



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CLIMATE CHANGE CABINET STEERING GROUP

17TH MARCH 2021

**DRAFT COUNCIL TACKLING CLIMATE CHANGE STRATEGY 2021-2025
FOR PUBLIC CONSULTATION**

**REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE IN DISCUSSION WITH CABINET'S
CLIMATE CHANGE CHAMPION (COUNCILLOR RHYS LEWIS)**

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group with an opportunity to consider the Draft Council Tackling Climate Change Strategy and agree to engage and consult with residents and businesses on the Council's response to Climate Change.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group:

- 2.1 Note the contents of this report and the Draft Council Tackling Climate Change Strategy in the Appendix.
- 2.2 Consider the Draft Council Tackling Climate Change Strategy and make recommendations to the Council's Cabinet on the Strategy before the Cabinet considers the Strategy at its meeting later this month. Cabinet will be requested to consider whether it wishes to commence a wide ranging engagement with residents and businesses on the Council's response to Climate Change starting in April 2021.
- 2.3 Request that the results of the consultation on the Draft Council Tackling Climate Change Strategy are considered by the Climate Changing Steering Group in June prior to the June meeting of Cabinet.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 For the Council to become Carbon Neutral by 2030.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 There can be no doubt of the speed of change required to reduce carbon emissions to protect the planet, or the need for us all to work together more quickly to do so.
- António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations **"If we don't act now on climate change, this coming century may be one of humanity's last"**.
 - Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission **"fighting Climate Change has become the greatest responsibility of our times"**.
 - Boris Johnson **"no-one can say they didn't see climate change coming"**.
 - Mark Drakeford **"Tackling the climate emergency requires a level of collective action we have not seen since the days of the Second World War"** and he urged the people of Wales to **"Think Global: Act local"** to make a difference.
 - David Attenborough has described climate change as **"our greatest threat in thousands of years"**.
 - Greta Thunberg **"This is the biggest crisis humanity has ever faced. This is not something you can like on facebook"**.
- 4.2 The science has never been clearer and the call to action, never louder. This Council is also clear that it must play its part in taking urgent action to mitigate the risks and tackle the catastrophic effects of the planet's rising temperatures. In doing so it has recognised the fundamental changes that are needed to the way we all live our lives.
- 4.3 The Council has already shown a positive commitment to meet and contribute to global, national and local targets to reduce carbon across the Council's services. The Council already purchases 100% of its electrical energy supply from renewable energy sources and has reduced its carbon footprint by 37% or 12,725 tonnes over the past five years. Examples of the action taken to date by the Council include:
- The upgrading of all street lights to efficient LED units and turning off street lights in specific localities;
 - Investing in solar panels, LED lighting, wall and roof insulation, energy efficient gas boilers, and combined heat and power units in many schools, leisure centres and council buildings. The solar panels fitted on council buildings are the equivalent size of two football fields;
 - Installed electric cooking equipment in all new kitchens to benefit from the renewable electricity we procure;
 - Significantly reduced the amount of waste that is disposed of by landfill or through energy for waste;

- Invested in the Healthy Hillside project with Welsh Government and the Fire Service with benefits for carbon reduction, biodiversity and air quality;
- Through planning agreements with windfarm developers, hundreds of hectares of peat and associated habitats have been targeted for restoration and their carbon and water storage has been increased;
- Invested in 20 micro generation Hydrogen Fuel Cells for our highest energy users (care homes, large schools and leisure centre) with the ambition to do more – this has a significant impact on the emission of greenhouse gases;
- Ensured all new schools and other council buildings are certified as BREEAM “Very Good” or “Excellent” with EPC ratings of A;
- Through various government grant schemes, enabled many residents on low incomes to improve the heat insulation in their own homes;
- Worked with partners to develop renewable energy projects such as, Clydach hydroelectricity, Vattenfall Wind Farm, Gasification Boiler at Ynysangharad War Memorial Park, and Bryn Pica Eco Park.

