

<b>Agenda Item</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Report No</b>	<b>HC/62/19</b>

## **HIGHLAND COUNCIL**

**Date:** 9<sup>th</sup> December 2019

**Report Title:** Resourcing the Climate & Ecological Emergency

**Report By:** Executive Chief Officer, Infrastructure and Environment

### **1. Purpose/Executive Summary**

1.1 This report sets out the anticipated resource requirements to meet the increased aspirations of the Council following the Council's declaration of a Climate and Ecological Emergency. Member approval is sought for a commitment from the Council's Change Fund of £145,000.

### **2. Recommendation**

2.1 Members are asked to agree the resource requirements detailed within this report.

### **3. Implications**

3.1 Resource – The resources required are outlined in the report, and total £145,000. It is intended that this be funded from the Change Fund, whilst recognising that the longer term funding of the staff elements will be addressed through the ongoing changes within the Council's structure.

3.2 Legal - The Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 places a legal duty on the Council to support national efforts to tackle climate change.

3.3 Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural) – There are no community implications arising from this report.

3.4 Climate Change/Carbon CLEVER – There are a number of climate change implications arising as a result of this report. However, the Council's ability to meaningfully address and respond to its declaration of a climate and ecological emergency will be significantly strengthened if the resourcing requests highlighted within this report are agreed by Members.

3.5 Risk – Given increasing public awareness of the issues around the climate and ecological emergency, there is a reputational risk to the Council around not being seen to be delivering climate and ecological action at sufficient pace.

3.6 Gaelic – There are no Gaelic implications arising from this report.

## **4. Background**

- 4.1 At a meeting of The Highland Council on 9<sup>th</sup> May 2019, following a motion brought by the Leader of the Council, Cllr Margaret Davidson, Members agreed that the Council declare a climate and ecological emergency.
- 4.2 It was agreed that the Council should establish a Climate Change Panel, which would have responsibility for oversight of climate change work across the Council, make recommendations around new climate change targets and to consult Highland communities around our approach to tackling the climate emergency. Membership of the Panel was approved by Council on 5<sup>th</sup> September 2019, with the Terms of Reference for the panel approved on 31<sup>st</sup> October 2019.
- 4.3 At a meeting of the Climate Change Panel on 26<sup>th</sup> November 2019, the Panel agreed that the Council's aspiration should be to reposition Highland as a low CO<sub>2</sub> region and develop a framework around this vision - making best use of our natural resources, offering opportunities for carbon friendly investment/offsetting, identifying critical projects and leading on more carbon efficient public services. In addition, it was recognised that we need to carefully examine Highland assets, for example, our renewables, forestry, land-base (scale of area), what we can potentially offer the rest of the country, and become an exemplar in respect of how a region can address the climate & ecological emergency. In summary, where could we be, and what should we be doing?
- 4.4 The panel also agreed that it is now timely to consider what resources might be agreed to be directed towards delivering the key areas of work required in order to achieve greatest impact, and maximise opportunities to access Scottish Government funding streams which will flow from their own climate emergency declaration. This paper sets out the key initial resources and actions required to begin to meet the Council's aspirations around the climate and ecological emergency.

## **5. Priority Work Streams and Resource Requirements**

- 5.1 One of the most important early actions for the Council, particularly in the run-up to the end of the financial year, is to position the Council's climate change work programme as closely as feasible with the Scottish Government Programme (see <https://www.gov.scot/programme-for-government/>). This will ensure that funding opportunities can be identified early and presented to Scottish Government as "shovel ready" projects.
- 5.2 There is already a significant body of work underway throughout the Council, particularly through the Change Programme – for example, the Grey Fleet project, Integrated Transport (public transport and active travel), Asset Rationalisation, Electric Vehicle Infrastructure, Energy & Renewables etc. It is therefore important to ensure that the Council positions itself to derive the greatest benefit from potential funding streams arising in the short to medium term. The best way of achieving this outcome is to seek external assistance in pulling together the various strands of work underway and matching those

against the SG Programme.

- 5.3 This short piece of work is estimated to cost a maximum of **£25k**, which will effectively be a spend to save, given the significant funding streams that Scottish Government has committed to. Part of this work will also cover the development of the wider vision to reposition Highland as a low carbon area.
- 5.4 In addition, Members will recognise the scale of the challenge and ambition within the Council following the declaration of the climate and ecological emergency and the aspiration to reach a net zero Highland by 2025. Members will also recognise the significant pressures being placed on the current resource within the Climate Change team (1 x Climate Change Officer, 1 x Climate Change Coordinator, both currently seconded 0.5FTE to the Change Programme). Whilst the restructure of the Council, and particularly improving the synergies and working arrangements with the Energy & Sustainability team will go some way to addressing the issues, it is understood by Members of the Climate Change Panel and senior officers that a more fundamental strengthening of our climate change response team is essential.
- 5.5 Given the increased importance and prominence of climate change across the Council, it is proposed that this requires a Climate Change Manager to lead the work and provide a sufficient level of seniority within the organisation, supported by a minimum of 2 officers – the net additional cost of these posts is expected to be **£75k**.
- 5.6 The Climate Change team, over and above existing statutory functions, will deal with a wide range of potential opportunities, including accessing funding streams identified through the work package identified above as well as partnership working, for example in such areas as:
- Tree planting and peatland restoration (the vision is that Highland could become a net carbon sink for Scotland and beyond)
  - Co-ordination of work with planners to revise our planning policies and also develop strategies around decarbonisation of our city and towns.
  - Research and develop business cases for appropriate hydrogen projects.
  - Energy projects which reduce the Council's consumption, emissions and costs.
  - Working with our Environment Team, SNH and other partners to bring about biodiversity gains to support the ecological aspect of the climate emergency declaration.
  - Planning, developing projects and securing funding to achieve a net-zero region by 2025.
  - Behaviour change initiatives (engagement and support for schools, high-emitting services etc)
  - Insulation opportunities for Highland homes
  - Investigate opportunities for low-carbon cruise Ship facilities
  - Work with partners to develop opportunities for oil rig powering.
- 5.7 Funding of **£20k** is also sought to complete carbon baseline work for the region. This will help us to understand how far away we are or how close we are to achieving net zero as a region, and will allow the Council to focus efforts and tap into funding streams which are most relevant to addressing the largest pockets of emissions across Highland.

- 5.8 In addition, a contribution of **£15k** for each of the next 3 years is sought to support the employment of a Project Manager to oversee the Highland Adapts initiative, which aims to create a partnership, place-based approach to climate change risk in Highland. This will be jointly funded by Community Planning Partners. The Outline Business Case has already been completed and the Highland Adapts initiative will be co-funded by Community Planning Partners.
- 5.9 It is also seen as opportune to host a climate change seminar in Spring 2020 – 1 or 2 days with high-profile keynote speakers. A **£10k** fund to organise and facilitate this is requested.
- 5.9 Members will recognise the key challenges as well as the very real opportunities for the Council in terms of addressing our climate and ecological emergency. By making the above changes, there is huge potential to lever in significant funds and reposition the Highlands as the low carbon centre for Scotland. The investment set out above is just the first step, and Members are asked to support the commitment of these funds from the Council's Change Fund at this stage. In total the amount sought is **£145,000**.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer, Infrastructure and Environment

Date: 9<sup>th</sup> December 2019

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