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| Agenda Item | 6 |
| Report No | CCWG/4/21 |

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Climate Change Working Group

Date: 16th April 2021

Report Title: Highland Adapts – A Place-based Approach to Climate Change Adaptation

Report By: Executive Chief Officer – Infrastructure & Environment

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 This report presents an update on the Highland Adapts initiative, which will deliver a Highland-wide, place-based partnership approach to climate change adaptation.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Members are invited to:

- i. Discuss and note the contents of the report.

3. Implications

3.1 Resource - There are no direct resource implications arising from this report.

3.2 Legal - The Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 places a legal duty on the Council to adapt to the impacts of climate change. Taking a place-based, partnership approach will ensure that the key cross-cutting risks of climate change are identified and addressed, protecting service delivery.

3.3 Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural) – There are no community implications arising from this report. However, taking a partnership approach to climate change adaptation is likely to have significant positive benefits for remote-rural communities, many of which are likely to be disproportionately impacted by the changing climate, and it has been recognised by the partners that Highland Adapts must be built on a strong foundation of community engagement and involvement.

- 3.4 Climate Change/Carbon CLEVER – There are a number of climate change implications arising out of this report. Whilst the main focus around developing a Highland Adapts partnership will be to prepare appropriately for change, there will also continue to be a requirement to mitigate our collective carbon footprint. The establishment of this type of partnership will provide a useful collective mechanism to support both adaptation and mitigation efforts.
- 3.5 Risk – Given increasing public awareness of the issues around the climate and ecological emergency, as well as the increasing frequency of extreme weather events, there is a reputational and financial risk to the Council from not taking sufficient action to prepare ourselves for changes to our climate.
- 3.6 Gaelic – There are no Gaelic implications arising from this report.

4. Background

- 4.1 Scotland's climate is already changing. There is a long-term trend of warming temperatures, shifting rainfall patterns and rising sea levels. We have experienced this as highly variable weather – hot, cold, wet and dry – that has proved hugely challenging in recent years.
- 4.2 The impacts of climate change have been felt across Highland: from damage to infrastructure, to disruption of vital services, and a shift in growing seasons. Work in Highland to reduce greenhouse gas emissions will contribute to limiting the extent of future climate change but we cannot turn back the clock. Past and present-day emissions mean that the rate of climate change is set to intensify over the coming decades, and we need to adapt now.
- 4.3 The impacts of climate change affect everyone, with consequences for our economy, society and natural environment. No one organisation, business or community can adapt to these impacts alone, since many risks are inter-related – for example, what transport operators do has an impact on the resilience of our healthcare system and the ability to deliver lifeline services.
- 4.4 The Council published its very first climate change adaptation plan in 2011, which was the product of significant levels of research and engagement with Highland communities around the most likely impacts of climate change in the coming years, and provided an outline approach on how to address them. However, the pace of change in respect of our understanding of the threat posed by the changing climate has increased in recent years, and it has become clear that a new approach will be required to meaningfully address the risks to service delivery which are, in some respects, already being felt by more frequent extreme weather events.
- 4.5 In 2018, the Climate Change team sought outline support from the Community Planning Partnership (CPP) to apply for funding from Adaptation Scotland for assistance in the development of a Highland-wide approach to climate change adaptation, which was secured. A project proposal was submitted to Adaptation Scotland by The Highland Council on behalf of the CPP. The funding bid was ultimately unsuccessful, as Adaptation

Scotland believed that a longer time frame and additional resources would be required to deliver on the vision set out in the application.

