

## The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Climate Change Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Wednesday 17 May 2023 at 10.30 am.

### **Present:**

|                      |                                   |
|----------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Ms S Atkin           | Mr D Louden                       |
| Mr J Bruce           | Mr R MacKintosh                   |
| Ms S Fanet           | Ms M Nolan (remote)               |
| Mr D Fraser (remote) | Mr K Rosie (Chair)                |
| Mr J Grafton         | Ms K Willis (Vice Chair) (remote) |
| Mr P Logue (remote)  |                                   |

### **Non-Members also present:**

|                       |                           |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| Mr C Ballance         | Mrs B Jarvie (remote)     |
| Dr C Birt             | Ms K MacLean (remote)     |
| Ms T Collier (remote) | Mr J McGillivray (remote) |
| Mr R Gale (remote)    | Mrs T Robertson (remote)  |
| Mr A Graham           |                           |

### **Officials in Attendance:**

Mr M MacLeod, Interim Depute Chief Executive  
Mr N Osborne, Climate Change and Energy Team Manager  
Ms F Daschofsky, Project Manager, Climate Change and Energy Team  
Mr R Macdonald, Energy Manager, Climate Change and Energy Team  
Ms D Morris, Climate Change Coordinator (Communications and Engagement)  
Mr J Bennett, Climate Change Coordinator  
Ms M Murray, Interim Principal Administrator  
Mrs O Bayon, Committee Officer

**An asterisk in the margin denotes a recommendation to the Council. All decisions with no marking in the margin are delegated to the Committee.**

**Mr K Rosie in the Chair**

### **Business**

#### **1. Calling of the Roll and Apologies for Absence Gairm a' Chlàir agus Leisgeulan**

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr C Aitken, Mrs I Campbell and Mrs P Munro.

#### **2. Declarations of Interest/Transparency Statement Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt/ Aithris Fhollaiseachd**

There were no Declarations of Interest.

#### **3. Carbon Emissions Land Tax Review Ath-sgrùdadh Cìs Fearainn Sgaoilidhean Carboin**

There had been circulated Report No CCC/8/23 dated 17 April 2023 by the Interim Depute Chief Executive.

During discussion, the following comments were made:-

- the introduction of a Carbon Emissions Land Tax (CELT) would potentially disproportionately impact community landowners, crofters and family farms, and disappointment was expressed that they had not been consulted as intended;
- concern was expressed regarding policy development being outsourced to an external organisation rather than being Member-led;
- the need for more information and different perspectives, to enable a fully informed decision to be made, was emphasised;
- it was necessary to know more about the logistics and bureaucracy associated with implementing a CELT, as well as the potential impact on food production and the rural economy. Food security was cause for concern going forward, with self-sufficiency in the UK being little more than 50% and the price of basic foodstuffs increasing exponentially;
- it would have been helpful to provide examples in the report of how a CELT would be managed, how landowners would deal with it and how much revenue it was expected to bring in;
- it was necessary to protect people as much as possible but, if the world was going to combat climate change, it was inevitable there would be some negative impacts;
- whilst the points regarding the need for more consultation and detail were accepted, some Members expressed strong support for the principle of a CELT, commenting that it had the capacity to make a major contribution to reducing and absorbing carbon emissions in Highland;
- some landowners would be more able to pay a CELT than others, and concern was expressed regarding how communities buying land would be protected;
- as stated in the report, the Council could not carry on with business as usual;
- reference was made to the recent issues surrounding The Scottish Government's consultation on Highly Protected Marine Areas, and the loss of trust in policymakers by rural communities, and the need for caution was emphasised;
- it would be beneficial to have more coproduction on the reports being brought to the Committee and specifically on the CELT proposals to create a policy that protected the climate as well as Highland's fragile rural economy and communities;
- a CELT presented risks in terms of incentivising further greenwashing, which would have a negative impact on local control of land usage, and disincentivising necessary activities such as house-building. There was also a risk a CELT would not bring in the revenue the Council would like to see;
- Council Tax bands were inherently unfair, and the proposal to establish a similar standardised banding scheme in respect of a CELT was questioned;
- the climate and ecological emergency was the biggest challenge facing the Council, and it was emphasised that the Committee was simply being asked to support the principle of developing a draft framework at this stage;
- the principle underlying a CELT was that landowners had a responsibility to manage their land in a way that was climate and nature conscious. Crofters and small farms would not be impacted, as had been suggested, as they did not have landholdings big enough to be subjected to a CELT. It was aimed at large

