

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Climate Change Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Wednesday 28 August 2024 at 10.30am.

Present:

Mr J Bruce (Remote)	Mr P Logue (Remote)
Mrs I Campbell (Remote)	Mr D Louden
Ms L Dundas (substitute)	Mr A MacKintosh
Ms S Fanet (Chair)	Ms L Niven (Remote)
Mr J Grafton	Ms M Ross
Mr A Graham	Ms K Willis (Vice Chair) (Remote)

Non-Members also present:

Dr C Birt
Mr R MacKintosh
Ms M Hutchison

In attendance:

Mr B Cameron, Interim Head of Housing and Building Maintenance
Ms N Wallace, Service Lead – Environment, Development and Active Travel
Mr N Osborne, Climate Change and Energy Team Manager
Mr R Macdonald, Energy Manager
Ms F Daschofsky, Project Manager
Ms I MacMillan, Project Manager
Ms D Morris, Climate Change Coordinator
Mr A Puls, Environment Team Leader
Mrs L Dunn, Joint Democratic Services Manager
Mrs O Marsh, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Ms H Loonsk, Climate Resilience Manager, Highland Adapts

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

Preliminaries

The Chair gave a verbal update on the following Good News items:

EV Rally

Highland Council hosted the start of the rally, a 2-day, near 600-mile event, travelling around the North Coast 500 route, before coming back to Inverness and travelling south to Edinburgh. The rally aimed to highlight the benefits of going electric, highlight innovation within the field of EV charging, as well as clean energy.

Awards

- The Climate Change and Energy Team had been successful at the Council's Staff Recognition Awards held in June 2024.
- The Energy Efficient Scotland: Area Based Scheme was the winner of the "Just transition to a Net Zero economy". The Climate Change & Energy Team spearheaded transformative whole-house retrofit projects helping households in fuel poverty.
- The Energy Benchmarking Tool won the "Delivering Excellence Award". This innovative tool empowered the Council in its journey towards Net Zero by providing vital insights into energy consumption patterns, costs, and performance efficiencies across the Council's diverse property portfolio.
- The Climate Change and Energy Team was nominated in "Regional Council or Local Authority Body of the year" at the Scottish National Energy Efficiency Awards 2024.
- The team was also nominated as "Large Scale Project of the year" and was announced "winner" for their innovative approach to building multi funded projects.
- The Energy Efficient Scotland: Area Based Scheme 23/24 had also been shortlisted for the National Energy Efficiency Awards 2024 - National Multi-Measure Project of the Year. This award recognised the efforts of all those involved in delivering a successful large scale energy efficiency project, where multiple energy efficiency measures of more than one type had been installed.

CIOB Sustainability Ambassador

Sharon Barrie, Highland Council's Service Lead – Design & Construction and member of the Built Estate & Energy thematic group had been appointed to the Chartered Institute of Building "Sustainability Ambassador" for the Scotland Region.

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

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Ms S Atkin.

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

There were no Declarations of Interest or Transparency Statements.

3. Recess Powers Cumhachdan Fosaidh

The Committee **NOTED** that the recess powers granted by the Council at its meeting on 27 June 2024 had not been exercised in relation to the business of the Climate Change Committee.

4. Net Zero Programme and Thematic Group Leads Update Prògram Neoni Lom agus Cunntas às Ùr mu Stiùirichean Bhuidhnean Cuspaireil

There had been circulated Report No CCC/12/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- it was queried if new commitments would be placed upon Highland Council due to the Flow Country being designated as a World Heritage Site. In addition, it was queried if the Council would work alongside the RSPB (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds) at the site. The Flow Country was also described as a good contributor of community wellbeing;
- further information was sought and received, whether the anticipated staff pay awards, and cuts to the Nature Restoration Funding would impact budget allocation towards addressing the ecological emergency workstream;
- Members expressed thanks for an excellent report, and to officers for the comprehensive and significant amount of work undertaken to date;
- it was queried what steps the Council was taking towards including the public to address the ecological emergency as there were risks of unintended consequences if this was not carried out;
- Members were supportive of the Manage the Estate for Wildlife and Nature project, as this demonstrated the Council was prioritising nature projects;
- the Members' workshop had been successful and additional future workshops would be welcomed;
- in light of the recruitment of new Planning Ecologists, it was queried how the Governments planned block on staff recruitment would affect the Council;
- the Caol and Balintore Energy Efficiency in Homes projects were welcomed. In this regard positive feedback from local tenants and private owners had been expressed regarding the project, and information had been sought on how they could be included in the energy improvements project as individuals;
- regarding energy efficiency works it was confirmed that the local housing association had pulled out of the agreement with Highland Council in Lochaber as it was struggling to bring in private owners, therefore it was queried how private owners could be encouraged to join the agreement of energy improvements;
- it was highlighted that the Planning, Land Use and Environment and Sustainable Travel had not included discussion on improvements to bus travel in communities;
- the lack of open space grass cutting had been a contentious issue in 2024, therefore Members welcomed the Climate Change team's collaborative working with the Amenities team and hoped that a strategic plan could be developed to manage reductions in grass cutting for biodiversity. In this regard further concern was expressed over the lack of grass cutting, hedges and shrub bed maintenance as on some occasions they presented health and safety issues for pedestrians;
- despite good progress with the Caol and Balintore projects, it was felt that the UK in general was far behind European counterparts with accelerating carbon free housing improvements; and
- regarding older housing stock properties that might not be suitable for programmed energy efficiencies, it was queried what the long term plan was for these property types.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** the project brief templates as set out in Appendix 1 of the report; and
- ii. **NOTED** this was an iterative process and further project brief templates would be brought to the Climate Change Committee for consideration.

