



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL CLIMATE CHANGE CABINET STEERING GROUP
Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group held on Wednesday,
10 November 2021 at 10.00 am.

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

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

Officers in attendance: -

Mr C Bradshaw, Chief Executive
Mr C Hanagan, Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication
Mr P Mee, Group Director Community & Children's Services
Ms L Davies, Director, Public Health, Protection and Community Services
Mr S Gale, Director of Prosperity & Development
Mr R Evans, Director of Human Resources
Mr R Waters, Service Director – Frontline Services
Mr D Powell, Director of Corporate Estates
Ms L Lawson, Performance Manager
Mr A Roberts, Head of Energy & Carbon Reduction
Mr R Wistow, Ecologist

Invited External Representatives of the Steering Group: -

Ms H Richards – Friends of the Earth
Mr I Thomas – Welcome to our Woods

9 Chairs Welcome

The Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting of the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group and welcomed County Borough Councillor J Barton to the Group. The Chair also informed the Group that County Borough Councillor M Webber was no longer a member of the Group and thanked her for her contributions to the Group and confirmed County Borough Councillor A Crimmings will take over the role of Vice Chair.

10 Declaration of Interest

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

11 Minutes

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 14th June

2021 as an accurate reflection.

12 Electric Vehicle Charging Strategy and Implementation Plan

The Head of Energy & Carbon Reduction presented Committee Members with an update to the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group with regards to the work underway on developing a Council Strategy for Electric Vehicle Charging (EVC) and how it relates to the wider RCT Council Net Zero and Carbon Reduction commitments.

Members were reminded that in April 2021 the Electric Vehicle Charging and Transportation Working Group was set up, comprising officers from across all Service Groups, under the leadership of the Corporate Estates Energy and Carbon Reduction Team.

The first part of the project has been the development of a Strategy to cover the future of Electric Vehicle Charging. Members were informed this lays out the aspirations of the Council and sets the scene for future development of EV Charging that is under the Councils remit.

The EVC Strategy has been updated and subject to approval by Cabinet is ready to be published, having progressed through internal consultation with stakeholders and a 2nd public consultation exercise. Members were given detail regarding the extensive consultation exercise that took place through the Councils 'Let's Talk' engagement platform with a dedicated project titled 'Let's Talk EV Charging'. The remarks, requests and other information that were submitted as part of the consultation were then collated into a report and fed into the final strategy document.

Members were informed the next steps will be the development of an Implementation Plan aimed at giving a clear road map on how to proceed, who to speak to, and how proposed works will need to be planned and implemented. The Implementation Plan will also contain an 'Action Plan' stating clear goals for the Council, including short, medium, and long-term targets for the Council to aspire towards, in the transition to the use of electric vehicles.

Member's attention was also drawn to the comprehensive impact assessment process that was undertaken with colleagues in the Welsh Language Service and the Diversity and Inclusion Service when developing the strategy.

The Chair thanked the officer for the report and acknowledged the work undertaken to establish the robust Strategy noting the strategy appears well thought out with thorough consideration for safe and accessible locations for all residents.

One Member praised the in-depth consultation process that had been carried out and how the comments from this process have been taken into account and fed into the final strategy showing the value in listening and engaging with members of the public and wider groups to ensure inclusion of those with disabilities and potential barriers to accessing an EV charging network.

Another Member queried information viewed outside of the meeting regarding to a UK Government restriction being placed on the use of EV Charging during peak hours. Officers responded that details of the specific restrictions mentioned by the Member were not known but that due to the complexity and capacity of the power network it is possible that there will need to be discussions held with

power suppliers regarding the introduction of an intelligent charging operation at specific times which ultimately may lead to the shaping of charging habits by EV users. Members were assured that future discussions will be ongoing with power suppliers to ensure the most suitable approach is adopted.

One Member raised the matter of charging points and accessibility to charge in terraced streets noting the presence of cables trailing across pavements and requested the Council provide clear guidance for residents on the legality of this practice in line with other Local Authorities. Members acknowledged the difficulty faced by the street scene in many locations particularly across the North of the borough in relation to terraced streets and accessing suitable charging points. Officers raised the potential health and safety risks this poses by having cables on pavements and highlighted from the report that as part of the strategy alternatives to at home parking were included as a possible solution in these circumstances. Members were also assured that guidance on the suitable practice of charging an electric vehicle at home including advice regarding the legal position of trailing cables from homes to vehicles is included as part of the implementation plan.

Most Members were in agreement that the development of the strategy is a positive move and moves the wider discussions on electric vehicle use on to the next stage. The group praised the efforts of and thanked Officers for their work in developing the strategy.

