

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Climate Change Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday 5 October 2023 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mr C Aitken (remote)

Ms S Atkin

Mr J Bruce

Mrs I Campbell (remote)

Ms S Fanet (remote)

Mr D Fraser (remote)

Mr P Logue

Mr D Louden (remote)

Mr R MacKintosh

Mr K Rosie (Chair)

Ms K Willis (Vice Chair)

Non-Members also present:

Mr M Baird (remote)

Mr B Boyd (remote)

Mr R Gale (remote)

Ms M Hutchison (remote)

Mrs A MacLean (remote)

In attendance:

Ms K Lackie, Interim Depute Chief Executive

Mr N Osborne, Climate Change and Energy Team Manager

Mr R Macdonald, Energy Manager

Mr A Morgan, Climate Change Coordinator

Ms R Burbaitte, Climate Change Coordinator

Ms I MacMillan, Project Manager

Ms M Murray, Principal Committee Officer

Ms R Ross, 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 J Grafton, Mrs P Munro and Ms M Nolan.

2. Declarations of Interest/Transparency Statements Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt/ Aithris Fhollaiseachd

There were no Declarations of Interest or Transparency Statements.

3. Net Zero Strategy – Action Plan Progress Report Ro-innleachd Neoini Lom – Aithisg Adhartais Plana-ghnìomha

There had been circulated Report No CCC/13/23 dated 12 September 2023 by the Interim Depute Chief Executive.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- thanks were expressed to officers for the detailed and informative report;
- the importance of maximising attendance at the proposed Members' workshops was emphasised. It having been queried whether online workshops were better attended, the Chair commented that it was important Members had the option as to how to participate. The Interim Depute Chief Executive added that it had been intended to hold a workshop on 2 November. However, that date was not suitable for several Members of the Committee so an alternative date, potentially 7 November, would be identified;
- attention was drawn to section 6.3 of the report which referred to the challenges associated with developing such an all-encompassing piece of work given the competing priorities of delivering operational services, and information was sought, and provided, on the approach being taken and whether the Council's Committee and Service structures formed part of the discussions;
- school buildings, which were huge emitters, were not within the remit of the Education Committee, and it was questioned whether making them part of schools' remit would encourage behaviour change;
- it was important to get the Action Plan right, and the proposed extension to the timeline was understandable given the complexities involved;
- in relation to the risk implications set out in the report, it was suggested that a further risk be added to future reports regarding the severe widespread impacts of not responding quickly and adequately to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and not increasing resilience;
- information was sought, and provided, as to whether the various thematic groups were on track to bring detailed progress reports to the December Committee given the complexity of the process and the many challenges involved;
- clarification was sought, and provided, regarding the utility cost projections on page 25 of the Net Zero Strategy;
- the Council had an opportunity not only to reduce emissions but to curtail costs, and that should be a clear area of focus for officers as work progressed;
- disappointment was expressed that Carbon Literacy Training for Elected Members was only strongly advised rather than mandatory;
- it having been queried whether training could be extended to Community Councils it was explained that, due to limited resources, it was necessary to focus on staff and Elected Members in the first instance. However, it was intended to look at providing educational material online; and
- once the Action Plan was in place the process of working with external stakeholders could be increased, and the Chair invited any ideas in that regard.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the approval of the Council's Net Zero Strategy (Appendix 1 of the report);
- ii. **NOTED** the complexities involved in the development of a cross-service Action Plan;
- iii. **AGREED** to extend the timeline to allow Members insight into and involvement in the development of a fully costed Action Plan;
- iv. **AGREED** Members workshops should be held in November 2023 and January 2024;

- v. **AGREED** the fully costed Action Plan would be developed for consideration in March 2024 by the Climate Change Committee; and
- vi. **AGREED**, in relation to the risk implications set out in the report, that a further risk be added to future reports regarding the severe widespread impacts of not responding quickly and adequately to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and not increasing resilience.

