

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Climate Change Working Group** held REMOTELY on Friday, 28 May 2021 at 10.30am.

Present:

Mr B Boyd	Mr A MacInnes
Mrs I Campbell	Mrs A MacLean
Mrs M Davidson	Mr D Macpherson
Mr C Fraser	Mr D Rixson
Mr J Gray	Mrs T Robertson
Mr D Louden	

Officials in Attendance:

Mr M MacLeod, Executive Chief Officer, Infrastructure & Environment
Mrs K Lackie, Executive Chief Officer, Performance & Governance
Mr K Masson, Climate Change and Energy Team Manager
Mr J Perry, Climate Change Coordinator
Ms K Andrews, Climate Change Coordinator
Mrs E Whitham, Principal Project Manager, Highland Adapts
Mrs N Wallace, Environment Manager
Mr R Bamborough, Senior Sustainability Officer
Mr D Mackenzie, Corporate Communications
Miss M Zavarella, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Rachel Currie, Newcastle University student (observing)
Martin Sherring, Highland Good Food Partnership
Helen O'Keefe, Highland Good Food Partnership

Mrs T Robertson in the Chair

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr J Bruce, Mr J Gordon, Mr S Mackie, Mr R MacWilliam and Mr B Thompson.

2. Declarations of Interest

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

Item 4-7 (Non-financial) – Mr D Rixson

3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

Members **NOTED** the Minutes of the Climate Change Working Group held on 29 January 2021, which were approved by the Council on 25 March 2021.

4. Climate Change Programme Alignment Report

Declaration of Interest: Mr D Rixson declared a non-financial interest in this item as the Council's representative 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 interest did not preclude his involvement in discussion.

There had been circulated Report No. CCWG/3/21 dated 23 March 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer – Infrastructure & Environment.

During discussion, the following comments raised:-

- Members appreciated the comprehensive report;
- it was necessary to set a target date for Net Zero emissions from Council operations;
- there were a number of actions that had to be tackled which required a holistic approach across the Council looking at service provision;
- it was frustrating to see the position the Council was in regarding the distribution network as there was no prospect for the Council to decarbonise its own buildings using Solar PV;
- the Council should have a comprehensive land ownership record and should identify what the land was used for;
- regarding waste energy, a lot of carbon was being expended transporting waste to landfill and it would be prudent to have this managed locally as the sooner the funding expended on this could be reduced, the sooner it could be allocated to other areas of need;
- there was a tension between economic recovery and tourism as tourism necessitated travel;
- regarding the Highland Council Sphere of Influence diagram in the report, it was suggested that Community Council and Planning Partnerships be included;
- social care, education, health and other public services in rural environments required local answers not central ones;
- regarding social housing, the quality had to improve though it was unclear who would be responsible for funding;
- digital skills could not be underestimated and it was important to be smarter about how the wider Highland workforce could be empowered in this regard;
- information was sought, and provided, about a change in language in the Implications – Climate Change/Carbon Clever section of Committee Reports and it was explained that this section was not given the weight required at an Officer level and there was not a clear set of guidelines about how to complete it so the Climate Change and Energy Team was thinking about how to improve this moving forward;

- the projects in the report described as “low hanging fruit” had to be thought about carefully as they were sensitive areas and the public would be sensitive to them as well;
- regarding waste management, it was important that waste and food waste was reduced as a region;
- it would be important to advertise and promote remote-working in job specifications;
- information was sought, and provided, about district heating systems and explained that it was much more challenging to deliver viable district heating schemes in Highland compared to other areas and would take time and resource to map them out;
- the idea of mini forests was a great concept and it would be easier to persuade communities to take ownership;
- in response to a question about the tensions within the report, it was explained that the Climate Change Agenda was a highly complicated one in terms of the transition to Net Zero and the report set out that the Council had the best opportunities to put itself in firmer footing to Net Zero;
- regarding blue carbon and the marine environment, it was explained that the size and scale of blue carbon resources were vastly underestimated and until the scale could be formally understood it would remain on the periphery. It was highlighted that despite rising up the agenda, public and political awareness was approximately 10 years behind peatland;
- the clarity of action orientation in the report was commended;
- it would be important to source all contracts locally within Highland to build and develop capabilities for the long term, meaning it would be an economic development opportunity, bringing funds into the region; and
- measurable and monitorable Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) were necessary so services and Officers responsible could be held to account.

Members:-

- i. **NOTED** the contents of this report; and
- ii. **AGREED** to support the arrangement of a Member workshop to present the outcomes of the Programme Alignment report, discuss options for the setting of a corporate net zero target date and then seek approval of a net zero target date at Full Council.

5. Highland Good Food Conference & Update on Food Growing Strategy

Declaration of Interest: Mr D Rixson declared a non-financial interest in this item as the Council’s representative 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 interest did not preclude his involvement in discussion.