4.4 Furthermore, in the autumn of 2019, the Council created this Steering Group, the Climate Change Steering Group, a sub-committee of the Council's Cabinet, which is charged with developing the Council's response to the Climate Change agenda and supporting Cabinet to achieve the 2030 Net Zero target. As you are all aware, the focus of this Steering Group is to understand the various carbon issues within the County Borough, make a series of recommendations to the Council's Cabinet and gather information to inform the development of the Council's Tackling Climate Change Strategy.

4.5 Whilst, the Covid19 Pandemic has had an impact on the work of the Steering Group, good progress has been made, and to date it has:

- **Biodiversity** - Considered, and challenged the Council's Biodiversity Plan and Cabinet has approved the Plan and considered and adopted the Wildflower Grassland Management Policy;
- **Community use of vacant/unused land** - Simplified the Council's processes and procedures to enable community groups to use underused or vacant Council land for environmental purposes;
- **Waste Management Strategy** – Recommended that Cabinet consider increasing the Council's waste recycling target from 70% of its household waste by 2025 to 80% by 2025 and challenged other public sector and private sector organisations to do the same. This new target will be the most challenging in the UK;
- **Local Procurement of Supplies and Services** –Currently, the Council spends £227m on supplies and services of which £51m is



spent with businesses registered in Rhondda Cynon Taf, and £138m on businesses registered in South East Wales. The Steering Group agreed to the Council advertising its tenders with the local market and wherever possible break the tenders into lots which enables small and medium sized companies to compete for parcels of the supplies and services being tendered. The Steering Group has requested a regular report on whether this change in approach is increasing the amount of money the Council spends locally;

- **Elimination of single use plastics in all Council contracts and premises** – Agreed an action plan that sets out the arrangements to eliminate/reduce the single use of plastics, and in particular seeks to remove all single use plastics from Council and school catering facilities by 31 March 2021 where there is an environmentally friendly alternative;
- **Taffs Well Thermal Spring – Generating carbon free energy for the community of Taffs Well** – Made a recommendation for Cabinet to consider at its [January 2020](#) meeting to invest in the technology to use the natural heat from Taffs Well Thermal Spring to heat the local school and community centre;
- **Transportation – how do we reduce our carbon emissions and change our modes of transport?** - This report focused on maximising the benefits of the South Wales Metro; considered electrical vehicle charging; opportunities to significantly increase active travel options; how we reduce the impact of the Council's fleet of vehicles, commissioned/subsidised public transport, licenced taxis and home to school transport. Progress is being made and a further report on electric vehicle charging is being considered by the Steering Group on 17th March 2021;
- **Air Quality – how do we improve air quality, and eliminate the “hotspots”, the Air Quality Management Areas in the County Borough** – The report considered what proactive action the Council is taking to tackle air quality in the air quality management areas, to ensure air quality improves across the County Borough. The Steering Group made a series of recommendations to Cabinet in respect of schemes/actions to be implemented to improve air quality in the air quality management areas;
- **Energy Generation – What opportunities do we have to generate energy on public sector land and/or rivers in Rhondda Cynon Taf** – This report set out a series of proposals for the Council to build and finance potential solar, wind and hydro schemes on Council or other public sector owned land and rivers, that will make a significant contribution to the Council achieving its Carbon Neutral target. The Steering Group supported the proposals and they were considered by Cabinet in [January 2021](#);

