



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL

Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday, 14 October 2020 at 5.00 pm.

County Borough Councillors - Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members in attendance:-

Councillor M Adams (Chair)

Councillor J Bonetto	Councillor P Jarman
Councillor H Boggis	Councillor J Brencher
Councillor E Stephens	Councillor L Walker
Councillor G Caple	Councillor M Griffiths
Councillor A Cox	Councillor G Hughes
Councillor W Lewis	

Officers in attendance

Mr C Hanagan, Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication
Mr N Wheeler, Group Director - Prosperity, Development & Frontline Services
Mr R Waters, Service Director Frontline Services
Mr O Griffiths, Flood, Water and Tip Risk Manager
Mr A Stone, Strategic Projects Manager

Natural Resources Wales

Mr M Evans, Head of Operations South Wales Central

Cabinet Members in attendance

Leader of the Council, County Borough Councillor A Morgan
Deputy Leader of the Council, County Borough Councillor M Webber

Other Members in Attendance as Observers

Councillor E Griffiths
Councillor J Williams
Councillor R Yeo

Co-opted Member in Attendance

Mr J Fish, Voting Elected Parent / Governor Representative

69 Declaration of Interest

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, there were no declarations made pertaining to the agenda.

70 Apologies

Apologies of absence were received from County Borough Councillors W Jones

and M Forey.

71 Minutes

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 30th July and the 12th August as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

Councillor Jarman queried the resolution in the last paragraph of the minutes from the 12th August and sought clarification as to the next step in the process. The Director of Communications & Democratic Services confirmed that the matter will be for Mr Powell, Director, Corporate Estates, to decide in consultation with the appropriate Cabinet Member and that, as yet, the matter hasn't been determined.

72 Consideration of the Impact of Flooding in RCT During 2020

The Chair indicated that the agenda would be dealt with out of sequence and that agenda item 4 would be dealt with first followed by agenda item 3 respectively.

The Service Director of Communications & Democratic Services presented his report in respect of the impact of flooding in RCT during 2020. The Service Director advised Members that the purpose of the report is to provide Members of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee with the opportunity to consider information relating to the severe flooding which took place across the County Borough during 2020. Members were reminded that this process will also provide the opportunity to contribute to the subsequent development of statutory reporting requirements by the Council (as the flood management authority).

The Service Director emphasised that the process proposes a mechanism to learn the views of Elected Members, whose electoral divisions were impacted by these flooding events.

The Flood, Water and Tip Risk Manager proceeded to illustrate his presentation to Members in respect of the impact of Storm Dennis and to inform Members of the Council's response and recovery. The officer gave a presentation which covered the following issues;

- Storm Dennis;
- Event Preparation;
- Impact of the Event; and,
- Response and Recovery

Following the presentation, the Leader of the Council, Councillor A. Morgan, thanked the officer for providing a detailed presentation and acknowledged the large scale impact of Storm Dennis on communities in RCT. The Leader acknowledged that the events are getting more severe and thanked Council officers and the senior leadership team for their hard work and dedication during extremely challenging times. The Leader informed Members that additional resources were brought in prior to Storm Dennis, however, the scale of the storm was unprecedented. The Leader wished to acknowledge the community involvement and to thank all residents for their help in the recovery process. Members were informed that in respect of the financial response, the Council

initially received £2.5M from the emergency assistance fund, around £2M Council resources were used (of which £800,000 was linked to the grants given to householders and businesses). The Leader also confirmed that the Council has received a letter from Welsh Government underwriting up to £6.5M towards the cost of damaged infrastructure and it was emphasised that the Welsh Government is still appealing to the UK Government for additional funding. Furthermore, the Leader confirmed that the Council has also recently secured £2.5M from Welsh Government to progress the work in Tylerstown. Committee Members were informed that the range of damage across the County Borough will be in the region of £82.5M and that the Council will continue to appeal to the UK Government for additional resources.

Following the update from the Leader of the Council, Members were provided with the opportunity to ask questions. The Chair began by passing on a message of congratulations from Members of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee to the Group Director – Prosperity, Development & Frontline Services for his award for the British Empire's Medal on the Queen's honour's List. The Group Director thanked the Chair and assured Members of the hard work that will continue in respect of recovery following Storm Dennis.

Following discussion, the Chair introduced Mr Michael Evans from Natural Resources Wales. Mr Evans confirmed that NRW have a series of significant reports to release, with particular regard to lessons learned. Mr Evans emphasised that February 2020 was the wettest on record and included up to four times the monthly rainfall. Mr Evans wished to place on record his sympathies and thoughts to the victims of the flooding and their families. Mr Evans emphasised the severity of Storm Dennis and its unprecedented nature and stressed that the assets at NRW could not have coped with that scale of flooding. Members were informed that the reports are still embargoed but that NRW are meeting with Senior Officers at the Council and they will be able to be released shortly. Unfortunately, Mr Evans acknowledged that even though the event was unprecedented, it is likely that similar events will happen more frequently due to climate change. Mr Evans thanked Council staff for the partnership working during Storm Dennis and emphasised his hope of continuing with this partnership in the future.

