

The Highland Council

Agenda Item	4i
Report No	CCC/18/26

Committee: Climate Change

Date: 4 November 2026

Report Title: Net Zero Programme Update

Report By: Assistant Chief Executive - Place

1 Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 This report provides an update on the Net Zero Programme and progress in implementing the strategic approach approved by Council through the Climate Change, Energy and Community Resilience Strategic Paper in March 2026.

1.3 The content and structure of the report is intended to:-

- assist Member scrutiny and performance management;
- inform decision making and aid continuous improvement; and
- provide transparency and accessibility

2 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:-

- Scrutinise and note** progress to date as outlined in the report and Appendices 1, 3 and 4 of the report; and
- Agree to recommend** to Council the approval of the project brief templates within Appendix 2 of the report for inclusion in the Council's Net Zero Programme.

3 Implications

3.1 **Resource** - The Climate Change, Energy and Community Resilience Strategic Paper highlighted the need to strengthen long-term organisational capacity, coordination and programme governance. Resource implications (staffing and funding) will continue to be managed under existing arrangements, while proposals to address longer-term capacity and resourcing requirements are developed for consideration by Council.

3.2 **Legal** - The Council has several requirements in respect of reporting against its climate change obligations, in addition to being required to directly support Scotland's target to end its contribution to climate change no later than 2045.

3.3 **Risk** - Failure to proactively address the climate and ecological emergency across all service delivery areas carries significant reputational, operational and financial risk. These risks were highlighted in the Climate Change, Energy and Community Resilience Strategic Paper and are underpinned by the evidence set out in the Highland Climate Change Risk and Opportunity Assessment (HCCROA).

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, climate-related risks to health, wellbeing and service delivery identified through the Highland Climate Change Risk and Opportunity Assessment will inform future adaptation planning and the development of the Council's Climate Change Adaptation Action Plan.

3.5 **Gaelic** - There are no implications arising as a direct result of 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 Net Zero Programme

5.1 Overall Project RAG & Milestones

Workstream: Net Zero Delivery		Portfolio: Net Zero, Energy Investment & Innovation	
Project: Net Zero Programme A		Portfolio Sponsor: Assistant Chief Executive	
Deliver Highland Council's programme to achieve net zero emissions.		MILESTONES CURRENT STATUS	
ACTIVITY: The Net Zero programme drives transformative change in the Council, accelerating the shift towards a sustainable, climate ready organisation and plays a pivotal role to incorporate sustainable measures into Council plans, policies and procedures.		Starts Apr 25 / Completes Aug 25	Net Zero Programme: Approval of an Adaptation Strategy for the Council M6 25/26 Completed
PROJECT ELEMENTS: - Develop and support the Net Zero Programme to embed in all operations / service delivery activities. - Develop business continuity plans. - Provide quantitative, data driven insights to inform future planning. - Cross council policy alignment.		Starts Oct 24 / Completes Sep 25	Net Zero Programme: Shared Procurement Service to evaluate and propose alternative carbon budgeting tools M7 25/26 Completed
		Starts Apr 24 / Completes Oct 25	Net Zero Programme: Agreement and introduction of core KPIs to be reported at both a Corporate and Service Level M6 26/27 No Significant Progress
		Starts Apr 24 / Completes Nov 25	Net Zero Programme: Net Zero embedded in Capital Programme M11 25/26 Completed
		Starts Jun 24 / Completes Jun 26	Net Zero Programme: Service carbon budgets/emissions targets approved M6 26/27 Some Slippage
		Starts Apr24 / Completes Mar27	Net Zero Programme: Develop proposed projects for inclusion in Net Zero Programme M6 26/27 On Target

Overall Project Status

While progress continues across several workstreams, the overall status of the Net Zero Programme is currently assessed as **Amber**, due to ongoing slippage in the following key milestone: **Agreement and introduction of core KPIs to be reported at both a Corporate and Service Level.**

Milestones

Milestones currently set up in PRMS to monitor progress of the programme are as follows:-

Timeline	Milestone	Current Status	Comments
Completes March 2027	Develop proposed projects for inclusion in Net Zero Programme	On Target	Work is underway to align the Net Zero Programme with the strategic approach approved by Council in March 2026. This includes identifying high-level workstreams to support a more coordinated approach to project development and prioritisation, aligned with the proposed governance model. Since the March 2026 report, a number of actions have progressed from development into implementation, as outlined in section 8. Progress to date is helping to inform the next phase of programme development and the future prioritisation of projects within the Net Zero Programme.
Completes September 2025	Shared Procurement Service to evaluate and propose alternative carbon budgeting tools	Completed	
Completes June 2026	Service carbon budgets/emissions targets approved	Some slippage	At the Council meeting in June 2026, Members agreed to approve the proposed approach to strengthening the Council's carbon reporting, management and decision-support capability.

			Members also agreed that the Council should progress a 12-month managed engagement with Eden Seven to support the delivery of this approach. A robust and consistent baseline of the Council's carbon emissions is essential to support the development and management of carbon budgets across services. Carbon budgets provide a key mechanism for managing corporate risk associated with emissions-reduction targets, enabling the Council to set realistic service-level expectations, track performance, and intervene early where delivery is off-track. Without a clear baseline and consistent dataset, it is difficult to allocate meaningful carbon budgets, assess cumulative impacts across services, or direct action effectively in line with the Council's long-term sustainability commitments. At its September 2026 meeting, the Net Zero, Energy Investment & Innovation Board (NZEI) approved a change request to revise the implementation timeline and adopt a phased approach. This will ensure that carbon budgets are underpinned by robust evidence, appropriate governance and an agreed methodology. Further detail is outlined under Key Risks.
Completes November 2025	Net Zero embedded in Capital Programme	Completed	

Completes October 2025	Agreement and introduction of core KPIs to be reported at both a Corporate and Service Level	No significant progress	As previously reported, progression of this milestone is dependent on the review of the Net Zero Programme's Terms of Reference and governance structure. A key focus of the Climate Change, Energy and Community Resilience Strategic Paper agreed by Council in March is to strengthen coordination across Council services and to develop proposals for a sustainable, long-term delivery model to support the Council's climate change, energy and resilience programme. This recognises that effective delivery will require sustained organisational capacity and programme coordination aligned with long-term programme delivery rather than short-term project funding cycles. Proposals, including an updated governance model for the Net Zero Programme, will be brought to Council.
Completes August 2025	Approval of an Adaptation Strategy for the Council	Completed	Climate Change Adaptation Strategy approved by Council on 18 September 2025.

Revised milestones and measures of success for the Net Zero Programme will be developed, alongside the governance review, in line with the direction set out in the Strategic Paper.

5.2 Key Risks & Measures of Success

Below is an extract of the second page of the PRMS project dashboard which sets out the Key Risks and Measures of Success for the programme:-

INVESTMENT		KEY RISKS ASSESSED / RESPONSE			CURRENT RISK RATING	RESPONSE
£	Net Zero Programme Investment: EMR (Current FY Forecast)				16	Treat
					9	Tolerate
					9	Tolerate
MEASURES OF SUCCESS		CURRENT STATUS				
£	Efficiency Savings: Staff travel utilisation, grey fleet and car club - FY 25-26 (Current FY Forecast)					
	Net Zero Programme: Grant funding secured [reporting starts tbc]					
	Net Zero Prog: % Carbon emissions reduction [reporting starts 23/24]	9.5 %				
	Net Zero Prog: The number of projects proposed to the Climate Change Committee [annual]	18				
	Net Zero Prog: % of Business Continuity Plans aligned with Council's Adaptation Strategy and Action Plan [reporting starts 2025/26]					
	Net Zero Prog: % of capital projects that have defined level of carbon impact prior to approval of capital spend [reporting starts 2025/26]					
	Net Zero Prog: Highland Council Carbon Budget [reporting starts 24/25] - Tonnes of CO2 equivalent (tCO2e)	34,893				
	Net Zero Prog: Service-level Carbon Budget Targets - Corporate [reporting starts 2025/26]					
	Net Zero Prog: Service-level Carbon Budget Targets - People [reporting starts 2025/26]					
	Net Zero Prog: Service-level Carbon Budget Targets - Place [reporting starts 25/26]					

Key Risks

There are no changes to the assessed likelihood or impact scores of existing programme risks. The governance review and wider programme development work are intended to strengthen management of these risks over the longer term.

Treatment Actions for the highest rated risk 'Failure to align our budget expenditure' are:-

Risk Action	RAG Status
Carbon Budgeting	GREEN
At the Council meeting on 25 June 2026, Members agreed to approve the proposed approach to strengthening the Council's carbon reporting, management and decision-support capability. Members also agreed that the Council should progress a 12-month managed engagement with Eden Seven to support the delivery of this approach. A robust and consistent baseline of the Council's carbon emissions is essential to support the development and management of carbon budgets across services. At its September 2026 meeting, the Net Zero, Energy Investment & Innovation Board (NZEI) approved a change request to revise the implementation timeline to reflect the work required to introduce carbon budgeting across the Council:-	

• October 2026: Contract signed and onboarding commenced with Eden Seven. • March 2027: Corporate carbon reporting, forecasting and scenario-modelling capability established through implementation of the cero.earth platform and organisational emissions baseline established. • August 2027: Carbon budgeting framework, including governance arrangements, roles and responsibilities, considered and approved. • December 2027: Service-level carbon budgets and emissions reduction trajectories developed. • March 2028: Service carbon budgets approved and incorporated into service planning and reporting arrangements.	
Establish Performance Reviews	AMBER
Delivery of this measure will be progressed through the proposed programme-led corporate delivery model, subject to Corporate Management Team and Member approval. Programme development proposals include establishing more consistent, structured engagement with each Service Cluster to support periodic performance reviews on the integration of Net Zero and resilience considerations into service planning, capital investment and operational delivery, addressing the misalignment identified in current arrangements.	
Integrate Net Zero into financial decision-making frameworks	AMBER
Integration of Net Zero into financial decision-making is being advanced through programme development proposals aligned to the Council approved Climate Change, Energy and Community Resilience strategic paper. This includes active work to embed Net Zero principles within the capital programme, notably through the introduction of whole life carbon assessment, improved capital governance and earlier integration of energy, carbon and lifecycle cost considerations into investment appraisal, capital planning and funding decisions.	
Service Net Zero Programme Reporting	GREEN
Recurring annual target date of November to align with the Public Bodies Climate Change Duties Reporting. Highland Council's Public Bodies Climate Change Duties Return for 2025/26 is included on this agenda as a separate agenda item.	

- 5.3 **Investment** - The Net Zero Programme has approved investment of £630,000 to cover months 1-36 of the Delivery Plan.

The table below shows spend against this investment for 2026/27:-

Net Zero Programme: Investment	M6 26/27	
	Current Forecast	Actual to Date
	£238,000	£117,269

Expenditure is currently in line with the approved 2026/27 budget profile, with expenditure to date relating to staffing costs incurred between April and September 2026.

6 Net Zero Programme – Quarterly Projects Updates

- 6.1 **Appendix 1** outlines progress of the projects approved to date.

7 Projects for Consideration

- 7.1 Project template slides within **Appendix 2** have been developed for consideration by the Committee detailing the planned activity, milestones and measures of success for each project.

8 Climate Change, Energy and Community Resilience Strategic Paper

- 8.1 The Climate Change, Energy and Community Resilience Strategic Paper, approved by Council in March 2026, identified a number of strategic priorities. Since approval, work has progressed across several of these areas, including youth voice, coastal change adaptation and resilience funding, and community resilience. A summary of progress is provided below.

8.2 Youth Voice

- 8.2.1 In response to the Council's commitment to embed the voice of young people within its approach to climate change, energy and community resilience, and following both the key asks presented by the Highland Youth Parliament and the subsequent Council motion on climate change and environmental education, the Climate Change and Energy Team (CCET) prepared a high-level mapping review of Learning for Sustainability and Sustainable Learning Settings across Highland.
- 8.2.2 The review was intended to provide an overview of policy drivers, existing activity, partnership working and accredited learning opportunities across Highland schools and settings. The review was shared with the Chief Officers for Education and presented to the Education & Learning Quality Improvement Group on 21 September. Engagement has also taken place with the Strategic Lead (Operations), with discussions underway regarding the establishment of an Education-led cross-service working group. This would provide a mechanism for coordinated cross-service working across Education, Property, Catering, Cleaning & Facilities Management, Waste, Environment, Amenities and CCET, supporting the delivery of the priorities and opportunities identified.