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

- To consider and note the feedback obtained from the public consultation in respect of the Electrical Vehicle Charging Strategy, and provide the above feedback to the Cabinet in respect of the adoption of the proposed strategy and its publication.
- To receive further reports to the Steering Group, providing further updates on progress with the development of an Implementation Plan.

It was noted that one Member (County Borough Councillor S Belzak) abstained from voting on this item commenting that further investment in bus transport would be better for the environment than Electric Vehicles.

13 The Council's Carbon Footprint Project

The Director of Corporate Estates provided an update to the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group with regards to the Carbon Footprint Project to measure and understand the Carbon Footprint of Rhondda Cynon Taf Council activities for the Financial Years 2019/20 and 2020/21. The Director of Corporate Estates also covered the associated new Welsh Government Carbon Reporting requirements for the same two Financial years and wider aspects relating to future for achieving the longer-term Rhondda Cynon Taf Council Net Zero and Carbon Reduction commitments.

Members were reminded that a previous report was presented in June setting out the Council's Carbon Footprint for 2019/20. The Officer drew Members to section 4.3 of the report which showed a reproduction of this data.

The Officer continued to advise Members that this was the first phase of the project with the second phase being work to calculate the Carbon Footprint for 2020/21 to identify the impact of Covid-19. Members were informed that the

Council commissioned the Carbon Trust to carry out the with the full report being provided as Appendix A.

The Officer pointed out to Members that the calculations were completed in conjunction with the Carbon Trust using a calculator widely used in other public sectors. Members were advised that at the time Welsh Government had not produced a calculator, so the Council proceeded with Carbon Trust. Members were informed that during the course of the year Welsh Government also produced guidelines for Local Authorities to use to calculate and the Council was required to submit data for the 2020/21 footprint along with 2019/20 data for baseline. The Officer stated that the Council were able to comply with deadline set and both sets submitted in accordance with Welsh Government timescales.

The Officer also highlighted to Members section 4.11 of the report which sets out the similarities in the reporting process between Welsh Government guidelines and the Carbon Trust calculator however it was acknowledged that there are some differences which were outlined and explained to Members.

The Council will continue to calculate Carbon Footprint in line with Welsh Government guidelines but will also continue to utilise the Carbon Trust calculator for comparison purposes.

The Officer drew Member's attention to section 5 of the report which outlines the establishment of a decarbonisation plan for Rhondda Cynon Taf Council activities which is a key project to guide successfully towards Rhondda Cynon Taf being a Carbon Neutral Council by 2030.

The Chair thanked Officers for their work involved in producing the data and a comprehensive report acknowledging the importance of identifying the current position of the Council. The Chair noted the downward trend in terms of the Carbon Footprint but acknowledged the ongoing challenges to continue this.

One Member queried what work the Council was doing regarding Carbon Capture and whether the Council measures how much Peat habitat there is within the borough emphasising the need to appreciate natural resources that can help mitigate some of the Carbon levels that occur. The Officer advised Members that the offset of natural assets is factored in to the data provided for the Carbon Footprint and he outlined the governance of sub-groups already set up within the Council who are working on projects to utilise the benefits of Peat habitat which feed into overall plan to de-carbonise the Council.

Another Member shared their concern that the Carbon Footprint does not include pension fund investments and the relation to fossil fuel investments. Discussion was held around the role of the Pension Fund Committee and the work being undertaken to look at reducing carbon fuelling investments.

Another Member raised the query of the impact of manufacturing processes on the Carbon Footprint data and if new manufacturers moved into the borough the resulting impact this could have. The Officer advised Members that the data provided within the reports is for Rhondda Cynon Taf as Council and not the borough as a whole however assured Members that Carbon reduction was a high priority for the Councils regeneration department as a whole.

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

1. To note the contents of this update report as part of the ongoing work of the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group
2. To provide feedback to the Cabinet in support the establishment of a Corporate Decarbonisation Plan for Rhondda Cynon Taf Council to provide a clear path and defined timescales for achieving the goal of reaching Net Zero by 2030 and;
3. To receive further reports to the Steering Group in 2022 providing further updates on progress.

14 Key Energy Generation Projects And Related Issues

The Head of Energy and Carbon Reduction provided a further update to the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group with regards to the progress made on the development of renewable energy projects and certain Carbon Reduction related issues.

Members were directed to section 5 of the report which detailed an update on current renewable energy projects.

