

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2017-2018

**PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY, COMMUNITIES
AND PROSPERITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

12th DECEMBER 2017

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR
PUBLIC HEALTH, PROTECTION & COMMUNITY
SERVICES**

Agenda Item No. 3

**THE ENVIRONMENT ACT
(WALES) 2015 BIODIVERSITY
DUTY AND THE EXAMPLE OF
POLLINATORS**

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 In March 2016 the Environment (Wales) Act came in to force. Its purpose is to secure healthy, resilient and productive ecosystems in Wales, while still meeting the challenges of creating jobs, housing and infrastructure. The Act provides a framework for a more integrated approach to managing natural resources, ensuring that long-term sustainability will be a core consideration in all decision making.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 It is recommended that Members scrutinise and comment on the information contained within this report; and
- 2.2 Consider whether they wish to scrutinise in greater depth any matters contained in the report.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 The **New Biodiversity Duty** will help reverse the decline and secure the long term resilience of biodiversity in Wales. The Act requires Welsh Government, Natural Resources Wales, and all public authorities (including Local Authorities)

“must seek to maintain and enhance biodiversity in the exercise of functions in relation to Wales, and in so doing promote the resilience of ecosystems, so far as consistent with the proper exercise of those functions”.

- 3.2 The Local Authority should prepare a plan setting out what it proposes to do to comply with the new Duty. The Local Authority is required to report to Welsh Government on action to comply with the new Duty, every three years, with the first report due at the end of 2019.
- 3.3 A plan setting out proposals for the implementation of the new Biodiversity Duty in Rhondda Cynon Taf has been prepared. It includes a brief description of the biodiversity of Rhondda Cynon Taf and its contribution to local well-being as well as its national and international value. This provides the context for the implementation of the Duty across all Local Authority functions. The proposals focus on the most significant areas for biodiversity impact, with scope for modification as our knowledge and understanding grows. The proposals are being developed collaboratively with stakeholders across the authority, with partners and interested members of the public. They seek to identify and build on areas of good practice, aiming for continuous improvement across all relevant functions. To assist in this process, the new Biodiversity Duty will be included in the Service Self Assessments undertaken this autumn which inform the Service Delivery Plans for 2018/19. This will also enable the Council to address biodiversity and ecosystems resilience in the implementation of the Well-being of Future Generations Act, as identified in the reports to Cabinet of 2nd November 2016 and 9th March 2017.
- 3.4 The Council's work relating to **pollinators** is an example of how the Biodiversity Duty can be developed and evidenced. The Scrutiny Committee Report of April 20th 2015 set out the proposed strategy for Council led action to provide habitats for pollinating insects. As that Report explained, RCT is very fortunate to have a rich native wildflower flora and an equally rich pollinating insect fauna. The focus for pollinator action was therefore aimed at the delivery of positive, cost-effective (and where possible, budget saving) management to allow the wildflowers in Council owned grassland areas to flower and seed and in doing so provide maximum value as pollinator habitat. As a result significant biodiversity and pollinator benefits have been achieved. Key successes include;
- Via Natural Resources Wales funding, the purchase of a specialist tracked 'cut and collect machine' which provides great flexibility and capability for 'hay-cut' management. This machine has been used very successfully in the last two years. Its capacity to work on wet ground allows its use in the autumn and winter, outside of the main operational pressure periods.
 - The development of specialist habitat management expertise within Parks and Countryside staff which ensures delivery of high quality pollinator management.

- The continued expansion of Council managed Sites. Not only have the numbers of sites in the original Taff-Ely pilot area increased significantly, but new pilot project areas have been established in the Cynon and Rhondda Valleys. The project now includes very significant areas of grass verge, key countryside sites, and Parks and Cemetery land.
- The management of wildflower rich habitat land through Conservation grazing on 4 key Countryside Sites (totalling over 70 acres), with planning to deliver further sites in future. Work has included close partnership working with Pori Natur a Threftadaeth (PONT), the conservation grazing organisation for Wales. RCT is seen as a lead practitioner and deliverer of best practice in Conservation grazing.
- Partnership work on the award winning 'Healthy Hillside's' project, managed by the Wildlife Trust with support from RCT, the Fire Service and NRW and others. This project which aims to reduce the impact of wildfires in RCT by reducing the 'fuel' (typically bracken and grass) through conservation grazing, cutting and rolling, will also restore extensive areas of wildflower rich grasslands.
- Through the planning process the securing of significant areas of habitat management agreement as part of public open space provision and biodiversity mitigation, many of these areas have direct pollinator action outputs.
- The results of Insect and invertebrate surveying and assessment of key sites which provides an important evidence base for success of this initiative, including evidence of rich invertebrate communities, with a number of rare and nationally endangered bee species.
- Positive public reaction.

4.0 **CONCLUSION**

- 4.1 The proposal is to continue to develop pollinator action, based upon management which can realise the natural wealth of native wildflower habitats found in the County Borough. The Biodiversity Duty will provide the structure and framework for the future development of the project, increasing the number and area of Council managed sites, promoting opportunities for public awareness and involvement and ensuring monitoring outputs and outcomes are collected and reported.

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