

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Waste Strategy Working Group** held in Committee Room 2, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness and via Microsoft Teams on Tuesday 8 August 2023 at 3.00 pm.

Present:

Mr J Bruce

Mr A Graham

Mrs J Hendry

Mr G MacKenzie (Chair) (remote)

Mr H Morrison (remote)

In attendance:

Mr A Gunn, Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place

Mr A McKinnie, Strategic Lead, Waste Strategy and Operations

Mr S Graham, Project Manager

Mr R Macdonald, Energy Manager (remote)

Ms M Murray, Interim Principal Administrator

Ms R Ross, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Mr D Jamieson, SLR Consulting (remote)

Mr M Nevin, Nevin Associates Ltd (remote)

Mr G Mackenzie in the Chair

Business

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr A Baldrey, Mr L Fraser and Mr R Gale.

2. Declarations of Interest/Transparency Statements

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the Waste Strategy Working Group held on 24 March 2023, which had been approved by the Communities and Place Committee on 24 May 2023, were **NOTED**.

4. Energy from Waste (EfW) – Feasibility Assessment Update

The Strategic Lead, Waste Strategy and Operations, and the Project Manager, in conjunction with representatives of SLR Consulting and Nevin Associates, gave a presentation on the findings of the feasibility study that had been undertaken on long-term residual waste management options.

It was explained that Diarmid Jamieson was SLR Consulting's Technical Director for Sustainable Waste Management and had co-ordinated the consultancy's conduct of the study. Mike Nevin, an economist, accountant and director of Nevin Associates, had led on the financial analysis of the long-term waste management options.

The study was part of a process involving many components, details of which were provided, and, as such, there was no imminent decision to be made but it was important that the findings were shared and discussed to help inform Members' decision-making at the appropriate time.

There were two principal options open to the Council:

Option 1 – transport residual waste to a merchant EfW facility outwith Highland, most likely in the Central Belt.

Option 2 – process the waste collected by the Council at an EfW facility in Highland, the former Longman landfill site currently considered to be the most likely location.

Detailed information was provided on:

- the context, including changes to the Council's waste service arrangements, work at the former Longman landfill site, economic/market conditions and new government policy/legislation;
- the features, pros and cons of each option;
- the comparative costs of each option including, in respect of Option 2, costs for both DBO (Design Build Operate) and DBFO (Design Build Finance Operate) models; and
- the carbon impact of each option, with figures being provided in respect of both diesel-powered vehicles and low-emissions vehicles for comparative purposes.

The way forward included a continuous drive to encourage recycling and reduce residual waste; a detailed analysis of the study findings by the Council's Waste and Finance Teams; commissioning work on a detailed heat and power plan for a Longman-located EfW facility; and an update to the Communities and Place Committee on 29 November 2023 with the findings of the study being discussed today.

In conclusion, it was reiterated that the study findings indicated that there was no imminent requirement to make a strategic decision. The project was very much a work in progress, and the Council's Finance and Waste specialists would require continued detailed interaction to come to a perspective on the likely best course of action for the long-term. This would also involve further input from, and interaction with, colleagues in the Council's Ecology and Climate Change and Energy Teams.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the Chair expressed thanks for the clear, comprehensive and informative presentation, and confirmed that the final feasibility assessment report would be published in due course and would be available to Members;
- information was sought, and provided, on the terms and duration of the current contract with Viridor, the likelihood of obtaining government funding if the Council opted to develop an EfW facility in Highland, and how other local authority EfW facilities had been funded;
- the Chair explained that he and officers had had a preliminary meeting with the Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity. The final feasibility assessment report would be shared with her when published, and she would then be invited to visit Highland to have more detailed discussions;

- in response to a question, it was confirmed that the potential for rail haulage of residual waste was being explored. It was emphasised that the impact of haulage on an EfW environmental footprint was relatively small, the most important thing being that the Council was no longer landfilling;
- it was necessary to consider the number of visitors that came to Highland every year and how to make it easier for them to recycle as, at present, a significant amount of recyclable material was going into residual waste. In response, the Chair explained that this would form part of a report to the Communities and Place Committee on 31 August 2023;
- the Net Zero Strategy having recently been approved by the Council, the opportunity to develop an EfW facility in Highland should be seen as a potential catalyst for other opportunities - for example, a “super-depot” at the Longman site could be the facility where the Council charged all its electric vehicles and with H2 Green establishing a hydrogen generation facility in the Longman area there was also a possible hydrogen supply for HGVs. Whilst the need to focus on waste was recognised, it was important to consider the impact on other initiatives and the potential benefits for other parts of the Council and report back to Members in that regard;
- the Longman site was Common Good land, and Inverness Members would require to consider how to protect the interests of the Inverness Common Good Fund as developments took place;
- the amount of energy produced by an EfW plant appeared to be relatively small;
- it having been queried whether the Communities and Place Committee would be asked to make a decision at its meeting on 29 November, it was reiterated that there was no imminent decision to be made. A significant amount of work had taken place and the report to Committee would provide a detailed update in that regard but further information was required to provide a complete picture. It was emphasised that the decision-making would be for Members in due course, and it was for officers to provide them with the necessary information to make those future decisions;
- it was suggested that it might be useful, as part of the deliberative process, to visit some other waste management sites such as Binn Ecopark;
- it having been commented that the value of the Council developing an EfW facility was in the heat offtake and it would be helpful to establish whether there was a viable heat offtake in the area, it was confirmed that officers were working with colleagues in the Climate Change and Energy Team to undertake a study on that aspect;
- it was queried whether there was a tipping point between public and private finance;
- the scale of the project and the number of complexities and uncertainties were acknowledged;
- information was sought, and provided, on the usability of the former Longman landfill site, during which it was confirmed that engineering solutions would be required and these had been taken into account as part of the cost analysis; and
- the Chair emphasised the importance of keeping the Working Group as informed as possible, and the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place, invited Members to contact him or any of the other officers involved directly if they had any questions. Members expressed their appreciation for the detailed updates being shared.

The Sub-Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the presentation and that an update would be presented to the Communities and Place Committee on 29 November 2023; and
- ii. **AGREED** that the possibility of visiting other waste management sites to inform the deliberative process be explored.

The meeting concluded at 4.20 pm.