



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL CLIMATE CHANGE, FRONTLINE SERVICES & PROSPERITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Hybrid meeting of the Climate Change, Frontline Services & Prosperity Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday, 18 October 2023 at 5.00 pm.

This meeting was live streamed, details of which can be accessed [here](#)

County Borough Councillors – The following Climate Change, Frontline Services & Prosperity Scrutiny Committee Councillors were present in the Council Chamber:-

Councillor C Middle (Chair)

Councillor G Warren

Councillor W Hughes

Councillor G Holmes

The following Climate Change, Frontline Services & Prosperity Scrutiny Committee Councillors were present online:-

Councillor J Barton

Councillor P Binning Councillor V Dunn

Councillor W Treeby Councillor R Yeo

Councillor G Jones Councillor A O Rogers

Officers in attendance:-

Mr J Bailey, Head of Planning

Mr S Humphreys, Head of Legal Services

Mr C Hanagan, Service Director Democratic Services & Communications

Mr S Gale, Director of Prosperity & Development

Mrs S Handy, Members' Researcher & Scrutiny Officer

County Borough Councillors in attendance:-

Councillor C Leyshon, Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Corporate Services

Councillor A Crimmings, Cabinet Member For Environment & Leisure

Apologies for absence

Councillor E L Dunning Councillor P Evans

Councillor G O Jones

10 Welcome

The Chair welcomed Members and Officers to the Committee and also welcomed the Cabinet Member For Climate Change and Corporate Services and the Cabinet Member for Leisure and Environment.

11 Scrutiny Research

The Members' Researcher and Scrutiny Officer referenced the research facilities that were available to Members within the Council Business Unit. Members were advised that if they have any specific queries to email them to Scrutiny@rctcbc.gov.uk.

12 Apologies

Apologies of absence were received from County Borough Councillors E. Dunning, G. Jones and P. Evans.

13 Declaration of Interest

In accordance with the code of conduct, there were no declaration of interest pertaining to the agenda.

14 Minutes

The minutes of the 27th June 2023 were approved as an accurate record.

15 Consultations

The Members' Researcher & Scrutiny Officer referenced the consultation links, which were available through the 'RCT Scrutiny' website. Members were reminded that information is provided in respect of relevant consultations for consideration by the Committee, which are circulated on a monthly basis and updated on a fortnightly basis.

16 Bi-Annual Cabinet Member Engagement

The Chair welcomed the Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Corporate Services to the Committee and thanked hr for attending. The Service Director, Democratic Services & Communications presented his report to Members and advised Members that they have an opportunity to scrutinise any arising matters with the portfolio holder responsible for Climate Change and Corporate Services and to ensure that the appropriate mechanisms are in place to effectively scrutinise the Executive.

Discussions ensued and a Member queried what steps the Council has tken to deal with artificial grass which is bad for the environment and also deadful to prevent flooding in the County Borough. The Member queried how much of our landscape is now artificial grass as opposed to natural grass. The Cabinet Member advised that at the moment the Council does not know what areas are covered and advised that this is a report that could come back to scrutiny in the

future. The Member advised that we do need to have a campaign to let people know the damage that plastic grass is doing. The Chair noted this as a future item for scrutiny and noted that it would also be useful for the Council to liaise with sellers to see how much stock they have sold.

Discussions continued and a Member asked for the ratio on EV Charging points in the County Borough, for example, electric vehicles ratio to the EV Charging points and queried what consideration has been given to the possible advancement in modern technology that may possibly overtake electric vehicles in the future. The Cabinet Member advised that Officers are in the process of collating this information and in respect of modern technology the Cabinet Member agreed that this is a concern and assured Members that all possibilities are being monitored closely. The Member further questioned how close the Council is working with the motor industry to monitor the steps they are taking with new technology advancements. The Cabinet Member advised that she would liaise with Officers and get back to Scrutiny at a later date with the information.

