



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL CLIMATE CHANGE CABINET STEERING GROUP
Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group held on Wednesday, 2
March 2022 at 11.00 am.

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

Councillor A Crimmings Councillor J Barton
Councillor S Belzak Councillor M Norris
Councillor E Webster

Officers in attendance: -

Mr Anthony Roberts, Head of Energy and Carbon Reduction
Mr Richard Evans, Director of Human Resources
Mr David Powell, Director of Corporate Estates
Ms Elizabeth Dean, Environmental Planner
Mr Christopher Bradshaw, Chief Executive
Ms Lesley Lawson, Performance Manager
Mr Marc Crumbie, Head of Procurement

Invited External Representatives of the Steering Group: -

Mr I Thomas - Welcome to our Woods

18 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

The Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting of the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group and apologies of absence were received from County Borough Councillor R Lewis.

19 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

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

20 MINUTES

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the meeting held on the 10th November 2021 as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

21 UPDATE FROM NET ZERO RCT STAFF EVENT - 17 JANUARY 2022

The Performance Manager provided Members of the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group with a verbal update on the Net Zero Rhondda Cynon Taf staff event held on the 17th January 2022. The Performance Manager acknowledged

the work undertaken in previous years in terms of engagement with residents and the community; it was recognised that there was a need to identify, discuss and attain staff views in regard to ways in which to tackle climate change and reduce the Councils Carbon Footprint. The Performance Manager informed Members of the inclusion of questions in staff and management surveys and through ongoing 'Lets – Talk Climate' conversations.

Members were informed that due to the significant focus on Covid-19 over the last two years, focus can now be directed towards engaging with staff and providing opportunities for involvement and contribution directly on climate changes and reducing Carbon emissions. The Performance Manager acknowledged the significance of staff, to the work undertaken now and, in the future, as around 80% of staff are residents of RCT.

Members were informed that the Staff Net Zero event was set up with the aim of providing a new and different opportunity to raise awareness of the Councils plans and to begin a more direct conversation with staff. The event was held virtually and open to all staff from different grades and services; Short surveys were provided to staff who wanted to contribute but were unable to attend.

The Performance Manager advised Members that when the session was set up, the team were unaware of the demand/numbers or level of engagement which would be received; however, a positive response was received with over 70+ staff in attendance to the virtual event. During the event, presentations were received from County Borough Councillor Rhys Lewis, Chris Bradshaw and David Powell. Following the presentations, the participants were directed into discussion groups where they were asked about their ideas towards ways in which the Council can reduce carbon and other emissions in its services and operations and secondly their ideas about the best way to involve and engage all staff to help the Council achieve its carbon reduction targets.

The Performance Manager confirmed the groups engagement and enthusiasm during the discussions; Useful information was attained which will be considered and utilised along with feedback from other engagement streams.

The contributions from the participants confirmed the value of more opportunities for staff to contribute and be involved in Climate Change discussions. Based on the discussions, the following was identified:

- Staff want more information about what the Council is doing about Climate Change and also what staff can do.
- There was a growing focus on reducing carbon emissions across and within services.
- There was growing recognition that 'green' will be our business as usual, and;
- There was growing acknowledgement that everyone has a part to play.

The Performance Manager informed Members that the new Climate Change strategy will direct much of the work which will be available for consideration and launch by the new administration. However, in the meantime preparedness has begun to introduce Climate Awareness Raising sessions for staff to accompany the launch of the new strategy. It was confirmed to Members that arrangements for the next Net Zero staff event have been scheduled for the 9th May 2022. A staff 'Green Space' in Teams has been set up where staff can join, share ideas, and access information concerning what the Council is doing to tackle climate change and provide the Council with direct access to a staff panel for

engagement on climate related issues.

Lastly the Performance Manager confirmed a new wide-ranging involvement or engagement plan that will continue the Climate conversations with residents, staff, and other stakeholders.