A presentation had been undertaken at the meeting by Martin Sherring, Highland Good Food Partnership. An overview was provided on two projects relating to growing Mediterranean vegetables in Highland and the circular economy of food and food waste. Mr. Sherring also made a request to Members to take a position of leadership in making a declaration in the run up to COP26 to make food possibility sustainable and at the heart of the global climate emergency. Mr Sherring

highlighted that there was an opportunity for Highland to sign a declaration and follow it up with action.

During discussion, the following comments were raised:-

- Member expressed appreciation for the interesting presentation;
- regarding the request for declaration it was explained that this would have to be put to full Council as a report or motion;
- it was important to look to Nordic countries, Finland was growing bananas and other tropical vegetables and the same could be produced in Highland though it would be important for landowners to be engaged in the process;
- regarding carbon reduction, one issue was food miles and anything that could be done to reduce food miles in Highland would be beneficial;
- clarification was sought, and provided, on whether the Highland Good Food Partnership (HGFP) partnered with distilleries to make use of wasted heat;
- information was sought, and provided, in relation to the use of biochar to enhance soil and improve crop growth;
- in response to a comment, it was explained that funding was only a minor factor, the support had to come from connecting the concepts of diet, climate, schools, waste, and seeing all as being interlinked and tackled from different angles with education being a key factor;
- in response to a question about the business plan for growing good food in Highland and support required from the Council, it was explained that the Council had to provide support with food policy, recognising that it was an imperative part of procurement and had to be integrated across service. Food procurement in schools was provided as an example. It was positive to see recruitment for the Community Growing Coordinator position as this would fill a need and it would be positive to see the team expanded.

Members **NOTED** the contents of the presentation.

6. Highland Adapts – A Place-based Approach to Climate Change Adaptation

There had been circulated Report No. CCWG/4/21 dated 23 March 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer – Infrastructure & Environment.

During discussion, the following comments were raised:-

- throughout the report there was reference to the need for strong community partnerships and the varied quality of Community Planning Partnerships had been raised as a subject of interest and a Member seminar arranged in this regard, it was queried whether these plans should be discussed at the seminar and it was explained that Highland Adapts were planning to build from the community up with action on the ground by understanding and speaking to the local communities in order to be able to build a proper risk profile across the region and were seeking to do so over three year initiative, focussing on building the vision for a climate ready Highland, understanding the needs and risk for local communities and building the action plan;
- regarding community led planning, it was important that there was a clear remit for who took responsibility when issues arose, or action required; and

- information was sought, and provided, on how the community lead approach would work in practice and explained that in all discussions with partners thus far there was a clear desire for strong and enthusiastic partnership working and an agreement that it had to be a community led initiative.

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

7. Just Transition – Implications & Opportunities for the Council

There had been circulated Report No. CCWG/5/21 dated 18 May 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer – Infrastructure & Environment.

During a presentation, Katherine Andrews, Climate Change Coordinator reviewed the background on the inclusive and supportive Just Transition, and what it meant for Highland focussing on the following areas; the energy system, the industrial base, buildings and how there were heated, transport system and how land was used and managed. Looking to the future, the following initiatives were highlighted; Highland Adapts, EV Infrastructure, Active Travel Networks and Community Wealth Building.

During discussion, the following comments were raised:-

- Members expressed appreciation for the thought-provoking report;
- concern was raised and clarification sought, and provided, about reducing agricultural land;
- elaboration was sought regarding the carbon border tax and need to mitigate against offshore emissions and jobs and the Climate Change Coordinator agreed to gather further information in relation to this and liaise with the Member directly (Cllr D Rixson);
- the position of agriculture in Highland was queried and it was explained that there was a recommendation to the Scottish Government on how to ensure that the transition was equal and when reducing the amount of agricultural land, ensuring that farmers were being supported through the transition;
- it was important to improve climate change education in school, making it a focus of the curriculum;
- information was sought, and provided, about Gross Domestic Product (GDP) changes and it was explained that GDP would not be eliminated though there would be a move to make it more inclusive to involve social elements such as poverty and wellbeing;
- the unique position of Highland had not been fully considered in the report, climate change was an opportunity for Highland and many aspects of what the country required to meet targets were found in Highland such as capacity for sequestration and carbon storage, wind power, hydro, tidal power and it was important to recognise that the Highland economy had the potential to grow at the same time it adapted to climate change;
- regarding divestment, the amount of fossil fuel investment in the pension fund was relatively small though there was a possibility to divest from fossil fuel to more sustainable investment elements and this would be the responsibility of the sub-committee and Pensions Committee, there were opportunities to enhance carbon neutral elements and it would be timely;

- 20-minute neighbourhoods could work well in cities but in rural areas it would be much more difficult;
- regarding young people, it was commented that many youth work organisations linked to the Youth Network were based in the community and it was explained that the Science Skills Academy was embedding a lot of climate action into the curriculum; and
- information was sought, and provided about farm and land managers training and regional land use partnerships and it was explained that the focus at this stage was on partnership and governance rather than delivering the framework.

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

The meeting ended at 12:26pm.