8.3 Coastal Change and Flooding

- 8.3.1 In line with the Council's March 2026 decision, a joint letter from the Council Leader and Convener was issued to the Scottish Government on 25 June 2026 seeking greater clarity on the future funding model for flood protection, coastal change adaptation and climate resilience. The letter, included within **Appendix 3**, highlighted concerns regarding the absence of long-term funding certainty, the lack of a dedicated funding stream for coastal change adaptation, and the growing gap between the scale of climate risk and available investment.
- 8.3.2 A response included within **Appendix 4** was received from the Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Rural Affairs, Gillian Martin MSP on 16 July 2026. While noting that funding reform work is underway through the Scottish Government, COSLA and local authorities, the Cabinet Secretary acknowledged the particular challenges facing Highland communities, confirmed continued investment in coastal adaptation activity, and indicated a willingness to meet with Council representatives to discuss the issues raised and learn more about the Highland Adapts partnership and its potential application elsewhere in Scotland.
- 8.3.3 Work will continue to progress the offer of ministerial engagement, advocate for a sustainable long-term funding model, and strengthen the alignment between community priorities and programme development. This will support the progression of deliverable projects and investment opportunities that address local adaptation needs, including within the 29 Highland communities identified as being at risk from coastal erosion.

8.4 Community Resilience

- 8.4.1 There is growing recognition across Highland of the need to strengthen climate adaptation and resilience. Work undertaken through the Community Planning Partnership, Community Partnerships, Community Resilience Planning and Local Place Plans has identified flooding, coastal erosion, climate adaptation and wider community resilience as priorities within a number of communities. This is reflected in emerging work being progressed through the Highland Community Safety & Resilience Partnership, which has identified community resilience as an increasing area of focus following recent experiences of severe weather, wildfires and other disruptive events. Council services, including CCET, have been identified as key strategic stakeholders to contribute to the development of this work.
- 8.4.2 In parallel, work is commencing across Council services to improve collaboration and visibility of activity being delivered across communities and partner organisations. A cross-Council officer collaboration session has been established to identify opportunities for greater coordination, reduce duplication and strengthen joined-up delivery across a range of community-focused agendas, including resilience-related activity.

8.4.3 Emerging engagement has also highlighted a recurring challenge in securing the funding, resources and capacity required to develop, maintain and implement resilience measures. This presents an opportunity to strengthen links between community resilience activity and the Council's wider climate adaptation, resilience and investment programmes, helping to translate identified risks and community priorities into deliverable projects, programmes and coordinated investment opportunities that support resilience and adaptation outcomes.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive - Place

Date: 1 October 2026

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Background Papers: None

Appendices: Appendix 1 – Net Zero Programme Project Updates
Appendix 2 – Net Zero Programme – Project Brief Template
Appendix 3 - Flood Protection, Coastal Change Adaptation and Long-Term Resilience Letter to Scottish Government
Appendix 4 - Flood Protection, Coastal Change Adaptation and Long-Term Resilience Scottish Government Response

Appendix 1

Built Estate & Energy						
Project	Activity	Project Elements	Measures of Success	Milestones	Update - August 2026	Update - November 2026
Net Zero Transition Surveys	Undertake surveys of 300 non-domestic Council properties to evaluate and identify measures required to transition to Net Zero carbon emissions	- Carry out physical surveys and associated analysis to prepare site-specific reports detailing measures required to transition to Net Zero - Compile database of costed opportunities - Identify, and where deemed cost-effective, to progress implementation of cost reduction opportunities and projects	- Year 1 – 35% of properties surveyed - Year 2 – 65% of properties surveyed - Year 1 – £0.20m of opportunities implemented - Year 2 – £0.45m of opportunities implemented - Year 3 – £0.45m of opportunities implemented	M1 - Plan agreed - Apr 24 - Aug 24 M2 - 1st Tranche properties surveyed - Apr 24 - Mar 25 M3 - 2nd Tranche properties surveyed - Apr 25 - Mar 26	Engagement ongoing with respect to implementation of associated projects.	Engagement continues with respect to implementation of associated projects. A programme of site investigations has been initiated with a focus on sites with poor water efficiencies. To date potential cost savings from rectifying issues at these sites are estimated to be £31,553/year (8,965m3 of water and 3tCO2e per annum).
Solar PV Council Estate	Optimisation and expansion of solar PV across the Council's non-domestic, non-commercial estate to supply green energy by direct wire; delivering a financial and carbon saving and protecting against future carbon tax liability.	- Identify and rank Council-owned/occupied sites - Undertake any remedial works required - Design and install - Maintenance regimes, compliance and certification built into management of the sites	100% existing sites operational and generating energy - Income: £1.3m by year 3 rising to £2m p/a - Increase in installed generation capacity - Reduced electricity costs for service users - Reduction in Council CO2 emissions	M1 - 04/24: >50% of total generation re-activated M2 - 04/24: Financial model signed off M3 - 05/24: 2024/26 Project and Programme in place M4 - 03/25: 60% of 1MW of new installation completed M5 - 09/25: 1MW of additional new installation completed M6 - 03/26: 1MW additional generation p/a up to 5 years	Aless Academy now operational. Grantown Grammar due to become operational in the Summer holidays. All new installations are currently on hold due to insurance-related considerations. Scotland's Solar Energy Efficiency Loans Scheme (SSEEL's) funding has been awarded for 26/27 projects, however due to delivery concerns an extension to the end of 2026 has been submitted to the Funders. Maintenance and inspection contract is currently in development with Procurement.	Grantown Grammar now operational. Scotland's Solar Energy Efficiency Loans Scheme programme initiated and contractors appointed for 4 sites, with installation works scheduled for completion Dec 26. Maintenance and inspection contract continues to be developed.
Conversion of Fossil Fuel Systems	Undertake detailed heating system options appraisals for properties with aged and poor condition fossil-fuel based heating systems.	Carry out options appraisals to determine how the heating systems can be converted to non-fossil fuel alternatives that support the transition to Net Zero carbon emissions	- Undertake 6 options appraisals on heating systems which have less than 5 years' life expectancy - Define and consult upon report format and content to ensure fitness for purpose - Complete by end of December 2025	M1 - 08/24 - Agree selected properties M2 - 12/24 - Complete options appraisals and associated reports for internal issue for review M3 - 02/25 – Incorporation into planned maintenance works for approved projects	Bid submitted for 2 oil boiler conversion projects, at Nairn Leisure and Dornoch Primary School, through the Capital Board in relation to the Climate Emergency Fund.	Climate Emergency Fund application, for Nairn Leisure and Dornoch Primary School, was unsuccessful. Appraisals continue to be undertaken and assessed when opportunity arises.
Net Zero Design Standards	Determine and agree net zero design standards applicable for non-domestic new builds and refurbishments.	- Review current guidance and legislation to determine the appropriate design standard for all categories - Update and publish technical specifications and associated guidance documentation - Information and knowledge through workshops for dissemination to relevant parties	- Production of technical standards and guidance - Production of compliant life cycle analysis reports for new buildings - Post occupancy evaluation demonstration of meeting operational energy targets - Compliant building carbon strategy documentation	M1 - 08/24: Solar PV technical specification adopted for all new domestic and non-domestic applications M2 - 01/25: Interim technical specification and guidance M3 - 01/26: Update of interim technical specification and guidance M4 - 08/26: Finalised technical specification and guidance published	Draft Net Zero & Sustainability Standard has been developed and issued internally for review with intention to bring to next NZEI portfolio board, and subsequently to committee.	Draft Net Zero & Sustainability Standard continues to be developed. Feedback and contributions have been made by various teams across the Council.

Strategic Asset Management Plan (SAMP)	Embed Net Zero and climate resilience principles across the three core components of the Council's Strategic Asset Management Plan (currently in development): •Asset Management Policy •Asset Management Strategy •Asset Management Working Action Plan	• Ensure the Strategic Asset Management Plan fully aligns with the Council's Net Zero Strategy. • Integrate carbon reduction and climate adaptation measures into a whole lifecycle approach to asset management, ensuring that sustainability, operational efficiency, and climate resilience are considered at every stage.	• The SAMP acknowledges and supports the Council's Route Map to Net Zero and associated targets. • Net Zero considerations are integrated as part of asset management processes and evaluations. • Public and private sector investment is leveraged with respect to Net Zero alignment and compliance.	05/25: First draft developed, led by members of the Built Estate & Energy Thematic Group. 06/25: Review of SAMP by CCET. 08/25: Strategic Asset Management Plan brought to Reconfiguring Our Asset Base (ROAB) Portfolio Board (07/08) and Redesign Board (28/08). 09/25: Approval of SAMP by Members (HC meeting 18/09). 10/25: Implementation of SAMP and supporting comms to all relevant stakeholders to ensure strategy is embedded. 10/26: Annual review of Asset Management Strategy. Ongoing: Continuous management, monitoring, and updating of the Asset Management Action Plan.	Strategic Asset Management Plan has been approved. Strategic principles and assessment tools embedded in Asset Management processes. No further updates expected until the plan is refreshed in 2027.	
Planning, Land Use & Environment						
Project	Activity	Project Elements	Measures of Success	Milestones	Update - August 2026	Update - November 2026
Address Ecological Emergency	Implement priority actions identified in the Council's Ecology Strategy	- Map and quantify greening opportunities across Council Estate - Utilise biodiversity in green space to reduce grass cutting across Council Estate - Develop and deliver a suite of greening projects across Council Estate - Secure external funding to support Council and community greening projects (Nature Restoration Fund) - Strategies and policies developed aligned to the Ecology Strategy - Secure funding and further develop management plan for World Heritage Site (WHS)	10 Council estate Greening projects delivered annually - Pipeline of projects identified, and delivered for biodiversity - Management plan for WHS finalised - Ash dieback mapped and managed across the estate - Identify number of policies to be aligned to the Ecology Strategy - Major planning apps assessed in line with NPF4 biodiversity policies - Funding secured for WHS (£600k) - Recruitment of planning ecologists	M1 - Q2 24/25: Nature Restoration Fund Community grant scheme launched M2 - Q3 24/25: Complete recruitment of Planning Ecologist M3 - Q4 24/25: Review and agree approach to Ash dieback M4 - Q4 24/25: First tranche WHS funding secured M5 - Q1 25/26: WHS staff recruited M6 - Q1 25/26: Opportunity map completed M7 - Q3 25/26: Adoption of Forestry and Woodland Strategy	A draft Greenspace Biodiversity Management Strategy has been developed, with approval being sought from Communities and Place Committee in August 2026 to undertake public consultation. Work is also progressing on the new Highland Forestry and Woodland Strategy, with consultants appointed and Member engagement planned for Autumn 2026. Further detail is provided within the Planning, Land Use & Environment Thematic Group Update to be presented to the Climate Change Committee in August 2026.	Draft Greenspace Biodiversity Management Plan approved for public consultation at C&P Committee in August. Work continues on Highland Forest and Woodland Strategy. Expected completion 27/28 Q1. Initiated work on the Biodiversity Duty Report 2024-2026 Initiated work on the Biodiversity Action Plan / Nature Recovery Plan.
Nature Networks	Create Nature Networks by identifying and mapping Nature Networks in Highland and strengthening connections between them to support improved ecological connectivity	- Identify and map potential high level Nature Networks across Highland. - Carry out workshops with partners and stakeholders to refine existing and potential new local Nature Networks - Identify, with partners and stakeholders, and map the first phase of Local Nature Conservation Sites (LNCSS)	- Nature Networks identified and mapped as part of the Local Development Plan. - Identify 10 opportunities to strengthen or create new Nature Networks. - Establish panel to identify and designate LNCSS. - Through the planning process Nature Networks provide opportunities for developers to focus and deliver biodiversity enhancement obligations.	M1 - 11/24: Establish baseline GIS dataset to include statutory and non-statutory designations, HABMap and key geographical map data M2 - 11/24: Start mapping potential existing Nature Networks (focusing on Inner Moray Firth area) M3 - 12/24: Carry out first workshops (focusing on Inner Moray Firth area) with stakeholders to refine map-based Nature Networks M4 - 04/25: Identify LNCSS (ongoing) and start the designation process (April 2025) M5 - 08/26: Completion of Highland Nature Networks	Alongside the development of Nature Networks, work is underway to identify Local Nature Conservation Sites (LNCSS). In May 2026, the Economy and Infrastructure Committee agreed to declare Ardersier Common as Highland's second Local Nature Reserve (LNR), alongside Merkinch. Further detail is provided within the Planning, Land Use & Environment Thematic Group Update to be presented to the Climate Change Committee in August 2026.	Local Nature Conservation Sites first tranche to be presented to Scientific Panel this quarter. Caledonian pinewood sites prioritised. Nature network mapping of non-30x30 sites ongoing. Presentation to Climate Change Committee delivered.

