

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Waste Strategy Working Group** held Remotely on Friday 23 April 2021 at 11.00 am.

Present:-

Mr J Bruce
Mr C Fraser
Mr R Gale

Mr A Henderson (Chair)
Mr D Macpherson
Mr H Morrison

In attendance:-

Ms C McDiarmid, Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place
Mr S Graham, Project Manager, Corporate Resource Service
Mr A McKinnie, Waste Operations Manager, Communities and Place Service
Miss J MacLennan, Principal Administrator, Chief Executive's Service
Miss M Zavarella, Committee Administrator, Performance and Governance

Business

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr A MacInnes, Mr R MacWilliam and Mrs T Robertson.

2. Declarations of Interest

The Working Group **NOTED** the following declaration of interest:-

Item 3 – Mr D Macpherson (financial).

3. Waste Projects Update

Declaration of Interest – Mr D Macpherson declared a financial interest in this item as a relative was a landowner of a site in Fort William and took no part in the discussion surrounding that particular matter.

There had been circulated Report No WS/01/21 dated 19 April 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place during which Members were informed of progress with the Inverness, Aviemore and Fort William Transfer Stations. In particular, it was pointed out that, in relation to the potential delay for the completing the construction of the Inverness Waste Transfer Station, discussions had taken place with the contractor and it was now hoped a deadline on January 2023 would be met. However, given the scale, site and that construction would be taking place over winter there would require to be a degree of flexibility.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- the Chair had contacted Fergus Ewing MSP in relation to the renegotiation of the lease for the Household Waste Recycling Centre at Fort William and a response was currently awaited. The Recycling Centre remaining at its

- present location at the Ben Nevis Industrial Estate seemed to be the most straightforward option; and
- in response to a query regarding the badger activity at the site for the Inverness Transfer Station, Members were informed that surveys were underway to ascertain the extent of this activity and discussions were taking place with Nature Scot to secure a protected species licence. Discussions were also taking place as to how works might be managed at a safe distance and how the badgers might be encouraged to move to new sets. At present the financial implications were unknown.

The Working Group **NOTED**:-

- i. the positive progress in awarding two contracts to construct waste transfer stations in Inverness and Aviemore;
- ii. the continuing efforts of officers to provide the opportunity to develop similar infrastructure in Fort William; and
- iii. the parallel efforts of officers to secure a new lease for the Household Waste Recycling Centre in Fort William.

4. Energy From Waste

i. Energy from Waste Presentation – Socioeconomic Study

The Project Manager gave a presentation on the key outputs of the Socioeconomic Study of providing an Energy from Waste (EfW) facility at the Longman site, Inverness. The advent of a combined Heat and Power EfW facility at that site would be the culmination of a very significant preparatory and financial undertaking. Highland Council was still at the early stages of the process to determine whether a facility could be sought with information being gathered such as the feasibility study, considered by the Working Group at its meeting in August 2020, and the socioeconomic study looking at the wider benefits associated with such a development.

The socioeconomic study focused on: if an EfW facility could alleviate fuel poverty in parts of the city, if it could be a cornerstone for other business developments and to what extent it could contribute to Low Carbon Highland. Input too from Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks (SSEN) had been sought regarding grid connection possibilities for the power output generated from the facility. High Heat Demand Zones had been mapped together with Fuel Poverty Zones and the overlap highlighted potential areas where both aspects could be targeted. For example, areas such as the Longman Industrial Estate and the Raigmore Hospital campus were high energy users. Custom from constant high heat users was fundamental so these clusters were an important part of the study. Areas identified as Providing Heat Network Opportunities were: Raigmore Hospital and Housing Estate; Raigmore, UHI and Inverness Retail Park; Raigmore, UHI, Inverness Retail Park and Inverness East Development; Harbour Road Industrial Estate; and South Kessock Residential Area. However, in consideration of these it was important to bear in mind the various infrastructure requirements of each option.

With 80-90k tonnes of waste being processed each year, the facility would generate a considerable amount of energy and various options for its use had been considered. These had been narrowed down to two, namely, exporting to the grid and then a Power Purchase Agreement with private consumers or exporting to the grid and then offsetting against consumption in Council buildings. There were also connection costs involved to connect

to the grid estimated at £300k, excluding any infrastructure works required. There were also other alternative uses for the power such as electric vehicle charging, hydrogen generations and utilisation, commercial markets and heating.

Looking to the future there would be further, more detailed, engagement with SSEN and, it was hoped, once Covid 19 Lockdown restrictions permitted, to engage in possible visits, at officer and Member level, to other EfW operators to understand the logistics of maximising the use of energy outputs. There was also a need for further understanding of the District Heat Networks and the considerable costs involved in the pipe work and the other plant required to convert waste to power and for customers to be able to accept the energy. Hydrogen strategy too was an important element of the Council's Climate Change approach and this would govern any complimentary investment in the EfW scheme the Highland Council would want to be involved in.