The following projects were highlighted to Members, outlining the successes and future works required with key updates being provided from the contents of the report:

- 5MW Solar Farm Installation;
- Taffs Well Thermal Springs;
- Amgen Developments (Nant y Gwyddon wind turbine and Bryn Pica site)
- 9MW Windfarms;
- 3MW Windfarm;
- Hydro Electricity Opportunities
- ULEV Project;
- Carbon Reduction Programme;
- Carbon Footprint Project

The Officer referenced section 6 of the report which provides Members with an update on initiatives established in support of the work of the Steering Group noting that Officers are meeting regularly and working collaboratively towards the Councils goal of becoming net zero by 2030.

The Chair thanked the Head of Energy and Carbon Reduction for the informative update and was pleased to hear about project developing around Solar and Wind Energy. The Chair recognised the importance of the Taffs Well Thermal Springs and urged for a visit to the site as the project is very innovative. At the request of the group, the Chair identified the need for further exploration into the feasibility of hydro-projects across the County Borough.

One Member raised a query regarding Heat Pumps and the further need for

investigation to identify their efficiency long term within County Borough homes. The Officer acknowledged the importance of the project concerning the Thermal Spring and confirmed to Members that A visit to the Thermal Spring would look to be facilitated. It was encouraged throughout the meeting by the members as its seen as an innovative scheme that benefits the Council and its residents.

The Chair acknowledged the challenge of providing heat pumps for residential use at affordable costs at present but highlighted the work of the Councils Heat and Save team who work with residents currently to provide suitable assistance in installing heat pumps.

Another Member also raised the potential for the Council to revisit Hydro-Schemes within a Community scale to encourage Community ownership, development and involvement. The Director Corporate Estates informed Members that discussions are currently ongoing with one Community Group in Clydach Vale but at present there are currently approximately 14 Hydro Schemes that are being reviewed, some of these which are Community based. He advised Members that the Council would be willing to engage with the Community to determine the viability of co-ownership schemes. One Member discussed the potential for Rhondda Cynon Taff Council to look to pursue schemes that utilise Mines Water as an energy source compared to Warm Springs

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

1. To note the contents of this update report as part of the ongoing work of the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group.
2. To receive a future report on the Solar Farm Installation, to highlight and realise the growing potential of these particular proposals.
3. To receive further reports in 2022 providing further updates on progress.

15 Cardiff Capital Region ULEV Strategy And Progress

The Director of Corporate Estates outlined the purpose of the report utilising information presented to Cardiff Capital Region Board to provide an update to the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group with regards to the work underway by the Cardiff Capital Region (CCR) with their Ultra Low Emissions Vehicles (ULEV) strategy and progress.

The Officer highlighted to Members that Cenex was commissioned to prepare a draft ULEV Strategy for the CCR and a full copy of the strategy was attached at Appendix 1. Further commissions include a Metro Plus ULEV Strategy and a ULEV Taxi Strategy.

Members were reminded that Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council is the lead Authority managing the funding of the ULEV transformation for the region with the Regional Transport Authority (RTA) providing leadership and overall management of the project.

The Officer drew Members attention to section 5 of the report which detailed schemes being carried out with the additional funding received by Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council including ULEV taxi charger provision, ULEV – Provision of Public Use Charging Infrastructure and ULEV – Provision of Bus

Use Charging Infrastructure. Members were also provided with an overview of future opportunities as outlined in Section 6 of the report.

The Chair thanked the Officer for the update report noting the funding pledged in section 4 of the report and the inclusion of strategies for taxi and bus provision. He also highlighted the positives in the strategy contributing to wider efforts across Rhondda Cynon Taf to rolling out EV infrastructure.

One Member noted the decreasing bus services and the impact this has on residents and the ability to provide a ULEV strategy. The Director Frontline Services acknowledged the importance of bus services across the borough but advised Members of the impact of Covid-19 on passenger numbers, services and the effects of driver shortages. Members were assured that work is being done to ensure continuing current provision of services.

Another Member acknowledged the aim for ULEV bus and taxi fleets are ambitious but raised concerns regarding taxi fleets and the preparatory work that would be required to be carried out in line with taxi operators in advance of any changes. The Director- Public Health, Protection And Community Services advised Members that the strategy was informed by consultation carried out with taxi fleet operators across Wales and the outcome of this showed they were encouraged by proposal but identified the need for a pilot operation as being key.

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

1. To note the contents of this report as an update on the wider regional approach to developing a ULEV strategy

16 Biodiversity and the Local Nature Partnership in Rhondda Cynon Taf

Members were provided with a report presented by the Councils Ecologist. The Ecologist outlined the purpose of the report to provide an update for members on the work of the Council and the Local Nature Partnership in relation to biodiversity in RCT and the future direction of this work.