Kingussie Flood Protection	The Gynack Burn, which flows through Kingussie, overtops during high rainfall events, resulting in flood damage to roads, railway, parks and buildings within the village. Previous modelling work by the Council has established the main cause of the problem being reduced capacity under road and rail bridges due to build-up of sediment and gravel beneath the bridges. Flooding leads to costly and energy intensive clear up operations as well as increased watercourse maintenance works to remove the large build-up of sediment that has raised the bed of the channel. The works proposed involve the stabilisation of the banks of the Gynack Burn further upstream where erosion is prevalent, the methods proposed are green bank protection providing a natural response, reducing sediment load in the watercourse.	• Identification of environmental constraints • Design of natural bank protection works • Establishment of joint working with Network Rail • Collaboration with Estate • Procurement of Contractor to undertake works. • Construction Works • Monitoring	• Stabilisation of previously erodible banks • Reduction in sediment transportation in watercourse and subsequent deposition below road/rail bridges. • Reduction in future watercourse maintenance works (dredging) • THC/Network Rail collaboration to deliver project. • Progression to next section of erodible banks.	M1 - 02/24: Fluvial Audit (complete) M2 - 04/24: Bank stabilisation design (complete) M3 - 09/24: Return of Tenders for works M4 - 10/24: Award construction works M5 - 12/24: Complete works on site		• Kingussie bank stabilisation works in collaboration with Network Rail, designs were completed and went out to tender but the high-cost relative to the reduction of damages anticipated made it unfeasible to progress. • The repair works to the flood relief channel on Pitmain estate were completed, these were part funded by the Council to divert peak flows from the burn, therefore reducing flood risk to the town. • Work will be undertaken, hopefully in the new financial year to remove sediment/gravel from under the road bridges – it would be hoped that this would be done in conjunction with Network Rail removing gravel from under the rail bridge. • Work will be undertaken with the school to ensure an appropriate plan is in place should there be a flood emergency and evacuation required. There will also be a plan put in place to review the maintenance and operation of the existing Flood Defences at the School undertaken in conjunction with the property owner. • Consideration will be given to the implementation of measures such as property level protection for those properties at risk of flooding in Kingussie.
Coastal Change Adaptation Plan (CCAP)	Within The Highland Council area, the coastal zone is home to much of the population, and contains significant infrastructure such as roads, railway lines, bridges, harbours etc. These coastal areas help to drive the economy within the Council area and as such a more adaptive approach is required to ensure our communities and infrastructure remain resilient in the future. The CCAP will provide an overview of the risks across The Highland Council coastal area, identifying locations and infrastructure that are least resilient to climate change and rising sea levels, providing a framework and flexible approach to address these risks over time.	• Development of a CCAP • Case Studies – focus on Relic Defences at 2 locations	• Develop a plan to address the highest risk areas of coastal flooding. • Improve community understanding of coastal flooding and erosion risks.	M1 - 10/24: Finalisation of Regional level Coastal Change Adaptation Plan M2 - 04/25: Case Study Report	Members are referred to the Planning, Land Use & Environment Thematic Group Update to be presented to the Climate Change Committee in August 2026, including updates on the Regional Coastal Change Adaptation Plan, Local CCAP development and correspondence with Scottish Government regarding future funding arrangements for flood protection and coastal resilience.	• The Regional Coastal Change Adaptation Plan (RCCAP) was approved at Committee (May 2025) and provides a high-level guide to those areas at highest risk of coastal erosion and flood risk within the Council area. This information will be used to inform where Local Coastal Change Adaptation Plans will be undertaken. • Local Coastal Change Adaptation Plans have been completed for Nairn and are being progressed for Avonch and Easter Ross Peninsula (including Inver, Portmahomack, Rockfield and the Seaboard Villages). • Case study funding was received for a number of locations and remains on-going including: - o Relic defences at Golspie – now being progressed by the community with assistance from the Council to re-establish a groyne in the location of the relic pier, work is on-going on design of the new groyne. - o Relic defences at Nairn – as part of this case study, some works have been undertaken to reconstruct the gabions at the West End of the beach and Marram Grass planted to help stabilise the restored dune system at that location –
Highland Local Development Plan (HLDP) – Evidence Report	The Development Plans Team is progressing the HLDP, in close collaboration with statutory key agencies, wider Council services, the development industry, and local communities. The first mandatory milestone is the submission of the HLDP Evidence Report. This project template slide focuses on the development of Chapter 4: Climate Change and Energy.	A comprehensive review has been undertaken by the Climate Change & Energy Team to inform the development of Chapter 4: Climate Change and Energy of the HLDP. This Chapter summarises key evidence and insights relating to: • National Context • Climate Emissions and Impacts • Climate Mitigation and Adaptation • Energy • Heat and Cooling	• All five areas are comprehensively covered. • Evidence sources are up-to-date, and aligned with national policy and the Council's Net Zero Strategy. • Peer review confirms the robustness of the evidence base. • Climate Change & Energy Team engagement completed within agreed timeframe.	07/25: Engagement with relevant CCET members. 08/25: Completion of evidence review across all five areas. 08/25: Revisions to Chapter 4 based on feedback from CCET. 09/25: Feedback from Key Agencies on draft Chapter 4. 10/25: Finalisation of Chapter 4 content, with statements of agreement from Key Agencies and integration into HLDP Evidence Report. 11/25 Report to E&I Committee on HLDP Evidence Report update.	Highland Local Development Plan Evidence Report approved by Highland Council on 25 June 2026 and submitted to Scottish Ministers for Gate Check on 1 July 2026. Chapter 4 (Climate Change and Energy) updated with latest evidence relating to mitigation, adaptation, energy, heat and cooling, including input from the Climate Change and Energy Team. Further progression of the HLDP is now dependent upon successful completion of the Gate Check process.	Highland Local Development Plan Evidence Report approved by Highland Council on 25 June 2026 and submitted to Scottish Ministers for Gate Check on 1 July 2026. The Evidence Report was subsequently withdrawn 27 August 2026 following recommendation to provide further evidence related to housing and infrastructure from the DPEA. Resubmission of the Evidence Report is planned for November 2026. Chapter 4 (Climate Change and Energy) contains evidence relating to mitigation, adaptation, energy, heat and cooling, including input from the Climate Change and Energy Team. Formal preparation of the Proposed Plan follows the successful completion of the Gate Check process, however development planning officers are beginning work to prepare future policies and evaluating settlement development sites.

Nature Restoration Fund	Highland Council has been allocated funding of £600K for 2025/26 through the Nature Restoration Fund. This is a capital and revenue fund designed to help support projects that will deliver nature restoration, safeguard wildlife, and tackle the causes of biodiversity loss due to climate change. This funding will enable the delivery of targeted projects.	•Funding of £300K will be made available for community groups and organisations. •Funding of £300K will be directed to internal Council-led projects. Projects currently under consideration include: •Woodland Management Plans for key Council woodlands •Initial works to support the establishment of a new Local Nature Reserve at Ardersier Common •Work with Amenities to deliver a range of grassland/biodiversity projects - Urban tree planting to restock areas where mature trees have been lost through age or disease •Support delivery of Nature Networks	•Number of community applications received •Number of successful applications and the associated outputs identified to deliver •Number of Council projects delivered •Area of improved habitats created/restored/safeguarded	•August 2025: Launch of NRF Community Grant Programme •October 2025: Recruitment of officer to manage grant programme •March 2026: Commitment of Funds by March 2026 •April 2026: Annual report to Scottish Government	Delivery of Nature Restoration Fund projects continues to support implementation of the Council's Ecology Strategy, including biodiversity enhancement, habitat restoration, nature recovery and community-led projects across Highland. A detailed update on funding allocations, project delivery and planned activity was presented to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee in May 2026 and can be found here: https://www.highland.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/86962/Item%25208.%2520Nature%2520Restoration%2520Fund	29 projects worth £329k have been funded through the NRF Community Grant Scheme. Full monitoring reporting form sent to Scottish Government and detailed update given to Climate Change Committee in August 2026.
Social Housing & HRA						
Project	Activity	Project Elements	Measures of Success	Milestones	Update - August 2026	Update - November 2026
Housing Strategy/ Policy	Enhance the Council's approach to achieving the Local Housing Strategy 2023-28 Outcome 4, "Partnership and innovation builds capacity in Highland so that housing condition and energy efficiency improve and all homes to move towards net zero." This will be achieved through reviewing existing housing stock with a focus on energy efficiency status, adopting whole house retrofit approach to support the reduction of fuel poverty and improving the efficiency of Council properties in line with Net Zero Standards. Review of HRA Capital Plan to remove barriers in achieving targets while incorporating the requirement to secure external funding to support delivery.	• Review stock information to derive a clear understanding of current energy efficiency status and the works required to achieve proposed Social Housing Net Zero Standard (SHNZS). • Review HRA budget allocations • Revise area-based funding allocation to ensure that properties of the greatest need (energy inefficient, off-gas, rural properties in Council tax bands E-G) are prioritised for energy efficiency works. • Undertake feasibility studies for energy efficiency projects including costings. • Review current process for tenant opt out.	• Approach established for achieving proposed SHNZS and alleviating fuel poverty in the Highlands. • Establish accurate costing against housing stock types. • 5 whole house retrofit feasibility completed per annum. • Increased HRA capital budget allocation to energy efficiency works. • Pipeline of shovel-ready energy efficiency projects. • Tracking the reduction in carbon emissions (aligned with Highland Council carbon emission targets).	M1 - 11/25: Report to Housing and Property Committee outlining analysis of stock, understanding of current energy efficiency and requesting approval to change current HRA funding structure. M2 - 11/25: Review of Policy approach/Amendment Review progress of Local Housing Strategy. M3 - Ongoing: Identification of priority projects.	A new HRA Capital Plan 2027-2032 is being submitted to Housing & Property Committee. This will focus on sustained investment in the energy efficiency of housing stock and a targeted approach to works to ensure that external funding is maximised and that houses which most need insulation, heating and fabric works are prioritised across Highland communities.	
Energy Efficient Homes - Caol	Utilise grant funding to support the delivery of a retrofit project to 32 properties located in Caol. Properties are all Swedish Timber construction, off gas and existing roof contains asbestos. Scope of works includes; external wall insulation, removal of asbestos roof, new roof with in-roof solar, insulation lofts (where required) and installing air source heat pumps (some properties already have a heat pump). Project to achieve a minimum of 50% external funding on eligible works.	• Align delivery of retrofit works to social & private properties in Caol. • Maximise and manage external funding, including ECO4 and Scottish Government EES:ABS enabling funds. • Improve condition of housing stock and reduce fuel poverty.	• 90% of allocated properties improved • 50% (min) of external funding leveraged • 100% of properties EPC C or above • Meeting standards, including EESSH2 • Delivery of place-based project including socially and privately owned properties.	M1 - 07/24: Completion of 2 pilot properties M2 - 08/24: Building Warrants approved M3 - 06/25: Project completion M4 - 09/25: Project close report, including monitoring and evaluation	M1 - M4 complete. This project is in defects period	All works have now been completed and formally signed off. Final project reporting, including independent case studies and post-completion evaluation, has been received and the project has been successfully closed. Further information including case study included in the Social Housing & HRA Thematic Group Update to the November Climate Change Committee.

Energy Efficient Homes – Balintore (mixed tenure)	Utilise SHNZF, ECO4 and EES:ABS funding to support the delivery of a mixed-tenure retrofit project to properties located in Balintore. Properties are all Norwegian Timber construction and off gas. Scope of works includes; external wall insulation, new windows & doors, new roof with in-roof solar, insulation lofts (where required) and installing air source heat pumps (some properties already have a heat pump). Project to achieve a minimum of 50% external funding on eligible works.	- Align delivery of retrofit works to social & private properties in Balintore. - Secure external Social Housing Net Zero Funding (SHNZF) and ECO4 funding. - Improve condition of housing stock and reduce fuel poverty. - Support regeneration of the area.	80% of allocated properties improved 50% (min) of external funding leveraged 100% of properties EPC C or above - Meeting standards, including EESSH2 - Delivery of place-based project including socially and privately owned properties.	M1 - 07/24: Submit revised project plan to SG M2 - 08/24: Procurement complete M3 - 09/24: Building warrants approved M4 - 10/24: Installations commence M5 - 06/25: Project completion M6 - 09/25: Project close report, including monitoring and evaluation	M1 - M6 complete This project is in defects period	The Balintore Mixed Tenure Retrofit Project has now been successfully delivered and built upon the experience and lessons learned from the earlier Caol retrofit programme. The project included a total of 75 properties comprising 65 Council homes and 10 privately owned properties. Further information including case study included in the Social Housing & HRA Thematic Group Update to the November Climate Change Committee.
Energy Efficient Homes – Full Retrofit Balintore (Highland Council)	Prioritise economies of scale and full house retrofit approach while delivering Energy Efficiency measures as part of Capital Investment in Highland Council properties. Utilise available capacity to deliver 2 simultaneous projects to one area, 2 project management teams – 2 contractors, same energy efficiency measures. 59.55% properties in area included. Introduce ECO4 funding to our current capital works delivery programme to enhance project's scope. Properties are all Timber construction and off gas. Scope of works includes; external wall insulation, new windows & doors, new roof with in-roof solar, insulation lofts (where required) and installing air source heat pumps.	- Steer capital investment towards a retrofit approach. - Explore externally funded opportunities and mix tenure project delivery. - Improve condition of housing stock and reduce fuel poverty. - Support regeneration of the area.	100% of properties EPC C or above - Meeting standards, including EESSH2 and future compliance 80% of allocated properties improved 50% (min) of external funding leveraged	M1 - 01/24: Initial tenant engagement and opt-in exercise M2 - 07/24: Two projects initiated – 2 contractors appointed M3 - 08/24: Second tenant engagement – Housing needs M4 - 09/24: Technical specifications agreed M5 - 10/24: Installations commence M6 - TBC: Project completion M7 - TBC: Project close report, including lessons learnt	M1 - Completed M2 Completed M3 - Completed M4 - Completed M5 - Completed M6 - Awaiting insulation certificates and EPCs before issue of practical completion - which will be backdated. Issues with Sureserve have resulted in going to senior management to progress	All planned retrofit works have now been completed. The project is currently in the final close-out phase, with end-of-defects inspections underway to address outstanding items and ensure all contractual obligations are fully satisfied. Final property sign-off activities are being completed alongside the receipt and verification of EPC documentation. Further information included in the Social Housing & HRA Thematic Group Update to the November Climate Change Committee.
GBIS - CWI for Social Properties	Utilise Great British Insulation Scheme (GBIS) to deliver cavity wall insulation (CWI) to Council-owned houses. Eligible properties will be insulated and ventilation upgraded (where required) as part of this project. Align delivery of HRA and private properties to create economies of scale and maximise external funding.	- Determine eligible properties - Maximise and manage external funding - Improve the energy efficiency of properties - Undertake external drill tests to confirm property suitability - Review opportunities to scale up the project	100 properties to receive CWI 97% external funding leveraged - Delivery of place-based project including socially and privately owned properties - EPC improvements, including increase in SAP rating and reduction in carbon emissions	M1 - 09/24: Project approval M2 - 03/25: Project completion M3 - 05/25: Project close report, including evaluation M4 - Ongoing: Identification of priority areas	Project closed - has been superseded by the D-C Highland Project.	

