

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 Friday 8 November 2024 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mr J Bruce

Mrs J Hendry

Mr L Fraser (remote)

Mr G MacKenzie (Chair)

Mr R Gale (remote)

Mr H Morrison (remote)

Mr A Graham

In attendance:

Mr A McKinnie, Strategic Lead - Waste Strategy and Operations

Mr S Graham, Project Manager, Strategic Improvement Team

Ms R Ross, Committee Officer

Mr G MacKenzie in the Chair

Business

1. Apologies for Absence

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Mr A Baldrey.

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 7 November 2023, which had been approved by the Communities and Place Committee on 28 November 2023, were **NOTED**.

4. Long-term Waste Management

There had been circulated Report No WSWG/1/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- in response to questions, it was confirmed that any future consideration of an Energy from Waste (EfW) facility would be dependent on the length of the future Waste Management Contract; the current Waste Management Contract would be in place until 2030 if the three-year extension was used; the next contract would need to be a longer-term solution; the Council was in a relatively strong position with the current arrangement as officers could choose the best time to go out for a new contract; there were several EfW projects in the pipeline elsewhere in Scotland which would ensure sufficient capacity for waste from Highland to be incinerated; and, in relation to negative publicity surrounding EfW, it was currently

the only available option for residual waste management, and it was important to focus on recycling to reduce carbon emissions;

- it was important to ensure that the Council was not adding to the vast amount of plastic being incinerated; and
- many members of the public believed that all their waste plastic was being incinerated or going to landfill so they needed to be educated on what happened to their recycling to ensure greater buy-in.

The Working Group **NOTED** that:-

- i. officers considered the most appropriate strategic approach for The Highland Council's long-term residual waste management to be one of seeking a long-term contract with a merchant service provider operating within Scotland. (A merchant provider was one which sold residual waste processing capacity within its facility to customers which might include local authorities and commercial organisations);
- ii. the feasibility study findings previously reported to the Working Group identified that the current medium-term merchant provider contract represented good value;
- iii. officers did not consider continuing to investigate the possibility of developing an Energy from Waste facility within the Highlands to be a suitable course of action;
- iv. the perspective of officers was based on the likelihood of a better cost outcome and more certainty of provision through using a merchant provider and these factors being more favourable for the planning and delivery of effective, strategic waste management operations;
- v. officers would ask the Communities and Place Committee to agree that the most appropriate long-term strategic direction for residual waste management was to tender for a merchant provider solution; and
- vi. subject to the Communities and Place Committee agreeing v. above, the Waste Service would seek, through tendering at the appropriate time, a long-term waste management solution through a merchant facility to succeed the current medium-term contract.

5. Waste Management Infrastructure

The Project Manager, Strategic Improvement Team, provided a verbal update on the three ongoing Waste Transfer Station projects, as follows:-

- the upgrades to the Waste Transfer Station at Seater in Caithness were due to conclude in mid-November. A frontage and roller doors were being added to the existing three-sided building which would keep recycling dry, allowing it to fetch higher prices;
- the construction of a new building on the site of the existing Waste Transfer Facility in Portree was due to start in January and finish by the end of May 2025; and
- the new Waste Transfer Station in Fort William, which formed part of the Capital Programme, was due to commence construction in January 2025, be finished in July 2025 and be operational by September 2025.

During discussion, information was sought, and provided, on how Waste Transfer Stations operated, and, in response to a question, it was confirmed that these three projects would conclude the Council's network of Waste Transfer Stations.

The Working Group **NOTED** the position.

6. Recycling Improvement Fund (RIF) Service Change

The Strategic Lead - Waste Strategy and Operations, provided a verbal update including the following main points:-

- the rollout of the new recycling service had commenced in April 2024 and, since then, over 90,000 households had been provided with new bins and service information;
- the feedback on the rollout had been very positive;
- there had been some issues with the rollout in Sutherland, which was ongoing;
- the early stages of the rollout in Caithness were going well;
- the rollout in Skye and Lochalsh and Lochaber would start in 2025 to tie in with the completion of the new Waste Transfer Stations;
- the Council had a new contract in place with Wyllie Recycling Ltd for the recycling of mixed plastic and metal containers. The containers were collected from Waste Transfer Stations and transported to a material recovery facility in Perth where they were sorted and separated into various material streams. The separated materials were then baled and transported to UK manufacturers to be made into new containers. The clear HDPE plastic was used to make new milk bottles and the clear PEP plastic was used to make water bottles; and
- for paper and cardboard recycling, the Council had a contract with Smurfit Westrock. Paper and card was transported from Waste Transfer Stations to a recycling facility in Glasgow where it was graded and baled. This was then transported to two paper recycling mills within the UK for processing into brown paper reels which were then transported to their 32 packaging plants and manufactured into high quality packaging products.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the project had been very successful, and progress so far had been excellent;
- the problems with the rollout in Sutherland were highlighted, especially where bins had been delivered to the wrong locations;
- information was sought, and provided, on glass recycling collections, difficulties with shared bins for blocks of flats, and the possibility of providing education on the recycling journey to schools;
- it was encouraging that wheelie bins issued 20 years ago were still in good condition;
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that additional funding had been requested from Zero Waste Scotland for an additional food waste vehicle;
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that the procurement process had started for two large item shredders, one for the Longman Waste Transfer Station and one for the Seater Waste Transfer Station; and
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that the online bin collection calendar had been updated as part of the Service Improvement Project.

The Working Group **NOTED** the position.

The meeting concluded at 11.15 am.