

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Climate Change Working Group** held REMOTELY on Wednesday, 18 August 2021 at 10.30am.

Present:

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

Officials in Attendance:

Mrs K Lackie, Executive Chief Officer, Performance & Governance
Mr K Masson, Climate Change and Energy Team Manager
Mr S Miller, Project Manager
Mr S Andrews, World Heritage Project Coordinator
Mr D Burns, Energy Engineer
Mrs E Whitham, Principal Project Manager, Highland Adapts
Mr J Perry, Climate Change Coordinator
Ms K Andrews, Climate Change Coordinator
Ms K Ellen, Food Growing Coordinator
Mr R Bamborough, Senior Sustainability Officer
Mr D Mackenzie, Corporate Communications
Miss M Zavarella, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Ms C Ferguson, Highland Good Food Partnership

Mrs T Robertson in the Chair

Prior to the commencement of formal business, the Chair highlighted the release of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report which reinforced the stark challenges ahead in terms of climate change. In this regard, it was emphasised that it was the Council's legal and moral obligation to make every effort to achieve net zero emissions. Specifically, desist using fossil fuels to heat buildings and power fleet, invest in buildings to ensure efficiency and ensure that climate commitment was a critical component of the Capital Programme and procurement decisions. Beyond this, strong leadership was required around the climate change agenda to support communities and it was necessary that Member decision-making was aligned with climate commitments. The Chair encouraged all Members of the Working Group to undertake the Carbon Literacy training offered by the Scottish Cities Alliance.

1. Apologies for Absence

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

2. Declarations of Interest

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

Item 3 (Financial) – Mrs M Davidson

Item 3 (Non-Financial) – Mr D Rixson

3. Energy Efficient Scotland: Area Based Scheme Update

Declaration of Interest – Mrs M Davidson declared a financial interest in this item due to intent in applying for the schemes outlined in the report related to insulation and home improvement but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that her interest did not preclude her involvement in discussion.

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/6/21 dated 21 July 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance.

During a verbal update, the Project Manager shared information about project targets, sources of funding, annual carbon savings, delivery challenges and next steps.

During discussion, the following comments were raised:-

- thanks were given to the Project Manager for the clarity of the report;
- the extraordinary efforts of the Climate Change and Energy Team more generally were highlighted;
- in response to a question about local training programs and skills upgrade, it was explained that the Council had well trained staff internally though the introduction of new legislation had caused a knowledge gap which was being addressed by the team in hopes of being able to provide in-house and external training in the future;
- clarification was sought, and provided, on the fixed amount of funding per household;
- in response to a question, it was explained that lobbying efforts with the Scottish Government had been undertaken previously to consider logistical impacts in Highland and future lobbying efforts would require increased evidence to justify additional funding. Gathering evidence was a priority of the team and this notion was supported by Members;
- reassurance was sought, and provided, that the impact of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry had resulted in the tightening of regulations in respect of plastic-based external wall insulation, and in addition, the Council team were ensuring due diligence in closely examining any potential implications before any decisions were made to move forward;

- information was sought on whether the Swedish Timber House program had resulted in reduced heating costs for owners and whether the external wall insulation design was being assessed as a fire risk and it was agreed that Councillor B Thompson would provide the specific example from his Ward directly to the Project Manager to allow for appropriate follow up out with the meeting;
- concern was shared for the low installation targets for Year 9 of the programme and it was explained that in order to increase the scope, evidence was first required to determine reasons for low uptake. It was highlighted that this was a priority of the team and Members were encouraged to reach out to their communities to assist in this regard;
- it was important to recognise that the additional cost to homeowners would be a barrier to uptake as not everyone had the disposable income required to participate;
- the number of listed buildings in Highland that had to be brought up to standard to ensure they were wind and water secure was a challenge as external insulation could not be utilised on listed buildings;
- there was concern shared among Members that Highland rural communities were being disadvantaged and discriminated against on the basis of the location of their residence and overall, there was inadequate funding from governments to support this;
- information was sought, and provided, on efforts to expand training to ensure a robust workforce of young people could be trained and deliver on insulation programs;
- it was crucial to understand the scope of the problem because making homes energy efficient was the best thing to do for the health and longevity of people and was of major importance in reducing the carbon footprint of Highland;
- clarification was sought, and provided, on what would be required to gather insight into the challenges for take-up of the program;
- in response to a suggestion around publicity, it was agreed that the Project Manager would prepare a briefing statement for Members that could be posted on social media networks and in community newsletters so the Scheme information could be disseminated through Highland communities;
- in response to a question about additional funding, it was highlighted that a new Equity Fund would be rolled out by the Scottish Government in the near future to assist those that could not make the necessary contributions;
- Highland had a Corporate Landlord model which had been assessing the suitability of houses to determine if the required improvements were too costly and if replacement properties that were up to standard were more suitable however, this was a challenging and time-consuming process;
- it was crucial to be communicating with all partners such as Highland Poverty Action Group, Community Planning Partnerships, Citizens Advice Bureau and others and the Project Manager shared the team's interest in speaking to Members in their wards and attending different forums to gather and share information; and
- it was suggested that assistance should be available to those who needed assistance filling out the Scheme forms through community services such as Citizens Advice Bureau.