landowners, many of which owned land in Highland which was not currently being managed sustainably. Eighty percent of peatland in Highland was currently emitting carbon when it should be absorbing it, there was virtually no woodland to store carbon and the UK was one of the most biodiversity depleted countries in the world. A CELT would encourage landowners to change how they managed their land and, as they did so, they would pay less tax. Surrounding communities would benefit from the regeneration and increased carbon capture and this would also create more local jobs in rural areas. It was added that the Council would be involved in developing the draft framework and, if it became policy, Councils would have the choice as to whether they wanted to implement a CELT;

- the Motion to Full Council in March had proposed that the Council become a Member of the Carbon Emissions Land Tax Coalition, and it would have been helpful to provide some detail in the report as to what that entailed;
- clarification was sought, and provided, in relation to the planned public consultation and engagement referred to in recommendation iii. of the report; and
- given the importance of this theme to rural areas and community landowners, crofters and family farms, it was proposed that the matter be referred to a Members' Seminar to ensure the views of Members were gathered prior to a decision being made, and that representatives from the John Muir Trust and all the aforementioned landholders be invited to be involved in the Seminar.

Following discussion, and given the nature of the debate, the Chair commented that a Members' Seminar was a sensible way forward and confirmed he was content to accept the proposal in that regard. It was further confirmed that the findings of the Seminar would be fed back to a future meeting of the Full Council to inform the final decision.

The Committee:-

- i. **AGREED**, given the importance of this theme to rural areas and community landowners, crofters and family farms, that the matter be referred to a Members' Seminar to ensure the views of Members were gathered prior to a decision being made, and that representatives from the John Muir Trust and all the aforementioned landholders be invited to be involved in the Seminar; and
- ii. **NOTED** that the findings of the Seminar would be fed back to a future meeting of the Full Council to inform the final decision.

#### 4. **Net Zero Strategy** **Ro-innleachd Neoini Lom**

There had been circulated Report No CCC/9 /23 dated 21 April 2023 by the Interim Depute Chief Executive.

During discussion, the following comments were made:-

- the rewarding collaborative process that had been followed in developing the Net Zero Strategy was commended and thanks were expressed to all officers and Members involved for their time and effort;
- information was sought, and provided, on the rationalisation of the Council's estate and what could be done immediately to reduce carbon emissions, such

as turning down heating; whether there would be Member input into the Local Transport Strategy; and the timeline for the Pathfinder Project in respect of Electric Vehicle infrastructure;

- the importance of local communities having a say as to what land would be set aside as green space was emphasised;
- concern was expressed regarding coastal erosion at Chanonry Point;
- the Annual Utility Cost Forecasts set out in the Strategy showed the extent of the pressure the Council was facing as a result of increasing energy prices, and the efforts of officers in coming up with schemes to both reduce carbon emissions and save money were welcomed;
- the Strategy came with many challenges as it was going to involve embedding climate action across all Council services and activities;
- going forward, climate action had to be the dominant theme in every Council budget, which would require collaboration and a complete change in decision-making and budget-setting;
- the section of the report on Governance and Reporting was fundamental to progressing the Strategy and the development of the Action Plan. Particular reference was made to the key role of the Thematic Group leads, and it was hoped they would be in attendance at Full Council in June;
- information was sought, and provided, as to how the Strategy and Action Plan would tie in with the Highland Local Development Plan and Place Plans;
- whilst the Net Zero Strategy was welcomed and commended, it was disappointing that it had taken so long for the Council to produce such a Strategy;
- targets were important as they encouraged Members to push forward and be ambitious. However, concern was expressed that the Strategy simply emulated the Scottish Government's Net Zero target of 2045, and it was suggested this could be reviewed, perhaps to 2040;
- political leadership was needed to drive the Strategy forward and ensure it was not business as usual, and there were strong arguments that the Chair of the Climate Change Committee, or the Vice Chair if the Chair was unavailable, should be on the Budget Review Group, the Senior Leadership Group and the Net Zero Strategy Group;
- achieving Net Zero was only stage one, and did not begin to address improving the situation;
- clarification having been sought regarding the recommendations in the report, the Chair confirmed the intention was that the Strategy would be presented to the Full Council on 29 June for approval;
- on the point being raised, the Chair confirmed that the fully costed Action Plan would feed into the Council's budget process for 2024/25; and
- all Elected Members had a duty to engage with local communities and promote the Council's vision for achieving Net Zero.

