

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Climate Change Working Group** held **REMOTELY** on Wednesday, 20 October 2021 at 10.30am.

Present:

Mr B Boyd
Mr J Bruce
Mrs M Davidson
Mr D Louden

Mrs A MacLean
Mr D Rixson
Mrs T Robertson

Non-Members also present:

Mr W MacKay

Officials in Attendance:

Mrs K Lackie, Executive Chief Officer, Performance & Governance
Mr K Masson, Climate Change and Energy Team Manager
Ms R Anderson, Energy & Sustainability Officer
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 D McKenzie, Corporate Communications
Miss M Zavarella, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Rachel Currie, Newcastle University

Mrs T Robertson in the Chair

Prior to the commencement of formal business, the Chair highlighted the following good news stories;

Highland Adapts – COP26

Emma Whitham, project lead for Highland Adapts was commended for the privileged opportunity to present on Highland Adapts at the COP26 Resilience Hub in the Blue Zone, the UN-managed space which hosted the negotiations. Furthermore, she had been invited to speak at the 'Leading For Climate Resilience' event at the Glasgow City Chamber. It was highlighted that both of the events were a wonderful opportunity to showcase Highland Adapts as one of the most exciting and inspirational climate action initiatives taking place, anywhere in Scotland.

Green Growth Accelerator Pathfinder Project

The Highland Council had been officially named as one of the pathfinder organisations in the Scottish Government's recently announced Green Growth Accelerator programme. The Scottish Government was to provide up to £1 million to support the pathfinders

through the development phase of the programme, which together could unlock £40 million of local government investment in green infrastructure, backed by long term Scottish Government funding commitments. The project would be focussed on Climate Action Coastlines and Mr Joe Perry was commended for all his efforts in this regard.

The Procurement Partnership Limited (TPPL) Dynamic Purchasing System

The Council in partnership with TPPL had established the new Dynamic Purchasing System for hydrogen and large-scale Electric Vehicle (EV) solutions and its first tender had been issued by Moray Council for the provision of 33 EV chargers. It was highlighted that a number of well-established and international businesses had joined this framework, including Scottish Power, Arcola, Doosan Babcock and Hydrasun, which would make procuring the right solutions for transport decarbonisation much more straightforward for the whole public sector across the UK.

Highland Council – NatureScot Partnership

In partnership with NatureScot, the Council had secured a new two-year position for a Biodiversity Partnership Officer to make progress in furthering the Council's commitments to addressing the biodiversity side of the twin climate and ecological emergency. Thanks were provided to Francesca Osowska, the Chief Executive of NatureScot and Councillor Davidson, Councillor Robertson, Malcolm Macleod and Nicole Wallace for their efforts and it was highlighted that it was the first position of its kind in Scotland. The position had been offered to Nathan McLaughlan from NatureScot. Mr McLaughlan would be working across the Council and with Members to identify priorities and opportunities to take proactive action in furthering the ecological emergency agenda, and to ensure that the Council was aligned with priorities and policy coming from NatureScot and Scottish Government. Mr McLaughlan would be taking action to deliver the Council's commitments in Highland Nature: Biodiversity Action Plan 2021-2026 and involved in a project due to start in November 2021 to identify Council sites that could be improved to benefit biodiversity.

Lastly, the Chair advised that Item 4 HIAL's Approach to Net Zero would be removed from the agenda and deferred to the December meeting of the Working Group.

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mrs I Campbell, Mr C Fraser, Mr J Gordon, Mr J Gray, Mr MacInnes, Mr D Macpherson, Mr Mackie, Mr R MacWilliam and Mr Thompson.

2. Declarations of Interest

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

Mr D Rixson declared a non-financial interest in all items 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

3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

Members **NOTED** the Minutes of the Climate Change Working Group held on 28 May 2021, which were approved by the Council on 24 June 2021 and on 18 August 2021, which were approved by the Council on 9 September 2021.

5. Scottish Government's Local Food Strategy – Draft Consultation Response

There had been circulated Report No. CCWG/10/21 dated 13 October 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer – Performance & Governance.