During discussion, Members made the following points:-

- the complex nature of this piece of work was recognised;
- there might be an opportunity to explore under pitch heating with Inverness Caledonian Thistle whose pitch was in close proximity to the proposed facility. Similarly, discussions would take place with the other cohort of potential customers in the area;
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that a sorting plant would still be required as any EfW facility would still be at last 7-8 years in the future; and
- the Council currently spent significant amounts on the disposal of waste and, looking to the future, these costs would only increase.

The Working Group otherwise **NOTED** the presentation.

ii. **Energy from Waste Development Potential**

There had been circulated Report No WS/02/21 dated 19 April 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

The Working Group **NOTED**:-

- i. the Council invested approximately £11m per annum on waste disposal, including internal, external and landfill costs. Compared to other Councils our costs were relatively high (we were ranked 20th for cost performance), the amount of household waste per person sent to landfill was the 2nd highest of all Scottish Councils at 0.27 tonnes per person. This created 297,808 tonnes of CO₂ emissions and placed us 5th highest for carbon impact per person, with 1.26 tonnes of CO₂ emitted per person. ([Source: SEPA, Scottish Household Waste – Summary Data 2019](#));
- ii. costs had already increased this year with additional budget of £405k agreed at the Council meeting in March 2021. These would continue to increase annually unless a sustainable long-term solution can be found for Highland residual waste;
- iii. four studies had now been concluded and three options remain: to do nothing and continue to landfill; to contract with service providers in other parts of Scotland or in England to receive and treat Highland waste; or to develop an EfW facility to serve the Highlands;

- iv. appraising these options needs to involve more than direct cost comparisons and to acknowledge the complexity in costing options accurately when prices are variable and largely outwith the Council's control;

and **AGREED**:-

- v. the framework for critically appraising the pros and cons of the options set out in Appendix 1 of the report, along with a proposed timeline for the governance route this year to decide on the preferred option; and
- vi. to participate in study visits to one or two operating EfW sites in Tayside and Lothian as soon as possible and ideally during June if that can be made Covid secure.

5. Recycling Improvement Funding

There had been circulated Report No WS/03/21 dated 16 April 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

During discussion, Members made the following points:-

- the fund could be used to explore how to encourage more householders to recycle;
- different solutions would be needed in different areas and discussions would take place at Ward Business Meetings to consider further recycling ideas and should any stage 2 application be invited;
- it was disappointing that there no options for customers to recycle outside takeaways and filling stations and it was important that owners of such premises were also encouraged to offer recycling facilities. In this connection, it was also suggested that recording licence plate numbers at takeaway drive-throughs might deter some from irresponsibly disposing of their rubbish;
- more recycling facilities were needed in remote and rural areas;
- education was key and officers visiting schools to explain the impact of littering and to promote the importance of protecting the environment was to be encouraged. This had greatest benefit if it took place in the early stages of Primary School. It was disappointing to note that despite the considerable number of Primaries which had Eco-Schools Green Flags, there were relatively few secondaries which had achieved the Award;
- as Lockdown was eased there had already been a noticeable increase in the amount of roadside littering;
- the reintroduction of the Deposit Return Scheme in July 2022 would undoubtedly encourage more recycling; and
- disposable masks had become an additional source of litter but, due to the materials involved in their production, they had to be treated as residual waste.

•
The Working Group **NOTED**:-

- i. that the Recycling Improvement Fund had been launched by the Scottish Government with the first call for Expressions of Interest (EOI) by 19 May 2021. The fund was a five- year programme of £70m and it would operate on a rolling basis for EOI forms and Stage 2 applications from local authorities;
- ii. the objectives of the fund, the funding availability and eligibility and the process for applying as described in sections 5-7 of the report;
- iii. the Council required support to improve recycling infrastructure given relative performance on recycling rates, waste landfilled and associated

green-house gas emissions. The public show high satisfaction with refuse collection and recycling facilities and they were regarded among the most important services provided to the public. If successful in gaining funding the Council would be able to improve services further, particularly in areas where services could be levelled up;

- iv. and discuss the initial list of proposals as set out in section 8 of the report and that these might develop further by the time the Working Group met and could be reported verbally;
- v. the proposal for discussion with Members in Ward Business meetings to consider other potential service improvements for the fund and for any discussion on developing stage 2 applications; and
- vi. the report with the Working Group's feedback could be taken to the Communities and Place Committee in May 2021.

The meeting ended at 12 noon.