

Financial Assessment of Motions: 9 March 2023

1. The horrendous spate of accidents and resultant fatalities on the single carriageway sections of the A9 has brought misery to families from across the country and beyond our Council area. Additionally the failure to upgrade this vital transport link has a huge, negative, economic impact to the economy of the whole Highlands.

As a result this Council deplores the decision of the Scottish Government to delay the dualling of the A9 between Inverness and Perth and asks that the Transport Minister immediately publishes a revised timetable for the completion of the works.

Signed: Mr B Lobban, Mr R Jones

S95 officer assessment of financial implications.

This motion is not anticipated to have any financial implication to the Council.

2. Carbon Emissions Land Tax (CELT)

This Council notes that:

Scotland's land should be a net carbon sink, removing millions of tonnes more greenhouse gases than it produces. Instead, because of the way it is used and managed, our land is a net polluter, emitting almost 8 million tonnes more CO₂ equivalent per year into the atmosphere than it removes.

Even when farming is excluded, Scotland's vast land area of moorland, mountains and peatlands is a net emitter of 500,000 tonnes of CO₂ equivalent annually.

Restoring 75% of Scotland's degraded peatland and allowing native woodland restoration to reach 20% of its maximum potential expansion in Scotland's could reduce our climate emissions by 6 MtCO₂ annually – more than is produced today by all the country's cars.

Taking bold action now to restore peatlands at scale and enable the natural expansion of native woodlands, is critical to reach Scotland's climate targets.

The Carbon Emissions Land Tax (CELT) proposed by environmental NGOs, is a powerful tool to accelerate changes in land management practices and encourage practices that maximise natural carbon capture, by enabling Councils to tax large landowners based on their estimated positive or negative land carbon emissions.

A CELT will also bring in much-needed additional revenue for rural Councils, which could be used to fund local carbon reduction and nature restoration projects.

Changes in land management practices will also improve biodiversity and habitat diversity, help to mitigate flood risks, improve water quality and public health, and create many local rural jobs strengthening local communities and diversifying their economies.

This Council therefore:

1. Supports the principle of a Carbon Emissions Land Tax and recognises it as a valuable policy to create positive land management changes at pace and scale across rural Scotland.
2. Calls on the Scottish Government to include a Carbon Emissions Land Tax in the Land Reform Bill so that Scotland's land can play its full part in combatting the climate and ecological crises.
3. Agrees to become a member of the Carbon Emissions Land Tax Coalition.

Signed: Mrs T Robertson, Ms K Willis, Dr C Birt, Mrs A MacLean

S95 officer assessment of financial implications.

There may be financial implications arising should Scottish Government implement a CELT as the motion calls for. The implication would ultimately depend on the detail of the Legislation and the Tax. The Council would expect that the financial implications of legislation progressing through Parliament would be subject to consultation with affected parties, and this would provide the opportunity for assessment at that time.

3. Council agrees with SNP MSP Fergus Ewing that the Scottish Government's failure to dual the A9 by 2025 amounts to "a betrayal of the Highlands," and supports his call for a parliamentary enquiry into the mishandling of the A9 improvement programme by the SNP/Green government.

Signed: Mr C Aitken, Mr A Christie, Mr R Gale, Mr A MacDonald, Ms M Nollan, Mrs T Robertson, Mrs A MacLean, Ms M MacCallum

S95 officer assessment of financial implications.

This motion is not anticipated to have any financial implication to the Council.

4. No such Thing As Waste

Noting the decision of Communities and Place to aim to implement measures to reduce the amount of residual household waste being collected;

Noting also that every kilo diverted from the waste stream saves the Council money;

Council resolves to form a stakeholder group consisting of members from the third sector repair, and reuse network, the Highland commercial reuse sector, Council officials and Circular Communities Scotland, to agree what is needed to grow the sector and increase repair and reuse in the Highlands, reporting back on progress and recommendations to the Communities and Place Committee;

And further, Council resolves to increase its communications on what can be reused, repaired or recycled, where, with an information campaign aimed at householders, including, but not limited to, increasing uptake of the Inverness food waste collection service.

Signed: Mr C Ballance, Ms K Willis

S95 officer assessment of financial implications.

This motion is not anticipated to have any financial implication to the Council. The Council on 2 March agreed as part of its 2023/24 revenue budget, funding of £0.275m which “will support the implementation of these major service changes including an information campaign across communities and schools to raise awareness of ways in which we can all reduce all types of waste; recycle and reuse more; and take better care of our resources.”

5. Local contracts for local Contractors

Noting the anticipated increase in installing renewable generation, both by public and private bodies,

and noting the requirements of Community Wealth Building that as much procurement spend should be directed locally as possible,

This Council asks the Convenor of Economy and Infrastructure Committee to set up a series of meetings between the relevant officers from the Council, UHI and HIE to investigate ways of enabling Highland-based construction companies, including sole traders, to bid for renewable installation contracts, including by training in renewable installation, overcoming the financial barriers to getting MCS accreditation, and secondly to make it easier for Highland based construction businesses to tender for public body renewable contracts in the Highlands.

Signed: Mr R Mackintosh, Ms K Willis

S95 officer assessment of financial implications.

This motion is not anticipated to have any financial implication to the Council, beyond the officer time to meet with the relevant parties named above, and any further officer work preparing for or arising from those meetings.

- 6.** With the drive to net zero very prominent in our minds it was disappointing to learn that at the E&I committee it was agreed that the electricity charges for EV charging would increase from £0.30p to £0.70p per unit. This increase equates to a rise of 130%.

It is therefore not surprising that this has resulted in an outcry by EV users across the Highlands and serves as a significant disincentive to promote the use and indeed the purchase of electric vehicles in favour of fossil fuel powered vehicles, going against the ethos of promoting the use of green transport and the green agenda. That being the case this council commits to overturning that decision and instead imposing an increase in line with inflation of 10%.

Signed: Mr R Gale, Mrs T Robertson, Mrs A MacLean

S95 officer assessment of financial implications.

This motion will result in financial implications for the Council, reducing income levels from that which had been agreed through the decision of the E&I Committee and with a resulting implication for the Council's revenue budget.

7. Council notes:-

- That the number of police officers in the Highlands & Island Division is at the lowest ever since 2017 to just 624 full time officers.
- The number of officers in the dedicated national road policing unit which has bases at Fort William and Dingwall, has fallen from 596 in 2014/15 to 556 in 2021/22, recognises this coincides with a 64.3% increase in Road Traffic Accidents (RTAs) between 1st April 2021 and 31st December 2022. In the Highland and Islands Division has the highest deaths on the A9 in two decades.
- That for the year ending September 2022 recorded crime in Scotland excluding Coronavirus related regulations, has increased by 6%.
- The centralisation of Police Scotland has deteriorated the visibility the visibility of local Policing provision in the Highland and Islands as a result in failing to meet the increasing needs of the public.

Council agrees that the Leader of Highland Council write to the First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Justice requesting an urgent review of Police Scotland resources in the Highlands and in particular the need for 24/7 police station provision to avoid delays in 101 service to restore public confidence.

Signed: Ms J McEwan, Mrs T Robertson

S95 officer assessment of financial implications.

This motion is not anticipated to have any financial implication to the Council.