The Performance Manager acknowledged that there is still more work to be done by ensuring that staff, particularly those who don't have access to emails have the chance to have their say. The Performance Manager informed Members that from work undertaken to date, it was identified that staff are keen to get involved and play their role with tackling climate change.

The Chair thanked the Performance Manager for the update provided and was pleased with the overall engagement from staff. The Chair was impressed with the 'Green Space' forum on Teams and recognised the value of the forum which encourages staff to share their ideas and views.

One Member echoed the Chair's praises and acknowledged the importance of staff involvement due to the value they possess within the Council by aiding in supporting and progressing projects forward.

One Member raised a query on funding allocation for the forum in order to implement the proposed ideas further. The Chief Executive advised that funding can be allocated depending on the quality of the idea proposed.

Following discussion, the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group **RESOLVED**:

- To note the verbal update of the Net Zero Staff Event.

22 UPDATE REPORT ON OUR PROCUREMENT RESPONSE TO CLIMATE CHANGE

The Head of Procurement presented a report to Members of the Committee which provided an update on the work currently undertaken by the Procurement Service in support of the Council's ambitions to be Net Zero by 2030.

Members were informed of a drafted Procurement Strategy 2021/24 which pulled together the requirements of the Draft Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Bill, identified three strategic themes that align with the Council's Corporate Plan 2020/24. The Head of Procurement confirmed that a key theme throughout the work of the Procurement Service is to support the Council's net zero ambitions.

Members were directed to section 5 of the report which highlighted changes made in respect of processes and standard document in order to further progress the Council's ambitions towards Climate Change.

The Chair thanked the Head of Procurement for the report and acknowledged the wide range of work undertaken by Officers and passed on her thanks for their hard work. The Chair was pleased to see the introduction of graduates towards innovative projects to tackle Climate Change.

A Member echoed the Chair's praises and was pleased to see the involvement of staff towards innovative projects and sharing ideas.

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

- To acknowledge the changes put in place by the Procurement Service and the general direction of travel, in support of the Councils net zero ambitions.

23 **UPDATE REPORT ON THE PROPOSED SOLAR FARM PROJECT**

The Head of Energy and Carbon Reduction presented the report which provided Members with further updates on the developments of the 'Land Based Solar Farm' project which will be located on Council owned land. The Head of Energy and Carbon Reduction acknowledged the great potential of the project in context of future carbon offsetting opportunities.

The report provided background information and key updates on the proposals which will provide significant contribution to offset carbon footprint and greatly contribute to achieving the Councils net zero carbon targets.

The Head of Energy and Carbon Reduction advised Members that the project can be described as a 6MW Solar Farm and has been given this title due to the combined output of the two 'export aspects' contained within the proposal. The 'export aspect' consists of Western Power Distribution and private wire arrangements. The Head of Energy and Carbon advised Members that negotiations for the private wire are currently at the delegative stage and subject to a non-disclosure arrangement that the Council has entered with a potential partner.

The Head of Energy and Carbon continued by advising Members that currently the Solar Farm proposals have three alternative options which can be utilised as summarised below:

Option 1: to build the solar farm to take advantage of our secured 5MW grid connection, as a stand-alone entity, that will feed directly into the grid at 33kV and trade the power generated via that sole route.

Option 2: to combine the setup described above with a private wire arrangement to a local partner, and export to trade at two levels, these being 33kV and 11kV.

Option 3: to combine both of the above scenarios with the exploration of other opportunities to provide green energy, at a low cost, to future commercial enterprises on a local industrial estate. This approach is hoped to incentivise traditional high energy consumers to relocate to the site, not only for the green energy but also the growth potential of the site. As part of the process, considerations of creating a sizeable Electric Vehicle Charging Station, powered partly by the solar farm but with battery storage facilities, initially for use by the Council and wider public sector fleet, but also in the longer term for commercial HGVs and private vehicles.

The Head of Energy and Carbon informed Members that focus will be targeted towards option 2; however, option 3 may be considered depending on investigations at a later stage and if there is a corporate willingness to pursue it.