Another Member asked for further information in respect of the ECO awards in schools and how we are making sure that nobody is excluded from these awards. The Cabinet Member advised that together with Councillor R. Lewis, they have met up with primary school children and that this year they are launching the bronze award and that they had as much feedback as possible from the primary school children on their ideas. The children were very keen on growing and cooking their own vegetables and cooking their own school meals. The Bronze awards has three categories; Biodiversity where pupils will study biodiversity in the County Borough and a Biodiversity Champion to introduce new initiatives, Secondly Waste and Recycling where there will be a dinner and lunch challenge in respect of food waste and the third will be Carbon emissions where we are asking schools to reduce their gas and electricity output by 10% each. It was emphasised that the awards are for all pupils to take part in.

Another Member queried how the Council is encouraging the younger generation to care for the allotments in our County Borough on behalf of the elderly. The Cabinet Member advised that there is a lot to be done and this includes Councillors locally raising awareness. It is about raising awareness and doing outdoor projects with young people so that they can use biodiversity skills out in their own environment. The Cabinet Member referenced a number of ongoing engagement projects with young people and this is what we need to keep doing moving forward. The Chair emphasised that this was raised in Committee last year and requested that this does come back to Scrutiny as a report item on progress on this potential scheme.

Another Member sought information on any recent data that can be provided on the impact that public and school buses are having on the environment. The Cabinet Member that the Council has started a progression with Electric Buses and that Officers are in the progress of collating data to show where the emissions are in the County Borough. The Cabinet Member advised that getting the data together is key so that we can move on in a progressive manner. The Member sought confirmation that the data will specifically be on buses and school buses. The Cabinet Member confirmed that it would be and that there are a range of options available, such as public buses instead of school buses, perhaps less buses on the road and to encourage families and children to walk to school.

Another Member queried whether relevant user groups have been considered in schemes such as the Office Accommodation Strategy. The Cabinet Member advised that all user groups have been considered and that under the strategy staff are encouraged to go to work by public transport, it will reduce electricity use by the Council, encourage staff to use town centre businesses and all disabled access requirements have been adapted to the needs of different user groups.

Discussions continued and a Member queried how the Council intends to reduce its Carbon footprint and also what the Council is doing to ensure that the public is aware of what services the Council offer in respect of grass cutting and maintenance on highways. The Cabinet Member advised that the information is advertised on the Council website and that local Councillors are also encouraged to promote this information in their local wards. Another project referenced by the Cabinet Member was 'Think Climate Change' which is also online. This outlines the Council's target of being Carbon neutral by 2030 and Net Zero by 2040. It was emphasised that the Council provides strong community leadership and environmental prosperity. The Cabinet Member referenced a number of ongoing projects and emphasised one of these being to leave the grass in certain areas to grow longer to protect the wildlife and butterflies. The Cabinet Member advised Members to look at 'Think Climate' online and advised that she would be happy to come back to Scrutiny to answer any further questions.

Following discussion, Members **RESOLVED**:

1. To Scrutinise the Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Corporate Services in respect of matters considered and agreed by Cabinet, and any key decisions taken, during the period 11 May – 18 October 2023; and,
- 2.2 To receive further reports to Scrutiny in respect of:
 - Areas with artificial grass within the County Borough its impact on the environment.
 - What assistance, if any, should the Council give to elderly people in the County Borough in respect of maintaining their allotments or gardens and how the Council can encourage young people to get involved; and,
 - To receive further information on grass cutting in the County Borough and the Council's policy of letting certain areas grow wild to enhance biodiversity in the County Borough.

17 THINK CLIMATE RCT' THE COUNCIL'S TACKLING CLIMATE CHANGE STRATEGY 2022-2025

The Service Director, Democratic Services & Communications presented his report on the Council's Climate Change Strategy 2022-2025. The Service Director provided an overview and set out the Council's progress in delivering the Council's Climate Change Strategy, '[Think Climate RCT](#)' as agreed in June

2022.

Discussions ensued and the Chair referenced the Council's target of being Carbon neutral by 2030 and Net Zero by 2040 and questioned how the Council would monitor these targets and also how the Council would monitor the private sector. The Service Director advised that the targets are a working progress and that Scrutiny will have a key role to play in monitoring the progress towards these targets. The Chair queried if Scrutiny could receive the information in chart form. The Service Director advised that this is an incredibly complex area and that we will focus on providing Members with support to receive thorough training on all aspects of Climate Change.

