

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Climate Change Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday 23 May 2024 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Ms S Atkin

Mr J Bruce

Mrs I Campbell

Ms S Fanet (Chair)

Mr J Grafton

Mr P Logue

Mr D Louden

Mr A MacKintosh

Ms L Niven (remote)

Ms M Ross (remote)

Ms K Willis (Vice Chair)

Non-Members also present:

Mr R MacKintosh

Ms K MacLean (remote)

Mr D Millar (remote)

In attendance:

Ms K Lackie, Assistant Chief Executive - People

Ms N Wallace, Service Lead, Environment, Development and Active Travel (remote)

Mr N Osborne, Climate Change and Energy Team Manager

Mr R Macdonald, Energy Manager (remote)

Mr A Puls, Environment Team Leader

Ms I MacMillian, Project Manager

Mr S McLaughlin, Technical Data Analyst

Ms R Burbaite, Climate Change Coordinator

Ms M Murray, Principal 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

Prior to the commencement of formal business, the Chair spoke to two items of good news as follows:-

Heat Network Support Unit

The Council had been awarded Strategic Heat Network Support by the Heat Network Support Unit to complete the feasibility study for the city-wide heat network in Inverness. The funding would cover up to 90% of the cost (capped at £150,000), requiring a 10% contribution from the Council. This support would help the Council understand commercial and financial analysis of a heat network opportunity for the whole of Inverness, identify the estimated scale of investment and investment opportunities, and understand whether the project was viable for further progression.

All Energy Glasgow

The Council had taken the opportunity to present the Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategy and Delivery Plan alongside the Scottish Government and two other Councils at

the All Energy conference in Glasgow. All Energy was the largest low carbon energy and supply chain renewables event aimed at private and public sector energy end users.

The Committee **NOTED** the good news.

Business

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

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr A Graham and Ms P Munro.

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

There were no Declarations of Interest or Transparency Statements.

3. Net Zero Action Plan – Proposed Revised Approach Plana-ghnìomha Neoni Lom – Dòigh-obrach Ùr ga Moladh

There had been circulated Report No CCC/04/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following main issues were raised:-

- the proposed format for reporting was welcomed, and it was hoped that RAG ratings could be incorporated so Members could clearly see where projects were in terms of delivery;
- it was good to see the inclusion of Net Zero in the Terms of Reference for all of the Operational Delivery Plan Portfolio Boards;
- the circular economy was key to achieving Net Zero and, on the point being raised, it was confirmed that officers would arrange a Members' workshop with Zero Waste Scotland and a date would be announced in due course;
- in response to a question regarding the calculation of Scope 3 emissions through procurement spend, it was confirmed it was intended to present a report in that regard to the next meeting of the Committee;
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that the Fleet and Staff Travel project would include travel by Elected Members;
- food waste in schools and the new recycling and waste collection arrangements being rolled out across Highland being cited as examples, information was sought, and provided, on the process in terms of implementing cross-service actions and achieving behavioural change;
- further information was sought, and provided, regarding the statement in the report that a number of thematic groups were not in a position to fully unlock the full costs of their operational decarbonisation;
- in response to a question, it was clarified that the reporting templates appended to the report were examples, and key actions would be incorporated in future reports; and
- with reference to section 3.1 of the report, information was sought, and provided, on the current position in terms of securing funding to meet the Council's climate change ambitions.

The Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** the approach for the development and reporting of the Net Zero Programme;
- ii. **AGREED** the more focused approach to project development and reporting; and
- iii. **NOTED** the alignment of future reporting with the Operational Delivery Plan.

4. **Draft Ecological Strategy** **Dreachd Ro-innleachd Eag-eòlasach**

There had been circulated Report No CCC/05/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main issues were raised:-

- thanks were expressed for the work that had gone into developing the Ecological Strategy and for the two constructive Members' workshops that had already taken place, and it was welcomed that the Strategy would come back to the Climate Change Committee for consideration following the consultation phase. In relation to the proposed Members' workshop in June, it was suggested it would be more beneficial for it to take place at a later date following receipt of the public consultation responses, and it was confirmed that would be arranged;
- there was a lack of understanding about how critical the ecological crisis was. It was interlinked and on a par with the climate crisis, and it was necessary to raise awareness across the board;
- it was suggested that consideration be given to consulting with schools/young people, possibly at the beginning of the session in August;
- on the point being raised, it was explained that engagement regarding the possible introduction of a Carbon Emissions Land Tax would take place once there was greater clarity as to the Scottish Government's intentions in that regard;
- the success of one species could have an impact on another – for example, the success of the Pine Marten had possibly affected the Capercaillie population. Deer fences had also had an impact, and there were things that could and should be done to prevent further loss;
- the Strategy stated that 1 in 9 species were threatened with extinction but, taking climate change into account in addition to the ecological crisis, it was suggested the figure was much higher;
- the people of Caithness were fully behind the efforts for further designations in respect of the Flow Country, and the leadership in that regard was welcomed;
- with regard to the statement in the Strategy that the Council would support the action in the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy to designate 30% of Scotland by 2030, information was sought, and provided, as to whether that was close to being achieved, and if 30% of Scotland meant 30% of land and 30% of marine areas;
- in terms of accessing funding to help with the restoration of peatlands and tree-planting, it was queried who the Council would and would not work with. It was added that there were significant conflicts in some rural areas about what purpose land should be used for, and this had impacted on accessibility to young people who wanted to get into crofting or farming;
- the need to bring communities along and keep them informed as to the discussions and work taking place was emphasised;
- the difficulties associated with balancing ecological issues with the need to keep grassed areas tidy and safe were recognised;