D-C Highlands - Council Properties (ECO funded)	Utilise the Energy Company Obligation (ECO) funding to deliver insulation measures, including cavity wall insulation extraction and fill, room-in-roof insulation, loft insulation, internal wall insulation, and cavity internal wall insulation but excluding external wall insulation (EWI) at this stage. Additionally, install Solar Photovoltaic (Solar PV) panels and Air Source Heat Pumps (ASHP) in Council-owned properties. Where insulation is installed, ventilation will be upgraded as required. Measures will be installed based on the properties' eligibility and suitability as outlined by the funding criteria. Align the delivery of Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and private properties to create economies of scale and maximise external funding.	• Determine eligible properties • Maximise and manage external funding • Improve the energy efficiency of Council properties • Undertake external drill tests to confirm property where required suitability • Review opportunities for fully and partially funded projects.	• % of dwellings with a SAP rating of C or above after energy efficiency works • Leverage over £6m of external funding • Delivery of place-based project including socially and privately owned properties • % tenant opt-in for energy efficiency works	M1 - 01/25: Project approval M2 - 12/25: Project completion M3 - 05/26: Project close report, including evaluation M4 - Ongoing: Identification of priority areas	D-C Highlands has now reopened, funding mechanism has changed and there is a 50/50 split on costs per measure. Progress to date: 42 properties completed covering 59 measures. Surveys are ongoing	The ECO funding programme has now closed to new projects. However, funding previously secured by the Council's delivery partner allows works already in the pipeline to continue. As a result, installation activity remains ongoing and is expected to conclude naturally by mid-November 2026. As of the end of August, the programme had delivered 229 individual energy efficiency measures, including solar photovoltaic systems, air source heat pumps, loft insulation and cavity wall insulation improvements. A further 89 surveys and installations are currently underway or programmed for delivery before the programme concludes. Further information included in the Social Housing & HRA Thematic Group Update to the November Climate Change Committee.
Educational Resources	Development of educational resources to support behaviour change and raise awareness of energy efficiency measures. Energy efficiency improvements can result in lower energy costs for tenants which in turn can reduce fuel poverty. This initiative aims to reduce the number of tenant opt-outs per project, particularly in relation to air source heat pumps. Tenant opt-out rates can impact the Council's ability to leverage external funding for energy efficiency programmes.	• Development of new website. • Creation of series of engaging videos showcasing the energy efficiency measures delivered as part of the various projects. • Produce FAQ documents. • Resources will be developed in conjunction with tenant feedback.	• % reduction of tenant opt-outs for energy efficiency works.	M1 09/25: Creation of resources. M2 09/25: Approval of resources. M3 10/25: Roll-out of resources. M4 Ongoing: Review to identify any additional requirements incorporating feedback from users.	The new Council website is live, the Energy Efficiency Homes page includes videos, case studies and further information. This has been developed for private households and resources are being tailored for Council tenants. FAQs documents have been adapted for the below measures, these have been developed in conjunction with housing colleagues and updated following tenant feedback from the April tenant forum. - air source heat pumps - solar PV - cavity wall insulation - external wall insulation - loft insulation Link to website https://www.highland.gov.uk/climate-change-net-zero/energy-efficient-homes Next steps Review and adapt existing videos for use with Council tenants, including any required content amendments. There is expected to be a cost associated for video editing.	
Integration of ECO funding	Integration of Energy Company Obligation (ECO) funding to support the delivery of works under the current Heating Framework to maximise Council HRA budget and increase delivery. Work with contractors on the Heating Framework to identify opportunities for ECO funding and support to access funds.	• Determine eligible properties • Maximise and manage external funding alongside HRA budget • Improve the energy efficiency of Council properties	• % of dwellings with a SAP rating of C or above after energy efficiency works • Leverage over £1m of external funding • % tenant opt-in for energy efficiency works • Positive feedback from tenants	M1 ongoing: Discussions with contractors to secure external funding. M2 ongoing: Identification of eligible properties. M3 Q3 25/26: Project approval. M4 Q3 25/26: Project Delivery.	This project is to be closed following UK Governments decision to not renew ECO schemes. The Council is currently reviewing alternative external funding opportunities.	The external funding landscape for energy efficiency and decarbonisation programmes continues to evolve. The UK Government has confirmed that there will be no direct successor to the Energy Company Obligation (ECO4) programme following its conclusion, although ECO4 has been extended to allow completion of existing commitments through to December 2026. Officers continue to engage with the Scottish Government and sector partners, receiving regular updates on emerging policy and funding opportunities associated with future
Sustainable Travel						
Project	Activity	Project Elements	Measures of Success	Milestones	Update - August 2026	Update - November 2026

Sustainable Travel Through Operational Efficiencies	The Council currently utilises a range of vehicles for business travel including white fleet (vehicles under 3.5T), grey fleet (employee owned vehicle use for work purposes), car club and car hire. This project aims to conduct a comprehensive review of these travel methods with the aim of optimising costs, reducing carbon emissions and improving efficiency while ensuring compliance with relevant policies and regulations.	• Data collection: - Gather data on white fleet, grey fleet, car club and casual car hire. - Review relevant policies, contracts and existing reporting mechanisms • Analysis and reporting • Develop comprehensive reporting detailing findings and recommendations for potential cost savings and emission reductions • Dashboard design • Create a user-friendly dashboard that integrates relevant data and established key performance indicators for efficient business travel • Implementation and training • Pilot dashboard with key services and gather feedback • Monitoring and continuous improvement	• Improved vehicle utilisation in alignment with prescribed travel hierarchy • Utilise data to inform demonstratable reductions in travel costs across all Services • Utilise data to inform demonstratable reductions in emissions across all Services • Improved fleet utilisation through the reduction in use of more expensive travel options • Adoption of use of dashboards across Services	M1 - (Date TBC): Data collection M2 - (Date TBC): Delivery of analysis report M3 - (Date TBC): Dashboard prototype developed M4 - (Date TBC): Pilot testing of dashboard completed M5 - (Date TBC): Dashboard rollout M6 - (Date TBC): Training/comms around use of dashboards M7 - (Date TBC): Implementation review	Dashboards are currently being developed to provide a monthly overview of staff travel across services. The Climate Change & Energy Team has provided analysis of Grey Fleet, Car Club usage and fleet utilisation to the Health and Social Care Travel Working Group and continues to support this work as a member of the group. An interim wider fleet utilisation report has been shared with key officers and is currently being reviewed. This work will support evidence-based decision making to optimise business travel, reduce emissions and improve value for money.	Fuel analysis is progressing which will provide a basis for utilisation, especially where vehicle telematics are unavailable. This will also provide additional intelligence where telematics are installed to show fuel economy against verified mileage, providing an insight into vehicles by type, age, size and other attributes. A live dashboard is being developed showing (close to) real time fleet utilisation to support the optimisation of our fleet operations. Additional tools and reports are being considered through pilot of Grey Fleet and Car Club usage dashboards in regard to Health, Wellbeing and Social Care.
Active Travel	Developing infrastructure to enable and encourage staff to choose active travel is a key area of focus highlighted in the Council's Net Zero Strategy. An employee travel survey will be conducted in Autumn 2024 to provide an updated evidence base to help identify actions to support a shift in travel choices for employee travel for commuting and work-related purposes.	• Develop, implement and analyse an employee travel survey • Refresh the existing Travel Plan for the Council HQ building in Inverness, considering both health and wellbeing, equalities and sustainability requirements • Design and facilitate focus groups with staff to help encourage greater engagement with the Highland Council Travel Plan • Provide a summary presentation/briefing of survey findings and subsequent actions/approaches as appropriate • Work with key stakeholders such as HITRANS to maximise impact	• Increase in active travel • Removal of barriers to staff using active travel	M1 - 09/24: Creation of an online employee travel survey M2 - 10/24: Focus Group sessions held M3 - 12/24: Production of a summary presentation/ briefing with findings and subsequent actions M4 - 01/25: Refreshed Highland Council Travel Plan M5 - 01/25 and ongoing: Delivery of actions	Analysis of the Staff Survey has been completed and priority actions identified. These have informed the development of a draft Staff Travel Action Plan. The survey findings and draft action plan were presented to both the Local Transport Strategy Steering Group and Officer Working Group and have helped shape a programme of actions focused on improving awareness of sustainable travel options, addressing barriers identified by staff and supporting increased uptake of walking, wheeling and cycling for both commuting and business travel.	Findings from the Council's Flexible Working, Travel and Asset Survey outlined in the Sustainable Business Travel thematic group update to the November Climate Change Committee. Priority actions, informed by the survey findings and staff business travel data, appended to the thematic group committee report.
EV Policy	Development of policy around the efficient use of council-operated electric vehicles (EVs) charging infrastructure	• Development of policy • Development and delivery of communications and training to support the policy implementation	• Increased network availability • Enhanced staff awareness and behavioural change • Mitigated reputational risk for the Council	M1 - 04/25: Policy Drafted M2 - 05/25: Present draft policy to Communities & Place Committee for approval M3 - 06/25: Roll out of communications and training	Development of the EV charging policy has been incorporated into the wider Net Zero Design Standard. This will provide a consistent framework for the use and management of Council-operated EV charging infrastructure.	As previous update.

Elected Member Travel	Develop reporting to provide meaningful and understandable information regarding Member Travel, including associated costs and carbon emissions.	• Review of current Member Travel including mode e.g. car club, lift share, own vehicle (grey fleet) • Create a user-friendly dashboard that integrates relevant data • Implementation and training in respect of dashboard • Identify champion to encourage other Members to carpool, use car club or alternatives to travel	• Adoption of dashboard • Reduction in mileage, leading to decreased carbon emissions and costs • Improved utilisation of Council vehicles e.g. car club instead of Grey Fleet • Increased levels of lift share, carpooling	M1 - 03/25: Data collection M2 - 05/25: Delivery of analysis report to Climate Change Committee M3 - 05/25: Identification of champion M4 - 05/25: Development and testing of dashboard M5 - 06/25: Training/comms around use of dashboard	Following requests from the Climate Change Committee, a Members workshop on sustainable travel remains to be scheduled.	Following requests from the Climate Change Committee, a Members workshop on sustainable travel remains to be scheduled.
Light Fleet - Optimal Utilisation	Review utilisation levels and actual business requirements for the Council's light fleet	• Develop a vehicle report template to highlight and report key metrics • Analysis of fleet data and individual vehicle reports to adopt a data driven approach for determining the optimal fleet size • Identify underutilised vehicles and opportunities to downsize the fleet or vehicle size, and determine where vehicles could be shared to ensure full utilisation • Strengthen guidance around misuse of vehicles to develop awareness across all members of staff as to the appropriate use of vehicles	• Improved fleet utilisation • Transition of high grey fleet usage/mileage to fleet vehicles • Reduction in the use of more expensive travel options, such as casual car hire • Additional financial savings, including reduced maintenance and insurance costs	M1 - 03/25: Data modelling completed M2 - 04/25: Completion of high-level Light Fleet Utilisation reporting M3 - 05/25: Individual vehicle reporting template finalised M4 - Ongoing: Monitoring and engagement with Services	Dashboards are currently being developed to support ongoing monitoring of fleet utilisation. Depot reports for Diriebught and Carrs Corner have been expanded into an interim fleet utilisation report covering a wider range of Council vehicles. The report has been shared with key officers and is currently being reviewed. A fuel reporting tool is also being developed and verified, providing information on vehicle mileage, fuel consumption, spend and efficiency. This will form the basis of a monthly Fleet Utilisation Dashboard, supporting evidence-based decision making around fleet provision, utilisation and opportunities for operational and carbon savings.	Fuel analysis progressing. Interim utilisation report continues to be reviewed by relevant officers to highlight areas for improvement and actions ongoing. Utilisation dashboard is being developed to be updated periodically (monthly, or quarterly at minimum). This will provide monitoring and evidence base for where efficiencies can be achieved. There has been a reduction of existing fleet year-on-year (reduction of 63 across all vehicle and plant categories).
Light Fleet - Process	Comprehensive review of process to acquire a new fleet vehicle or replace an existing vehicle. Staff will be signposted to alternative options such as Car Club where mileage does not justify allocation of a fleet vehicle. In cases where a vehicle is approved, a ULEV will be provided as standard wherever possible. The process will also consider the opportunity to 'pool' vehicles to ensure the correct size and type of vehicle is utilised. This would negate the need to lease larger vehicles required infrequently (e.g. where a smaller vehicle is sufficient most of the time).	• Review whole end to end process for light fleet • Develop new process and form for instigating a request for new or replacement light fleet vehicles • Develop decision making process / hierarchy to outline where a dedicated light fleet vehicle may not be the most appropriate option	• Data driven decision making • Robust approval process • Increased scrutiny • Cost and carbon savings	M1 - 04/25: Identify Key Performance Indicators M2 - 04/25: Review and revise current processes and policies M3 - 05/25: Light Fleet Request platform developed, tested and launched M4 - Ongoing: Monitoring	Ongoing. The review and approval process for new and replacement light fleet vehicles is being aligned with the wider fleet reduction and utilisation programme.	Fleet utilisation intelligence will feed in to processes to align with alternatives where applicable. This is likely to include Car Club and enablement of fleet vehicles shared between services for example.