Discussions ensued and the Chair asked whether NRW or the Council have liaised with insurance companies to discuss measures that can be taken to prevent it happening again. The Flood, Water and Tip Risk Manager informed Members that the first priority of the Council is to understand the impact of the flooding.

Councillor Jarman sought clarification as to whether the tip in Tylerstown was ever the subject of a land reclamation scheme and whether it was ever the intention that any remedial work would be carried out prior to the land slip incident in 2020. Councillor Jarman emphasised her hope that adequate planning and resources would be in place to cope with the coming winter, whether it be sandbags to deal with flooding or road salt to deal with icy conditions. Councillor Jarman also asked whether NRW will commit to tree planting in de-forested areas of land owned by them in RCT as part of dealing with a changing climate. Councillor Jarman also queried whether it would have been beneficial to invite Dwr Cymru to the meeting to respond to concerns that the flooding was exacerbated by failing pumps and drainage managed by Dwr Cymru.

In respect of the Tylorstown tip, the Chair clarified that the area referred to is not the Tylerstown Tip itself but a slightly different area known locally by a different name. He stated that the Tylorstown Tip area has never been subject to the reclamation scheme as there has never been an issue there as far as he is aware. The Service Director, Frontline Services confirmed that to his knowledge there has never been a reclamation scheme in the area referred to by Councillor Jarman, however, the Service Director confirmed that the area is identified by the Council and the coal Authority and inspected on that basis. The Service Director further confirmed that the Council has had extensive reviews with Welsh Government since the events of Storm Dennis in February. The meetings are jointly chaired by the First Minister for Wales and the Secretary of State for Wales where these issues are being raised and progress updates are received. Members were informed that the Coal Authority is compiling a database of all the tips across the Welsh coal fields and they've adopted the Council's risk strategy as a standard risk assessment process for all those tips. The Group Director, Prosperity, Development & Frontline Services also informed the Committee that he has a meeting on Tuesday morning with officers from NRW in respect of tree planting across the County Borough and will be feeding back the outcome of that meeting to the Climate Change Steering Group.

In respect of the query raised by Councillor Jarman in relation to Welsh Water, the Chair sought confirmation from the Service Director of Democratic Services & Communications as to whether they would be invited to the next meeting of the Working Group. It was confirmed that if Members feel that this would add value to the discussion then it is something the Council could facilitate at the next meeting. Following discussion, Members agreed that Welsh Water would be invited to the next inquiry session.

Discussions continued and Councillor Caple queried the connection between the flooding in lower Trehafod and in Britannia and sought clarification on the connection between making sure the culverts are clear and the efficiency of the pumping stations. The Flood, Water and Tip Risk Manager confirmed that the Council is currently continuing with its investigation into the flooding in this location and will be looking into any secondary or contributing factors. The Flood, Water and Tip Risk Manager assured Members that as soon as they have any outcomes, they will of course provide feedback to the Committee.

****At this point in the meeting, the Leader, Councillor Andrew Morgan, provided Committee Members with his apologies as he needed to leave to attend a COVID meeting****

Discussions ensued and Councillor Cox commented that due to climate change, events such as Storm Dennis can no longer be labelled "unprecedented" and that unfortunately, these events are likely to happen far more frequently. Consequently, Councillor Cox expressed his view that the Council's response to these events has to be clear. Councillor Cox also wished to place on record his thanks and gratitude to Council staff in respect of their response to the crisis. However, Councillor Cox emphasised that we must look at lessons learned and at what steps we can take to improve. Councillor Cox sought clarification as to the Council's escalation pattern in terms of how it responds during a crisis. The Member also queried what activities were taking place in the three months prior to Storm Dennis such as what activities were being undertaken to clear the culverts. In respect of category C and D tips, Councillor Cox asked whether the works have been scheduled and what the level of risk in those tips presents to communities. The Flood, Water and Tip Risk Manager advised Members that

prior to Storm Dennis, we did experience Storm Callum and Storm Donna and that RCT has experienced 25,000 storm events since 2018. The Flood, Water and Tip Risk Manager assured Members that the Council has been undertaking a review of its responses and undertaking winter preparation works. The Flood, Water and Tip Risk Manager also confirmed that in respect of category C and D, the Council undertakes inspections on a monthly basis, a three monthly basis and a six monthly basis depending on their status. The Group Director, Prosperity, Development & Frontline Services also wished to place on record his respect and admiration for all Council staff who worked extremely hard during unprecedented times. In respect of the red warning, the Group Director, Prosperity, Development & Frontline Services informed Members that the Council's procedure is to monitor the weather forecast and to use that information to decide on the appropriate resources. Members were reassured that this is monitored closely day and night to ensure that appropriate action is put into place. The Group Director, Prosperity, Development & Frontline Services emphasised the unprecedented nature of Storm Dennis and advised Members that this was the first time that the Council needed to call in help from other Council areas.