- it was questioned whether there might be an influx of people wanting to live in Scotland in the future because the rest of the planet was degrading and becoming much hotter, and it was suggested the Committee should look further forward and put plans in place for future generations;
- reference was made to the increasing number of mosquitoes in Scotland and the probable effect on local species as well as the potential for Malaria;
- the Council was doing its best, but it was questioned how much work could continue to be done in the future due to a possible lack of funding;
- in relation to Local Development Plans, it was important to ensure that information was clear and conveyed to local residents and Community Councils;
- information was sought, and provided, as to whether plans were in place to monitor and control invasive species, such as Rhododendron, within the Council estate;
- the action to lobby government to work with coastal communities to mitigate the impacts of rising sea levels was welcomed, and it was requested that Members of the Black Isle and Easter Ross Area Committee be advised of or be asked to feed into any action being taken in that regard so they could keep communities informed;
- information was sought, and provided, in relation to the felling of woodland and the need for Members to be kept informed in that regard so they could reassure their constituents;
- climate change affected everyone, and linking in across all Council services was critical;
- reducing the Council's carbon emissions was a much greater challenge than had been anticipated, and there was a constant tension between economic development and protecting the environment;
- the Council could do better in terms of leading by example; and
- concern was expressed that areas that were not flood plains at present would soon become flood plains, and it was necessary to work with the Planning Service in that regard.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the content of the draft Ecology Strategy and Actions contained therein;
- ii. the public consultation exercise outlined in Section 8 of the report;
- iii. that a further report providing feedback from the consultation would be presented to a future meeting of this Committee before being taken to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee for approval; and
- iv. that, taking into account Members' feedback, the proposed workshop for all Council Members would take place at a later date following receipt of the public consultation responses.

5. The Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategy (LHEES) Delivery Plan Progress Report **Aithisg Adhartais Plana Libhrigidh Ro-innleachd Teas agus Èifeachdas Lùtha Ionadail**

There had been circulated Report No CCC/06/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

In introducing the report, the Climate Change Coordinator (LHEES) drew attention to an error on page 62 of the papers, clarifying that the Ward Area in respect of Project No. 1 should be Caol and Mallaig, not Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh.

During discussion, the following main issues were raised:-

- off gas grid communities faced particular difficulties, and information was sought, and provided, as to whether they could be prioritised;
- it was important that the actions the Council was taking to encourage greater use of electricity and reduce carbon heating in homes were not being offset by the actions being taken by energy providers such as OVO and Octopus. For example, Quantum storage heaters, which the Council used extensively, were based on a low overnight tariff but that tariff was in the process of being eliminated, and information was sought, and provided, as to whether such matters were being factored in;
- the new Belford Hospital in Fort William, which was currently on hold, was a superb opportunity for a local heat network, and an assurance was sought that this would be considered when development work resumed. Similarly, it was queried whether any discussions had taken place regarding a potential heat network using excess heat from the aluminium smelter in Fort William; and
- information was sought, and provided, on the next stage of the Inverness Heat Network project, and it was queried what analysis had been done in terms of carbon and heat generation from a potential Energy from Waste facility in the Inverness area.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. progress to date;
- ii. a workshop would be scheduled in summer 2024 to provide Members with the opportunity to input to the development of the LHEES Delivery Plan; and
- iii. that the detailed Delivery Plan would be brought to the Climate Change Committee for consideration in November 2024.

6. 2023/24 External Funded Project Overview, Planning of Future Domestic Retrofit Projects and Domestic Power BI
Foir-shealladh Pròiseact Maoinichte bhon Taobh A-muigh 2023/24, a' Planaigeadh Phròiseactan Iar-fhiotaigidh Dachaigheil san Àm ri Teachd agus BI Cumhachd Dachaigheil

There had been circulated Report No CCC/07/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

In addition to the report, a demonstration of the Domestic Power BI was provided.