E-Bike Scheme	As part of the Council's approach to fleet decarbonisation, the Council has participated in an E-cargo bike pilot scheme for business travel. The pilot has highlighted challenges around the storage of bikes; charging/storage of batteries; and staff being unable to use the bikes for commuting purposes due to insurance exclusions. Initial feedback has suggested e-bikes would be preferable for several teams that have participated in the pilot. Further work is required to determine the future delivery model	• Evaluation of E-cargo bike pilot • Assess leasing options to include the provision of e-bikes/e cargo bikes, servicing, maintenance and insurance • Undertake comparison of resources (staffing and costs) to deliver in-house vs leasing • Work with key stakeholders such as HITRANS to determine future delivery model, including the feasibility of a shared scheme with partner organisations/open access to the public	• Expansion of accessible e-bike scheme • Alleviation of current challenges regarding maintenance and insurance • Increased uptake of low-emission business travel • Reduction in fleet usage and associated emissions and costs	M1 - 01/25: Evaluation of pilot M2 - 02/25 Identify journeys currently undertaken using fleet vehicles, where use of an e-bike may be more appropriate M3 - 03/25 Comparison of costings M4 - 08/25 Determine future delivery model following discussions with partner organisations	Staff Travel Survey findings identified interest in active travel, while also highlighting barriers including access to bikes, infrastructure and confidence. Actions to support greater uptake of active travel have subsequently been incorporated into the draft Staff Travel Action Plan. Discussions are underway regarding the future development of the Council's bike fleet, including options for leasing, maintenance and servicing arrangements, to support increased use of e-bikes and e-cargo bikes for business travel. The recent installation of charging infrastructure at Headquarters, Inverness, has helped address a key barrier identified through the pilot scheme and will support future expansion of the programme.	Findings from the Council's Flexible Working, Travel and Asset Survey outlined in the Sustainable Business Travel thematic group update to the November Climate Change Committee. Priority actions, informed by the survey findings and staff business travel data, appended to the thematic group committee report.
Transitioning the Light Fleet	Within our light commercial fleet (vehicles under 3.5T), Highland Council has introduced 93 low emissions vehicles, representing 13% of the light fleet total (715 vehicles). The 93 low emission vehicles can be broken down to 30 electric and 63 petrol hybrid. The Fleet Service will continue to implement a prioritised fleet replacement programme to transition the light fleet to Ultra Low Emission Vehicles (ULEV).	• Replacement of 41 diesel small light commercial vans with 41 plug-in hybrid small vans • Development and roll-out of staff training/induction process around the use of ULEVs and charging infrastructure • Policy around the efficient use of council-operated EVs charging infrastructure (this project element was brought to the Climate Change Committee in January but is highlighted as an essential component in transitioning the light fleet)	• Increase in number/percentage of ULEV vehicles in the Council's fleet • Reduced carbon emissions and running costs	07/25: Policy on EV infrastructure use 09/25: Training on use of ULEVs and Charging Infrastructure 11/25: Replacement of 41 vans	New vehicle leases remain suspended while fleet utilisation reviews and fleet reduction measures are progressed. This approach is ensuring that fleet replacement decisions are informed by evidence of operational need and vehicle utilisation, helping to right-size the fleet and maximise opportunities to transition to lower-emission vehicles where operationally feasible.	Ongoing monitoring of 41 vans transitioned to ULEV has shown savings in both emissions and cost. Early reporting has suggested efficiency reported as between 50 to 55mpg. Further analysis and monitoring required. New vehicle leases remain suspended in the interim.
Local Transport Strategy 2025-2035 Delivery Plan	The Highland Local Transport Strategy (LTS) 2025 to 2035 sets out the future policy direction and focus for how the transport system in Highland will be maintained, managed and improved, and responds to national Net Zero commitments over the next 10 years. Following the Council's adoption of the LTS in February 2025, a detailed Delivery Plan will be developed.	• Establishment of Steering Group, comprising senior representatives from across the Council and other relevant organisations, to provide strategic oversight and support the delivery of the LTS. • Develop a detailed set of actions to progress the LTS policies to achieve the overarching vision and objectives for the transport network in Highland as laid out in the LTS. • Review of existing plans and strategies including the Council's Net Zero Strategy. • Collaboration with Council teams to gather insights from existing work plans, including the in-house bus service and other initiatives. • Identification of roles and responsibilities for each action to embed accountability and facilitate effective delivery.	• Delivery Plan includes a prioritised list of actions aligned with LTS objectives. • 100% of actions assigned to relevant team/organisations. • Monitoring framework established with KPIs and reporting schedule (annual report template). • Delivery Plan approved within target timeframe.	Q2: LTS Steering Group established and Terms of Reference finalised. Q3: Actions identification – preparation of database. Q3/4: Production of Delivery Plan and Monitoring Proposals. Q4: Delivery Plan presented to the Economy & Infrastructure Committee.	Two working group meetings have been held, featuring presentations on Community Transport and in-house bus operations to support knowledge sharing across departments. Two steering group meetings have also taken place, including presentations on the new Local Development Plan, with a particular focus on the transport appraisal process. From these discussions, two key workstreams have been identified; (1) Urgent need to review and update the Roads and Transport Guidelines for New Developments. Meeting held to agree the next steps for progressing this work. (2) The development of Transport Area Profiles for each committee area. These profiles will bring together transport-related information from a range of existing plans and strategies. As part of this work, officers are also exploring how Transport Forums and Community Support colleagues can contribute to establishing a closed-loop system for identifying, communicating and responding to community priorities. Consideration is also being given to how transport priorities are assessed and balanced across different areas, with officers exploring the potential for a criteria-based approach to prioritisation.	Delivery Plan Steering Group meetings continue quarterly with general updates and each time a focus on a particular strategic theme. Delivery Plan Working Group meetings continue monthly again with general updates and a themed presentation, to improve visibility of transport projects across different workstreams. Key workstream 1: resource has been identified for an update to the RTGND and initial scoping has been carried out. Internal engagement will follow; work will complete before 31 March 2027. Key workstream 2: Transport Area Profiles have been built for some areas with the rest to follow. They draw on Local Place Plans as the key document (where they exist), Area Place Plans and other key documents e.g. Community Action Plans. These can help inform planning around e.g. bus infrastructure improvements, active travel routes. In addition officers in Community Support, Future Operating Model and Community Planning Partnerships have strengthened links and are developing practical ideas for how to improve two-way communication with communities on transport-related initiatives.

E-bike Charging Infrastructure	A key barrier to the effective use and wider adoption of e-cargo and e-bikes has been the charging and storage of batteries. Funding has been secured to install safe, secure, and accessible external charging infrastructure at Highland Council HQ. This will enable reliable charging, support the expansion of the e-bike fleet and promote sustainable business travel across Council services.	•Charging infrastructure site identification and assessment •Procurement of appropriate infrastructure •Installation of charging infrastructure •Development of operational framework, including usage guidelines, safety protocols, and maintenance schedule •Communication and engagement activities to promote e-bike travel and raise awareness of infrastructure developments	•Increased uptake of e-bike and e-cargo bike use •Reduction in business miles travelled by diesel and petrol vehicles •Enhanced safety and security of charging infrastructure •Fleet vehicles offset through increased use of sustainable travel options •Health and wellbeing benefits reported by staff using active travel modes	•Q3 2025/26: Infrastructure site identified and approved •Q3 2025/26: Procurement process completed and installation initiated •Q4 2025/26: Charging infrastructure installed and operational •Q4 2025/26: Communication and engagement activities delivered to promote uptake and raise awareness	Installation of e-bike charging infrastructure at Council Headquarters has now been completed and the facility is operational. This addresses a key barrier identified through previous e-bike trials relating to the safe charging and storage of batteries. The infrastructure supports delivery of actions identified through the Staff Survey and emerging Staff Travel Action Plan, which highlight the need to enable and encourage greater uptake of active travel. Future work will focus on promoting the facility, supporting staff confidence in the use of e-bikes and e-cargo bikes, and exploring opportunities to expand the Council's bike fleet and associated maintenance and servicing arrangements.	Findings from the Council's Flexible Working, Travel and Asset Survey outlined in the Sustainable Business Travel thematic group update to the November Climate Change Committee. Priority actions, informed by the survey findings and staff business travel data, appended to the thematic group committee report.
HVO Trial	Trial to assess feasibility and performance of hydrotreated vegetable oil (HVO) as a low-carbon fuel alternative.	• Implement HVO fuel in two Council vehicles - a public bus and a refuse collection vehicle. • Assess feasibility and performance including technical compatibility, operational reliability, and stakeholder engagement. • Collect and analyse data on emissions reduction, fuel efficiency, maintenance requirements, and cost implications compared to diesel baseline. • Evaluate trial results to inform recommendations for scalability and wider fleet adoption.	• Carbon Reduction: % decrease in emissions compared to diesel baseline • Operational Reliability: No significant downtime or technical issues • Cost Impact: Comparative analysis of fuel and maintenance costs • Scalability Assessment: Recommendations for wider fleet adoption	• Quarterly Ongoing - Assessment of operational functionality, as well as analysis of emissions and expenditure. • Quarterly Ongoing – Assessment of wider fleet adoption / closure of trial based on benefit realisation.	Since the introduction of HVO-fuelled vehicles in November 2025, the pilot has expanded to include five double-decker buses and two refuse collection vehicles. The decision to increase the number of vehicles participating in the pilot was driven by several positive outcomes: (1) Tailpipe emissions reductions have been demonstrated at 100%. (2) Significant cost savings have been identified through the lower cost of HVO compared with diesel. (3) A reduction in AdBlue-related faults and other maintenance issues has been observed. During June, the pilot delivered fuel cost savings of approximately £2,000 compared with equivalent diesel operation. Vehicles achieved an average fuel economy of 7.8 mpg, compared with a diesel equivalent of 7.6 mpg. No maintenance issues have been reported across the fleet since the transition to HVO. Discussions are continuing with Procurement to identify options for extending the pilot beyond the current spending threshold. Expenditure currently stands at approximately £38,000 against a £50,000 threshold.	Pilot ongoing. Due to procurement thresholds, scaled back to 2 double-decked buses. Procurement activity relating to extension of maximum spend during the pilot being progressed to allow continuation until tender exercise is completed. Cost savings over a 5-month period have been in the region of £8,000 in comparison to diesel, additional to near zero tailpipe emissions.
Net Zero Delivery						
Project	Activity	Project Elements	Measures of Success	Milestones	Update - August 2026	Update - November 2026
Capital Projects - Net Zero	The Highland Council is committed to achieving Net Zero carbon emissions, in line with national targets. Capital projects represent the Council's largest source of carbon emissions, making it crucial to adopt a rigorous approach to reducing these emissions. An assessment process for capital projects will be developed to ensure statutory climate and ecological targets are met.	• Working group established. • Develop clear guidance for incorporating Net Zero into Capital Project planning and design. • Develop pilot projects to validate and refine the approach. • Establish a framework to track and report on metrics and weighting as outlined in Capital Programme Bid Evaluation and Prioritisation Matrix approved by Council on 14/03/24. • Revise policy documents reflecting the integration of Net Zero considerations.	• Establish business case model to ensure consistency of assessment of projects • Approval of guidelines and implementation of process • Successful delivery of two pilot projects that demonstrate whole life cost approach • Approval of standardised business case documentation and reporting frameworks for all new Capital Projects • 100% compliance with new guidelines adopted after policy change	M1 - 08/24: Project initiation M2 - 11/24: Development of clear guidance M3 - 11/24: Develop pilot projects M4 - 01/25: Implementation of framework M5 - 03/25: Policy updated and approved by Council	The Councils adoption of the Net Zero Standard to Hip projects is informing decision for other projects going forward. The documentation under review by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place will help set the approach to all capital projects.	Development of an internal Net Zero and Sustainability Design Standard is underway. The Net Zero Public Sector Buildings Standard (NZPSBS) has been adopted across the first phase of Highland Investment Plan (HIP) projects, ensuring a consistent approach to delivering high-performing, sustainable buildings. Key objectives include reducing operational energy consumption, minimising whole-life carbon emissions, improving climate resilience, and supporting resource-efficient design through embodied carbon assessment and Whole Life Carbon Assessments (WLCA's).

