



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL CLIMATE CHANGE CABINET STEERING GROUP
Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group held on Monday, 16
November 2020 at 2.00 pm

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

Councillor R Lewis Councillor M Webber
Councillor A Crimmings Councillor S Belzak
Councillor E Webster

Officers in attendance:-

Mr C Bradshaw, Chief Executive
Mr C Hanagan, Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication
Mr S Gale, Director of Prosperity & Development
Mr R Evans, Director of Human Resources
Mr D Powell, Director of Corporate Estates
Lawson, Performance Manager
Mr M Crumbie, Head of Procurement Delivery
Mr S Lock, Head of Energy Project Management
Mr R Wistow, Ecologist

Invited External Representatives of the Steering Group:-

Mr C Harries – Friends of the Earth
Ms M Newton – Rhondda Skyline

1 Chair's Welcome

The Chair welcomed the attendees to the meeting of the Climate Change Steering Group and acknowledged that there had not been a meeting in some time due to the global pandemic. The Chair took the opportunity to assure the Steering Group that despite the difficult circumstances, officers had maintained momentum in terms in the Climate Change agenda and the Council's ambition to become carbon neutral by 2030.

Apologies for absence were received from County Borough Councillor M Norris and the Welcome to our Woods representative.

2 Declaration of Interest

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

3 Minutes

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 28th January 2020 as an accurate reflection.

4 Nature's Assets

The Council's Ecologist provided the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group with a report, which provided information on issues relating to Nature's Assets and the climate and biodiversity emergencies.

The Chair thanked the officer for the information and was interested to note the opportunities to maximise carbon storage through the natural assets, commenting that RCT was fortunate enough to have a plethora of biodiversity on its doorstep.

The Deputy Leader spoke of a local Community Group, which planted 5000 bulbs locally in the previous year. The Cabinet Member explained that, as part of the exercise, the Group had identified the benefits of planting the bulbs and successfully reinvigorated the ground to bring back the natural wild flowers, which were previously dormant. Nonetheless, the Cabinet Member spoke of the importance of ensuring that any trees planted in specific areas are manageable and do not affect the water course. The Deputy Leader continued and emphasised the need to engage with the community and with local farmers.

The Cabinet Member for Environment, Leisure & Heritage Services echoed the Deputy Leader's comments in terms of communication and engagement with the community. The Cabinet Member was pleased to note that the Council's internal departments had worked in partnership, such as Environmental Health, the Planning department and the Education department.

One Member was particularly interested in the natural regeneration of the woodland. The Member raised concerns in relation to the damage caused to tree saplings by mountain fires and questioned if there were mitigations in place to prevent it. The officer advised the Member of the 'Healthy Hillside Project' approach, which ensures conservation management/conservation grazing in areas which are not subject to wildfire problems, in order to maintain fern whilst promoting wildflowers, wildlife and woodland regeneration.

The Chair emphasised the importance of education and spoke of the high profile campaigns involving the fire service and police service, which sought to educate young people on the importance of the hillsides and its wildlife. Furthermore, the Chair was pleased to note that there was potential for a Graduate Officer and Apprentice roles to work alongside the Council's Ecologist.

An External Representative echoed earlier comments in relation to community involvement and questioned what areas in RCT had been identified for rain gardens. The officer advised that the rain garden developed on Mill Street, Pontypridd was the first to be identified as a problem site and approved for funding. The officer advised that in the coming year, Welsh Government were due to allocate funding for Urban Greening and as such, new sites would be identified. It was also explained that officers had been tasked with incorporating green infrastructure into the designs of sustainable drainage features.

The External Representative acknowledged the work undertaken to maximise natural carbon storage by restoring peat bogs on publicly owned land and questioned whether there were similar plans for privately owned land. The officer

advised that advice and support is provided to private land owners through the Biodiversity Action Plan and the new Local Nature Plan but due to costs and lack of funding, the Local Authority could not undertake the work. In addition, the officer informed the Group that the focus on publicly owned land provides assurance of delivering outcomes and best practice.