4. **Annual Report under Public Bodies Climate Change Duties 2022/23** **Aithisg Bhliadhnaile fo Dhleastanasan Atharrachadh Gnàth-shìde nam** **Buidhnean Poblach 2022/23**

There had been circulated Report No CCC/14/23 dated 21 September 2023 by the Interim Depute Chief Executive.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- concern was expressed that emissions appeared to have risen and that every year the Council did not act the annual emissions reduction target was going to increase;
- further information was sought, and provided, on the increase in electricity consumption;
- it was surprising that diesel consumption had increased given the Council was decarbonising its fleet. In addition, it had been hoped that the number of vehicles in use would have reduced post-Covid due to there being no requirement for social distancing. An explanation was sought, and provided, on these points;
- in relation to buildings emissions, it had not been a particularly bad winter in 2022/23 and concern was expressed regarding the potential impact of a severe winter;
- it was queried whether emergence from Covid had caused a spike in the figures;
- the majority of emissions reductions had been Scope 2 and related to the decarbonisation of the electricity grid which was not within the Council's control. Given that the Council did not yet have a full picture of Scope 3 emissions, information was sought, and provided, as to what was being reported to the Scottish Government in that regard;
- it was queried whether consideration had been given to reducing diesel consumption by decentralising simple tasks such as grass-cutting to communities to avoid fleet vehicles having to travel to remote areas; and
- working with Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Councils to adopt data-reporting software made sense, and it was questioned why there was not a national system that all local authorities could use.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** Highland Council's draft return for reporting year 2022/23 under the Public Bodies Climate Change Duties;
- ii. **NOTED** progress against the organisation's emissions reductions targets;
- iii. **NOTED** that the draft would be updated as more data and information was received from Services across the organisation and on completion of a peer-review with the Scottish Borders Council;
- iv. **AGREED** to delegate authority to the Interim Depute Chief Executive to submit the finalised report to the Scottish Government by 30 November 2023 following

consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Climate Change Committee;
and

- v. **NOTED** a final copy of the report would be presented to the Climate Change Committee on 5 December 2023 for information.

5. Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategy (LHEES) and Delivery Plan Update Ro-innleachd Teas agus Èifeachdas Lùtha Ionadail agus Cunntas às Ùr mu Phlana Libhrigidh

There had been circulated Report No CCC/15/23 dated 21 September 2023 by the Interim Depute Chief Executive.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- given the report indicated that the LHEES was a high-level plan and would likely have few building-level actions, clarification was sought, and provided, as to how it would lead to taking action forward in the future;
- the importance of taking the public along was emphasised, and information was sought, and provided, as to what the public consultation referred to in section 5.4 of the report would involve;
- it was encouraging to hear that 22 ways in which the strategy might be implemented had been identified, and it would be interesting to know the costs of those and the benefits to the Council, partner organisations and households;
- some interventions would be low-cost and others would be high-cost. It was necessary to identify low-hanging fruit, and it was queried whether the cost of delivering interventions was being factored into the discussions; and
- information was sought, and provided, on the timeline for the proposed stakeholder engagement sessions and whether they would take place across Highland, and on the involvement of appropriate thematic groups in the LHEES.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the contents of the report; and
- ii. that the Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategy would be brought to the Climate Change Committee for consideration in December 2023.

6. Energy Benchmarking of Property Estate A' Dèanamh Tomhas-measaidh Lùtha air an Oighreachd Sheilbhe

There had been circulated Report No CCC/16/23 dated 21 September 2022 by the Interim Depute Chief Executive.

In addition to the report, the Energy Manager provided a live demonstration of the Energy Benchmarking Tool.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- the Energy Benchmarking Tool (EBT) was impressive and had huge potential, and Members commended all those involved in its development;
- information was sought, and provided, as to how it would be ensured the data within the EBT was accurate and the next steps in terms of using it to accelerate emissions reductions;

- much of the data within the EBT was relevant to Community Councils, and sharing it with them and encouraging them to apply it to their areas would pay considerable dividends;
- the Council was part of the wider Highland economy and Members looked forward to it taking a leading role in working with other organisations to address climate change issues. It was added that the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport would have a substantial role to play;
- it was necessary to consider how to help the population of the Highlands cope with the considerable changes climate change would bring in the next few decades;
- it was queried whether Building Passports for new builds formed part of the EBT;
- in response to a question, it was explained that the EBT did not provide any weighting but rather the data within it would inform the decision-making process in respect of future capital investment;
- the EBT being made available to the public was welcomed;
- the EBT could be used to bring communities on board, drive behaviour change and show how changing behaviour had led to visible results;
- testing the EBT would be a great cross-curricular school project. The Chair added that the Chamber of Commerce and private sector organisations might also be interested;
- it was queried whether, once there was a timeline of data and it could be seen that energy efficiency was increasing, carbon emissions were reducing etc, there would be background information within the EBT to explain what had led to those improvements. The Energy Manager confirmed that this would be taken under consideration; and
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that a contact number would be provided and the Energy Team was happy to provide training on the EBT as required.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the delivered Energy Benchmarking Tool; and
- ii. that the tool would initially be available internally to allow officers to test it fully prior to it being made available on the public-facing Council website.