Inverness Castle – Sustainable Operations	The Inverness Castle Experience (ICE), set to open in 2025, aims to become a premier visitor attraction. There is an expectation ICE will look to attain gold standard in the Green Tourism Award, as an exemplar to tourist attractions throughout the Highlands.	• Baseline assessment – review current/proposed sustainability practices. • Identify and address key operational, environmental and engagement factors across core sustainability themes, including: Energy & Carbon; Water Use; Waste Management; Sustainable Procurement; Biodiversity & Nature; Community & Destination Engagement; Transport & Travel; and Communication & Marketing. • Implement sustainable technologies and policies. • Apply for certification.	• Environmental, Social and Governance solutions embedded in operations and practices. • Implementation of measures to reduce carbon footprint. • Achievement of sustainability certification. • Enhanced reputation – competitive advantage.	M1 - 03/25: Identify cross-service representatives for working group. M2 - 04/25: Inception meeting of working group. M3 - 04/25: Assess current & proposed sustainability measures. M4 - 05/25: Set goals – identify key focus areas. M5 - 07/25: Engagement. M6 - 07/25: Develop training and educational resources. M7 - 10/25: Implement sustainable policies & technologies. M8 - 01/26: Apply for certification, working with assessors. Ongoing: Continuous monitoring and improvement.	No substantive progress during this reporting period due to competing operational priorities associated with the Inverness Castle Experience. The action remains under review and will be progressed as resources allow.	No substantive progress during this reporting period due to competing operational priorities associated with the Inverness Castle Experience. The action remains under review and will be progressed as resources allow.
Highland Climate Change Risk & Opportunity Assessment	Highland Adapts is leading on the first regional Climate Change Risk & Opportunity Assessment to identify and prioritise climate-related risks across Highland. A regional scoring workshop will be held in December. To ensure the Council's input is reflected, an internal workshop will be held shortly after to review and refine scoring. This approach supports alignment with the Council's Climate Change Adaptation Strategy and will directly inform the development of the Council's Climate Change Corporate Risk & Opportunity Assessment.	• Attendance at regional workshop by the Net Zero Programme Manager and Climate Change Coordinator (Adaptation). • Internal workshop held following the regional session. • Engagement with key Council services including Resilience, Flood Prevention, Planning, Infrastructure, Environment, Economy, Housing, Energy, Transport, and Tourism. • Review and sense-check of scores from regional workshop to ensure Council priorities are accurately reflected. • Outputs to inform development of the Council's Corporate Risk & Opportunity Assessment.	• Internal workshop held with broad cross-service participation • Strengthened regional priorities through Council contribution • Reduced duplication between regional and internal assessments • Council's Corporate Risk & Opportunity Assessment and Adaptation Action Plan informed by regional assessment	Q3 2025/25: Regional workshop held - 11 December 2025. Q3 2025/25: Internal workshop – planning, delivery, and outputs shared Q3 2025/25: Synthesis of workshop outputs for internal alignment Q4 2025/25: Production of the Council's Corporate Climate Risk & Opportunity Assessment Q4 2025/25: Publication of Highland Climate Change Risk & Opportunity Assessment	HCCROA published and now provides the principal regional evidence base informing adaptation planning and resilience activity across Highland. Members are referred to the Highland Adapts Update and Funding Request report presented to Climate Change Committee in August 2026 for further information on proposed next steps and delivery priorities.	Development of a corporate Climate Change Risk and Opportunity Assessment ongoing, using the findings of the HCCROA to identify and assess climate-related risks and opportunities affecting Council services, infrastructure, assets and operations.
Integrating Net Zero into HIP Projects	Embed Net Zero and sustainability principles into Community Points of Delivery (PODs) projects, ensuring climate and resilience outcomes are integrated from the outset.	• CCET and Net Zero Strategy Group to define all sustainability and Net Zero components for Community PODs. • Corporate approach to be agreed for embedding climate and resilience principles consistently across the full lifecycle of projects, ensuring these requirements are applied from early feasibility through design, procurement, construction, and operational phases. • Governance model and Community PODs team structure to reflect required input from CCET and Net Zero Strategy Group.	• Sustainability components (Whole Life Carbon, Energy, Adaptation, Circularity, Water, Biodiversity, Travel) integrated into PODs design, delivery, and operation • Carbon Gateway Reviews completed at all key stages; Whole Life Carbon targets achieved • Key performance outcomes delivered (energy efficiency, renewables, biodiversity) • PODs operational as resilience hubs	Dec 2025: Initial meeting held with Property, CCET representatives and hub North Scotland Dec 2025: Confirm governance model and PODs team structure to ensure appropriate input from CCET and Net Zero Strategy Group Jan 2026: Define and agree all sustainability and Net Zero components for Community PODs March 2026: Paper to be presented to Members outlining corporate approach for embedding climate and resilience principles	The Hip projects have now committed to developing projects in alignment with the Scottish Net Zero Building Design Standards. The specification metrics have been agreed between Hub North, The design team and CCET. The Council's net zero design standard document is currently under review with Assistant Chief Executive - Place.	Integration of Net Zero considerations into the first phase of Highland Investment Plan (HIP) projects has been completed, with projects aligned to the Scottish Net Zero Building Design Standards. Further work is underway to develop the Council's Net Zero and Sustainability Design Standard, which will be presented to a future meeting of the Net Zero, Energy, Investment and Innovation Portfolio Board for consideration.
Waste						
Project	Activity	Project Elements	Measures of Success	Milestones	Update - August 2026	Update - November 2026

Recycling Infrastructure Improvements across the Estate	Introduce twin-stream recycling systems across the Council Estate to accelerate progress towards meeting targets. Reducing non-recycling waste and increasing the quality and quantity of recycling will reduce carbon emissions associated with residual waste treatment, additionally, costs associated with waste disposal and processing recycling will reduce. These changes will also be accompanied by the expansion of food waste collection in specific geographical areas.	• Benchmarking recycling rates in schools to gauge progress. • Improve recycling infrastructure across the Council estate through the roll out of twin-stream recycling systems. • Expand the food waste collections in schools and other Council premises in specific geographical areas. • Targeted communications campaign to support the roll out of new recycling systems. • Development of Waste E-learning module as part of Mandatory Net Zero training	• 15% reduction of total waste by 2025 • Reduce food waste by 33% by 2025 • Recycle 70% of remaining waste by 2025 • Send no more than 5% of remaining waste to landfill by 2030 • Cost savings benefits (£0.365m 24/25 and £1.695m 25/26 – total external and internal waste) associated with waste disposal. • Net reduction in carbon emissions	Recycling infrastructure improvements initiated aligned to the following phased service change timeline: M1 - 05/24: Ross & Cromarty M2 - 07/24: Nairn and Inverness M3 - 09/24: Badenoch & Strathspey M4 - 10/24: Sutherland M5 - 11/24: Caithness M6 - 03/25: Skye & Lochalsh M7 - 09/25: Lochaber	Waste audits have identified opportunities to improve recycling infrastructure across Council premises, with funding options continuing to be explored. Members are referred to the Waste Thematic Group Update to be presented to the Climate Change Committee in August 2026 for further detail.	Kingussie recycling pilot - Waste Services and CCFM met at Kingussie High School to understand the issues with recycling from the school - most notably that there is no improvement in recycling rates and lots of contamination. Waste Services will improve the signage on the recycling bins to help pupils recycle more easily. CCFM will monitor the recycling to establish improvements. Waste Services will follow up with Head Teacher to help improve the recycling rates. The next steps are to introduce the same recycling system into IRA school which is also part of the recycling pilot. No budget has yet been identified for recycling bins to be distributed across the school estate.
Re-Use Portal	Develop and pilot an in-house portal to redistribute resources within the organisation such as furniture, fixtures, fittings, school materials and office consumables. Additionally, identify companies that would purchase used furniture, and/or organisations/charities that would take assets no longer required by the Council to avoid items being sent for disposal	• Development of platform that allows activities to be user-led or automated to minimise the resources required to run the platform • Development of guidance including items that can be redistributed via the portal (e.g. ICT equipment must be returned directly to ICT) • Identification of companies and/or organisations/charities that would buy or reuse assets no longer required by the Council	• Reduced procurement spend • Reduced waste disposal costs • Minimisation of waste • Reduced associated carbon emissions • Cost avoidance – subscription fees of using an external provider in respect of the portal	M1 - 01/25: Develop and test portal M2 - 02/25: Draft guidance to address potential issues such as electric items with no current PAT test; suitably trained officers for heavy lifting; expected minimum condition of furniture etc. M3 - 02/25: Launch and promotion of portal M4 - 08/25: Evaluate pilot	Work is underway to develop a corporate approach to the reuse, redistribution and responsible disposal of Council assets, including electrical equipment and other resources. The Waste Thematic Group is also identifying opportunities to make better use of resources across the organisation and reduce the volume of materials sent for disposal. Further details are provided within the Waste Thematic Group Update to be presented to the Climate Change Committee in August 2026.	Ongoing.
Reusable Lunch Packaging Pilot	Pilot reusable lunch packaging in Kingussie High School with the aim of reducing the amount of single-use canteen containers disposed of. This activity is part of a wider project to benchmark waste and recycling rates in schools.	• Conduct waste audit to identify baseline waste composition and associated carbon and cost. • Identify and implement recycling infrastructure requirements in KHS. • Communication and engagement activities to support the roll out of new infrastructure and reusable pilot. • Roll-out reusable lunch packaging to Kingussie High School. • Promote, support and integrate waste hierarchy principles into the Sustainable Learning Settings' 4 C's (Curriculum, Campus, Culture and Community) through engagement, learning and incentives.	• Reduced procurement spend • Reduction in waste, associated disposal costs and carbon emissions	M1 - 03/25: Waste audit undertaken at Kingussie High School M2 - 03/25: Cross-service meeting held with representatives from KHS, Facilities Management, Catering, Waste and CCET M3 - 09/25: Programme of Communication and Engagement activities to support the roll out of recycling infrastructure and reusable pilot M4 - 09/25: Roll out of recycling Infrastructure at KHS M5 - 09/25: Roll out reusable Lunch packaging at KHS M6 - 04/26: Evaluate pilot and consider further roll-out	Reusable lunch packaging pilot at Kingussie High School continues to deliver positive outcomes. Follow-up waste audits show a reduction in single-use packaging from 9% to 5% of the waste stream, with reusable containers and standard crockery now incorporated into day-to-day catering operations. Further engagement is planned to improve recycling performance and embed sustainable behaviours.	Catering and Waste to review the results for the pilot and to establish a plan for rolling out the reusables and/or crockery across other Secondary schools.

