

**The Highland Council**

Minutes of Meeting of the **Climate Change Working Group** held REMOTELY on Thursday, 17 September 2020 at 10.30am.

**Present:**

Mr B Boyd	Mr S Mackie
Mr J Bruce	Mr A MacInnes
Mr J Gordon	Mrs A MacLean
Mrs I Campbell	Mr D Macpherson
Mrs M Davidson	Mr R MacWilliam
Mr C Fraser	Mr D Rixson
Mr J Gray	Mrs T Robertson
Mr D Louden	Mr B Thompson

**Non-Members also present:**

Ms P Hadley

**Officials in Attendance:**

Mr M MacLeod, Executive Chief Officer, Infrastructure & Environment  
Mr K Masson, Climate Change Officer  
Mrs N Wallace, Environment Manager  
Mrs I MacMillan, Energy Efficient Scotland Project Manager  
Mr M Cooper, Transport and Logistics Manager  
Mr J Perry, Climate Change Coordinator  
Miss M Zavarella, Administrative Assistant

**Also in attendance:**

Katie Jepson, Senior Project Manager, Students Organising for Sustainability UK  
Annabel Davidson-Knight, Senior Associate, Collaborate

**Mrs T Robertson in the Chair**

**1. Apologies for Absence**

There were no apologies for absence.

**2. Declarations of Interest**

Members **NOTED** the following declarations of interest:-

Cllr D Rixson - Item 6 (non-financial)

**3. Green Impact – Report & Presentation – Students Organising for Sustainability**

There had been circulated Report No. CCWG/11/20 dated 9 September 2020 by the Climate Change Coordinator.

In this connection, a presentation was undertaken by Katie Jepson, Senior Project Manager, Students Organising for Sustainability UK.

Members **NOTED** the contents of the report and **AGREED** that opportunities should be explored to secure funding to pilot Green Impact for a period of 1 year.

#### **4. A Place-based Vision for North West Highland – Presentation – Annabel Davidson-Knight**

A presentation was undertaken at the meeting by Annabel Davidson-Knight which provided an overview of scoping work and plans for the next stage of developing a place-based vision for rural economic development for the North West Highlands.

During discussion, the following comments were raised:-

- It was queried if the work had been commissioned by the John Muir Trust. In response, it was confirmed that the scoping phase of the work was commissioned by John Muir Trust, however, for the design phase of the work there would be a different approach in seeking multiple investments over a wide range of organizations. It was emphasized that the work had to be community driven and may be a model with multiple inputs. It was highlighted that the specifics were in the process of being finalized;
- It was queried as to whether the Trust was trying to impact policy change at a national level. In response, it was emphasized that at this time the focus was on developing a process which was balanced across a range of interests, not owned or run by a specific interest set in order to keep a value neutral space but allow for a range of interests to feed in;
- It was commented that neutrality would be important if it was to have the desired effect and that political backing was often lacking. It was highlighted that there was a desire for communities to be at the forefront of decision making, however, leadership was required for communities to know what was possible to achieve;
- Clarification was sought regarding a graph of Scotland on the PowerPoint Presentation. In response, it was reviewed that the map outlined climate projections carried out in 2009 and studied precipitation changes in the summer and winter months. It was included in the presentation as it displayed that the most significant changes with respect to precipitation were in the Highlands;
- It was queried if the Council was being disadvantaged by not using carbon offsetting schemes and commented that when trees were treated as a commercial crop it produced employment, however, often contract employment which did not always translate to local long-term employment opportunities. In response, it was confirmed that there were opportunities around carbon capture and offsetting and that some authorities in the UK had successfully developed local procurement and commissioning;
- It was emphasized that this project needed to be locally driven, which would come along with many challenges due to competing interests, Brexit, and the potential resulting impact on the fishing communities. In response, it was

reviewed that the challenges across communities and competing interests had not been underestimated and they are seeking assistance from Collective Leadership for Scotland (a transformation team within Scottish Government) to assist in developing a framework for communication;