The Head of Energy and Procurement advised Members that being able to move the outlined proposals to project status will enable the necessary approved systems of governance to be put in place for continued development

of the project and will permit the Councils appointed team to control matters as progressions are made.

One Member raised concern surrounding the volume of the Solar Farm project and its impact to the natural habitats, vegetation, and carbon footprint on the site. The Member was concerned as there would be a lot of energy and resources which will be utilised to develop the project with minimum return. One Member echoed similar concerns in regard to the ecological impact of the project.

The Head of Energy and Carbon Reduction advised Members that investigations will be undertaken to ensure the ecological condition of the site will be maintained to its current conditional status. In regard to the vegetational impact, the Head of Energy and Carbon Reduction reassured Members that efforts will be made to maintain and reduce disturbances on the ground to a minimum. The Head of Energy and Carbon Reduction advised Members of investigations which will be undertaken for carbon footprint during the procurement process and relevant queries will be raised surrounding what the carbon footprint of the project will be. A Member understood the concerns raised however was in support of the project due to its overall future financial benefits towards the Council.

The Chief Executives advised Members of the Steering Group that the Solar Farm will provide continual long-term positive impacts to the environment, as the energy provided from the Solar Farm would be used for over 20 years. A Member echoed the Chief Executive, referring the longevity of the project and generation of energy; however, the Member requested for further reports which would inform Members of the energy utilised during the production on the Solar Farm project.

The Welcome to Our Wood representative supported the development of the Solar Farm project detailing the benefits of producing Council owned energy which in result provides Energy security.

Following discussion, the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group **RESOLVED**:

- To note the contents of the update report
- Agree that the report can be presented to Cabinet, to recommend the approval of the proposal, as a project.
- To receive further reports in 2022 providing further updates on progress.

24 UPDATE REPORT ON REDUCTION OF SINGLE USE ITEMS

The Head of Procurement presented the report to Members of the Steering Group which provided an update on the use of single use items across the Council.

Members were directed to section 3 of the report which highlighted the effective progress made within the corporate environment in respect of removing single use items with all the items listed in section 3.2; now been removed from the Council catalogues.

The Head of Procurement advised Members that further work has been undertaken in respect of other non-plastic single use items as highlighted in section 3.3 of the report.

Despite the successes of reducing single use items within the Council, the Head of Procurement informed Members of the challenges faced of implementing this within the school sector, the reasons for this being set out within the report. However, the Head of Procurement advised Members that actions will be implemented to review the use of single use items across schools in Rhondda Cynon Taff as highlighted in section 3.5 of the report. The Head of Procurement advised Members that in addition to reviewing the catering sector, the cleaning and janitorial sector will be reviewed.

To conclude the Head of Procurement directed Members to section 4 of the report, highlighting the importance of adopting a responsible and sustainable approach to managing products which no longer have a use. Two examples were included within the report - IT Equipment and Office Furniture, Fixtures and Fittings.

The Chair thanked the Officer for the report and was pleased with the actions taken towards reducing single use items, especially within the school sector.

One Member echoed the Chair's praises towards to work undertaken to reduce single use items and the re-furnishment and re-using of IT equipment and office furniture. The Member stated the importance of a re-usable and circular economy.

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

- To note the progress made in respect of removing the ability to order single use items from the Councils online ordering systems.
- Acknowledge the impact of Covid-19 towards the group in relation to tackling single use plastic/items within the school sector.
- To note the progressing work with broader supply categories where single use plastics/items are being purchased, with a focus on the Council's cleaning and janitorial contracts.

25 TO RECEIVE A VERBAL UPDATE FROM THE DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE ESTATES

THE TREE PLANTING PROJECT

The Director of Corporate Estates provided a verbal update in regards to the Tree Planting Project. To begin, he advised Members of the Councils annual rolling programme for replacing damaged or dead trees across Parks and Countryside's areas in RCT. The Director of Corporate Estates confirmed that thus far, the team have been able to plant three times the number of trees than in previous years. He confirmed that currently the team are in the process of planting 1,200 trees across the three areas in RCT.