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

4. Flow Country World Heritage Site Update

There had been circulated Report No. CCWG/7/21 dated 14 July 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance.

During a verbal update, Dr. Steven Andrews, Project Coordinator reviewed the purpose of the report in providing background and an update on the World Heritage Site nomination process. In this regard, the steps that had to be undertaken were highlighted which involved; a nomination dossier, justification of the importance of the site, a plan to protect the area and a business management plan. It was commented that there was a plan for submission by the end of 2022 with a decision being made in mid-2024.

During discussion, the following comments were raised:-

- thanks were provided to the Project Coordinator for the report;
- there was an important job to be done in terms of protection of the land particularly as it related to wildfires and this was not given the recognition it required;
- in response to a question, it was explained that there was no specific tipping point in terms of temperature, however peatland did become vulnerable when dry and focus had to be given to maintaining the peatlands in the best condition to keep the land as resilient as possible;
- community consultation at the onset of the project was successful and it was important to build on this moving forward;
- clarification was sought, and provided, on how additional carbon restoration should take place; and
- Members looked forward to updates on progress.

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

5. SMART Cities – SMART Buildings Programme Update

There had been circulated Report No. CCWG/8/21 dated 28 July 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance.

During a verbal update, the Energy Engineer provided an overview of the goals of the SMART Cities Project and highlighted that the project aimed to improve on data collection and developing a single online platform with the ultimate goal of reducing energy waste in Estate buildings. The project comprised of two main elements; the Smart Energy Data Dashboard and the deployment of Internet of Things (IoT) sensors with specific details of these elements being outlined. The progress of the project thus far and next steps were highlighted.

During discussion, the following comments were raised:-

- thanks were given to the Officer for the interesting report and work undertaken thus far;
- it was hoped that this project would give an indication as to where heat was escaping buildings and where insulation was required;

- it had been a concern for a number of years that energy usage in individual buildings was unable to be monitored and would be very positive if this work would enable the Council to determine what buildings were leaking energy and costing far more to heat than they should;
- regarding rationalising Estate, it was important to determine if the more costly buildings could be brought to standard or be removed;
- one of the most simple, cost-effective measures in reducing energy use was reminder notices on light and heaters switches which encouraged personal responsibility;
- there was a balance between improving ventilation with Covid-19 and reducing energy waste during the pandemic; and
- it was important with the increase in data that focus be given to personal responsibility and education.

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

6. Glasgow Food & Climate Declaration – Next Steps

There had been circulated Report No. CCWG/9/21 dated 14 July 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance.

During a verbal update, the Principal Project Manager reviewed the formation, purpose and aims of the Glasgow Food and Climate Declaration as well as the importance of tackling the food system given the Council's commitment to the climate emergency and national health crisis.

During discussion, the following comments were raised:-

- thanks were expressed to the Principal Project Manager for the report;
- the Council had been granted the Food for Life Bronze Award in some schools and it was disappointing that there was not more widespread rollout in other schools;
- transport of food to Highland was an issue, and it was necessary to decarbonise transport and determine how food miles could be reduced;
- if small farms in Highland could not be successful it meant a reliance on food from other areas;
- it was important to involve supermarkets in planning regarding buying local and reducing waste and food miles;
- reassurance was sought, and provided that the Planning Department was supportive and positive about community growing however, barriers remained in terms of regulations of allotment associations;
- there had been discussions with the Planning Department to encourage developers to provide the necessary infrastructure for allotments;
- access to water supply had proved to be a barrier to the success of allotments in the past;
- it would be useful to involve distilleries in discussions to determine if a mechanism could be put in place to utilise waste heat to assist community groups in growing food locally;
- it was important to develop community woodlands to grow produce;

- at the consumer level, it was important that attitudes changed regarding the shape, size and appearance of vegetables and fruit at the supermarket in order to reduce waste;
- information was sought, and provided, on the stage of development of the Regional Land Use Partnerships through the Scottish Government;
- community buy-in was a necessary factor for progress;
- in response to a question about procurement partnerships, it was explained that, as a Council, it was crucial to work collaboratively with community partners to tackle the climate emergency and highlighted that the Council was in the top quartile when it came to locally procured goods and had taken a proactive stance on this;
- regarding food miles, it was important to encourage schools, colleges, care homes and other partners to support local food producers; and
- there was a lot of work happening within communities and it was important to share what was going on.

Following the conclusion of the discussion, Ms K Ellen and Ms C Ferguson were welcomed to the team by the Chair and had the opportunity to introduce themselves to Members.

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

The meeting ended at 12:31pm.