

## **The Highland Council**

Minutes of Meeting of the **Climate Change Working Group** held **REMOTELY** on Friday, 28 January 2022 at 10.00am.

### **Present:**

Mr B Boyd  
Mr J Bruce  
Mrs I Campbell  
Mrs M Davidson  
Mr C Fraser

Mrs A MacLean  
Mr D Rixson  
Mrs T Robertson  
Mr D Louden

### **Officials in Attendance:**

Mrs K Lackie, Executive Chief Officer, Performance & Governance  
Mr K Masson, Climate Change and Energy Team Manager  
Mr B Cameron, Housing Policy and Investment Manager  
Mr N Osborne, Project Manager  
Mr N Chaplin, Mechanical Design Engineer  
Mr Bamborough, Senior Sustainability Officer  
Ms R Anderson, Energy & Sustainability Officer  
Mr J Perry, Climate Change Coordinator  
Ms K Andrews, Climate Change Coordinator  
Mr D Mckenzie, Corporate Communications  
Mrs O Bayon, Committee Officer

### **Also in attendance:**

Mrs E Whitham, Principal Project Manager, Highland Adapts  
Ms K Ellen, Community Food Growing Coordinator  
Ms G Robinson, Project Officer, HITRANS

### **Mrs T Robertson in the Chair**

#### **1. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr J Gray, Mr J Gordon, Mr A MacInnes, Mr S Mackie, Mr D Macpherson, and Mr R MacWilliam.

#### **2. Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

#### **3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The Working Group **NOTED** the Minutes of the Climate Change Working Group held on 20 October 2021, which were approved by the Council on 28 October 2021.

#### **4. FASTER Project – EV Charging Infrastructure**

A presentation was undertaken by Gemma Robinson, Project Officer, HITRANS, giving an update on the progress of the FASTER project (Facilitating A Sustainable Transition to EVs in the Regions). This project was funded by the Interreg VA programme and match funded by Transport Scotland.

It was explained that the main deliverables of the project were the installation of 73 rapid / journey (50 kilowatt) public chargers and to achieve active collaboration with the different involved regions. 24 chargers have been allocated for Scotland, with 8 allocated for each of the 3 Scottish Council areas. The presentation included details on the site selection methodology including the 4 council sites identified in the selection process within Highland. The project would progress through to May 2023.

During discussion, and in welcoming the presentation, the following comments were made:-

- even though the Interreg VA project only covered the North and West of Scotland, it was anticipated that HITRANS would include the whole of the Highlands as a separate project;
- it was queried if additional EV (Electric Vehicle) charger providers were available in the Skye and Lochalsh area due to high peak demand;
- it was explained that new EV chargers had 2 x 50 kilowatt separate outputs and had 2 connection options which accommodated most EV types. However if additional funding was made available, a further EV charger type which included a third connection option would be installed;
- due to the high number of tourists on the Road to the Isles in Lochaber, the need for additional EV chargers was highlighted;
- 50 kilowatt EV chargers were classed as rapid chargers, with an average charge time up to 80% of 30-40 minutes; and
- it was important that the project progresses without delay. In this regard, it was reemphasised that Skye & Lochaber were part of the North Coast 500 and therefore received excellent publicity for tourists and EV users.

Thereafter, the Working Group **NOTED** the contents of the presentation.

## **5. Improving the Energy Efficiency of Council Housing in Highland**

There was circulated Report No. CCWG/1/2022 dated 14 January 2022 by the Executive Chief Officer – Housing & Property.

During discussion the following comments were made:-

- it was queried if the Council had a more up-to-date Standard Delivery Plan than 2007;
- as the Council had declared a climate change emergency in 2019, it was queried if the Housing Service had taken note of this to achieve the Council's own targets rather than national targets. In this respect, it was also queried if properties were being upgraded to meet energy efficiencies when Void;

- information on tenant feedback was sought regarding properties with heat pumps installed. It was explained that while tenant feedback was important that the education in owning and operating a heat pump should be a key focus. Fitting a heat pump without the correct efficiency measures was where additional expense was incurred, not from the efficiency of the heat pump;
- the Climate Change Working Group in October 2021 estimated that for the UK to become carbon neutral, the cost would be £1.4 trillion. Therefore, Members acknowledged the high costs involved to achieve this at a Highland level; the reason why some tenants opted out of electric heating system upgrades was mainly due to affordability concerns. In this regard, Members stressed the importance of addressing this issue at a Highland Council and Scottish level, despite recognition that UK energy policy was reserved to Westminster. Again if the correct energy efficiency interventions were made the installation of a modern heat pump which could provide a scope of between 3 and 4.5 (1kW in = 3-4.5kW out) in the Region was an incredibly efficient form of heat;
- it was suggested that the report include an affordability cost calculation which compared kilowatt hour running costs of the various heating system options for tenants;
- it was welcomed that the new electric heat pumps, although sometimes larger in size than previous models, now run silently which would offset tenant noise complaints;
- consideration needed to be given to affordable technologies such as solar PV or solar thermal and establish the capital and revenue costs of these options. In addition, battery energy storage was proposed as a potential further option;
- as some tenants were already recognised as being under financial pressures due to rising energy costs, Members acknowledged the difficulty in considering property rent increases;
- it was important to roll out energy efficient heating systems as quickly as possible and prioritise properties with coal fire heating and single glazing. In this regard, it was suggested that coal fires be replaced with wood burning stoves to reduce reliance on coal. However, the roll out of low carbon heating without a full review of the energy performance of the individual property could result in no improvement and in a number of cases could actually compound the problem. Focus had to be on a Fabric first approach.;
- Members welcomed the property internal insulation trial to improve heat retention;
- it was deemed critical to improve cases of fuel poverty rather than potentially exacerbate cases by rolling out the heating programme;
- a costed assessment of energy efficient works to the Highland Council housing stock by Changeworks was welcomed; and
- Members keenly anticipated a Housing update report and stressed the need to progress improvements timeously.