Following discussion, Members **RESOLVED:**

- Take a view on any potential areas for further consideration as part of the Climate Change, Prosperity and Frontline Services Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme;
- Note the recommendation arising from the Climate Change Cabinet Sub Committee, see para 5.1, in respect of procured goods and services, and the impact on the Council's Carbon Footprint;
- Note the potential to further embed the Council's response to Climate Change to the business of the Council as part of the development of the Council's new Corporate Plan; and,
- Consider whether Members wish to scrutinise in greater depth any matters contained in the report in line with the Terms of Reference of the Committee including to receive regular updates to Scrutiny in respect of the Council's progress in meeting its Net Zero targets and to receive regular training on Climate Change for Scrutiny Members.

18 Community Infrastructure Levy Annual Monitoring Report

The Chair introduced the item and advised Members that this item was a pre scrutiny item, where Members comments would be fed back to Cabinet. The Head of Planning presented his report to Members in detail, referring Members to the relevant appendices.

Following this, Members were provided with the opportunity to ask questions. The Chair queried how much CIL money do Town Councils actually have or is it specifically within infrastructure projects. The Head of Planning advised that the Town Council has direct responsibility for CIL spending money, however, they still have to demonstrate that it is spent appropriately and in accordance with the CIL regulations. Members were advised the Community Council Clerks should interact with the Council's CIL Officer to seek advice about what is appropriate. The Chair questioned how this works in the Rhondda where they do not have any Town Councils. The Director of Prosperity and Development advised that this issue was first explored when CIL was adopted by Cabinet. The Director advised that if there was a development in the Rhondda that attracted a CIL payment such as a new supermarket then effectively the Council would hold the CIL and engage with the Local Members as to what the CIL money should be

spent on. The Chair questioned whether there was a timeframe in which that money has to be spent on infrastructure within the County Borough. The Head of Planning advised that there is not a time period within the County Borough, however, there is a time period on Community Councils but there is also an element of discretion.

Discussions ensued and another Member referred to the regulation 123 list and the A4119 Castell Mynach signalised junction item and questioned if those works were still to progress as proposed. The Head of Planning advised that the works that feature are to remain unaltered.

A Member queried if CIL funding is only available for new developments and queried if someone came into Aberdare to carry out remedial work replacing RAAC concrete in the building would CIL funding cover this. The Director of Prosperity advised that that situation would not be eligible and that the CIL regulations are there so that the money collected is spent on infrastructure to support growth in the Local Development Plan (LDP).

Following discussion, Members **RESOLVED** for Scrutiny's comments on the report to form part of the reported feedback to Cabinet, at its meeting to be held on the 23rd October 2023.

19 Tree and Hedgerow Strategy

The Director of Prosperity and Development presented his report in respect of the progress made in delivering against the RCT Tree, Woodlands and Hedgerow Strategy.

Discussions ensued and a Member queried how we were measuring the progress of tree regeneration, for example how much is growing throughout the County Borough. The Member also emphasised the importance of engaging with the Local Member(s) for each ward. The Member also queried how this fits in with planning, particularly the LDP. In respect of measuring tree regeneration, the Director advised that the report sets out how we are starting to measure natural regeneration through analysing our own land and the tree cover has grown significantly on our own land holdings. It was emphasised that Officers are confident that the growth in tree cover is through natural regeneration. In terms of land outside of the Council's ownership, there is a reliance on information coming from NRW and that does come periodically and when its available that can be shared with Scrutiny. In respect of the planning policy, the Director advised that through the planning system there are a number of ways of protecting trees; the value of trees and the biodiversity they support will be protected more in this LDP compared to previous and where there are particular concerns about an existing tree(s) we've also got tools like Tree Preservation Orders (TPO) that we can use. The Member emphasised the importance of TPO's and advised that we should be pro-active in this through the planning process.