The Director of Corporate Estates was pleased with the excellent progress made towards tree planting across the area; To progress the project further, the Director of Corporate Estates confirmed collaborations with Welcome to Our Woods in order to discuss and share ideas and double the efforts of ensuring the right tree is planted in the right place.

The Welcome to Our Woods Representative advised Members of the significance of the project to Climate Change and the opportunity to demonstrate partnership working with Rhondda Cynon Taf Council. He provided Members with a brief overview of the three items discussed in relation to the Tree Planting Project; these included:

1. Planting Trees in Private Gardens
2. Working with local businesses to plant trees in staff resting areas, and
3. Planting trees on unused waste land.

The Welcome to Our Woods representative echoed the importance of planting the right tree at the right place for the right reason. He advised Members of the value of the project which is aimed at leaving a positive legacy behind for local people and businesses within RCT.

The Chair was impressed with the work currently being undertaken by team; she advised the importance of the Local Authority working together with the Community.

One Member advised the importance of the Local Authority to display the appropriate message to the Community and residents detailing the significance of the right tree at the right place. An inquiry was also raised concerning ash dieback and its effect on the trees along with the Councils Corporate Plan for replacing the removed trees.

One Member advised the Steering Group of the importance of including the Tree Planting Project within the Green Space Forum in order to encourage staff input and involvement.

The Chief Executive advised the Steering Group that further updates should be provided to the Committee in relation to the Tree Planting Project in order to highlight the progress being made. He confirmed funding availability towards tackling Climate Change which can be utilised as a long-term favourable investment in order impact the environment positively.

EV Charging Strategy & the Comments from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Head of Energy and Carbon Reduction provided Members with a brief overview of the EV Charging Strategy. Members were reminded of the earlier work undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in relation to the consideration of the development of the infrastructure to support for low carbon vehicles in RCT which formulated 10 recommendations for the Cabinet's consideration in 2018. Members were advised that the recommendations were formed with 10 ambitions which were displayed in the strategy. The Head of Energy and Carbon Reduction advised Members that the strategy was well received, and the efforts of the staff was commended by Councillors.

The Head of Energy and Carbon Reduction advised Member that the strategy was published in January 2022 and is now available on the Councils website under [Think Climate Change](#). Members were advised that the implementation plan is now in development with a small team under the remit and oversight of the working group. The plan is currently being produced with an inherent action plan that will set objectives and milestones to signpost the way forward. The Head of Energy and Carbon Reduction advised Members that the anticipation for the second part of the project will formally be agreed upon by the wider working group during mid-March to enable it to be brought forward for scrutiny and comments by the Senior Leadership Team (SLT).

The Head of Carbon Reduction informed Members of a new company called Connected Kerb which has been appointed to work on the Electric Vehicle Charging Points as the original supplier had been removed from the Contract by Cardiff City Region. The Head of Energy and Carbon Reduction informed Members that the new company has met with Frontline Services and plans are in place to continue distribution of the first phase of the project for 30 plus EV Charging point in different locations. Phase two of the project will be in the future with a further roll out of 30 plus EV charging points.

The Chair advised that the increase in EV Charging Points will be welcomed by residents and Councillors. The Chair was pleased with the inclusion of the information on the Website as it keeps residents informed.

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

- To note verbal update

26 UPDATE REPORT ON THE EDINBURGH DECLARATION

The Environmental Planner presented the report to Members; the report aimed at advising Members of the Edinburgh Declaration and the role of Local Authorities within the post-2020 global biodiversity framework; This aims at ensuring transformative change for nature over the coming decade.

