capacity and resourcing of the Climate Change and Energy Team and other relevant Council services;
- d. the external funding, invest-to-save, income-generation and other sustainable funding opportunities available to support delivery; and
- e. any staffing, financial, governance or organisational proposals requiring Council approval, in sufficient time to inform the Council's budget and workforce planning for 2027/28.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the publication of Scotland's Climate Change Plan 2026-2040;
- ii. **NOTED** the implications of the Climate Change Plan for the Council;
- iii. **NOTED** that the final Climate Change Plan reinforced the strategic direction approved by the Council in March 2026 and supported the Council's ongoing programme of work to strengthen coordination of climate mitigation, adaptation, energy transition and community resilience across Council services; and
- * iv. **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to the Council that, in light of the implications of Scotland's Climate Change Plan 2026–2040 and building on the Council's Net Zero Strategy and programme-led approach to climate change, energy and community resilience, a report be brought to Full Council no later than December 2026 setting out:
 - a. how the national Climate Change Plan aligns with the Council's Net zero target and programme;
 - b. any additional actions, responsibilities or delivery pressures arising for the Council;
 - c. the implications for the capacity and resourcing of the Climate Change and Energy Team and other relevant Council services;
 - d. the external funding, invest-to-save, income-generation and other sustainable funding opportunities available to support delivery; and
 - e. any staffing, financial, governance or organisational proposals requiring Council approval, in sufficient time to inform the Council's budget and workforce planning for 2027/28.

2. Fourth Climate Change Risk Assessment – Independent Assessment Ceathramh Measadh Cunnairt Atharrachadh na Gnàth-shìde – Measadh Neo-eisimeileach

There had been circulated Report No CCC/15/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Members raised concern regarding the increasing frequency of wildfires and, with reference to a recent article in The Lancet, emphasised the significant public health risks arising from the inhalation of smoke generated by such incidents. It was suggested that every effort should be made to prevent wildfires from occurring in Scotland and to raise awareness of the associated health risks;
- support was expressed for the earlier suggestion of screening the National Emergency Briefing on the climate and nature crises in the UK for Elected Members and officers;

- challenges relating to food and energy insecurity were highlighted, with particular emphasis on the impact these issues had on farmers;
- the pragmatic nature of the Independent Assessment was welcomed;
- reference was made to the links between climate resilience, land use and food security. Concern was expressed regarding the precarious nature of food supply chains, with reference to recent disruption to food supplies in Skye, and it was suggested that consideration be given to opportunities to increase local food production, including through crofting and increased access to land for allotments, thereby supporting both food security and community resilience; and
- the Chair outlined warnings of increasingly extreme climate-related crises, including food shortages, rising food costs, water shortages and wildfires, and, further to earlier comments regarding the National Emergency Briefing, proposed an additional recommendation, namely that the Committee agree to recommend to the Council that screenings of the National Emergency Briefing on climate and nature in the UK be organised for staff and Elected Members to inform the continued development of the Council-wide Climate Change Adaptation Action Plan and resilience activities across Council services.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the findings of the Technical Report and A Well-Adapted UK summarised in the report and the associated appendices;
- ii. **NOTED** the implications of these reports for the Council's climate adaptation and resilience activities;
- * iii. **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to the Council that the findings of the Technical Report and A Well-Adapted UK be used to inform the continued development of the Council-wide Climate Change Adaptation Action Plan and related adaptation activity, where relevant and appropriate; and
- * iv. **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to the Council that screenings of the National Emergency Briefing on climate and nature in the UK be organised for staff and Elected Members to inform the continued development of the Council-wide Climate Change Adaptation Action Plan and resilience activities across Council services.

3. Highland Adapts Update and Funding Request

Cunntas às Ùr agus Iartras Maoineachaidh Co-cheangailte ris A' Ghàidhealtachd a' Freagarrachadh

There had been circulated Report No CCC/16/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In presenting the report, the Net Zero Programme Manager highlighted that, since publication of the report, Highlands and Islands Enterprise had confirmed a contribution of £20,000 to the Highland Adapts Partnership. Approval of the Council's proposed contribution of £15,000 would result in the Partnership being fully funded for 2026/27.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** 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. **NOTED** 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. **NOTED** the contribution of Highland Adapts to the delivery of the Council's strategic approach to Climate Change, Energy and Community Resilience; and
- * iv. **AGREED 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.

4. Performance Monitoring Report Q1 2026/27 Aithisg Sgrùdadh Coileanaidh R1 2026/27

There had been circulated Report No CCC/17/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

The Committee scrutinised and **NOTED** the service performance information.

The meeting concluded at 3.55 pm.