Thereafter, the Working Group **NOTED** the contents of this report ahead of future reporting to the Housing & Property Committee.

## 6. Annual Report under Public Bodies Climate Change Duties 2020/21

In introducing the report, the Chair of the Climate Change Working Group advised that Mr K Masson (Climate Change and Energy Team Manager) was leaving his post within HC. In this regard, warm tributes were paid to Mr Masson by Members who recognised his contribution to the work and his achievements for the Climate Change Working Group. As such, he would be very much missed and the best wishes of all present at the meeting were conveyed to him.

There was circulated Report No. CCWG/2/2022 dated 11 January 2022 by the Executive Chief Officer – Performance & Governance.

During discussion the following comments were made:-

- focus should be maintained to amplify and increase the hard work being carried out within primary and secondary schools regarding climate change, especially as delivery was carried out by Highland Council in-house. However, it was also pointed out that there needed to be an internal focus on the involvement from a larger number of schools across the region. While work completed to date had had a positive impact within the schools involved it needed a wider commitment;
- on page 60 of the report, it was pointed out that there was a typographical error in the spelling of 'Inner Moray Firth';
- it was requested that Fig. 1 – The Highland Council's Corporate Carbon Emissions – 2011–2021 be amended to show zero amount to demonstrate work remaining to be achieved;
- it was recognised that Covid restrictions might have accelerated a reduction of CO2 emissions and sector spend in the last 2 years;
- information was sought, and provided, on the high usage levels of biomass fuel referred to within the report;
- it was suggested that the report include a chart with the generation and consumption data split; and
- the Working Group was informed that a replacement for Mr Masson was already in place and they had been working closely together to ensure a smooth transition.

Thereafter, the Working Group **NOTED** the return submitted for reporting year 2020/21 under the Public Bodies Climate Change Duties.

## **7. Growing our Future – Draft Highland Community Food Growing Strategy**

There was circulated Report No. CCWG/3/2022 dated 12 December 2021 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer – Communities and Place.

During discussion, and in welcoming the presentation, the following comments were made:-

- focus should remain on local food composting provisions;
- the provision of contact details for those requiring growing permissions was welcomed;

- in relation to question 3 of the Draft Strategy Consultation Questions, it was suggested, to assist local groups identify best and worst locations for community food growing, including advice on shelter and drainage, notes be included;
- whilst acknowledging that there were no Gaelic implications in the report, it was expressed that there was an opportunity to develop synergies between a modern Highland in tackling climate change, and historical and cultural traditions;
- the branding proposal was praised for its attractive presentation;
- further information regarding practical ways of improving soil quality to assist communities grow food was requested for future reports. It was felt that there were areas of land which had degraded and there was a need to identify ways to improve these; and
- as tree planting within Highland had not achieved its anticipated level, it was suggested that, due to the Queen's Green Canopy tree planting initiative, Highland Council should consider planting 70 trees in each Ward. In this regard, Members asked that they collaborate with officers on proposals for appropriate sites and tree species.

Thereafter, the Working Group:-

- AGREED** any changes required to the draft strategy, action plan and accompanying guidance; and
- NOTED** that the final strategy would be presented to the Communities and Place Committee on 23 February 2022 for agreement.

## **8. Highland Adapts – A Place-based Approach to Climate Change Adaptation**

There was circulated Report No. CCWG/4/2022 dated 14 January 2022 by the Executive Chief Officer – Performance & Governance.

Ms Emma Witham, Principal Project Manager, Highland Adapts, gave a presentation in amplification of the report, during which it was explained that the purpose of the Highland Adapts initiative was to bring communities, businesses, land managers and the public sector together to facilitate transformational action towards a prosperous, climate-ready Highland. Detailed information was provided on the founding partners, guiding principles, partnership objectives and structure, as well as the collaborative work taking place with Architecture and Design Scotland and Climate Hub.

In relation to appendix 1, guiding principal 3, Members requested further information on how the Place-based principal would be delivered as an inclusive bottom-up approach. Potential further sources of funding were highlighted, such as the Play Space and Investment Funds which had been rolled out to Area Committees over the last couple of years.

Thereafter, the Working Group **NOTED** the contents of the report.

## 9. The Highland Climate Change Conference 2021

There was circulated Report No. CCWG/5/2022 dated 14 January 2022 by the Executive Chief Officer – Performance & Governance.

During discussion, the following comments were made:-

- thanks were expressed to officers for the excellent summary report of the Highland Climate Change Conference which had taken place on 21 and 22 October 2021 and for the significant amount of work undertaken to date;
- the conference was praised as a success and Members were able to discuss and promote other important issues such as the Scottish pollinator strategy;
- Members welcomed that attention was drawn to deer management within the report as this issue was deemed critical to food production;
- it was imperative to include the practise of Muirburn (the managed burning of heather, gorse, and grassland) on the Agenda; and
- the highland-wide coordinated approach to food waste management was welcomed.

Thereafter, the Working Group **NOTED** the contents of the report.

Prior to closing the meeting, the Chair expressed her appreciation to Members and officers for their excellent work in getting the Council to its current position regarding Climate Change.

The meeting end at 12 noon