Members were advised of Conference of the Parties (COP15); Members were advised that the framework was delayed by the Pandemic, however, a meeting should take place in the Spring which agrees on the post-2020 framework of biodiversity. The vision for the framework is to be living in harmony with nature by 2050. The Environmental Planner informed Members of the goals in place to conserve biodiversity; implementation plans are in progress which include the involvement of Local Authorities (LA) as well as the National Government.

The Environmental Planner advised Members that progression of the framework will be undertaken through a participatory approach; Members were advised that the Edinburgh Declaration was a result of that. To conclude the Environmental Planner informed Members that LA have been encouraged by the Welsh Government to sign up and support the implementation of the international agreement.

A Member advised of the importance of the document and significance of it being signed.

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

- To support the signage of the Edinburgh Declaration

SUMMARY REPORT OF OUTCOMES ACHIEVED IN RECENT YEARS

The Head of Energy and Carbon Reduction provided an update to Members in relation to the key environmental and energy outcomes achieved in recent years and the work underway on renewable energy projects and other carbon reduction related issues. He advised Members that the report aimed to provide an overview of the good work undertaken thus far and future projects.

The Head of Energy and Carbon Reduction advised Members of the RCT Corporate Plan 2020/24 'Making A Difference'; He advised Members of the Council acknowledgement of delivering on Climate Change commitments as one of the greatest challenges.

Members were directed to section 5 of the report which lists out the Councils projects achievements to date in relation to tackling Climate Change. Some examples of these successes included reducing carbon emissions by 40% from Council investments in renewable energy sources; all street lighting in RCT has been converted to LED versions and since 2016 this has resulted in annual 84% reduction in reported carbon from 2018/19; The Head of Energy and Carbon Reduction informed Members that RCT Council is the first LA to install Hydrogen Fuel Cells which now have 21 units installed in Leisure Centres, School and Offices throughout RCT.

The Head of Energy and Carbon Reduction directed Members to section 6 of the report which highlighted to Members RCT Council's current projects in progress. The projects include 'Taffs Well Thermal Spring', which utilises geo-thermal heating, the Council investment in world leading automated recycling plants at Bryn Pica, which has improved the Councils recycling targets, biodiversity work underway which explores trees and peatbogs as a source of capturing carbon and a number of 'Active Travel' routes which have been established across RCT such as the Taff Trail, Church Village Community Route and Cynon Trail. The Head of Energy and Carbon Reduction advised members that focus has been directed on improving active travel networks by developing new routes which will improve connectivity and serve key local facilities such as schools, colleges, places of employment and shops.

Members were directed to section 7 of the report; this section highlighted the Councils plans to decarbonise the County Borough by working collaboratively to develop EV charging and decarbonise the Council's fleet, and staff training and the new green space forum initiative. The Head of Energy and Carbon Reduction advised Members that section 7 of the report refers to the Councils new system of Corporate Governance which has been set up under the Steering Group as illustrated in the appendix of the report.

As highlighted in the report the Head of Energy and Carbon Reduction advised Members of the excellent work that has been undertaken which reflects the sustainable development of the principles of the Well-Being and Future Generations Act (2015), as projects are meeting the present needs without compromising the ability of future generations. Despite the successes achieved the Head of Energy and Carbon Reduction acknowledged there is further work to be done.

The Chair was pleased with the report and the excellent work which has been undertaken to date. The Chair encouraged the achievements made to be advertised and promoted to residents and staff.

One Member echoed the praises from the Chair; he was pleased with the achievements made during a short period of time.

A Member commended the work undertaken within the project, however requested for further new installations of LED lighting in some parts of RCT as lighting produced is focal rather than spread out. The Head of Energy and Carbon Reduction advised the Member of the evolution of LED technology and reassured the Member that better LED street lighting will be installed.

Following discussions, the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group **RESOLVED:**

- To acknowledge the content of the report as part of the ongoing work of the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group.
- To receive further reports in the future providing further updates on achievements and progress.

This meeting closed at 11.55 am

**COUNCILLOR A CRIMMINGS
CHAIR.**