The Committee:-

- i. **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to the Full Council the Strategy for approval;
- ii. **NOTED** that the Strategy would be presented to Full Council on 29 June 2023 for ratification; and
- iii. **NOTED** a fully costed action plan would be developed for consideration by the end of December 2023.

## 5. **Draft Communications and Engagement Strategy** **Dreachd Ro-innleachd Conaltraidh is Com-pàirteachais**

There had been circulated Report No CCC/10/23 dated 2 May 2023 by the Interim Depute Chief Executive.

During discussion, the following comments were made:-

- the proposed Strategy was a large piece of work that effectively involved the whole of the Council and how it operated and communicated;
- the development of a business case for in respect of a behavioural change app was welcomed;
- officers were commended for the comprehensive report;
- the framing and tone of climate change messaging was critical;
- it was felt that the Communications and Engagement Strategy needed to be in place and operational already, particularly as the Net Zero Action Plan was in development, and the proposed timeline of early 2024 was questioned. In addition, it was questioned why no consideration had been given to external communication and engagement with Community Councils and the wider community; and
- in relation to engaging with communities, the Chair confirmed that Highlands & Islands Climate Hub would be invited to participate at a future meeting of the Climate Change Committee.

The Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** that officers proceed with the delivery of the first phase of communications and engagement, in accordance with the approach outlined within the report; and
- ii. **NOTED** a detailed internal Communications & Engagement Strategy and Action Plan would be developed for consideration at a future Climate Change Committee.

## 6. **Training and Literacy** **Tréanadh agus Litearras**

There had been circulated Report No CCC/11/23 dated 28 April 2023 by the Interim Depute Chief Executive.

During discussion, the following comments were made:-

- given the scale of the climate emergency, surprise was expressed that many Elected Members had never attended a meeting of the Climate Change Committee, and the need for Members to increase their knowledge of the issues surrounding climate changes was emphasised. However, it was recognised that Members had many other important commitments and managed their time accordingly;
- food production and consumption contributed 30% of carbon emissions, significantly more than transport. However, it was acknowledged that the Council did not have control over food production;
- it was important that training was provided to all Members and staff;
- it was suggested that training be extended to schools and that, through working with the Education Committee and Education and Learning Service, the work

taking place in Highland to address climate change be included as part of the curriculum;

- it was suggested that public sector catering should take the lead in terms of promoting plant-based diets as a successful way to combat climate change;
- Members needed to stand and work together, based on facts, in the face of populism;
- mandatory climate literacy training was essential, particularly in terms of developing the Net Zero Action Plan, and needed to be coordinated with the Communications and Engagement Strategy. In addition, information was sought and provided, on the timeline for delivering the training.

The Committee **NOTED**, subject to the approval of the Net Zero Strategy:-

- i. the need for climate change training to be mandatory across all levels of the Council, from officers to Elected Members, to achieve our climate change ambitions; and
- ii. that Carbon Literacy Training should be delivered to Members, the Executive Leadership Team and the Senior Leadership Team in the first instance, to allow for assessment of training requirements for other staff.

**7. Inverness West Bank and Inverness Castle Heat Network Feasibility Studies  
Sgrùdaidhean Iomchaidheachd Lìonra Teasa Bruach an Iar Inbhir Nis agus  
Caisteal Inbhir Nis**

There had been circulated Report No CCC/12/23 dated 28 April 2023 by the Interim Depute Chief Executive.

During discussion, the level of engagement from external stakeholders was highlighted and welcomed. In addition, appreciation was expressed to officers for the significant amount of work that had gone into developing the two feasibility studies.

The Committee otherwise **NOTED** the contents of the report.

The meeting concluded at 12.00 noon.