**The Highland Council**

Minutes of Meeting of the **Climate Change Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Wednesday 20 March 2024 at 10.30 am.

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| **Present:**  Ms S Atkin  Mr J Bruce  Mrs I Campbell  Ms S Fanet (Chair)  Mr J Grafton | Mr P Logue  Mr D Louden  Ms M Ross  Ms K Willis (Vice Chair) (remote) |
| **Non-Members also present:**  Mr M Baird (remote)  Mr C Ballance  Ms L Kraft (remote)  Mr R MacKintosh | Mr J McGillivray (remote)  Mr P Oldham (remote)  Mrs T Robertson (remote)  Mr K Rosie (remote) |
| **In attendance:**  Ms K Lackie, Interim Depute Chief Executive  Mr B Cameron, Interim Head of Housing and Building Maintenance  Mr N Osborne, Climate Change and Energy Team Manager  Ms F Daschofsky, Net Zero Project Manager  Ms I MacMillan, Project Manager  Ms S James-Gaukroger, Climate Change Coordinator  Ms R Burbaite, Climate Change Coordinator  Ms M Murray, Principal Committee Officer  Mrs O Bayon, Committee Officer  Mr M Nixon, 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.**

**Ms S Fanet in the Chair**

**Business**

## Calling of the Roll and Apologies for Absence

**Gairm a’ Chlàir agus Leisgeulan**

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr A Graham, Mr A MacKintosh, Mrs P Munro and Ms L Niven.

## Declarations of Interest/Transparency Statement

**Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt/ Aithris Fhollaiseachd**

There were no Declarations of Interest or Transparency Statements.

## Presentation – Highlands and Islands Climate Hub

**Taisbeanadh – Hub Gnàth-shìde na Gàidhealtachd is nan Eilean**

Joan Lawrie, Highlands and Islands Climate Hub Manager, explained that Highlands and Islands Climate Hub (the Hub) was part of a growing national network of climate action hubs, funded by the Scottish Government, which supported community organisations to carry out community-led climate action activities. She then introduced a film, “Climate Action: Highlands and Islands”, which told the story of a selection of the Hub’s inspiring members as they showcased the action they were taking to combat the climate emergency.

During discussion, the following main issues were raised:-

* it was great to see climate action activity happening in every part of Highland and the Northern Isles, and thanks were expressed for the inspiring and well-made film;
* information was sought, and provided, on a number of points including whether community hydro schemes provided electricity for the communities they served; whether there was anything the Council could do to support more community energy schemes across Highland; links with other organisations such as Community Energy Scotland; and whether there was a directory of funding sources for community groups/projects;
* climate change was beyond the point where a little bit of action was sufficient, and there was a need for serious leadership from public bodies;
* the island communities of Eigg and Gigha had long-established community energy schemes, and were very helpful to other community groups looking to set up similar ventures;
* in relation to the Polycrub tunnels seen in the film, information was sought on where the plastic was sourced, the life expectancy, and what would be done with it afterwards. Ms Lawrie undertook to find out and revert to Members;
* on the point being raised, it was confirmed that the film was available online and a link would be shared with Committee Members. Community screenings could also be provided if community groups were interested, and a projector and cinema-size screen was available to borrow for that purpose. Members added that there was a cinema at the Seaboard Centre, and an invitation was extended to screen the film at the Fisherfolk Festival in May. Interest was also expressed in screening the film at Bonar Bridge Community Hall, and attention was drawn to another excellent film, “Riverwoods”;
* coastal erosion was an issue in the Black Isle and the Seaboard Villages, and interest was expressed in the coastal erosion work taking place in Golspie;
* there would be businesses and commercial organisations that would want the services offered by the Hub, and it was queried whether consideration had been given to a subscription model;
* it would be good to consider how the Council might develop its working relationship with the Hub and better understand how community wealth building and climate action might be enabled;
* in relation to renewables and how to better develop opportunities in and directly for communities, it was explained that the role of the Hub was to build capacity and confidence within communities to take the opportunities that might be afforded to them; and
* it was highlighted that the Highlands and Islands Climate Festival, which was run by the Hub, would be running from 1 September to 30 September 2024.

The Committee otherwise **NOTED** the film.

## Net Zero Strategy – Action Plan and Supporting Workstreams Progress Report

**Ro-innleachd Neoni Lom – Plana-gnìomha agus Aithisg Adhartais a Thaobh Taic do Shruthan-obrach**

There had been circulated Report No CCC/1/24 by the Interim Depute Chief Executive.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