7. Heating Policy for Non-Domestic Estate Poileasaidh Teasachaidh airson na Oighreachd Neo-dhachaigheil

There had been circulated Report No CCC/17/23 dated 15 September 2023 by the Interim Depute Chief Executive.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- the development of the Heating Policy was welcomed;
- reference was made to biomass boilers that needed to be switched on permanently in order to function properly and information was sought, and provided, as to how the Heating Policy would be applied in such instances;
- it was queried whether guidance on lowering emissions could be made available in the short term as the Heating Policy would not come into effect until Easter 2024;
- information was sought, and provided, on how much on-site control there would be over heating as having to request permission for all changes could lead to difficulties when the weather changed unexpectedly; and

- allowing local interventions would not necessarily lead to an increase in emissions and it would be interesting to monitor this.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the development of the Heating Control Guidance; and
- ii. the work carried out to date in shaping the proposed policy.

8. Energy Efficient Scotland: Area Based Scheme Update Alba Lùth Èifeachdach – Cunntas às Ùr Stèidhichte air Sgìre

There had been circulated Report No CCC/18/23 dated 13 September 2023 by the Interim Depute Chief Executive.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- fuel poverty was a serious issue and anything that could be done to address it was very welcome;
- information was sought, and provided, on opportunities to scale up this type of programme and develop the workforce to meet green skills requirements;
- on the point being raised, it was explained that the Energy Team hoped to work with Home Energy Scotland on island projects;
- it was difficult to find information on and apply for the Area Based Scheme. In that regard, Ms MacMillan, Project Manager, undertook to liaise with ICT Services and Corporate Communications to ensure that the information on the Council's website was clear and any hyperlinks were functioning;
- the need to work with the private sector was highlighted, as was the importance of communication to ensure that, where there was social and private housing in the same development, it would not seem as though private sector properties were being upgraded by the Council;
- information was sought, and provided, on the eligibility criteria for the Area Based Scheme and the impact of properties being part of a block of flats or in a conservation area;
- clarification was sought, and provided, on the difference between Energy Company Obligation funding and ECO Flex, and whether Energy Company Obligation funding was solely for social housing;
- information was sought, and provided, on the timescales and costs involved in the delivery of the Area Based Scheme;
- it was queried whether loft insulation could be an appropriate use of the funding available as it was relatively cheap and could have a big impact on the efficiency of properties;
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that the Energy Team had been working with the Welfare Team to identify possible candidates for the Area Based Scheme;
- it could be helpful for the Energy Team to liaise with the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport concerning skills training;
- it was queried whether areas that did not have access to a mains gas supply would be considered when deciding which areas to prioritise;
- information was sought, and provided, as to why thermal stores, accumulator tanks and solar thermal panels had not been included in the list of measures funded as part of the Area Based Scheme programme;

- in response to a question, it was clarified that eligibility for the scheme was based on Council Tax band and living costs rather than means testing;
- information was sought, and provided, on what would happen if homeowners decided not to take the Council's preferred "fabric first" approach and opted for the installation of a heat pump without first installing insulation; and
- many people had no idea they were entitled to funding, and the importance of communication was reiterated.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the contents of the report;
- ii. **AGREED** to support the promotion of external funded opportunities across the region;
- iii. **NOTED** opportunities to expand Energy Company Obligation funding to Council housing stock; and
- iv. **AGREED** that information on the steps being taken to raise awareness of the various schemes and improve access to information via the Council's website be presented to the next meeting of the Committee.

The Chair commended officers for the quality of their reports, which demonstrated how the various strands of works taking place were coming together, and the high standard of response provided during the debate.

The meeting concluded at 1.10 pm.