



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL CLIMATE CHANGE CABINET STEERING GROUP

Minutes of the meeting of the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group held on Monday, 18 November 2019 at 2.30 pm at the Committee Room 1, The Pavilions, Cambrian Park, Clydach Vale, Tonypany, CF40 2XX.

County Borough Councillors - Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group Members in attendance:-

Councillor R Lewis (Chair)

Councillor M Webber Councillor M Norris
Councillor A Crimmings Councillor S Belzak
Councillor E Webster

Invited External Representatives of the Steering Group:-

Mr C Harries - Friends of the Earth
Mr I Thomas - Welcome to our Woods

Officers in attendance:-

Mr C Bradshaw, Chief Executive
Mr C Hanagan, Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication
Mr N Wheeler, Group Director – Prosperity, Development & Frontline Services
Mr P Mee, Director, Public Health, Protection & Community Services
Mr B Davies, Director of Finance & Digital Services
Mr D Powell, Director of Corporate Estates
Lawson, Performance Manager
Ms E Dean, Environment Planner
Mr R Wistow, Ecologist

1 Welcome

The Chair welcomed everyone to the inaugural meeting of the Climate Change Steering Group.

The Chair asked Members to introduce themselves and noted that the Steering Group will provide a forum for the Council to become more ambitious through resetting targets and challenging how the Council operates and approaches challenges in the future to become a Carbon Neutral Council by 2030.

2 Declaration of Interest

In accordance with the Council's code of conduct, there were no declarations of interest made pertaining to the agenda.

3 Terms of Reference

Members were asked to approve the Group's Terms of Reference. The Service Director of Communications & Democratic Services referred Members to the

attached Terms of Reference and noted that the terms were agreed by Cabinet on the 17th of October 2019. Members were advised that the Steering Group includes a cross party membership and it was established under the Leader's scheme of delegation.

The Service Director reminded Members that the aim of the Group is to secure a consensus around the Council's future approach to become a Carbon Neutral Council by 2030. The Cabinet Steering Group has been established to ensure an Authority-wide approach to issues of climate change and the Council becoming a carbon neutral organisation by 2030. Its membership will provide strategic direction and will initially consider any local policies regarding climate change and associated matters. Its membership will consider how the Council can support changes in residents' behaviour, to deliver the necessary actions to respond proactively to climate change and in doing so, support business, communities and residents to reduce their own environmental impact.

The Service Director informed Members that the Cabinet Steering Group will provide the opportunity to proactively discuss and progress the delivery of actions, which emanate from the Corporate Plan, which aims to meet climate change challenges and reduce the Council's carbon footprint.

The Service Director also stressed the importance of inviting local interest groups to attend meetings of the Steering Group to ensure that residents and communities are fully and directly involved in shaping its work.

Discussions ensued and a Member noted that there is a significant difference between 'Net Zero' and 'Zero Carbon' and stressed the importance of this distinction going forward. The Service Director reminded Members that the terms of reference are not set in stone and can be amended accordingly.

Following discussion, Members **RESOLVED** to approve the Terms of Reference of the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group.

4 Future Work Programme

The Chief Executive presented his report to Members in respect of the Steering Group's Forward Work Programme.

Members were reminded that the Council's Cabinet revisited its commitment to becoming a Carbon Neutral Council, and set an ambitious target of achieving this by 2030, along with the residents and businesses of the County Borough.

The Chief Executive informed Members that the work programme sets an ambitious target and emphasised that the Council welcomes input from other organisations and individuals in helping to achieve the 2030 target.

In respect of frequency, Members were advised that meetings will be held on a monthly basis to provide the Steering Group with the opportunity to consider actions that are needed by the Council in respect of the Corporate Plan and the 2030 Net Zero targets.

The Chief Executive explained that the external members of the Steering Group could also agenda items for consideration, and that space had been allocated in the March meeting to consider these items. If the two external members wished to bring forward any agenda items, the Council officers would be prepared to work with the two members to undertake any research or write draft reports to

support them. The Chief Executive welcomed their advice as to the best way to engage a wide range of community groups that had a direct interest in protecting the local environment.