During discussion, the following comments raised:-

- Members commended the report and the interesting case studies included;
- it was important to recognise that it was unsustainable to have food from all over the world readily available for consumption at any time of year;
- how food was produced and supplied had consequences that could not be ignored;
- reducing food miles could have a significant impact if everyone played their part and the draft consultation was the beginning of the process to inform on how this could be accomplished;
- regarding school meals, canteen staff were expected to produce meals for pupils on a limited budget which sometimes resulted in buying non-local foods that had been processed because it was more affordable, and it was important that budgets were examined to allow for locally produced foods to be used more regularly;
- it was commented that the report should reflect the importance of the fishing industry to the Highland economy and the Food Growing Coordinator agreed to include information related to the fishing industry in the report;
- more should be done to encourage local fish consumption and provide education in this regard;
- it would be useful to work closely with supermarkets as it related to the sale of 'imperfect' foods to reduce waste of edible goods;
- many schools had lost green space and had limited growing capacity due to the requirement for additional classrooms;
- respect was given to the community member who organised the fundraising for the Seaboard Polytunnel in Balintore who had recently passed away, it was recognised as a brilliant idea and should be rolled out to other Highland communities to encourage community growing;
- there was keenness for the use of waste heat to be explored and examples provided on how this could be used in areas such as hydroponics or polytunnels to grow produce and reduce food miles in the future;
- Farmer Jones Academy was doing important work to assist local communities to establish community growing and provide education to young people on where their food comes from;
- it was commented that initiatives involving young pupils at school were innovative, impactful and could help sustainability by producing local food on a larger level;
- food used to be available seasonally in the supermarket and it tasted better as a result;

- there should be a focus in education for children, young adults, parents and carers on how to cook basic meals with local foods and it should not be assumed that this was universal knowledge;
- education around preparing produce for the winter would be useful;
- in addition to the Council's responsibility, it was important to look to Community Planning Partners and utilising their grounds for outdoor growing;
- the Climate Change and Energy team was doing a fantastic job with a small team and it would be important to make a point of showcasing their successes;
- there was a need to develop the business of growing and distributing foods in school; and
- in response to a comment, it was highlighted that there was a consultation underway with head teachers to feed into the Community Growing Strategy and Members were encouraged to spread awareness with their local head teachers as it sought to gain an understanding of what was being done to support food production in schools and any barriers faced.

Members provided commentary on the contents of the Council's response and **AGREED** a final response to the consultation be submitted to the Scottish Government.

6. Highland EV Research Programme

A presentation had been undertaken at the meeting by Rachael Anderson, Energy & Sustainability Officer and Rachel Curry, Newcastle University on the Highland EV Research Programme.

During the presentation, Ms Anderson and Ms Curry provided an overview of the virtual placement experience that Ms Curry took part in with the Climate Change & Energy Team. It was highlighted in detail how the placement was a useful undertaking from the team and student perspective. Ms Curry was in the process of completing a dissertation to understand opinions on EV Infrastructure in Highland which utilised a survey that had garnered significant interest and the data would be shared amongst Members once it became available.

In addition, a brief EV update was provided on the Local Authority Installation Programme, Fleet Decarbonisations and Low Carbon Travel and Transport (LCTT) fund progress.

During discussion, the following comments were raised:-

- Members expressed appreciation for the positive presentation and update;
- information was sought, and provided, on whether trends had emerged from the survey that locating electric charging points had been a deterrent for people;
- in response to a question, it was explained that Highland Council would be the owner of the EV charging points and there was currently advice being sought on implications when charging points were placed on private land;
- the speed of change towards EV was worrisome due to the concern that the infrastructure would not be in place to cope and the Climate Change & Energy Team manager provided a response in this regard;

- in response to a question about charging points for E-bikes, it was explained that as part of the LCTT project there would be E-bike stations installed at five different locations;
- information was sought and provided on the monitoring and time limiting on charge points; and
- in response to a comment about charging points in rural areas, it was explained that prior to moving forward with site decisions in rural locations SSE was contacted to review whether substations had the necessary capacity to allow for installation. Further, due to the expense of grid reinforcement upgrades it would become more common to have a partnership led model for installation.

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

7. All-Member Session (2.00pm – 4.00pm) – Dynamic Coast 2 – Coastal Change in Highland

Members were reminded to attend the all-Member Session which took place at 2.00pm.

The meeting ended at 11:39am.