- **Nature's Assets - Using the Natural Environment to reduce carbon emissions and the effects of climate change** – This report focused on opportunities to maximise carbon storage through natural assets in the County Borough. The Steering Group recommended that Cabinet identify a number of potential suitable sites and consider funding the development of these sites including allocating funding within the 21/22 capital budget. A range of projects, were considered such as a long term native woodland programme, urban green infrastructure schemes in town centres, and peatbog restoration schemes which will have a positive impact on improving air quality, supporting flood management and prevention schemes, reducing noise and vehicle pollution and generally improving the living environment of residents. We are currently working with National Resources Wales to identify the land in the Council's and NRW's ownership suitable for carbon sequestration;
- **Strategic and Local Development Plans – How do we plan for the future, and ensure new homes, new buildings, and other infrastructure are carbon neutral?** – Cardiff Capital Region and the Council are planning to prepare a regional SDP and a RCT LDP. It is essential that these ten year plans include new policies and commitments to ensure our housing, transportation and business infrastructure minimises our carbon footprint and it is fit for purpose in the 21st Century and beyond. This will include commitments to ensure offices and homes are well connected with public and active travel options; town centres become places to live as well as work and socialise; and the natural environment is enhanced. The Steering Group has provided its views on a range of topics that need to be considered by the LDP, and this feedback was also considered by Cabinet in progressing the LDP process;
- **Quantifying Rhondda Cynon Taf's carbon footprint on Wales and the World** – The Welsh Government's planned carbon footprint measurement tool has yet to be released. Therefore, the Carbon Trust has been commissioned to establish a robust baseline for the County Borough which will be considered by the Steering Group early in the new financial year, in order to understand the data and to use it to determine the next steps to prioritise interventions and investments.

5 THE TACKLING CLIMATE CHANGE STRATEGY

- 5.1 The Council's draft Tackling Climate Change Strategy set out in Appendix A seeks to set the overall direction for the Council over the coming five years, describing its vision, purpose and ambition as local authority in respect of the Council's carbon footprint and the carbon footprint for the County Borough.

5.2 The Council's proposed vision is:

By 2030

- Rhondda Cynon Taf Council will be carbon neutral;
- The whole County Borough will be as close as possible to carbon neutral;
- Our work with partners will have contributed to reducing carbon emissions across the County Borough by *****.

5.3 In order to deliver our Vision, the Council will continue to provide strong community leadership and create a cleaner, greener environment for people and businesses to be independent, healthy and prosperous and for natural eco systems to thrive. We will play our part in tackling climate change and protecting the planet.

5.4 In our Corporate Plan 2020-24, [Making A Difference](#), the Council acknowledged that delivering our Climate Change commitment is our greatest challenge. In our plan we committed to delivering three main priorities, all of which will contribute to and benefit from tackling climate change:

- Ensuring **People**: *are independent, healthy and successful;*
- Creating **Places**: *where people are proud to live, work and play;*
- Enabling **Prosperity**: *creating the opportunity for people and businesses to: be innovative; be entrepreneurial; and fulfil their potential and prosper.*

5.5 Our Climate Commitments underpin each of our priorities. These commitments have been developed using the best information available at a time of significant and competing local, regional, national and global priorities with new and fast-moving opportunities being presented by governments and businesses alike. The pace of change is also being accelerated by the growing pressure of people across the world to take climate action.

5.6 No single plan can set out the many ways in which we are working to reduce carbon emissions in to achieve our commitments in Rhondda Cynon Taf. This plan is a framework to guide us and shape what we do to reduce both the Council's carbon footprint and that of the County Borough. We will also be working within the Welsh Government's Delivery Plan for a [Low Carbon Wales](#) and its 'Route Map' to decarbonise the public sector in Wales.

