

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**MINUTES** of the meeting held at Rhondda Cynon Taf Headquarters, Clydach Vale on Monday 14th July, 2014, at 5.00 p.m.

**Present**

County Borough Councillor G R Davies – in the Chair

**County Borough Councillors**

(Mrs) J Bonetto	S Bradwick	S Carter	J Elliott	G Holmes
P Howe	L Langford	S Powderhill	(Mrs) A Roberts	G Smith
(Mrs) M Tegg	M J Watts			

**Other Councillors in Attendance:-**

(Mrs) A Crimmings

**Officers**

Mr N Wheeler – Service Director, StreetCare  
Mr P Mee – Service Director, Public Health & Protection  
Mr N Brinn – Service Director, Highways, Transportation & Strategic Projects  
Mr A Stone – Strategic Projects Manager  
Ms J Ellis – Housing Strategy & Standards Manager  
Ms L Lloyd – Housing Strategy Officer  
Ms L Williams – Housing Energy Efficiency Officer  
Mr A Wilkins – Corporate & Democratic Services Solicitor

**1. APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from County Borough Councillors (Mrs) L De Vet, (Mrs) S Pickering, M Weaver and (Mrs) T Williams.

**2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

In accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct there were no declarations of personal interest pertaining to the agenda.

**3. ANNOUNCEMENT.**

The Chairman welcomed County Borough Councillor S Cater to the committee membership and also took the opportunity to thank Cllr R Turner a previous member of the Committee for his service to the Committee during the previous Municipal Year.

The Chairman also reflected on the recent ill health of the Group Director, Environmental Services and asked the Service Director, Streetcare for an update on the Group Director's condition. The Chairman commented on the great loss to the Committee and the Authority without the Group Director and it was **RESOLVED** that a letter be sent from the Committee, wishing him a speedy recovery.

#### 4. **MINUTES**

**RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the Environmental Services Scrutiny Committee held on the 7<sup>th</sup> April, 2014 as an accurate record.

### **REPORTS OF THE GROUP DIRECTOR, ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES.**

#### 5 **ENERGY EFFICIENCY MEASURES.**

The Service Director, Public Health & Protection took the opportunity to introduce to the Committee, officers from Housing Strategy & Community Housing Services, in particular the Housing Strategy officer who was to provide a PowerPoint presentation to the Committee regarding energy efficiency and fuel poverty within RCT, and the actions being taken forward by the Council to address these issues.

The Housing Strategy Officer commenced the presentation by providing members with an insight into the background to the introduction of the different initiatives and schemes, such as the creation of the Affordable Warmth Action Plan following the Housing stock transfer in 2007. The Committee were provided with information in relation to the Heat & Save' scheme, and the work undertaken in partnership with social landlords, energy companies and many more. The committee were also advised of the work taken forward promoting the Welsh Governments NEST scheme via targeted mail out and public events. The Housing Strategy Officer also provided information to the Committee on the successful creation of an Housing Energy Officer post and it was explained that this officer provides independent, impartial and practical energy efficiency advice to anyone in RCT. Through the use of a DVD recording, the Committee were provided with real life examples of the work undertaken by the Housing Energy Officer and her impact on the lives of people living within the County Borough.

As well as details of successful stories and illustrations of performance the Committee were provided with information in respect of the continuing work being taken forward by the team and future aspirations.

The Chairman thanked the officer for the detailed presentation and opened up the item for members comments.

The officers were queried on the difficulty of using energy efficiency measures in certain types of properties and it was queried whether a 'community' solar panel scheme could be taken forward to allow the Community to self help. Officers commented that due to the different types of properties within the County Borough a 'one size fits all' approach could not be taken forward and spoke of previous problems recognised by some RCT residents undertaking external wall insulation, and the Housing Strategy officer spoke of the unintended consequences noted with this measure. The Officer confirmed that a community solar panel scheme had not currently been taken forward.

Members referred to 'smart meters' installed within properties and the Housing Strategy Officer commented that her understanding was that they were used by the Energy companies to monitor a households energy usage and spoke of 'phone apps' available which also monitor a households usage. The officer spoke of the importance of getting people to understand their energy usage and the officer commented on the importance of the 'after care' plan provided to residents of RCT by the Housing Energy Officer.

Members queried how areas across RCT were selected for grant entitlement and officers confirmed that areas entitled for grant funding needed to be within highly deprived areas, and it depended on the house type, with funding going to those properties hardest to treat.