- A vision around managing depopulation, resettlement and the school rules was queried. In response, it was reviewed that there were significant discussions around the issue of depopulation and there were opportunities emerging regarding a national rethinking around infrastructure investment and opportunities around this;
- In respect of economic development, there was a hope that the vision would extend beyond tourism and the traditional industries to other competitive advantages available in the area. It was queried if a skills inventory would be undertaken. In response, it was highlighted that there had been discussion through the project around how to strengthen community resilience whereby a desire to develop a skills exchange and peer support across several organizations was expressed and Members thoughts would be appreciated; and
- It was queried and confirmed that this project has been in contact with UHI and they were involved in the initial scoping work and there was potential for further collaboration moving forward.

Members thanked Ms Davidson-Knight and **NOTED** the content of the presentation.

## 5. Energy Efficient Scotland Programme

There had been circulated Report No. CCWG/12/20 dated 4 September 2020 by the Energy Efficient Scotland Project Manager.

During discussion, the following comments were raised:-

- It was commented that private housing in the rural areas was some of the poorest housing and it was required that the local authority had more discretionary power around eligibility;
- Regarding MSP support to have the remote rural uplift become Highland wide, the Leader of the Council advised that with details from the Climate Change Officer and the Energy Efficient Scotland Project Manager that she would pull together a letter to MSPs to ensure there was a sensible bid for it;
- The central heating project was commended, and it was requested and confirmed that Members would receive an informative flyer that could be left with constituents so they could take the steps to determine their eligibility;
- There was concern raised for the houses that do not qualify, such as the older built houses that often housed the elderly population who were more vulnerable to the effects of the cold. In response, it was emphasized that the cost had significantly increased over the years and the funding provided for these homes was inadequate to cover, it was advised that claims had been made to the Scottish government to increase funding for these types;
- It was commented that many could not afford the interest-free loan due to financial constraints and could not afford any contribution to the scheme. In response, it was reviewed that there was a minimum income threshold, an uplift for the Highlands and then to be living in fuel poverty or be living with a

condition that leaves them vulnerable to the effects of the cold. It was commented that there was significant fuel poverty in the Highlands, further, there was additional funding for extreme fuel poverty. There was a calculator self-declaration tool available given to the houses and the funding for this scheme was external only at this time; and

- It was queried whether there was an age criterion to determine eligibility and in response, it was confirmed that those under 5 and over 65 or vulnerable living with the effects of cold would be included in the calculation; and
- It was queried whether the success of the measures (i.e. reduction of fuel bills) put in were systematically measured, in response, it was confirmed that there were monitoring devices in some of the properties, and soon the behavioural aspects would be included in the studies as well. There were also case studies where devices were analysed and bill savings reviewed.

Thereafter, the Working Group:-

- (i) **NOTED** the contents of this report; and
- (ii) **AGREED** the Leader of the Council, with support of the Climate Change Officer and Energy Efficient Scotland Project Manager draft a letter to MSP's in support of the remote rural uplift becoming Highland wide.

## 6. Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Vision

### Declaration of Interest

Mr D Rixson declared a non-financial interest in this item on the grounds of being the Highland Council nominee to the Lochaber Environmental Group but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his their interests did not preclude his their involvement in the discussion

There had circulated Report No. CCWG/13/20 dated 10 September 2020 by the Energy Engineer & CET Project Manager.

During discussion, the following comments were raised:-

- While commending the current three staff members in post for their work it was questioned whether this was enough staff in this department for the demand and queried what commitment was being made to expand the team. This comment was echoed by Members. In response, it was advised by the Executive Chief Officer, Infrastructure and Environment that expanding the team was one option, however, redesigning the team so they are more agile across the whole Council where everyone had a responsibility and role to play is the underlying priority;
- It was emphasized that this Working Group needed to send a strong message that a better resourced team was required and a timetable for when it could be implemented;
- The importance of renewables and emphasis on islands and remote communities was important rather than solely focussing on city centres. In response, it was reviewed that the document would be fluid and changing while trying to be as pragmatic as possible and working with partners to expand partnerships in future years;

