

Minutes of Meeting of the **Waste Strategy Working Group** held remotely on Thursday 19 January 2023 at 2.00pm.

**Present:-**

Mr A Baldrey  
Mr J Bruce  
Mr L Fraser  
Mr R Gale

Mr A Graham  
Mrs J Hendry  
Mr G MacKenzie  
Mr H Morrison

**In attendance:-**

Mr A Gunn, Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place  
Mr A McKinnie, Strategic Lead, Waste Services, Communities and Place  
Mr S Graham, Project Manager, Communities and Place  
Miss J MacLennan, Principal Administrator, Corporate Governance

**Mr G Mackenzie in the Chair**

**Business**

**1. Apologies for Absence**

There were no apologies for absence.

**2. Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

**3. Minutes of Previous Meeting**

The Minutes of the Waste Strategy Working Group held on 20 October 2022, which was approved by the Communities and Place Committee on 16 November 2022, were circulated and **NOTED**.

**4. Waste Projects Update**

There is circulated WS/1/23 dated 13 January 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place. Officers provided an update of developments since the Working Group's last meeting including the current position with regard to the transfer stations in Inverness, Aviemore and Fort William; the positive response received from the Scottish Government regarding a long term solution for Highland, including a potential Energy from Waste (EfW) plant; longer term waste management options; the transfer of waste to an EfW plant in Dunbar; and progress in relation to the Recycling Improvement Fund.

During discussion, the following points were made:-

- information was sought, and provided, as to how often and what tonnage of waste was involved in the transfer of waste to the Dunbar plant. This still offered a better financial solution, especially as the landfill tax had now risen to £102 per tonne;
- there still remained a small degree of material which could not be used in EfW plants, such as bulky waste, and negotiations with landfill providers would be necessary;

- the excellent work achieved was commended and it was essential that, looking forward, this message was communicated to the public. It was suggested that by explaining the journey of recyclates, providing a full understanding of the process and the benefits, it might encourage more recycling;
- Members were looking forward to the forthcoming visit to the Inverness transfer station and were keen that the press also attend;
- recognising the skilled work involved at the transfer station, a TUPE process was underway with the aim of securing operations staff from existing providers, operating a shift pattern, and the facility would become operational on 3 April 2023;
- in the long term, Highland would either need an EfW plant or it would have to continue to transport waste elsewhere;
- it was suggested that Highland could combine with a neighbouring local authority with a view to developing an EfW plant, Moray Council being suggested. However, Moray Council and Aberdeenshire Council had already entered into an agreement with Aberdeen City a few years ago building a new joint EfW facility in Aberdeen;
- the Recycling Improvement Fund was a significant bid for Highland Council and would have significant revenue implications offset by reduced costs such as collection and disposal;
- the collection of food waste was to be rolled out to areas such as Nairn, Fort William and some of the larger settlements in Easter Ross;
- clarification was sought as to the proposed arrangements in relation to household bins and concern expressed that, particularly those who paid for a garden waste collection, the additional bin would take up further space;
- for those who did recycle, recycling bin sometimes could be full whilst the household waste bin was relatively empty. Members were assured a collection of one bin would still take place each week;
- the aim of the new recycling arrangements was to make recycling easier and to change customer behaviours;
- there were still some key steps required, such as the purchase of appropriate vehicles, before all the new recycling bins could be introduced;
- in response to a question it was explained that the green bins, currently used for household waste, would not be cleaned by the Council but, before they were repurposed for recycling, householders would be encouraged to clean them themselves;
- the lack of recycling facilities at filling stations and shops was considered disappointing; and
- the introduction of the Deposit Return Scheme could significantly reduce the amount of plastic and glass currently disposed of;

#### The Working Group:-

- i. **NOTED** that the Aviemore waste transfer station was now operating;
- ii. **NOTED** that the construction programme for Inverness waste transfer station was complete;
- iii. **NOTED** that Heads of Terms were waiting for the preferred site upon which to develop a waste transfer station at Fort William and also for a new lease to continue operating the Household Waste Recycling Centre at its current location;
- iv. **NOTED** that preparations were being made for submitting a planning application to seek approval for constructing a waste transfer station in Fort William;
- v. **NOTED** the new timeframe for submitting the Recycling Improvement Fund application;

- vi. **NOTED** that the contract to send, on a rolling programme basis, the residual waste collected by Highland Council to an energy-from-waste facility had begun;
- vii. **NOTED** that the Scottish Government Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity had provided written reassurance that Highland Council ought to continue its assessment of long-term waste management options which included assessing whether establishing an energy-from-waste facility is feasible; and
- viii. the Chair of the Communities and Place Committee and senior Highland Council representatives would meet with the Scottish Government Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity to discuss the Council's long-term waste management considerations and the circular economy agenda in general.

## 5. Scottish Government Energy from Waste (EfW) Review

The Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place gave a presentation on the Scottish Government's Energy from Waste Review. The review indicated that there would be a surplus of processing capacity within energy from waste facilities at a national level in Scotland from 2027. The landfill ban would become active from 31 December 2025 and the review indicated that there was likely to be insufficient national capacity in Scotland from that date until 2027. Highland Council had averted any issue with that capacity concern by proactively establishing its contract with Viridor, the EfW plant in Dunbar, to ensure that the residual waste collected was being directed to a contractually agreed, legally compliant processing facility.

The review also stated that supplementary work would be undertaken to consider how Scotland's waste management sector might be further decarbonised. The review team's report was expected during mid 2023 and Highland Council would need to factor in any recommendations that were subsequently adopted by the Scottish Government in its future waste management practices. In considering the best long-term waste management option a factor to be taken into consideration was the power outputs of an energy from waste facility and how these might be beneficially applied in the locality such as district heating schemes as had been achieved elsewhere. If Highland Council decided to seek planning permission for an EfW facility then it would need to provide as evidence a heat plan that demonstrates the facility can genuinely look to supply customers with its heat output.

In discussion, Members raised the following points:-

- it was queried what would happen if there was an over supply of EfW capacity;
- if recycling rates increased there would be less material available for an EfW plant. This would be difficult to ascertain as the increase in housing had also to be taken into consideration;
- an EfW plant was a long term plan;
- with the Cromarty Firth having been announced as a green freeport, there would undoubtedly be Working Groups required and it would be important that someone from Waste Services was involved; and
- there were also opportunities to consider hydrogen production.

The Working Group **NOTED** the current position.

The meeting ended at 3.40 pm.