During discussion, the following main issues were raised:-

- the Domestic Power BI was commended, and information was sought, and provided, as to whether it was available to the public;
- with reference to the £2.4m of Scottish Government funding awarded to the Council in 2023/24 to deliver energy efficiency improvements to privately owned and rented properties, it was queried whether a similar amount of funding was available in 2024/25;
- in relation to future domestic retrofit projects, it was welcomed that there would be a project in Caol and that there would be a consultation. In addition, clarification was sought, and provided, as to whether funding had been secured for this work and the reason some properties had been carried over from 2023/24;

- thanks were expressed for the work that had taken place in the Tain and Easter Ross Ward;
- it was vital for Highland residents that their homes were made more liveable, and thanks were expressed to officers for the work they had done to source funding and shorten the amount of time it would take to upgrade all domestic properties;
- the volume of enquiries was a measure of the demand for energy efficiency improvements;
- the importance of the work taking place in terms of helping families who could not afford to heat their homes was emphasised; and
- information was sought, and provided, as to whether renting out a spare room via Airbnb would impact eligibility for energy efficiency improvements, and whether there was any flexibility around Council Tax bands, which were a crude proxy for income.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the contents of the report; and
- ii. the development of externally funded projects across the region and the opportunity to scale up.

7. Climate Change Impact Assessment Measadh Buaidh Atharrachadh Gnàth-shìde

There had been circulated Report No CCC/08/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following main issues were raised:-

- it was welcomed that carbon emissions would be considered at the outset as projects were developed;
- thanks were expressed for the workshop that had taken place, and the report provided further clarity on the impact assessment process;
- information was sought, and provided, on a number of points including the weighting that carbon emissions and impacts would be given within an overall project assessment; the procedure in respect of returns that stated there was no impact; the scope of the impact assessment process, and whether it applied to closing a school, for example; the impact, in terms of workload, on the staff reviewing the assessments; what proportion of proposals it was anticipated would proceed to Stage 2 – Full Impact Assessment; whether some groups of the population would be more impacted by climate change than others; and when the Climate Change Impact Assessment would go live;
- drawing out the positive impacts of adapting to climate change was as important as focussing on mitigating the negative impacts;
- on the point being raised, the Assistant Chief Executive – People undertook to follow up on the suggested inclusion of neuro-difference in the equalities element of the Integrated Impact Assessment; and
- the inclusion of islands in the Community implications section of committee reports was welcomed.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the Climate Change Impact Assessment and supporting guidance; and

- ii. the integration of the Climate Change Impact Assessment into the Integrated Impact Assessment tool, which would be presented to Full Council for approval.

**8. Climate Change – Draft Scottish National Adaptation Plan 3: Consultation
Atharrachadh Gnàth-shìde – Dreachd Plana Freagarrachaidh Nàiseanta na h-Alba 3: Co-chomhairleachadh**

There had been circulated Report No CCC/9/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, thanks were expressed for the workshop which had taken place, and it was requested that as much notice as possible be provided in respect of future workshops to facilitate Members' attendance.

The Committee **AGREED** to homologate the Council's response to the draft Scottish National Adaptation Plan 3: Consultation which closed on 24 April 2024.

**9. Renewables Framework: Increasing Supply Chain Capacity in the Highlands
Frèam So-ùrachaidh: A' Meudachadh Comas na Sèine-solair sa Ghàidhealtachd**

There had been circulated Report No CCC/10/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following main issues were raised:-

- information was sought, and provided, about what discussions were taking place with colleges and schools with a view to addressing skills shortages;
- reference was made to the extensive range of work and services set out in Appendix 2 of the report, and it was commented there might be some things a joint procurement agency or Scotland Excel could help with;
- accrediting contractors could be an onerous task, and it was hoped the Council would work with Skills Development Scotland, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and University of the Highlands and Islands to try to fill any gaps identified;
- there were local companies and small traders that specialised in renewable energy, and it was queried whether they were being included and supported to take on apprentices;
- in addition to air source heat pumps, ground source heat pumps could be installed by qualified local contractors; and
- many homes in Highland were old, and the time and bureaucracy involved in implementing the installation of solar panels and other energy saving measures was seen as an issue. It was asked if discussions around this topic had been taking place.

The Committee **NOTED** the contents of the report and the proposed Highland Energy Efficiency Framework.

**10. Heat in Buildings Bill: Next Steps
Bile Teas ann an Togalaichean: Na h-Ath Cheumannan**

There had been circulated Report No CCC/11/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

In introducing the report, the Climate Change and Energy Team Manager referred to section 6.2 and suggested, in light of changes within the Scottish Government and the announcement of a General Election on 4 July, the Members' workshop be held in August 2024 at the earliest.

During discussion, the following main issues were raised:-

- in relation to section 4.1 of the report, it was suggested a media strategy be included as the Highland perspective and voice needed to be heard in the national debate;
- support was expressed for holding the proposed workshop in August and, on the point being raised, it was confirmed that the workshop would be cross-service and open to all Members;
- the UK government had banned multi-fuel stoves in new homes, and information was sought, and provided, regarding the use of such stoves in Highland and whether wood was considered to be a polluting heat source; and
- concern was expressed regarding the impact of the Bill on young people, who had difficulty competing when houses came up for sale, and it was queried whether it would be possible to allow a longer period for them to make adaptations.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the possible routes for engagement set out in the report;
- ii. **AGREED** the proposed approach for delivering a workshop; and
- iii. **AGREED** that the proposed workshop take place in August 2024 at the earliest.

The meeting concluded at 2.00 pm.