Discussions ensued and a Member noted that the Council has to empower its communities. The Member emphasised the importance of sharing knowledge and models of good practice, particularly the importance of passing knowledge on to the next generation. Members were referred to the community in Rhydyfelin and how residents have been encouraged to plant over 7000 bulbs in the area during the 2019/20 Municipal year.

In respect of the Council's recycling policy, the Welsh Government has set each local authority the target of recycling at least 70% of its household waste by 2025. Members were informed that the Council is already very close to achieving this target. However, the Council wants to increase this level of ambition to at least 80% of all household waste by 2030. The Group Director- Prosperity, Development & Frontline Services emphasised that the Council cannot reach the 80% target without the commitment of residents throughout the County Borough.

Discussions continued and a number of Members emphasised the opportunities available to empower local communities. The Chief Executive voiced his agreement and stressed the importance of publicising the Council's ongoing work to become Net Zero. Members agreed that the Council will need to work collaboratively with local community groups and town and community councillors. The Service Director of Communications and Democratic Services also stressed the importance of involving community youth forums. The Group agreed that education and engagement will be a key part of the Council's strategy.

In respect of renewable energy, a Member noted that there is currently no correlation between energy consumption and GDP. Another Member stressed the importance of managing resources for carbon consumption and informed the Group that good management of the forestry is how we will secure more carbon.

A Member cautioned that there will be elements that are outside of the Group's remit and that the Group should focus its work and take a realistic approach.

Following discussion, Members **RESOLVED** to agree draft four month work programme to the 31st of March 2020.

5 Biodiversity Duty

Members received a presentation, in conjunction with the report of the Director, Public Health, Protection and Community Services, which updated Members on the progress made in discharging the Council's Biodiversity Duty.

Members were reminded that the Council is required to report progress in the discharge of its biodiversity duty to Welsh Government. The Director referred Members to Appendix 1 & 2 of the report, which presented the current position and Members were asked to consider and approve the report for submission to Welsh Government.

Members received a presentation in respect of biodiversity from the Council's Ecologist and discussions ensued.

The Director, Public Health, Protection and Community Services introduced the Council's Ecologist who with the aid of Power Point highlighted the key areas of the local plan, which set out progress with the implementation of the biodiversity duty in Rhondda Cynon Taf and its significance on both a local and national level. The presentation included reference to the Council's work relating to pollinators and how the Council owned land, which is a rich resource of grass flowers and grasses, is managed.

Following the presentation, the Chair thanked the Ecologist for providing such in depth information and noted that the presentation shows how our landscape has changed over time.

Discussions ensued and a number of Members noted that biodiversity needs to be managed and Members stressed the importance of creating a sense of ownership in local communities. Members agreed that Social Media will play a crucial role in getting the message out to local residents. The Group Director-Prosperity, Development & Frontline Services stressed the importance of getting an appropriate balance in respect of the Council's wider policy and noted the importance of creating a sustainable management solution.

A Member raised a query in respect of the significant loss of insects throughout RCT over recent years. The Ecologist noted that there has been significant loss, however, he emphasised that the climate in RCT is more temperate and consequently the impact in RCT has been less than in other areas.

Following the detailed presentation made by the Council's Ecologist, who responded to many questions raised, Members praised the work being undertaken throughout RCT.

Following discussion, Members **RESOLVED:-**

1. To endorse the update report on the actions undertaken to further the 'Biodiversity Duty' by RCT; and,
2. To agree for the report to be submitted to Welsh Government, subject to the comments proposed by the Climate Change Steering Group.

6 Corporate Estates Energy and Carbon Reduction Update

The Director of Corporate Estates provided Members with a report in respect of relevant developments to Energy and Carbon Reduction.

Members were reminded that the report should be considered as part of the main 'Discussion Paper- Work Programme for the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group'.