Members' Catering	At the January Climate Change Committee, Members requested a project template be developed and brought to the May Committee regarding Members' catering and the potential to reduce food waste. Avoidable food waste costs Scotland £1.1billion a year. A third of all food produced globally is thrown away, while food production and consumption account for around a third of global greenhouse gas emissions. When we waste food, we also waste all the energy and resources that went into producing, processing, transporting, and cooking it.	- Review current process for ordering catering - Assess feasibility to introduce process to determine understanding of in-person Member attendance (will require Member engagement)	- Reduced food waste - Reduced costs	M1 - 05/25: Review current process M2 - 08/25: Provide recommendations to Members Group	Initial data collection and monitoring of Members' catering food waste is ongoing and will be used to establish a baseline understanding of food waste levels and inform future recommendations.	Ongoing.
Highland Reuse & Repair Fund	Funding of £500k has been allocated through the Council's Revenue Budget (2025/26 – 2027/28) to create a fund that supports community-led projects that reduce waste, promote reuse and repair, and help build a circular economy in the Highland region.	- Allocate £500k through the delivery of two funding rounds with grants ranging from £2k-£50k for capital and revenue costs. - Support community-led projects that reduce waste, promote reuse and repair, and advance a circular economy across the Highland region. - Assess applications for technical eligibility, waste reduction impact, socioeconomic benefits, and alignment with sustainability objectives. - Monitor funded projects and collect and analyse data on waste diversion, skills development, and infrastructure outcomes to inform future circular economy initiatives.	- Number of projects and funding allocated per round - Estimated waste diverted from landfill contributing to emissions reduction - Number of workshops delivered and participant engagement - Establishment or expansion of repair cafes, tool libraries, reuse hubs.	November 2025: Launch of fund February 2026: Commitment of Round 1 applications by February 2026 May 2026: Deadline for Round 2 applications Ongoing: Support and monitoring of funded projects August 2027: Evaluation and reporting on waste reduction, skills development and circular economy outcomes	A total of £546,019 has now been awarded through the first two funding rounds, supporting 29 projects across Highland that increase repair and reuse capacity, divert materials from disposal, and deliver wider environmental, social and community benefits. Members are referred to the Waste Thematic Group Update to be presented to the Climate Change Committee in August 2026 for further detail.	Third round closes on 16 October 2026.
Waste Strategy 2026-2031	Development of a Waste Strategy for the five-year period April 2026 to March 2031, to maximise reuse and recycling, with a focus on reducing and decarbonising non-recycling waste.	- Draft Waste Strategy for April 2026-March 2031, setting out objectives, actions, and performance measures. - Policy readiness assessment to ensure compliance with future national waste policies, including: - Circular Economy Strategy and targets - Packaging Extended Producer Responsibility - Deposit Return Scheme - Household Recycling Code of Practice - Digital Waste Tracking; and - Emissions Trading Scheme	- Clear and approved roadmap for compliance with upcoming national waste policies - Defined and measurable targets for increasing reuse and recycling rates across the Highland region - Quantifiable and reportable reduction in emissions from non-recycling waste streams	04/26: Stakeholder engagement with internal services, communities, and industry partners to align strategy with local needs and national requirements 05/26: Approval process through Communities & Place Committee 05/26: Commence implementation of approved strategy actions Annual: Annual review to track progress against reuse, recycling, and carbon reduction targets	Development of the Waste Strategy remains subject to ongoing regulatory and policy developments at a national level. Members are referred to the Waste Strategy Development Plan considered by the Communities and Place Committee in May 2026, which sets out the proposed approach to reviewing and updating the Strategy. In the meantime, the Waste Thematic Group continues to progress a range of practical actions focused on waste reduction, reuse, recycling, food waste prevention and circular economy principles across the Council estate.	A report was provided to the Communities and Place Committee on 21st May 2026 (Waste Strategy Development Plan) which detailed the next steps towards developing the next Highland Council Waste Strategy. Due to ongoing proposed regulatory changes, the full development of the Waste Strategy has been deferred to summer 2027 to ensure that these statutory changes can be considered and incorporated.

**Activity**

Develop the Council's fleet, travel and operational data capability to improve reporting, increase visibility of utilisation, travel activity and associated costs, and support evidence-based decision-making across Sustainable Business Travel, Fleet and related services.

Measures of Success

- Near real-time reporting capability established for fleet, grey fleet and car club utilisation data
- Fleet utilisation and business travel dashboards adopted and used by services
- Improved visibility of fleet, grey fleet and car club utilisation to support scrutiny, service planning and evidence-based decision-making
- Evidence base established to support identification of efficiency opportunities and potential cost savings across fleet, grey fleet and car club arrangements
- Opportunities to improve fleet utilisation, reduce unnecessary travel costs and support lower-carbon business travel identified through improved data and reporting

Project Elements

- Develop fuel reporting template to improve fleet data quality, reporting and analysis
- Develop fleet utilisation reporting and dashboard capability to support service planning and operational decision-making
- Undertake a review of Health & Social Care travel activity, including grey fleet, fleet and car club utilisation
- Develop enhanced reporting and monitoring of car club utilisation, including penalties and non-use trends
- Develop the evidence base and business case to inform future decisions on fleet, grey fleet and car club arrangements within Health & Social Care
- Support preparation of the Sustainable Business Travel update report for November Climate Change Committee

Milestones

- **September 2026:** Fuel reporting template completed and supporting reporting developed
- **3 October 2026:** Sustainable Business Travel report completed for Climate Change Committee deadline
- **Q3 2026/2027:** Dashboards developed and implemented
- **Q3 2026/2027:** Health & Social Care travel review progressed
- **Q4 2026/2027:** Expand scope to include car hire, rail travel and other elements

Programme Theme 4) A Sustainable Highland Environment and Global Centre for Renewable Energy

Links to Performance Plan targets:

4.7

Place – Achieve our Net Zero Targets

Links to Delivery Plan:

Net Zero Programme

Investment & Innovation: EV Infrastructure

Key Risks

- Capacity constraints and competing priorities may impact delivery of agreed workstreams and timescales
- Availability, quality and consistency of source data may limit reporting accuracy and analytical capability
- Limited availability of specialist data governance support may impact progress on data sharing, reporting and dashboard implementation

Thematic Group

Net Zero
Delivery

Project

Implementation
of Revised
PBCCD Statutory
Guidance (2026)

Responsible Officer:
Net Zero Programme
Manager



Net Zero Programme

Senior Responsible Officer:
CCET Manager

Project Sponsor:
CO Facilities & Fleet Management

Activity

Assess Highland Council's current position against the revised Public Bodies Climate Change Duties Statutory Guidance 2026, identifying existing arrangements, activity underway, gaps and risks, and informing future Net Zero Programme priorities, governance and reporting arrangements

Measures of Success

- Agreed interpretation of the revised Statutory Guidance
- Clear baseline assessment of the Council's current position established
- Gaps, risks and areas requiring further consideration identified
- Key areas requiring incorporation, refinement or updating within the Council's Net Zero Strategy identified and reported
- Recommendations developed to support alignment with the revised guidance
- Findings incorporated into future Net Zero Programme and CCET work planning

Project Elements

- Review and agree the Council's interpretation of the revised Statutory Guidance
- Assess the Council's current position against the agreed interpretation
- Identify existing arrangements, activity underway, gaps, risks and areas requiring further consideration
- Develop an assessment matrix and overview report for the NZEII Portfolio Board
- Identify recommendations and priorities to support alignment with the revised guidance

Milestones

- **September 2026:** Agree interpretation of revised Statutory Guidance and present high-level overview paper to NZEII Portfolio Board
- **October 2026:** Complete assessment of the Council's current position and supporting assessment matrix
- **November 2026:** Present detailed assessment, gap analysis and recommendations to NZEII Portfolio Board
- **December 2026:** Agree priority actions and implications for future work programmes, governance and reporting arrangements
- **January 2027:** Report findings and proposed implementation approach to Climate Change Committee

Programme Theme 4) A Sustainable Highland Environment and Global Centre for Renewable Energy

Links to Performance
Plan targets:

4.7

Links to Programme:

Place – Achieve our Net Zero Targets

Links to Delivery Plan:

Net Zero Programme

Key Risks

- Capacity constraints due to competing priorities e.g. PBCCD
- Emerging statutory expectations may require additional resources, governance arrangements or capacity
- Recommendations may have implications for future budgets, staffing or programme prioritisation

Thematic Group

Net Zero
Delivery

Project

Climate Change
Impact
Assessment

Responsible Officer:
Net Zero Programme
Manager



Net Zero Programme

Senior Responsible Officer:
CCET Manager

Project Sponsor:
CO Facilities & Fleet Management

Activity

Strengthen the implementation and effectiveness of the Climate Change Impact Assessment (CCIA) process across the Council, ensuring climate impacts are consistently considered within policy, strategy, project and decision-making processes.

Measures of Success

- Increased number of FIAs completed where climate impacts (positive or negative) are identified
- Improved quality and consistency of CCIA's
- Enhanced confidence and capability among CCIA authors following training
- CCIA process embedded within the Granicus platform, supporting a streamlined and integrated assessment process
- Climate impacts consistently considered and evidenced within policy, strategy, project and decision-making processes

Project Elements

- Reinforce the purpose and strategic value of Climate Change Impact Assessments
- Improve governance, quality assurance and oversight arrangements
- Enhance guidance, templates and supporting processes to improve consistency and usability
- Embed CCIA requirements within corporate systems and decision-making processes, including integration with the Granicus platform
- Build organisational capability through targeted training and support
- Align CCIA improvements with wider IIA development activity through the Fairer Highland Group
- Strengthen monitoring, reporting and continuous improvement arrangements

Milestones

- **Q3 2026:** CCET working group convened to agree requirements for pre-screening, full CCIA assessment and supporting governance processes
- **Q3 2026:** Updated CCIA templates, guidance and quality assurance arrangements agreed
- **Q4 2026:** CCIA requirements configured and integrated within the Granicus platform
- **Q4 2026:** Targeted training and support programme in place
- **Q4 2026:** Monitoring and reporting arrangements implemented
- **Q2/3:** Review implementation and effectiveness of CCIA improvements and report progress to Climate Change Committee

Programme Theme 4) A Sustainable Highland Environment and Global Centre for Renewable Energy

Links to Performance
Plan targets:

4.7

Links to Programme:

Place – Achieve our Net Zero Targets

Links to Delivery Plan:

Net Zero Programme

Key Risks

- Continued inconsistent application of CCIA requirements across services
- Low engagement with training and guidance
- Delayed integration into Granicus platform
- Insufficient monitoring and reporting arrangements to assess effectiveness
- Resource and capacity constraints

Thematic Group

Net Zero
Delivery

Project

Sustainable
Learning Settings
& Youth Voice

Responsible Officer:



Net Zero Programme

Senior Responsible Officer:

Project Sponsor:

Activity

Support delivery of the Council's commitments arising from the Highland Youth Parliament presentation to the Climate Change Committee and subsequent Council decisions, supporting Learning for Sustainability and Sustainable Learning Settings while embedding youth voice within climate change, energy and community resilience decision-making.

Project Elements

- Support implementation of the Council's response to the climate-related priorities identified by the Highland Youth Parliament
- Support delivery of climate change and environmental education priorities identified within Education Service improvement planning and wider educational priorities
- Explore opportunities to strengthen Learning for Sustainability and Sustainable Learning Settings across Highland schools
- Support implementation of the Council's commitment to embed young people's voices within climate change, energy and community resilience policy, planning and decision-making
- Explore opportunities to strengthen links between schools, communities, industry and the region's renewable energy, environmental and engineering sectors
- Identify opportunities for partnership working and collaborative delivery with education, community and climate partners

Measures of Success

- Agreed priorities and future delivery arrangements developed through engagement with Education Service, schools, young people and partner organisations.

Milestones

- **August 2026:** Learning for Sustainability and Sustainable Learning Settings mapping paper completed and shared with Education Service colleagues to inform future discussions and priorities
- **September 2026:** Attend Education Quality Improvement meeting to discuss Learning for Sustainability, Sustainable Learning Settings and Highland Youth Parliament priorities
- **Q3 2026/2027:** Explore establishment of a Sustainable Learning Settings Working Group to be led by Education Service as part of the emerging Net Zero Programme governance arrangements
- **Q3/4 2026/2027:** Future priorities and delivery arrangements agreed following engagement with Education Services, schools, young people and partner organisations

Programme Theme 4) A Sustainable Highland Environment and Global Centre for Renewable Energy

Links to Performance
Plan targets:

4.7

Links to Programme:

Place – Achieve our Net Zero Targets

Links to Delivery Plan:

Net Zero Programme

Key Risks

- Delivery is dependent on engagement and collaboration from multiple stakeholders, including schools, young people, Council services and external partners
- Governance, ownership and resource requirements for any future delivery arrangements are yet to be agreed
- Demonstrating impact and measuring outcomes across diverse schools and learning settings may be challenging

Thematic Group

Net Zero
Delivery

Project

Good Food
Nation Plan

Responsible Officer:



Net Zero Programme

Senior Responsible Officer:

Project Sponsor:

Activity

Support development of Highland Council's Good Food Nation Plan and ensure climate change mitigation, adaptation and resilience considerations are reflected throughout the Plan's outcomes, priorities and actions.

Measures of Success

- Climate change, resilience, sustainability and Just Transition considerations embedded throughout the Plan's outcomes, priorities and actions.
- Climate-related opportunities, risks and food system resilience considered during Plan development.
- Alignment demonstrated with relevant Council strategies, plans and policy commitments.

Project Elements

- Contribute climate change and resilience expertise to Plan development.
- Support consideration of food-related greenhouse gas emissions.
- Promote alignment with the Council's Net Zero Strategy and Adaptation Strategy.
- Encourage consideration of food security and resilience to climate risks.
- Support integration of sustainability principles across relevant themes and actions.

