

**The Highland Council**

Minutes of Meeting of the **Climate Change Working Group** held in Committee Room 1&2, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Friday, 28 February 2020 at 10.30am.

**Present:**

Mr B Boyd	Mrs A MacLean
Mr J Bruce	Mr R MacWilliam
Mrs I Campbell	Mr D Rixson
Mr C Fraser	Mrs T Robertson
Mr D Louden	

**Non-Members also present:**

Ms C Caddick

**Officials in Attendance:**

Mrs N Wallace, Environment Manager  
Mr K Masson, Climate Change Officer  
Ms Sue Nield, Catering Services Manager  
Jackie Sayer, Engineer (Energy & Sustainability)  
Miss M Zavarella, Administrative Assistant

**Also in attendance:**

Emma Whitham, Consultant, A Food Growing Strategy for Highland

**An asterisk in the margin denotes a recommendation to the Council.  
All decisions with no marking in the margin are delegated to Committee.**

**Mrs T Robertson in the Chair**

**1. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mrs M Davidson, Mr M Finlayson, Mr J Gray, Mr S Mackie, Mr A MacInnes, Mr D Macpherson, and Mr B Thompson.

**2. Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

**3. Minutes of Previous Meeting**

There had been circulated Minutes of the Climate Change Panel held on 15 January 2020 which were **NOTED**.

#### 4. Presentation – A Food Growing Strategy for Highland

A presentation was undertaken at the meeting by Emma Whitham. Ms. Whitham provided an overview of the background, vision and objectives of A Food Growing Strategy for Highland. Ms. Whitham reviewed that following a roadshow in December 2019 there were several areas of support identified including; lack of knowledge/ confidence/connection to others, access to land, access to tools and resources, and limited manpower. Key recommendations included; identifying resources to support Highland Food Growing Network, working with community planning partnerships to identify land availability for growing and encouraging wider investment, getting Grow Your Own (GYO) active in all schools and taking a creative approach in how we think about GYO, where it could take place and how to inspire communities.

During the presentation, Members raised the following: -

- Members welcomed this presentation;
- There were positive mental health benefits linked to growing your own food;
- Food miles were an important factor to consider; with 75% of food being imported and 75% being exported a different strategy was required;
- Food that is 'in season' is an aspect to consider;
- The government has a pollinator strategy which must be reviewed as it impacted yield;
- Barriers to a larger rollout of this strategy was queried. It was commented that Community Planning was a great place to send these ideas to, however, due to resources it would not be the best avenue as there was limited personnel and the movement was already not moving forward at the pace required. In response, it was commented that it required a select few dedicated and hardworking individuals in a community to launch an initiative such as this and maintain it over time, however, having an overarching network with peer support and training within the Third Sector itself would alleviate the concerns;
- Every community had its own strengths, however, a large part of what was missing was the information sharing as most communities were unaware of the initiatives that other communities were working on;
- There were queries about engagement/support and getting participation and how the Council could help open the door and lift barriers for an initiative such as this. In response, it was commented that standardized guidance in schools would be helpful as at this time different schools have different policies and further that children want to do something tangible for the environment, actions and inclusion are important; and
- It was queried whether there could be a brief newsletter aimed at headteachers to communicate this initiative. In response, it was reviewed that the strategy itself would do this and it would showcase different case studies.

Having thanked Ms. Whitham for her presentation, Members **NOTED** the content of the presentation.

#### 5. Electricity Supply & Generation Restrictions in Highland

There had been circulated Report No. CCWG/3/20 dated 21 February 2020 by the Energy & Sustainability Manager.

During discussion, Members raised the following:-

- Scotland had copious supply that required distribution which relied on a willingness for the UK government to manage the problem, it was a difficult predicament as Scotland had self-sufficiency in renewable energy but could not distribute the supply elsewhere. In response, it was commented that there was a conference in June 2020 where this conversation could perhaps be developed further.

Members **NOTED** the issues surrounding electricity network grids and engagement with the DNO, UK Government and Ofgem to seek changes to current structures and availability for use.

## 6. Presentation & Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Update Report

A presentation was undertaken at the meeting by Ms. Jackie Sayer to provide and update regarding Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure. In addition, there had been circulated Report No. CCWG/4/20 dated 20 February by the Energy & Sustainability Manager.

During discussion, Members raised the following: -

- There was concern raised that the charge points take up four car park spaces and vehicles have been plugged in and left in those spots all day. In response, it was clarified that the charge points do not take up four car park spaces and these details can be negotiated, and the team can allow the community to decide some details of the installation, further, that there was discussion about introducing an additional charge once a vehicle has been in a spot for a certain period of time to deter from parking for long periods; and
- It was queried whether there was enough supply for electric vehicles to be charged at home. In response, it was reviewed that renewable energy (i.e. Solar panels) could be utilised to avoid pressure on the system.

Having thanked Ms. Sayer for her presentation, Members **NOTED** the contents of the report.