The Director reminded Members that the Energy Invest to Save programme for Financial Year 2020/21 is in the process of being finalised but is envisaged to commit the Council to invest at least a further £1.4m on energy and carbon reduction improvements.

Discussions ensued and a Member referred the Group to the considerable

investment that has been made by the Council into more Energy efficient Street Lighting. Members were reminded that all Street lights in the County Borough have now been converted to their LED equivalent , and this, along with part night and dimming policies, have resulted in a 75% reduction in the energy used.

Another Member referred the Group to the £7m that has been invested by the Council in Energy Reduction measures and the estimated energy reductions of over 18m MW of Energy. The Member commented that it would be useful to receive the MW hours that have been saved as a direct result of energy reduction measures.

Discussions continued and a Member emphasised the importance of showing the public what measures have been taken over the past ten years by Rhondda Cynon Taf to invest in energy reduction measures. The Member referred the Group to the Council's policy of agile working and the Council's paper light approach. In this respect, a Member queried what steps have been taken by the Council to install electric charging points throughout the County Borough. The Director of Corporate Estates informed the Group that the Council has added in new Electric Vehicle installation charging points for every new Council project going forward.

In respect of agile working, a Member questioned whether an increase use of IT equipment was good for the environment. The Member commented that agile working could possibly result in an increased use of energy. Discussions ensued and a number of Members agreed that overall, agile working uses less energy consumption and is a positive step towards energy and carbon reduction.

Members noted the need for the Council to promote the work that has already been done by the Authority in respect of carbon and energy reduction and emphasised the importance of sharing knowledge and information. It was noted that RCT are the first Local Authority to form a Climate Change Steering Group to specifically tackle the Climate Change emergency and agreed that as a Local Authority proactive steps need to be taken going forward.

The Group Director- Prosperity, Development & Frontline Services informed Members that considerable work is being done in respect of the Council's fleet policy and that the Council are using pool cars and hybrid vehicles. However, the Group Director also emphasised that technology in this area is still being developed and that there is still a long way to go to tackle carbon emissions. In respect of low carbon vehicle infrastructure, the Service Director of Communications & Democratic Services noted that the Steering Group will monitor infrastructure and the Group's recommendations will be reported back to the Cabinet.

Following discussion, Members **RESOLVED** to note the update in respect of Corporate Estates Energy and Carbon Reduction.

7 Community use of underused/vacant RCT land

The Director of Corporate Estates introduced his report in respect of a streamlined process to allow Communities to apply for and use underused/vacant Council owned land for the purposes of garden use in support of the Council's Climate Change Strategy.

Members were reminded that the Council receives many requests from

members of the public to use to use small parcels of land for various forms of gardening operations. These requests are from both individuals and groups and the land in question is usually small in nature and unused, sitting vacant and often attracting unwelcome uses such as fly-tipping.

The Director advised that in order to protect the Council's position in terms of Insurance cover; Regaining possession of the land at a future date; Mis-use/inappropriate use of the land; the land and/or items placed upon it falling into disrepair, It is important that a formal document is entered into with the third party no matter how small the land parcel but it would be beneficial to create a less detailed, streamlined process for this area of land use.

Members were informed that the procedure currently in place has been reviewed with the above in mind and a simpler application form has been produced to streamline the scrutiny of the applicant(s) ability to take on the project.

Discussions ensued and Members emphasised the importance of involving residents in the process and giving ownership to communities.

Following discussion, Members **RESOLVED** to:-

1. Agree to consult with external parties to consider the contents of the proposed procedure and incorporate feedback/comments where appropriate; and,
2. To receive a future report to formally recommend to Cabinet a new procedure to simplify the process for Community use of underused/vacant Council owned land.

8 Chair's closing remarks

The Chair thanked Members for attending and confirmed that the Climate Change Steering Group will continue to meet on a monthly basis.

This meeting closed at 16.16pm

**COUNCILLOR R LEWIS
CHAIR.**