One member commented on the detailed presentation and commented that all members should be made aware of the detail, to assist them with signposting members of the public. The Service Director, Public Health & protection confirmed that raising awareness was a key objective of the service and spoke of the importance of member engagement in this area.

Officers were commended for their hard work and efforts protecting the disadvantaged and vulnerable people within the authority and a member questioned the safeguards in place to protect the public from rogue tradesmen. The Committee were advised that advice was readily available for the public in respect of reputable tradesmen and further advised of the new practices in place in relation to cavity wall insulation.

The Chairman queried whether the private sector and owner occupiers were included within the energy efficiency measures taken forward by the Authority and the officers confirmed that the Housing Energy officer provided advice to any resident of RCT and commented that schemes were taken forward on a community approach, therefore not tenure specific.

Following the detailed discussion on the area the Committee **RESOLVED** to note the contents of the report.

## **6 LAND RECLAMATION**

The Service Director, Highways, Transportation and Strategic Projects, along with the Strategic Projects Manager provided the Committee with both a

detailed report and a PowerPoint presentation providing a general update on the land reclamation programme and also outlining the progress made to date with the Albion Tip scheme.

Members were reminded of the reason for undertaking the reclamation work in the Albion Lower tip, due to the need to stabilise the tip following significant movements experienced in the late 1980's. The Strategic Projects Manager confirmed that following installation of specialist drainage works during 1991, significant improvement in the stability of the tip resulted.

The Committee were advised of the scheme submitted in 2002 in respect of Land Reclamation and the most recent decision taken forward by Cabinet in 2010 to progress an alternative scheme based on the already successful 'under tip drainage'. Through the PowerPoint presentation members were provided with photos of the construction phases and the measures put in place within the scheme in respect of stabilisation. The Strategic Projects Manager confirmed that monitoring the effectiveness of the measures would be conducted for a 12 month period following completion of the project, and it was added that completion of the project and design verification would significantly reduce the liability on the Council and reduce the current monitoring costs.

Following the update on the Albion Tip scheme the officers commented on future reclamation projects and the Committee were advised that where previously the Welsh Government had funded reclamation at 100%, the Council had been notified from Welsh Government that it was unlikely to receive future funding in this area, unless a business case, illustrating economic outputs was provided. The Committee were advised of the implications this had on various schemes within the Authority and the Service Director, Highways, Transportation and Strategic Projects confirmed that the service continues to work with the Welsh Government, Planning colleagues and the private sector to bring the projects forward.

One member questioned whether trees could be utilised as a measure of extracting the water from the tip, and the Service Director confirmed that trees are used as part of the Council's flood risk management strategy, but in this instance of the Albion Tip, this measure could not be used due to the potential of the tree roots causing destabilisation.

Members commented on the seriousness of the situation with the Albion tip and thanked officers for the hard work in producing the results seen today with the stabilisation.

One member queried how the lack in future funding would impact the monitoring requirements currently in place. The Service Director, Highways, Transportation & Strategic Projects advised the Committee that monitoring of tips would continue, due to it being a requirement under the Mines and Quarries Act and again reiterated the problems that the service would encounter with the lack of funding taking any future schemes forward.

The officers were further queried on the amount of water drained from the tip and effects this had on the river levels and one member commented on the positive benefits with ecology.

Members of the Committee commented on their concerns with the lack of future funding and the Chairman commented that a priority for the Welsh Government should be safety not just regeneration.

Following the discussions the Chairman thanked the officers for the detailed presentation and the Committee **RESOLVED:-**

- a) To note the contents of the report
- b) To ask the Cabinet Member for Safer Communities, Tourism & Heritage to make representation to the Welsh Government highlighting the Committees concerns in respect of lack of funding for future land reclamation schemes.

**7 PREPARAION OF A WORK PROGRAMME FOR THE ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR 2014/15.**

The Scrutiny Support Officer provided the Committee with an overview of the report which advised members of issues for consideration when preparing a work programme and suggested items for inclusion for the Committee when forming a balanced work programme. The officer advised that to assist members and officers, the work programme was set out on a 'themed basis', whereby one area of the service is considered at each meeting.

Members commented in agreement with the proposed work programme and following discussions the Committee **RESOLVED:**

- a) to note the content of the report;
- b) to agree the draft work programme as set out at appendix 1.
- c) that the revised work programme be presented to the next scheduled meeting of the Committee.

Cllr G Davies  
**Chairman**

The meeting closed at 18:40pm.

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