## 7. Single Use Plastics Update

There had been circulated Report No. CCWG/5/20 dated 20 February by the Catering Services Manager.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues: -

- It was suggested that students take cutlery from their own home, use drinks in their own reusable bottles and the children are directly surveyed to determine what they would be willing to eat to maintain uptake;
- There were many queries about a bulk supply of milk, juices, water being used in a dispenser to avoid the use of single use plastics. In response, it was advised that the solution was not feasible at this time as there were specific regulations that must be adhered to and the suppliers do not currently have the bulk dispensers available, and further if the children cannot get bottles at the school there is concern they would walk down the road and buy it elsewhere;
- It was queried whether seeking to improve recycling opportunities and behavioural changes (awareness) was the best strategy or to combat it with

- resources, income and uptake; In response, it was added that nutritional guidelines would be changing, as this would also have an impact on uptake;
- It was emphasized that children should be asked what they want and what they would be willing to commit to in support of the climate emergency;
  - Members recognized limits and restrictions on the catering service and the significant challenge they were facing at this time;
  - Members discussed having a youth representative at the committee and in response, it was hoped that this youth could be identified at the conference in June; and
  - Members discussed having a wider paper that would be brought to full Council about the implications for the staff and cost of catering to allow a wider Members' discussion, including the feedback from the children.

Thereafter, the CCWG **AGREED** that, considering the points raised during discussion and to allow opportunity to gather the children's view on the issue, a full report would be prepared for a future meeting of The Highland Council.

Members **NOTED** the contents of the report.

## 8. COP26 Update Paper

There had been circulated Report No. CCWG/6/20 dated 21 February 2020 by the Climate Change Officer.

During discussion, Members raised the following: -

- Pointing to some of the negative consequences of past actions there has been a huge quantity of natural woodland which has not been allowed to regenerate, and although it could be seen as a negative point, historically it can be demonstrated how varied the natural woodlands were in the Highlands and as there are pockets of ancient woodland remaining there can be a focus on restoration and rebalance of this;
- There were a lot of community groups and Third Sector organizations that may be unknown that are already doing a lot of work to address climate change, the community was the lead on this and it was important that the Council did not become the barrier to these projects moving forward;
- The Highlands have been involved in huge amounts of technologies that have been developed and have been of interest around the world, it was emphasized that the large scale was important but individual actions and individual communities have a major impact as well. This point was echoed by Members, that it was important to consider both the macro and micro level when addressing the climate emergency;
- Land reform and land usage in the Highlands was essential to tackling the issues that need to be dealt with. Further, the rate of change was very slow but needed to be move very quickly to unleash the potential of communities to be able to do what needs to be done to address issues head on and for this to happen there must be a move away from old political thinking;
- There was a query about whether there was a resource to get staff into communities to arrange community events with a focus on information sharing and awareness. In response, the Climate Change Officer reviewed that, for example, there was a positive meeting with Skye Climate Action recently and they expressed that they had no visibility around what the Council was currently doing regarding the climate agenda and this was simply due to lack of resources. It was reviewed that the Council was trying to find a mechanism for community groups to feed in, tell the Council what

they need and for the Council to provide feedback regarding feasibility. This would also allow the Council to be able to access funding schemes that it would not normally have access to. In summary, community groups had great interest in working in partnership with the Council but at this time there was no capacity to do so at the level required;

- There was clarification about the forthcoming Net Zero for Nature conference on 9<sup>th</sup> March 2020 at the Macdonald Highlands Hotel in Aviemore. In response, The Climate Change Officer commented that there will be three delegates from the Council attending and this would be an opportunity for more joined up thinking; and
- There was frustration expressed that there was expertise out in the community and if the Council was looking to disseminate and receive information it could not be expected that one or two officers have the capacity to do this work. In response, the Environment Manager commented that the Council required a network, relationships and outreach within the community, a coordinator and a line of communication to be monitored and this resource would need to be built over time.

The Group **NOTED** the contents of the report.

## 9. Carbon Offsetting Update

There had been circulated Report No. CCWG/7/20 dated 21 February 2020 by the Climate Change Officer.

During discussion, Members raised the following: -

- It was commented that the report took a corporate view in looking at the problem in terms of what the Council can do, however, recognizing that the Council was an organization that provided services, some being statutory, it was important to look at it as a Highland Economy Objective rather than a Highland Council Objective;
- There was a query about the Highland Council being an intermediate conduit for carbon offsetting to be able to take from bodies/firms that wish to offset and redistribute, using the Council's status as a local authority in Scotland. In response, the Climate Change Officer shared that there are only two recognized offsetting bodies in the whole of the UK and setting up these organizations is extremely challenging. It was reviewed that the aspiration was there, but the capacity and ability was very limited at this time. However, it was still useful to have these conversations internally and look at mapping greenspaces and potential partnerships in the future but there are many unknowns at this point that will change and evolve over next year;
- The first step should be reducing emissions and offsetting on the Council's estate first and foremost. Secondly, it was important to be thoughtful about which trees are being planted - native species are important but similarly as temperature rises some of those species will become less sustainable and less able to survive. In response, it was echoed that this was an important consideration and there had been ongoing mapping about what the asset base looked like, however, it was important to know that at this time there was no mechanism to capture what the offset would be if the Council planted trees on its own estate as it was not scoped into any Council strategies. It was reviewed that when the climate action plan is revised and there can be a growing target set out in hectares or acres per year than it would allow the Council to monitor, manage and calculate moving forward

and further, looking at partnerships highland wide to develop those schemes.

The Group **NOTED** the contents of the report.

The meeting ended at 1:13pm.