The Service Director, Frontline Services further informed Members that the Council has spent approximately £80,000 since the February floods on inspection of tip assets. Members were also reassured that there are currently four different sets of contractors out on sites inspecting the tips and drainage etc and The Service Director emphasised that all tips would have been inspected several times since the February flooding events. Mr Michael Evans, NRW, also advised Members that even though NRW had 5 days' notice that a storm was likely, due to changing weather patterns it is difficult to pinpoint how much rain will fall and where.

Discussions ensued and Councillor Brencher asked if there were any extraordinary circumstances that could account for a sudden change in river behaviour in the February floods and sought clarification and sought clarification as to whether this was part of the investigation by NRW. Councillor Brencher also echoed Councillor Jarman's earlier comments in respect of tree cutting across the County Borough and would like to see a commitment on this from the Welsh Government. Councillor Brencher also noted that during Storm Dennis, sandbags took a while to arrive and Councillor Brencher sought reassurance that steps have been taken to stop this happening in the future. The Flood, Water and Tip Risk Manager reassured Members that in respect of the flood water coming up through the floor, this will form a part of the Council's investigation and data will be collected from residents. Mr Evans, NRW, informed Members that there were no reservoir openings during that time and that this has also been confirmed with Welsh Water. Mr Evans emphasised the intensity of the rainfall and emphasised that it reached the level of the river Taff extremely quickly. In respect of the trees, Mr Evans informed Members that they were planned to be cut and that there was a statutory duty to clear that area. However, Mr Evans emphasised that regardless of this, flooding would have been inevitable. In terms of cropping, Mr Evans assured Members that NRW will be looking at doing their regimes differently in the future and that this will be dealt with in NRW's reports.

In respect of sandbags, the Group Director, Prosperity, Development & Frontline Services informed Members that the Council has invested in a new style sandbag and that these have already been given out to residents in Pentre. These new style sandbags act as a deterrent to stop the water getting in.

Discussions continued and Councillor Hughes wished to thank Officers at the Council, NRW and Welsh Water for their hard work during the unprecedented event. Councillor Hughes emphasised the unprecedented scale of the event and felt that whilst it is important to take all preventative measures, there is nothing that could ever completely eliminate the risk of further flooding. Councillor Hughes queries whether Welsh Government will be looking to provide financial assistance to residents in identified areas and commented that all Members should lobby the UK Government for further funding to support the repair works following the storm.

The Strategic Projects Manager informed Members that flood risk management is not concerned with just physical flood defences but rather a whole host of flood management and support resources to deal with unprecedented storms and flooding which cannot always be prevented.

Discussions continued and Councillor Stephens raised concerns that flooding in her ward may have been exacerbated by blocked drains and uncut brambles and foliage affecting water courses and drainage from the mountains. Councillor Stephens noted that with fewer Council resources and staff as a result of COVID-19 and historical streamlining, there are concerns that this will continue to be a problem going forward. The Group Director, Prosperity, Development & Frontline Services assured Members that there is no issue in respect of staffing levels and that COVID lockdown measures would have no effect on the staffing situation as these staff are classed as "key workers". The Group Director, Prosperity, Development & Frontline Services advised Members that a regular inspection regime is in place in respect of culverts and drains and that issues are identified and rectified on a continuous basis.

A further query was raised by Councillor Griffiths concerning construction and property applications on flood plains across RCT. The Flood, Water and Tip Risk Manager informed Members that under the Flood & Water Management Act, the Risk Management Authority defers to NRW concerning flood Plains around rivers and that RCT Council will deal with surface runoff and site discharge management as part of the planning process to ensure that developments mirror the natural water discharge and runoff rates of the site prior to development.

Mr Evans, NRW, confirmed that the Welsh Government policy dictates flood mapping and that the decision on the planning remains with RCT Council not NRW.

Councillor Bonetto also raised her concerns in respect of flood plains and sought reassurance as to what measures are in place for houses built on flood plains. Mr Evans, NRW, agreed that Nantgarw is on a flood plain and informed Members that NRW are remodelling the Taff river mapping from Pontypridd down to the centre of Cardiff based on new measurements and new information. Mr Evans assured Members that NRW are looking at improving their resilience to flooding but emphasised that there is no easy solution to dealing with the issues in Nantgarw as the introduction of further flood defences will simply move the flooding risk to communities further along the river.

