



NET ZERO: PLACE-BASED CO-ORDINATION PROGRAMME

Report by Chief Officer, Economic and Community Regeneration

PURPOSE

- 1.1 To seek endorsement to develop a Place-Based Net Zero Co-ordination Programme.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 An [Energy Developments Update](#) to the Comhairle in April 2024 summarised the significant pipeline of renewable energy developments proposed for the islands in future years, and the challenges and opportunities this could pose for the islands and for the Comhairle.
- 2.2 It outlined that a Major Developments Forum had been established to ensure co-ordination across the public and private sector. The report also proposed the establishment of a Major Developments Oversight Board within the Comhairle, overseeing the strategic and operational response to developments. The Major Development Forum is scheduled to meet in September and a meeting of the Major Developments Oversight Board will be convened thereafter.
- 2.3 Across the Highlands and Islands, local authorities are grappling with how to respond to renewable energy developments to achieve the best outcome for their communities across a range of fronts, while also meeting statutory obligations.
- 2.4 The Comhairle has received support from the Scottish Futures Trust (SFT) to consider new ways of working to respond to these challenges and initial propositions have emerged. The intention over the coming period would be to engage major stakeholders on the benefits of taking a place-based approach to forthcoming renewables investment and associated economic development in the islands.
- 2.5 Essentially the proposals would seek to draw in additional, and improve alignment of, resources. It is anticipated this would be required across the following phases: Consenting, Co-ordination, and Legacy, and would deliver a model to provide additional support in terms of Planning and Project Management resources for the public sector across these phases. Involvement from stakeholders additional to the Comhairle, including HIE and Scottish Government, is assumed.
- 2.6 The further development of these proposals would not address the pressing need for additional planning resource within the Comhairle and there remains a requirement to identify a solution to current service pressures.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 **It is recommended that the Comhairle endorse the development of a Place-Based Net Zero Co-ordination Programme.**

Contact Officer: Anne Murray, Chief Officer, Economic & Community Regeneration

Appendix: None

Background Papers: [Energy Developments Update](#), Sustainable Development Committee, April 2024

IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The following implications are applicable in terms of the Report.

Resource Implications	Implications/None
Financial	There are no immediate financial implications arising from agreement of the recommendations. The proposals seek to align existing partner resources and lever in additional funding.
Legal	The Comhairle has statutory responsibilities that it needs to fulfil in relation to the renewable energy projects that will be coming forward. The intention would be that this model would enhance organisational capacity to do so.
Staffing	Staff oversight to the development of the proposals will be required.
Assets and Property	None
Strategic Implications	Implications/None
Risk	Proposals seek to reduce operational and strategic risk to the Comhairle.
Equalities	None
Corporate Strategy	Fits with Corporate Strategy priorities in relation to strengthening the local economy and supporting the islands to reach national Net Zero targets.
Environmental Impact	There are no direct environmental implications arising from agreement of the recommendations.
Consultation	None

BACKGROUND

- 5.1 An [Energy Developments Update](#) to the Comhairle in April 2024 summarised the significant pipeline of renewable energy developments proposed for the islands in future years, and the challenges and opportunities this could pose for the islands and for the Comhairle.
- 5.2 Across the Highlands and Islands, local authorities are grappling with how to respond to renewable energy developments to achieve the best outcome for their communities across a range of fronts, while also meeting statutory obligations.

DETAIL

- 6.1 The Comhairle has received support from the Scottish Futures Trust (SFT) to consider new ways of working to respond to these challenges and initial propositions have emerged. The intention over the coming period would be to engage major stakeholders on the benefits of taking a place-based approach to forthcoming renewables investment and associated economic development in the islands. This would highlight the contribution that the Outer Hebrides is set to make to the delivery of UK and Scottish Government policies on net zero and economic growth, while also reinforcing that the scale of impact on local services, infrastructure and communities merits additional resourcing to co-ordinate activity in order to reduce risk, improve efficiency during implementation, and build positive legacy for island communities.
- 6.2 Essentially the proposals would seek to draw in additional, and improve alignment of, resources. It is anticipated this would be required across the following phases: Consenting, Co-ordination, and Legacy, and would deliver a model to provide additional support in terms of Planning and Project Management

resources for the public sector across these phases. Involvement from stakeholders additional to the Comhairle, including HIE and Scottish Government, is assumed.

- 6.3 The further development of these proposals would not address the pressing need for additional planning resource within the Comhairle and there remains a requirement to identify a solution to current service pressures.

CONCLUSION

- 7.1 SFT has a track record of engaging across the public and the private sector to develop delivery models that maximise the economic and community benefits of infrastructure investment. Member endorsement is sought to take forward proposals into more detailed discussions with Scottish Government and other potential programme partners and funders. Should feedback be encouraging, this will inform a detailed set of proposals for approval by Members. By offering a solution-based approach to challenges across the region, there is scope for the Outer Hebrides to develop a model that could be replicated elsewhere, so there is an element of first mover advantage to be gained.