- It was stressed that climate change was the most important thing that will affect every one of us and that what was in the report is what was achievable; and
- It was queried whether motorhomes were being examined and there could be lobbying done with manufacturers. In response, it was reviewed that greening the fleet has involved a lot of procurement work with Aberdeenshire/Aberdeen/Moray in looking at hydrogen. Experience and information sharing had been occurring across councils and manufactures were becoming more involved in the greening of fleets whether it be hydrogen or electricity. However, a lot of companies were hesitant to become involved as this was onerous work and altering vehicles interfered with warranties. Regarding the Highland fleet, there were currently 79 EV/Hybrid vehicles, dedicated EV vehicles were more challenging to deploy due to the infrastructure and costs involved. Member feedback was welcomed with respect to managing the complications.

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

## 7. Climate Change Workstreams

There had been circulated Report No. CCWG/14/20 dated 8 September 2020 by the Climate Change Officer.

- It was commented that Members were eager to have view of the basic figures and benchmarking that needed to be done and how the Council was currently aligning with national policies. It was suggested that draft reports be circulated to Members prior to the next Climate Change Working Group meeting in November. In response, it was reviewed that there were a few reports nearing completion that could be circulated in draft to Members ahead of the next meeting of the Working Group;
- It was commented that the coverage and exposure of the Council's efforts in managing climate change was lacking, and the connection was not being made to businesses, communities and pressure groups. It was highlighted that opening the lines of communication with Extinction Rebellion would be useful in getting focussed on the progress that the Council needed to make and the role ER could play in the process. In response, it was reviewed that communication to the wider public had been a standing issue due to the small team and pressures across the council including in corporate communications, however, it was highlighted that each of the items on this agenda could be a separate press release and it was about finding a workable compromise in this area;
- The need for having a dedicated officer responsible for the promotion of climate change across the Highlands with communities, business, the press and pressure groups was emphasised;
- Concern was raised about the Internal Markets bill going through Westminster and how this would impact on environmental protections and climate change. It was highlighted that this Working Group had a lot of keen members of staff and it was suggested that a joint letter be written to Rosanna Cunningham (Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform) on behalf of the Committee/Council on her observations on how this bill would impact environmental protection. In response, it was agreed the Climate

Change Officer would pull together evidence to create the basis of a letter for Member feedback;

- It was highlighted that planting trees was a strategy to absorb carbon, and it was queried if there were landowners in the Highlands willing to take this investment on and if not, there would be a major challenge in slowing down climate change. This was echoed by other Members and there was a request to the Chair to have an item on tree planting at the next meeting. In response, it was agreed that the Climate Change Coordinator would do a presentation at the next meeting on the Landscapes as Carbon Sinks project;
- It was emphasised that there was a desire on the part of some Members for information from bodies such as Edinburgh University which show more detailed analyses of climate change issues and to keep Members in mind to share this information;
- It was emphasized that while discussing the importance of tree planting it was also crucial that the felling of trees was challenged and protecting what currently exists;
- It was suggested that Woodland Trust Scotland be invited to do a presentation on planting the appropriate trees in the appropriate place and provide an insight into this in more detail. In response, the Leader of the Council suggested that Forest and Land Scotland would have more influence and ability to distribute woodland planting grants; and
- It was queried whether peatland was as good for carbon as planting trees and in response, the Climate Change Coordinator explained that damaged peatland were net greenhouse gas emitters and healthy wet peatlands were incredibly good for the environment. It was commented that unfortunately given the projections for warming in the north of Scotland predicted decreasing quantity of peatland.

Thereafter, the Working Group:-

- (i) **NOTED** the contents of this report;
- (ii) **AGREED** draft reports be circulated to Members prior to the next Climate Change Working Group meeting in November;
- (iii) **AGREED** that the Climate Change Coordinator organise a presentation for the next meeting of the Climate Change Working Group on the topic of Landscapes as Carbon Sinks;
- (iv) **AGREED** that the Climate Change Officer draft a letter for Member feedback to the Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform on how the Internal Markets Bill would impact on environmental protections and climate change;

The meeting ended at 12:54pm.