Milestones

- **May 2026:** First Officer Working Group meeting held
- **October 2026:** Second Officer Working Group meeting held
- **19 November 2026:** First outline draft Plan considered by Redesign Board
- **2027:** Ongoing development, engagement and consultation
- **January-March 2028:** Finalisation and approval of the Plan
- **1 April 2028:** Statutory publication deadline for the Highland Council Good Food Nation Plan

Programme Theme 4) A Sustainable Highland Environment and Global Centre for Renewable Energy

Links to Performance
Plan targets:

4.7

Links to Programme:

Place – Achieve our Net Zero Targets

Links to Delivery Plan:

Net Zero Programme

Key Risks

- **Competing priorities across services and partners may affect project timescales.**
- **The breadth of issues and stakeholder interests may make it challenging to develop a shared Plan.**

Thematic Group

Net Zero
Delivery

Project

Fuel Additive
Trial

Responsible Officer:
Transport Manager



Net Zero Programme

Senior Responsible Officer:

Service Lead – Transport & Logistics

Project Sponsor:

CO Facilities & Fleet Management

Activity

Evaluate the effectiveness of a fuel additive in reducing emissions, improving fuel efficiency and supporting the transition to lower-carbon fleet operations.

Measures of Success

- Trial completed with sufficient operational and emissions data collected.
- Quantifiable assessment of emissions reduction achieved.
- Impact on fuel consumption and efficiency understood.
- Impact on vehicle performance and maintenance requirements assessed.
- Cost-effectiveness and scalability evaluated.
- Evidence base established to inform future fleet decarbonisation decisions.

Project Elements

- Identify suitable vehicles and operational environments for the trial.
- Implement and monitor the use of the fuel additive across selected fleet vehicles.
- Assess impacts on fuel consumption, emissions, vehicle performance and maintenance requirements.
- Compare trial results against baseline fuel and emissions data.
- Evaluate costs, benefits and potential applicability across the wider fleet.
- Develop recommendations regarding future adoption.

Milestones

Q3 2026: Trial design agreed and vehicles selected.

Q3 2026: Fuel additive deployment commenced.

Q4 2026: Monitoring and analysis completed.

Q4 2026: Trial findings and recommendations reported.

Q1 2027: Decision on wider rollout or further testing.

Programme Theme 4) A Sustainable Highland Environment and Global Centre for Renewable Energy

Links to Performance
Plan targets:

4.2, 4.7

Links to Programme:

Place – Achieve our Net Zero Targets

Links to Delivery Plan:

Net Zero Programme

Key Risks

- Emissions reduction benefits not realised.
- Limited availability of reliable baseline data.
- Vehicle manufacturer warranty or compatibility concerns.
- Insufficient trial period to demonstrate meaningful results.
- Additional costs outweigh operational or environmental benefits.

Thematic Group

Net Zero Delivery

Project

Nature Restoration Fund 2026/27

Responsible Officer:
Environment Team
Leader



Net Zero Programme

Senior Responsible Officer:
Service Lead

Project Sponsor:
ACE – Place

Activity

The Highland Council has secured £326,000 through the Nature Restoration Fund for 2026/27 to support nature recovery across the Highlands. The fund will deliver targeted habitat creation, restoration and enhancement projects, helping to reverse biodiversity loss, safeguard wildlife and increase resilience to climate change. Investment will also support action for priority species and the development of stronger, better-connected ecosystems, delivering lasting benefits for nature and communities.

Project Elements

£164,000 will be made available through a community grant programme to support local groups and organisations. £166,000 will support Council-led initiatives focused on habitat creation, restoration and enhancement. Current projects under development include:

- Implementation of Woodland Management Plans for key Council woodland sites.
- Initial works to support the establishment of the new Local Nature Reserve at Ardersier Common.
- Native tree and woodland planting projects.
- Support to establish a Local Environmental Record Centre (LERC).
- Habitat improvements for the great crested newt and other priority species.
- Delivery of grassland, biodiversity and urban tree-planting projects in partnership with Amenities, as part of the Greenspace Biodiversity Management Strategy.
- Support for the development of Nature Networks to improve habitat connectivity and species movement across the landscape.

Measures of Success

- Number of Community Grant Scheme applications received
- Number and value of successful community grants awarded
- Number of Council-led projects delivered
- Area (ha) of habitat created, restored or enhanced
- LERC established and the evidence base for habitat creation, restoration and enhancement projects strengthened, enabling better targeting of actions for priority species and nature recovery

Milestones

- August 2026: Launch of NRF Community Grant Programme
- March 2027: Commitment of Funds by March 2027
- April 2027: Annual report to Scottish Government

Programme Theme 4) A Sustainable Highland Environment and Global Centre for Renewable Energy

Links to Performance
Plan targets:

4.4, 4.7

Links to Programme:

Place – Achieve our Net Zero Targets

Links to Delivery Plan:

Net Zero Programme

Key Risks

- Delivery timescale - annual allocation
- Low uptake of grant scheme
- Non-completion of projects by applicants
- Long-term security of fund.

Gillian Martin MSP
Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Rural Affairs
The Scottish Government
St. Andrew's House
Regent Road
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

25 June 2026

Dear Gillian

Flood Protection, Coastal Change Adaptation and Long-Term Resilience

We wanted to take this opportunity to highlight the need for a revised long-term funding model for flood protection, coastal change adaptation and climate resilience that reflects the scale of risk facing Highland communities and their wider national significance.

As you know, climate impacts are already affecting communities, infrastructure and public services across the Highlands and are expected to intensify over coming decades. The region has the longest coastline in Scotland, alongside dispersed rural and island communities, nationally significant infrastructure and limited alternative routes, resulting in high response costs and increased vulnerability.

The latest regional evidence base further demonstrates that climate impacts in the Highlands are material, interconnected and accelerating, with risks that are systemic and cross-cutting across infrastructure, communities and the economy. Given the region's national significance in supporting Scotland's energy transition, infrastructure networks and rural economy, these risks are not confined locally but have wider strategic implications.

The Highlands play a key role in delivering Scotland's climate and energy ambitions; however, the costs associated with climate adaptation and resilience remain disproportionately local. This creates an increasing imbalance whereby national economic benefits are realised more widely while local authorities and communities bear the costs of climate impacts.

While we welcome the increased flood resilience allocation for 2026/27, this highlights a wider strategic issue. Since the current national funding baseline was established in 2016, there has been a significant shift in the evidence base and national understanding of climate risk.

However, the national allocation for flood resilience has remained at £42 million per annum since 2016, resulting in a real-terms reduction in investment despite increasing risk. This has created a clear misalignment between the level of risk now understood and the scale of response current funding arrangements enable.

This is compounded by the short-term nature of current funding, which provides no certainty beyond the current year and limits effective planning and delivery of inherently multi-year programmes.

We are also concerned about the position on coastal change adaptation. The previous programme provided an important foundation; however, its discontinuation leaves a gap in both funding and strategic direction.

The Council's Coastal Change Adaptation Plan identifies 29 communities at heightened risk; however, this represents only a subset of wider exposure across the Highland coastline. National evidence demonstrates that a significant proportion of at-risk assets are concentrated within a small number of local authority areas, including the Highlands, reinforcing the need for targeted investment.

There is a growing gap between the ambition set out in Scotland's National Adaptation Plan and the funding currently available to support delivery at the pace and scale required. This creates a risk that continuing to rely on short-term and fragmented funding approaches will result in higher long-term costs and increased disruption, rather than enabling planned, preventative adaptation.

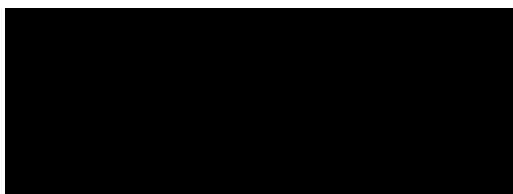
We therefore seek:

- A multi-year, integrated funding programme for flood and coastal resilience, providing greater certainty on funding levels and allocations
- Alignment of funding structures with the current national evidence base on climate risk, enabling delivery at the pace and scale required
- Recognition of rurality, remoteness and infrastructure exposure
- A stronger emphasis on preventative, place-based adaptation aligned with national infrastructure and resilience priorities

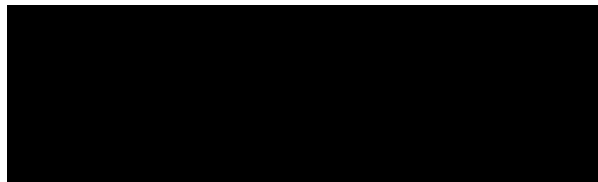
We would welcome the opportunity to discuss how a more strategic and sustainable funding model could be developed in partnership.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely



Councillor Raymond Bremner
Leader of The Highland Council



Councillor Bill Lobban
Convener of The Highland Council

Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Rural Affairs

Rùnaire a' Chaibineit airson Gnìomhachd na Gnàth-shìde agus Cùisean Dùthchail

Gillian Martin MSP

Gillian Mhàrtainn BPA



Scottish Government
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Gordon Morrison

Gordon.Morrison@highland.gov.uk

Our Reference: 202600524977

Your Reference: Letter from Highland Council to Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Rural Affairs

16 July 2026

Dear Councillors Bremner and Lobban

Thank you for your letter regarding the flood resilience and coastal adaptation challenges facing Highland communities, and the need for Scottish Government, COSLA and local authorities to work together towards a new long-term funding model for flood resilience.

I want to begin by recognising the particular challenges faced by communities across the Highlands. The region's extensive coastline, dispersed rural and island populations, nationally important infrastructure, and central role in Scotland's energy transition, economic growth and net zero ambitions create a unique combination of opportunities and vulnerabilities.

Since 2016, the Scottish Government has invested more than £612 million in flood resilience across Scotland. This includes eleven years of the agreement between COSLA Leaders and the Scottish Government to allocate £42 million annually through the local government General Capital Grant for flood resilience, alongside an additional £150 million provided during the previous parliamentary term.

This investment has supported all local authorities through allocations based on average annual flood damages as well as supporting the delivery of major Cycle 1 flood protection schemes across Scotland - including the three schemes completed in Highland.

I recognise your concerns about the increasing impacts of climate change and the importance of ensuring that funding arrangements effectively support local authorities to deliver flood resilience and wider adaptation measures. The Scottish Government and COSLA have long agreed that the current

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Tha Ministearanna h-Alba, an luchd-comhairleachaidh sònraichte agus Rùnaire Maireannach fo chumhachan Achd Coiteachaidh (Alba) 2016. Faicibh www.lobbying.scot

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flood funding system requires reform. This is why the joint COSLA/Scottish Government Flooding Funding Working Group was established, why further affordability measures have been agreed for the remaining Cycle 1 schemes, and why the National Flood Resilience Strategy committed to establishing a Flood Advisory Service to strengthen the planning, governance and delivery of major flood resilience projects across Scotland.

As part of our ongoing work on Flood Resilience Funding last year the Scottish Government proposed extending the agreement on the annual £42 million allocation for four years. COSLA's Settlement and Distribution Group considered that a one-year extension was more appropriate, and new proposals will be brought forward this autumn once feedback has been received from local authorities on the new funding distribution model introduced this year.

I am pleased that Highland Council has welcomed its increased flexible flood resilience allocation for 2026–27. This increase has been made possible through collaborative work between COSLA, local authorities and the Scottish Government to improve the affordability of the remaining Cycle 1 schemes. Ministers and COSLA have also agreed on the need for greater certainty around the costs of the existing programme before committing funding to new major schemes.

The new distribution model has also delivered greater flexibility for councils and, for the first time, includes a minimum allocation level, which has particularly benefited rural and island authorities.

Alongside this, work on the Flood Advisory Service, that will eventually provide governance and gateway processes for new major flood resilience measures, is progressing well. The Scottish Government has provided funding to SEPA to develop options for a national service, supported by a development group that includes COSLA and local authority representation. The service will help ensure lessons from Cycle 1 are captured and applied as we develop future flood resilience funding models.

I was also interested to hear recently about the work of Highland Adapts following discussions between Highland Council's Chief Executive, Derek Brown, and some of my senior officials. I would be pleased to meet to discuss the issues you have raised but also would be keen to hear more from you on that initiative, particularly any lessons that could help inform adaptation activity elsewhere in Scotland.

You also highlight the work Highland Council has done on its Coastal Adaptation Change Plan and the benefit derived from the Coastal Change Adaptation Fund. Building on the almost £12 million invested in that fund over the past four years, the Scottish Government has committed a further £14 million to support local authorities to adapt our coasts, better respond to the rise in sea levels and reduce the risks associated with coastal erosion through a similar fund by the end of this parliamentary term. This complements our commitment to provide an additional £15 million for flood resilience and to identify priority activity for that investment within our first 100 days.

Please be assured that the Scottish Government remains fully committed to working in partnership with COSLA and local authorities to develop a fair, sustainable and affordable long-term approach to flood and coastal resilience funding. Through the work already underway to reform flooding funding, the Flood Advisory Service and future investment planning, we are laying the foundations for the next generation of resilience projects. I look forward to continuing this collaborative work to ensure that communities across the Highlands, and across Scotland, are better protected and better prepared for the impacts of a changing climate.

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