Another Member spoke of the drainage at the Albion Tip, Cilfynydd, which had changed significantly over the last decade and as a result, had affected the farmland to the north. The Member questioned whether it would be appropriate to contact local farmers to include them in any such scheme. The officer acknowledged that many sites had become wetter over the years, which was possibly due to the change in climate. In terms of working with third party land owners, the officer suggested that the Local Authority firstly prove its model on publicly owned land before moving forward.

Following the number of questions in relation to drainage, the Chair recommended that a report is brought forward to a future meeting of the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group, which provides information in relation to the work undertaken in the water catchment areas, mitigations, culverts, land usage, tree planting and the Local Authority's relationship with NRW.

The Chief Executive suggested that he commission a review to be undertaken by the Director, Corporate Estates and the Council's Ecologist to identify those sites which are most suitable for peatbog restoration on land owned by the Local Authority and NRW. The review would consist of identifying the priority areas and the cost implications, in order to present a report back to the Steering Group of the findings for its consideration. The Chief Executive emphasised the importance of planning ahead, should Cabinet agree to set money aside within the Capital budget.

The Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group **RESOLVED:**

1. To comment on the issues raised in this report;
2. That the Director, Corporate Estates and the Council's Ecologist undertake a review of the publicly owned land, to identify those sites which are most suitable for peatbog restoration and the cost implications; with a report presented back to the Steering Group for its consideration; and
3. That the feedback and comments of the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group are reported to Cabinet for their consideration.

5 Strategic and Local Development Plans - Their Policies and Commitments to ensuring Housing, Transportation and Business Infrastructure minimises the Carbon Footprint

The Director, Prosperity and Development provided the Steering Group with the report, which set out what the Strategic Development Plan (SDP) and the Revised Local Development Plan (LDP) are required to address with regards to policies and commitments to minimise our Carbon Footprint; and the opportunities that would present themselves during the preparation and formulation of these plans, (particularly from an LDP perspective), to expand upon these standard requirements from an RCT perspective.

The Director drew Members' attention to Section 6 of the report and explained that there were a number of areas that can be researched further with regards to their relationship with Climate Change and Carbon Reduction; and ultimately

considered for inclusion within it. The Director suggested the following questions for the Group's further consideration:

- What percentage of car parking spaces should have charging points in new non-residential developments?
- Should there be a similar policy for new residential developments?
- Should all new homes in RCT be built as zero carbon?
- What is the role of RCTs uplands in combating Climate Change?
- What is the group's view on the density of development around Metro nodes and car free policies on new development?

The Chair thanked the Director for the report and acknowledged the amount of work undertaken to prepare the revised Local Development Plan. The Chair acknowledged Welsh Government's ambition for Wales to become Net Zero by 2050 and the other positive initiatives such as the Cardiff Capital Region, the South Wales Metro, sustainable travel and sustainable ways of creating employment.

The External Representative questioned whether it was the intention to develop a wider Climate Change Strategy for the Local Authority, which could tie in with the work of the revised LDP. The Chief Executive confirmed that a Climate Change Strategy would be developed, following the Group's consideration of various key reports in relation to topics such as transport, housing, biodiversity, plastics and energy. The Chief Executive hoped to present the initial draft of the Strategy to the Steering Group in the New Year in readiness to engage with the wider community.

The Director explained that the LDP would act as the land use expression of the Council's aspirations, including climate change and carbon reduction, which ensures that key elements are allocated. The Director referred to the Group's Peatbogs recommendation in the previous report on Nature's Assets and explained that the priority areas identified could be allocated within the revised LDP.

The Deputy Leader informed the Steering Group that electrical vehicle charging points had been installed in Tesco carpark and commented that the LDP could act as a persuasive document for developers to consider eco-friendly options moving forward.

The Chair added that the City Region had agreed funding for electrical vehicle charging points for taxi and transportation services in the first instance; and noted that officers were undertaking an exercise to look at Council car parks to consider any opportunities for charging points.