The Chair then invited second questions only from Members.

Councillor Stephens asked for confirmation that there had been no cutbacks to the maintenance programme for culverts and drains across RCT. The Group

Director, Prosperity, Development & Frontline Services reassured Members that the programme continues unchanged and that there was no reduction in resources or regularity.

Councillor Jarman queried how much of the current drainage infrastructure in RCT was still in use from the Victorian era. The Flood, Water and Tip Risk Manager informed Members that the infrastructure report identified over 700km of drainage assets and water courses across the County but the focus had been on identifying responsibilities, locations, routes etc and information was not readily or easily available on the age of these assets. The Flood, Water and Tip Risk Manager commented that the existing infrastructure ranges in age from modern to Victorian construction.

Following discussion, Members **RESOLVED:**

1. To acknowledge the contents of the information presented by the local authority's Group Director for Prosperity, Development & Frontline Services;
2. Establish a scrutiny inquiry session to consider the views of Elected Members who represent those communities impacted; and
3. Agree to subsequently consider the Council's assessment, as the statutory flooding authority, taking consideration of the information provided through the scrutiny enquiry session.

73 Cabinet & Scrutiny Work Programmes 2020-2021

The Service Director of Communications & Democratic Services presented his report in order to provide Members of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee with a work programme for the Municipal Year 2020/21.

Members were asked to consider future scrutiny topics since it established its initial 3 month work programme which focused on the Council's COVID-19 response and recovery.

The Service Director of Communications & Democratic Services also informed Members that it may be necessary over the next three months to provide some flexibility in the Forward Work Programme to consider the Local Government Settlement Bill. Furthermore, Members were reminded that the Welsh Government consultation in respect of Corporate Joint Committee closes in January and that this will also need to be factored into the Work Programme.

The Chair, Councillor M. Adams, also informed Members that the LDP Members Steering Group will take place shortly and that recommendations will come back to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee in due course.

Councillor Webber emphasised the need for Scrutiny to be flexible and wished to

place on record her heartfelt sympathies to the victims of the flooding in RCT but also her gratitude to all Councillors for their hard work during such an unprecedented event.

Councillor Brencher raised a queried whether the implications of Brexit would also be coming as an agenda item to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee. The Service Director of Communications & Democratic Services advised Members that this is something for Committee Members to determine. The Chair reminded Members that this will only be the Work Programme for the initial 3 months and that until the details are clear on Brexit, it will be difficult to factor this into the Forward Work Programme. Members agreed with this proposal.

Councillor Jarman noted her agreement with having a flexible work programme, however, Councillor Jarman also expressed her disappointment that the Overview & Scrutiny Committee were not given the opportunity to pre-scrutinise a Cabinet report titled '21 Century Schools and Colleges Programme – Mutual Investment Model' - considered at its 24th September meeting. Councillor Jarman queried why such a significant item had not been included as a stand-alone item in the Cabinet Forward Work Programme and had therefore not been drawn to the attention of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee Members. The Service Director of Communications & Democratic Services informed Members that there was a tight deadline within which the Council could respond, however, the Service Director advised Members that the new model could be identified today for pre-scrutiny in the future. The Service Director explained that the timescales were particularly restrictive in terms of Welsh Government requirements, however, he also emphasised that matters are still in a very early stage and that there will be many reports to come forward to Cabinet in the future where there will be opportunity for Scrutiny to add value.

Councillor Jarman stated that the main purpose of the report was for RCT Council to join in a Strategic Partnership agreement with Welsh Government and that this is a significant change to how schools in RCT will be funded. Councillor Jarman emphasised her concern that a new model of funding has been agreed without prior approval of Elected Members. The Chair explained that as and when funding becomes available, the Overview & Scrutiny Committee will then have the opportunity to add value to the discussion.

Discussion ensued and Mr Fish, the Elected Parent/Governor Representative, noted his agreement with Councillor Jarman and expressed his concern on behalf of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee. Furthermore, Mr Fish sought clarification as to when there would be the opportunity for cross cutting across the Scrutiny committees, particularly in respect of COVID and educational issues. The Service Director of Communications & Democratic Services agreed on the importance of this approach, however, he emphasised the importance of avoiding duplication of the work.

Following discussion, Members **RESOLVED** to acknowledge the contents of the proposed draft Overview & Scrutiny Work Programme for the 2020/21 Municipal Year (October –December 2020), attached as Appendix 1 to the report.

74 Urgent Business

There was no urgent business to consider.

75 Chair's Review and Close

The Chair summarised the key recommendations and outcomes of the meeting and thanked Members for attending and for engaging in a constructive and detailed discussion.

This meeting closed at 7.15 pm

**Cllr M Adams
Chairman**