- 4.6 However, officers from Adaptation Scotland and Climate Ready Clyde recognised the merit in developing a partnership approach to adaptation work in Highland. As a result, they provided in-kind support to the Highland Council to develop the outline of what a region-based, partnership approach to adaptation might look like. The range of work which has been undertaken to date can be summarised as follows:
- Workshops were held with Community Planning Partners in June 2019 to identify what work was being undertaken in Highland around the adaptation agenda, and to better understand what partners would like to see from a partnership approach to adaptation;
 - Meetings were held with key internal stakeholders including the Chief Executive, the then Director of Planning & Infrastructure and Head of Planning & Environment to assess how a partnership approach could support wider service delivery and resilience for the Council;
 - A survey was created to assess the impact of climate change and extreme weather events on the Highland public, with a view to better understanding the likely challenges we are going to face as well as establishing where the public think responsibility for this work should sit;
 - A series of detailed interviews were conducted with senior representatives from potential partner organisations including NHS Highland, Highlands & Islands Enterprise, ChangeWorks, NatureScot, Transport Scotland, Zero Waste Scotland and the Scottish Government to assist in establishing what the vision of the Highland Adapts partnership should be, the key aims and objectives, identifying critical risks, assessing the levels of financial or in-kind support which might be available to establish the partnership, and drafting of an indicative operational plan for the first three years of the initiative;
 - Data from the workshops, interviews and surveys were assessed and collated, and then used to develop the outline business case for the Highland Adapts partnership. As a result, a funding commitment of £45k from the Change Fund over 3 years was agreed by the Council in December 2019 to support the recruitment of a Principal Project Manager to lead the Highland Adapts initiative;
 - Following on from this funding commitment, and additional £135k has been committed by partners to enable this recruitment to take place. A job and person specification was developed collaboratively by partners over the course of January and February 2021, with interviews for the post taking place w/c 15th March 2021, and an appointment was made on 19th March 2021. The new Highland Adapts Principal Project Manager will take up their post on 4th May 2021.
- 4.5 It was clear from discussions with all partners throughout this process that there is appetite for taking a region-wide approach to adaptation, particularly given the various challenges presented in a region of this size as well as its largely remote rural population. It was also recognised that there are multiple benefits (social, economic, financial and environmental) which are likely to flow from such an approach, and it is anticipated that the number of partners and reach of the initiative is likely to grow once the Principal Project Manager is in post.

5. The Highland Adapts Partnership & Draft Operational Plan

5.1 The formal Highland Adapts Partnership is currently comprised of the following funding partners:

- The Highland Council
- Changeworks
- Highlands & Islands Enterprise
- NHS Highland
- NatureScot
- Zero Waste Scotland

5.2 The focus of the partnership will be around enabling the Highlands to adapt to the unavoidable impacts of climate change. The initiative will bring organisations, businesses and communities together to develop a shared vision and understanding of climate change risks and opportunities across the Highland region. It will identify adaptation and mitigation priorities for communities, areas and sectors that will establish where (both spatially and thematically) and how the region can increase resilience and adapt.

5.2 The Highland Adapts initiative will pioneer a fair, inclusive and integrated approach to adapting to climate change. The initiative will seek to involve communities in all aspects of its work recognising there is no 'one size fits all' approach to adapting to climate change. The initiative will also work proactively to ensure that disadvantaged and underrepresented groups are involved and benefit equally from action to adapt.

5.3 The outline operational plan for Highland Adapts is comprised of three work packages, which will be completed over the first three years of the initiative:

- 1. Governance and leadership** - Governance arrangements for the Highland Adapts initiative will be further developed and finalised during the first six months of operation. This will include establishing a programme board and scoping options for community involvement which could include setting up a Highland-wide network of adaptation champions. A draft Memorandum of Understanding is currently being agreed by the partners, which will develop into a more formal partnership agreement in due course.
- 2. Understanding the challenge** - A risk and opportunity assessment is required in order to identify the climate risks and opportunities that will affect the Highlands up to the end of the century and highlight areas where action is needed in the next five years to prepare the ground for these changes, from both an infrastructure and built environment perspective as well as capacity building for change. The assessment must identify Highland-wide risks and also take account of the variation in risks and opportunities across different communities, places and landscapes.
- 3. Planning and implementation** - The main planning and implementation phase of the Highland Adapts initiative will take place following completion of the risk and opportunity assessment. The governance established to run the Highland Adapts initiative and the engagement process used to develop the risk and opportunity assessment will build understanding, trust and a shared vision and sense of

urgency among partners. The planning and implementation phase will build on this work and will identify priority actions that multiple partners are able to commit to. This phase is likely to involve developing a regional adaptation strategy and action plan and will be agreed by Highland Adapts partners at a later stage.

6. Next Steps

- 6.1 Whilst significant progress has already been made in respect of establishing the Highland Adapts initiative and partnership, progress has been necessarily constrained by the lack of a dedicated resource to take a lead on driving things forward at pace. It is expected that the recruitment of the Highland Adapts Principal Project Manager will expedite the agreement of governance structures for the initiative, the leveraging of additional funding to expand the reach of Highland Adapts as well as the planning for the community engagement elements, which will be crucial to ensure that the initiative delivers positive outcomes for Highland residents.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer – Infrastructure & Environment

Date: 23rd March 2021

Author: Keith Masson, Climate Change & Energy Team Manager