5. Net Zero – Communications and Engagement Conaltradh agus Com-pàirteachadh

There had been circulated Report No CCC/13/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- suggestion was made that the report Aims be changed to confirm the Council's transition to Net Zero and to become a climate-ready 'region' or 'community';
- regarding page 26 of the report, it was felt that Community Councils should be included on the list of participants to input into the process. In this regard, Community Councils had raised their concerns to Members concerning grass cutting and a perceived lack of strategy over areas to be cut or left for wilding;
- it was questioned if all Highland Council job descriptions should be updated to reflect the importance of delivering Net Zero, and if every Council Service should have a nominated Net Zero ambassador, including nominating Member representatives across the political spectrum;
- it was confirmed that the Climate Festival was commencing in September 2024 with events across Highland. Further information was available on the Highlands and Islands Climate Festival Facebook page;
- it was recognised that successful communications with communities was a two way process;
- concern was raised that Net Zero information responsibilities could not just be passed onto schoolteachers to include within the curriculum due to a lack of time or understanding of the subject. In this regard, it was felt that alternative ways to educate children in schools should be explored in more detail; and
- it was requested that School meal waste processes be included in the Net zero strategy.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- * i. **AGREED** to **RECOMMEND** that the Council approve the Net Zero Communications and Engagement Strategy; and
- ii. **NOTED** the Net Zero Ambassador Network would be crucial to the successful delivery of the Communications and Engagement Strategy.

6. Training Trèanadh

There had been circulated Report No CCC/14/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- it was requested that Members and Community Councils be included in the various training packages for their valuable input;
- it was felt that Members needed additional training especially if they were to act in an advisory capacity to local Community Councils, such as advice on mitigation processes. In this regard, it was queried if the upcoming workshop discussing Climate Science would include a complete overview of all aspects of the climate challenge; and
- it was hoped that food production information be included in future comprehensive training sessions as it was a large contributor to carbon emissions.

The Committee **NOTED** the content and delivery of the Climate Solutions Workshop.

7. Highland Adapts Progress Report Aithisg Adhartais mun Ghàidhealtachd a' Freagarrachadh

There had been circulated Report No CCC/15/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

Ms H Loonsk, Climate Resilience Manager, Highland Adapts, gave a presentation providing an update on Highland Adapts' work programme since 2021, including the Highland Climate Risk and Opportunity Assessment and Highland Charter for Climate, Nature, and Health. It also gave a preview of the next steps for Highland Adapts, including business development planning and support for community-driven climate resilience projects.

During discussion Members expressed thanks for the comprehensive and balanced report and requested a copy of the full Paul Watkiss Associates report. In this regard, it was queried what project brief the report was based upon, whether it was based on current challenges or future risk and opportunities.

The Committee **NOTED** the presentation and the report and activities achieved by Highland Adapts to date, as well as the future work schedule as detailed in sections 6 and 7 of the report.

8. Circular Economy Eaconamaidh Chearacallach

There had been circulated Report No CCC/16/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- a training workshop on the Circular Economy, perhaps by Zero Waste Scotland, to strengthen Members decision-making knowledge base was requested;
- there was a need to educate people on the Circular Economy, but to balance needs against availability;
- it was felt that the next stage of the process would be the identification of specific targets that required to be met;
- it was queried if there had been engagement with local food retailers to discuss a reduction of plastic waste packaging material;
- regarding empty Council buildings, it was queried if utility standing charges were still being paid. In addition, it was queried if staff were taking proactive steps to turn lights and heating off when not required to save energy and money;
- in terms of efficient use of resources, it was queried if superior hot tar products could be used to fill roads potholes as cold tar appeared to wash out quite quickly in wet inclement weather conditions; and
- information was sought regarding the Councils plastic waste recycling process, as this could be used to educate local communities on best recycling practice.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the requirement to align the Circular Principles identified in the Council's Net Zero Strategy with the Circular Economy (Scotland) Bill; and
- ii. **AGREED** to support the approach to align and embed Circular Economy Principles into the Council's Day to day operations.

9. Net Zero Audit and Survey Programme Update Sgrùdadh Neoni Lom agus Prògram Suirbhidh

There had been circulated Report No CCC/17/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- thanks were expressed to officers for the report, and for the very comprehensive work undertaken to assess buildings;
- it was queried how buildings deemed beyond remediation were assessed, and what the next steps would be for these identified buildings; and
- regarding Appendix 1 within the report, further information was sought and received, on how the priority scoring was determined.

The Committee **NOTED** the:-

- i. proposed programme of works; and
- ii. resulting indicative report deliverables.

10. Climate Change Performance Monitoring Report Q1 2024/25 Aithisg Sgrùdadh Coileanaidh Atharrachadh Gnàth-shìde R1 2024/25

There had been circulated Report No CCC/18/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- it was felt that monitoring the performance of climate change should be prioritised higher up the agenda. Overall, it was felt that the Committee was finding its feet and these issues would be fine-tuned in due course; and
- attention was drawn to a potential typo in the report at page 119, item 7.2 regarding the Data figure of 36,147 to a Target Value of 47,605 as the figures were increasing rather than decreasing.

The Committee scrutinised and **NOTED** the Service's performance information.

The meeting concluded at 1.05pm.