One Member did not agree with the assumption that the current way of life could be maintained, by simply switching to electricity and was of the view that there was an insufficient amount of energy available to power the current fleet of vehicles. The Member spoke of the average capital energy cost to manufacture a car, in addition to the ongoing energy cost of running the vehicle.

The External Representative acknowledged the Member's views and added that a wider emphasis should be placed on improving public transport and reducing the need to travel.

One Member noted the speed of technology development and felt it would be

wise to move forward at a steady pace.

The Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group **RESOLVED:**

1. To comment on the issues raised in this report, and in particular the discussion points set out in paragraphs 6.9 to 6.15; and
2. That the feedback and comments of the Steering Group are reported to Cabinet for their consideration

(**Note:** At this point in proceedings, County Borough Councillor M. Webber left the meeting)

6 Reducing the Use of all Single Use Plastics in all Council Contracts and Premises

The Head of Procurement Delivery provided members of the group with an overview and update following the report presented to the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group in [December 2019](#).

The report included the progress made in respect of the in-depth audit on those categories of spend where single use plastics are currently in circulation and a detailed Action Plan, aimed at reducing or, where it is practical to do so, eliminating the use of single use plastics across the Council by the end of 2020.

The Chair thanked the officer for the update and was encouraged by its momentum, despite progress being slightly hindered in recent months due to Covid-19. The Chair noted that the Action Plan sought to identify those areas where more audit work is required and the use of plastics in PPE, which was a new area that has resulted from the impact of Covid-19.

The Cabinet Member for Environment, Leisure & Heritage Services spoke of the importance of RCT delivering the recommendations detailed within the action plan to ensure its residents and young people note the commitment.

One Member questioned the approach for schools and whether children would be forbidden to use plastics. The officer advised that the ambition was to speak with catering suppliers and identify where the plastic is utilised, in order to identify suitable alternatives.

The Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group **RESOLVED:**

1. To acknowledge the impact that Covid-19 has had since the previous report to the Group, on our ability to put in place and action tangible outcomes that aim to reduce the use of single use plastics within the timeframe set out in the previous report
2. To agree the action plan provided in Appendix A that sets out the arrangements to eliminate/reduce the use of single use plastics across the Council; and
3. To note the intention to remove all single use plastics from Council and School catering facilities by 31 March 2021 with an environmentally friendly alternative.

7 Local Procurement of Supplies and Services

The Head of Procurement provided the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group with an update on the planned work that aimed to ensure the local economy of the Council receives the maximum possible benefits from the Council's

procurement arrangements.

The officer reminded the Steering Group that it was previously agreed that an in-depth review of the Council's top 50 suppliers (based outside of RCT) would take place. It was explained that the necessary data was prepared and the survey compiled but due to the nationwide lockdown, the review had not taken place. As such, it was now considered that the time would be better spent looking forward and ensuring that the positive outcomes when contracting are fully considered when preparing tender documents in future.

The officer informed the Group of the lessons learned from the pandemic and provided details of how the Council could make its contracts more accessible to businesses. Members were informed that the Council was keen to explore the potential of how it can utilise local SME's more and its aim to identify potential opportunities to introduce them into the supply chain in the future.

The Chair thanked the officer for the update and acknowledged the importance of supporting local businesses during such a challenging time. The Chair was pleased to note that many businesses had adapted to meet the change in needs throughout the period.

The Chair was pleased to note the split-contract approach detailed at Section 7 of the report, which would spread the benefits across local businesses. From a climate change perspective, the Chair was happy to support SME's within the Borough, particularly in terms of supply chains to ensure products aren't travelling large distances, which would reduce the carbon footprint and grow the local economy.

The Cabinet Member for Environment, Leisure & Heritage Services referred to the athletic track in Aberdare, where the majority of the workforce were within a maximum of a 20 mile radius, which created a local and community ownership.

The Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group **RESOLVED:**

1. To agree with the approach of the Council advertising its tenders more clearly with the local market, and for the Procurement Service to challenge each tender at its early stage with a view to establishing if appropriate lotting would be applicable; and
2. That an update on these actions be presented back to the Group at a future meeting.

8 Energy Generation and Related Issues

With the aid of a PowerPoint presentation, the Director, Corporate Estates and the Head of Energy Project Management provided the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group with an update on the progress of the development of renewable energy projects and certain other related issues up to 30th September 2020.

The officers outlined the Council's current energy strategies, current renewable energy projects and the potential expansion of renewable energy ambitions.

The Chair thanked the officers for the update and noted the various ambitious and positive energy generation initiatives such as the development of Taffs Well Thermal Spring, which would produce energy for the local school and hub and the development of an Eco Park on undeveloped land at Bryn Pica.

One Member referred to Section 5.5 of the report and questioned how the estimated Carbon Benefit of 2,323 Carbon Tonnes per annum had been calculated. The Director advised that further information would be circulated following the meeting but explained that the figure had been determined by a standard calculation process in conjunction with the Welsh Government Energy Service. The calculation had been comprised by focussing on the carbon savings in use for the generated energy only, based on investment and not the embedded carbon in delivering the project up to that point. The Director recognised that the embedded carbon would need to be considered if the Council were to claim that the project would be Net Zero in its own right.

The External Representative questioned what the recycling of rain water would be used for in the Taffs Well Thermal Spring. The Director advised that rain water harvesting was a standard installation, which was also used within the Council's schools and that its purpose was to flush the toilets within the buildings.

The External Representative was pleased to note that a range of energy options had been explored, such as wind, solar and hydro energy. The Director advised that RCT had provided support to the Cambrian Trust in Tonypany, to deliver its hydro scheme.

The Cabinet Member for Environment, Leisure & Heritage Services thanked the officers for the detailed report and noted the sheer volume of work undertaken within her Cabinet portfolio, in relation to the climate change agenda, such as transport, electric vehicle charging points and lighting changes made throughout Council buildings.

The Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group **RESOLVED:**

1. To note the contents of the update report as part of the ongoing work of the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group;
2. To continue with ongoing discussions with third parties with a view to maximising the energy generation subject to the final Welsh Government carbon footprint calculator; and
3. To receive a further report in early 2021 providing a further update on progress.

9 Urgent Business

- With the agreement of the Chair, the Rhondda Skyline Project Manager, Ms M Newton provided the Climate Change Steering Group with the key progress milestones of the Rhondda Skyline Project:
 - Discussions were underway with NRW in terms of how community land stewardship is managed, which is the aspiration of the Skyline Project;
 - Successfully secured £238,000 from the Climate Action Fund Developing Fund, to develop the following business streams:
 - To support the setup of the Community Land Trust and the Community Stewardship Agreement with NRW;
 - A Biochar programme to look at wood as a waste material and how it can be utilised in other ways;
 - Timber framed housing and how to build sustainable housing with local skills;
 - Community Horticulture;

- Timber Enterprise and the development of a timber site at the old brewery site in Treherbert; and
- Electric Vehicles and whether there is a demand for an electric vehicle car pool for use by the community.
- If the above-mentioned initiatives were to be secured, the intention was to bid for a further £2.5M of funding to implement the work.
- The Foundation Economy Challenge Fund had a significant underspend as a result of Covid-19. As a consequence, Skyline were working with Social Farms and Gardens as one of three pilots to look at controlled environment agriculture. The aim was to set up temporary units on the old tapas site, Treherbert and the project was due to be completed by end of March 2021.

The Steering Group commended Skyline for their work and the exciting initiatives planned for the upper Rhondda area, which meets a number of needs and ambitions.

- The Chair informed the Steering Group that the next meeting would take place on Monday 18th January 2021 at 2pm and wished attendees a happy Christmas and New Year.

This meeting closed at 3.40 pm

**COUNCILLOR R LEWIS
CHAIR.**