5.7 Our commitments to reduce carbon within the Council include:



- Reducing our carbon footprint in respect of all the Council's activities.
 - Reducing the demand for energy and embedding carbon reduction into everything we do.
 - Using public sector land for green energy generation and/or carbon storage.
 - Investing in solar energy installations in Council buildings and making sure that all new schools, offices, homes and commercial buildings within the County Borough are built to a Net Zero standard.
 - Supplying all our buildings and offices with low carbon heat and/or generating our own electricity.
 - Further developing the use of hydrogen for fuel cells in Council vehicles and buildings.
 - Ensuring we recycle or reuse 80% of all municipal waste by 2025.
 - Continuing to locate services closer the people that use, work and visit them.
 - Procuring a vehicle fleet that is fit for purpose yet has a limited impact on the environment and replacing all our new cars and light goods vehicles with ultra low emission vehicles **by 2025**
 - Taking a sustainable approach to the supplies and services we buy within the Council, from major building projects to eliminating single use plastics, so that we better support the local and green economy.
 - Reducing staff travel by car by continuing to maximise the use of technology, encouraging active travel and greater use of public transport significantly reducing car commutes and business travel.
- 5.8 To achieve the 2030 target and respond to increasing public expectations, will require the Council to invest significant sums in ensuring its day to day activities become Carbon Neutral. This means that the Council must plan for the fact that this additional cost will not be met from simply doing more of what it is currently doing, but from making other difficult choices on what it does or does not provide.
- 5.9 Responding to the pandemic and the impact of Storm Dennis has had impact on the Council's financial position, in the short term. Longer term, the UK Government will have to repay the enormous sums spent in protecting jobs and the economy during the long periods of lockdown. This will inevitably have an adverse impact on public sector funding. Therefore, it is important that the Council, despite these significant financial challenges in the years ahead, ensures its longer term financial planning can meet the challenge to be carbon neutral by 2030. The Council's Medium Term Financial Plan for 2022-25 will consider this in detail in July 2021 after the Council's Tackling Climate Change Strategy, as set out in the Appendix, is consulted upon and residents and businesses feedback their views and priorities for the future.

6 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 An Equality Impact Assessment is not required with regard to this report.

7 CONSULTATION

- 7.1 The draft Tackling Climate Change Strategy will be subject to a comprehensive public consultation over the two months to 31 May 2021, the strategy will be scrutinised by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, and it will be important to involve all elected members in the consultation.
- 7.2 It is proposed to involve as wide a range of stakeholders as possible during the two months in order to engage as many as possible in the conversation of “how do we all tackle climate change?”. The Council will work with national and local environmental groups to engage residents and businesses and to also encourage them to engage in changing their behaviours. To raise awareness, the Council’s social media and marketing expertise will be used to develop and deliver targeted campaigns for specific audiences, as well as more general awareness raising of the impact of climate change. In particular, we will be keen to engage with the Rhondda Cynon Taf Youth Forum, schools and other youth groups, in addition to the various groups that the Council has traditionally engaged with for consultation processes.
- 7.3 The lockdown will inevitably limit the opportunity for face to face engagement, however, the Council will make best use of the variety of social media, remote meetings and digital tools to engage with stakeholders.

8 FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

- 8.1 There are no financial implications aligned to this report. Any investment required to address the priorities being consulted upon will be reported and considered separately as part of the Council’s Medium Term Plan to be considered in July 2021. Nevertheless, over the course of the next few years the Council will seek to realign its revenue and capital budgets to ensure that it has the financial resources to invest in major projects that can have a positive impact on reducing the Council’s carbon footprint.

9 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are no legal implications aligned to this report.

10 LINKS TO THE CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT

10.1 The Council has committed to becoming a Carbon Neutral organisation by 2030 and to work with residents and businesses to ensure the whole County Borough is Carbon Neutral as close as possible to the 2030 target. This supports the priorities of the Council's Corporate Plan "Making a Difference" – 2020-24.

10.2 This report reflects the Sustainable development principles of the Well-being of Future Generations Act and will contribute to all seven national goals, with more immediate direct contributions to a Globally Responsible Wales, a more Resilient Wales, a Healthy Wales and a Wales of Cohesive Communities.

11 CONCLUSION

11.1 The Council has set the ambitious target to become a Carbon Neutral Council by 2030, along with the residents and businesses of the County Borough. The draft Tackling Climate Change Strategy sets out the action the Council will take over the next four years to make significant progress and lay the strong foundations to enable the Council to make progress towards achieving the 2030 target.

11.2 Achieving the 2030 target requires the communities of Rhondda Cynon Taf to work together. The Council, therefore, welcomes the opportunity to consult and engage with elected members, other public and private organisations, community and environmental groups and individuals in seeking their views how we can all help to achieve this ambitious target.