* officers were thanked for the detailed report;
* it was confirmed that the Net Zero Strategy was considered to be one of the core workstreams of the Council;
* it was necessary to think outside of silos, and it was disappointing to note the difficulties highlighted regarding cross-service collaboration;
* it was queried if section 7.4 of the report referred to establishing a hierarchy of more readily achievable actions;
* behavioural change required a sophisticated communications strategy, and an update was sought in that regard;
* school buildings were large carbon emitters, and it was queried how children’s energy awareness education was progressing;
* it was felt that nature restoration projects could be scaled up at speed in each Council ward. In addition, an update was sought on the Council’s ecological strategy and it was queried if the Council was reaching out to other organisations such as Scotland: The Big Picture and Trees for Life for guidance;
* food waste in schools was an ongoing concern, and it was suggested that focus be placed on primary schools improving from bronze to silver status in the Soil Association Food for Life awards;
* concern was expressed that matters could drift if firm dates, actions and responsibilities were not clearly specified. It was added that it was necessary to be careful regarding reputational risk if target dates were seen to keep changing. The Interim Depute Chief Executive acknowledged that there was a need for greater rigour in terms of indicators and targets, and explained that it was anticipated that, by the May Committee, officers would be in a position to provide greater assurance around the activity taking place and the impact it was having;
* it was requested that Elm Trees be included in the action relating to Ash dieback. In this regard it was queried if there was a replanting plan with similar but disease-free or more resilient strains;
* regarding mapping of Highland carbon resources, it was suggested that the possibility of utilising the Planning Service’s database be explored;
* in relation to procurement and community wealth building, it was felt there was a gap as capital procurement and Housing Revenue (HRA) procurement were not in scope;
* regarding sustainable business travel, a regular report comparing the number of petrol/diesel vehicles purchased/leased each year with the number of zero emissions vehicles was suggested. In addition, information was requested on the average mileage of the 750 cars and light commercial vehicles referred to in the report as the greater the mileage the greater the opportunity to offset the increased lease costs associated with EVs. The Interim Depute Chief Executive undertook to circulate the available data to Members;
* in response to concern that 50% of HRA housing stock was not technically viable for full retrofit measures to meet the required energy standards, it was clarified that these properties could be retrofitted but they would not achieve the Band B target;
* disappointment was expressed regarding the lack of progress in terms of helping Council tenants reduce energy consumption, and it was hoped that the Heat in Buildings legislation would be taken into account in looking at possible solutions for social housing;
* regarding waste, it was queried if there were any plans for composting or furniture recycling;
* information was sought, and provided, on funding sources and whether the Energy Team would seek to produce its own revenue streams;
* whilst the timeline for determining the cost of Net Zero Energy Surveys was 24 months, it was queried what the target was for completion of the identified works;
* on the point being raised, it was confirmed that officers would seek to organise a workshop for all Members with Zero Waste Scotland regarding the circular economy;
* regarding section 5.2 of the report, as the Scottish Government’s independent advisers had stated that Scotland’s climate target was now unreachable it was queried what implications this would have for the Council’s interim 2030 target. The Interim Depute Chief Executive confirmed that officers would take stock following the recent announcement and respond at the next meeting of the Committee;
* it was queried what enforcement or encouragement could be implemented regarding the replanting of trees as part of agreed planning applications;
* it was highlighted that rewilding also included bodies of water, and reference was made to the announcement by NatureScot regarding seagrass planting programmes; and
* information was sought, and provided, as to why the fully costed Net Zero Action Plan had not been part of the budget setting process rather than entirely separate.

The Committee:-

1. **AGREED** a revised approach to the development of the Net Zero Action Plan would be brought to the Committee in May for consideration;
2. **NOTED** a workshop was scheduled in April 2024 to provide Members with the opportunity to provide input to the development of the Climate Change Impact Assessment;
3. **NOTED** a bespoke Climate Training workshop would be delivered to the Council’s Corporate Management Team in March/April 2024 prior to wider roll out; and
4. **NOTED** the updates provided for all of the Net Zero Strategy Workstreams set out in the appendices.

## The Council Response to Social Housing Net Zero Standard: Consultation

## Inbhe Neoni Lom Taigheadais Shòisealta: Co-chomhairleachadh

There had been circulated Report No CCC/02/24 by the Interim Depute Chief Executive.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

* information was sought, and provided, as to whether the Government would provide extra funding to the Council to aid in the installation of clean heating systems, and on the availability of grants for private tenants;
* it was questioned whether the funding could meet the ambition of the proposed new Standard given the circumstances those who lived in Highland had to contend with, such as higher electricity costs, lower wages, older housing stock and less well insulated homes; and
* support was expressed for the consultation response. However, it would have been helpful to have had the chance to review it prior to submission, and an assurance was sought that Committee Members would be granted the opportunity to contribute to future consultation responses. In that regard, it was explained that the timescale for the consultation had not allowed the opportunity for the response to be brought before the Committee prior to submission. However, it was recognised that that was not ideal and confirmed that if there were specific points Members wished to add following the submission date officers would be happy to do so.

The Committee **AGREED** to homologate the response to the Social Housing Net Zero Standard: Consultation attached at Appendix 1 of the report.

## The Council Response to Heat in Buildings Bill: Consultation

**A’ Lìbhrigeadh Neoni Lom airson Togalaichean na h-Alba – Bile Teas ann an Togalaichean: Co-chomhairleachadh**

There had been circulated Report No CCC/03/24 by the Interim Depute Chief Executive.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

* concern was expressed that some of the proposals in the consultation were unrealistic and the costs involved could lead to properties being abandoned;
* the challenge of replacing fossil fuel heating would not be overcome unless there were achievable and realistic proposals in place;
* it was questioned whether the consultation allowed sufficient consideration to be given to the serious and complex nature of the issues raised by the proposals;
* it was recognised that officers had to respond to the questions on a practical basis. However, other Members commented that responding to a consultation such as this was inherently political, it was the role of councillors, not officers, to make policy, and it was important that Members had an input;
* it was suggested that some of the responses seemed arbitrary, and it was questioned how the timescale at Question 10, for example, had been chosen;
* the proposals were predicated on the affordability of electricity, and it was necessary to focus on finding ways to reduce the cost of electricity, either directly or by lobbying government, so that communities in Highland were not even more adversely affected by making the alterations necessary to respond to climate change;
* Members wanted to hear more about the cost of not acting compared to the cost of adapting; and
* it was explained that there would be further opportunities to contribute to the passage of the Bill, and the Interim Depute Chief Executive undertook to come back to the next meeting of the Committee with a proposal as to how Members could be engaged in the Bill’s progress.

The Committee **AGREED** to homologate the Council’s Consultation response to the Proposals for a Heat in Buildings Bill: Consultation which closed on 8 March 2024.

The meeting concluded at 1.00 pm.