Another Member questioned how we can encourage local community groups and community councils to engage in these initiatives. The Director advised that the Local Nature Partnership scheme is a great initiative to bring in local groups and also referred Members to the Council's website. The Director agreed that they need to do some reminders that the website is there and emphasised that

the website is a good asset for schools and local nature groups. The local groups would be encouraged to look at the Action For Nature website and through there would be local contact information.

Discussions ensued and a Member queried if there was any way that we could ask a potential purchaser of Council land, what his intention is for the trees on that land before selling the land on and if so, could we sell the land with a TPO attached to it. The Director advised that there is a fairly robust internal process before land is sold and it gets circulated to Council departments to comment on before that land is sold. The Director advised that he would double check that this internal process does go to the Tree Officer. It is fairly common that trees on Council owned land are not protected by a TPO on the basis that if they are on Council owned land that is protection in its own right. The process would then be that we place a TPO on them as part of the sales process. The Member asked if it is possible for the Council to ask an owner what their intention is with the trees prior to the sale of land and if they have considered the impact on the environment. The Head of Legal Services advised Members that if a planning application comes in then the Council has powers to control the cutting down of trees but if the trees are not protected and no planning has been submitted then there is nothing that stops the person cutting down a tree that is not protected by a TPO. The Member stressed that where the Authority is taking time to plant trees and then selling off plots of land with trees on that can be cut down it is counterproductive. The Head of Legal Services advised that they can look at making the internal process more robust where the appropriate people in the Council are consulted before land is sold off to ensure that any trees that deserve protection can be considered.

Discussions continued and the Chair referenced areas in the County Borough that are experiencing a large infestation of rats due to a lot of overgrowth and that the overgrowth has generated a lot of complaints. The Chair queried the Council's stance on letting areas to grow wild for nature but also the requirement for the Council to cut these growth areas and ensure that it is not going into other people's properties. The Head of Legal Services advised that this falls into the area of nuisance so that if a tree is overhanging into someone's property from a Council land that person has a common law right to cut that tree. Unless it is seriously impacting on the adjoining property the Council wouldn't take action to cut down trees or branches. The Chair sought clarification on the policy of allowing roundabouts and highways to grow wild. The Director of Prosperity & Development advised that the highways team work very closely with ecologists and that this information can come back to Scrutiny. The Chair queried if there was a map of the County Borough showing which areas have been allowed to grow wild. The Head of Planning advised that he has recently had a meeting with Streetcare and officers from the Countryside team and confirmed that there is an existing maintenance regime confirming which areas will be left to grow wild. The Head of Planning emphasised the importance of getting this information out to the public. The Chair queried if local members have been made aware of this on a case by case basis and Officers confirmed that all local members are kept up to date.

Another Member queried if we should be looking at where we plant the trees and whether they should be planted in such close proximity to each other. The Head of Planning advised that this is an issue for the experts in that field, the Tree Officer and the Park Rangers and they best understand the distance that has to be maintained for the healthy growth of those trees. The Chair asked if Members could be informed if there is any major tree planting within their wards. The

Director of Prosperity and Development confirmed that this is the plan going forward.

A Member sought information on how many TPO's there are in RCT and where they are. The Chair advised that information could be provided in terms of any significant TPO's throughout the County Borough. The Service Director, Democratic Services & Communications advised that rather than this being a piece of scrutiny work, Officers can provide the Member with that information specific to their ward area. Members are best placed to have this information.

Following discussion, Members **RESOLVED**:

- To note and consider the progress on delivering the RCT Tree, Woodlands and Hedgerow Strategy; and,
- That following Scrutiny of the strategy the following considerations be taken forward: :
 - Further information in respect of the overgrowth of hedges and wild grass on the highway and the Council's work with ecologists in this area;
 - For Local Members to be kept up to date with any major Tree Planting schemes in their ward; and,
 - For Members to receive information about Tree Preservation Orders in their local area

20 Urgent Business

There was no urgent business to report.

21 Chairs Review & Close

The Chair thanked Officers and Members for attending and reminded Members that the next meeting will be held on the 22nd November 2023. The Chair summarised the Committee's requests for further information and advised that this will be distributed to Members accordingly.

This meeting closed at 6.20 pm

**Councillor C Middle
Chair.**