Members were provided with some background to the report with the Ecologist reminding Members of the importance of the Biodiversity Duty placing a duty on all public bodies to consider biodiversity in the work that it does and the challenges and opportunities this presents in terms of cross departmental working. This process has become embedded in the corporate performance culture of the Council and whilst much of this is routine, it is also encouraging some innovative projects.

The Ecologist referenced the Pen Y Cymoedd wind farm project and discussed the content of the detail set out in the report. He also highlighted the importance of the process of Planning on biodiversity outlining changes to Planning Policy Guidance from Welsh Government as set out in the report.

Members were reminded of the Nature's Assets report presented previously to the committee which has also led to a number of on-going projects associated with peat-bog restoration opportunities, the carbon storage, water management and biodiversity potential of Council owned land, schools, ancient woodlands and trees.

The Ecologist also provided an overview of an engagement project hosted through the Council's 'Let's Talk RCT' platform titled 'Let's Talk Wildflowers' whereby residents were invited to identify areas they would like to see Wildflower management for consideration in future programmes of work. Members were told that the engagement had been well received and a number of responses had so far been received that will be reviewed in the coming months.

Further examples of community engagement were highlighted to Members through discussion around the Local Nature Partnership Plan and the Ecologist informed Members that the new plan was currently in the process of being written. Details of funding received as part of the plan and how it has been spent were pointed out to Members in sections 4.7 and 4.8 of the report.

The Ecologist also updated Members from the report regarding the Living Landscapes project and details of 29 pilot sites that have been identified. Members were also informed about the appointment of two biodiversity apprentices providing an opportunity to undertake practical works on these sites utilising supervision and training input from established staff, including the LNP co-ordinator and the graduate ecologist.

The Chair thanked the Officer for a comprehensive report noting the pleasing update regarding the various projects ongoing throughout the borough and the co-working opportunities these provide.

One Member also commented on the good practice of cross departmental working and the benefits of this across the authority. Praise was also given to the engagement being carried out with local residents regarding biodiversity through the 'Let's Talk RCT' platform.

One Member raised a question regarding the presence of peat bogs and wetlands in RCT and why there may be an increase in these drying out. The Ecologist advised Members that a main reason for this would be drainage patterns.

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

1. To note the progress made in RCT in recent years and the increasing importance of biodiversity conservation in the Council's work.
2. To support the increased profile that all parties in the Senedd have given to biodiversity, which is reflected in the Programme for Government.
3. To recommend to the Cabinet that the Council take full advantage of any grant funding available to continue and increase work on this issue.

17 **Active Travel Strategy, Measures And Issues In Rhondda Cynon Taf**

The Director of Frontline Services informed Members that the purpose of the report was to outline the strategy of the Council developing active travel (walking and cycling) across Rhondda Cynon Taf, the investment that has either already been committed or is planned and the issues that need to be taken into account when implementing schemes. The Officer highlighted the significance of the report; focusing on the Active Travel Act (Wales) 2013, as vital tool which can be

utilised to tackle Climate Change with the focus on enabling meaningful journeys, via Cycling and Walking. The Officer stated that Under the Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013, the team are required to produce and submit Active Travel Networks Maps to the Welsh Government by December 2021 with authorization from Cabinet members.

Members were informed that currently the Network Maps are out to formal Consultation until the 22nd of November 2021; so far, 700 responses have been received from the consultation thus portraying the interest in Active Travel.

The Director of Frontline Services highlighted to Members that delivery of the aspirations set out in the strategy will be dependent on funding and directed members to section 5.5 and 5.6 of the report which detail the Councils success in receiving funding towards the Active Travel Scheme. The officer stated Welsh Government will look to invest £70 million in Active Travel infrastructure this year across Wales which will aid in creating a vast portfolio of new assets which will need to be maintained through a range of ways including glitter picking, gritting and potholes.

Members were advised that the appendices attached to the report set out annual progress reports which the Council are required to submit to Welsh Government each year highlighting works and projects undertaken under the Active Travel Act (Wales) 2013. He stated that the Council are required to show continual improvement year on year and highlighted a range of infrastructure initiatives and education / training opportunities outlined within the appendices.

The Chair thanked the Director of Frontline Service for the positive report, and the actions being taken to tackle Climate Change. The Chair referred members back to section 5.6 of the report highlighting the positives in levels of funding from the Welsh Government for 2021/22; however, he did recognize the need for further funding for future projects in the coming years. The Chair urged the members of the Cabinet and community to participate in the consultation which will be formulated and fed back to the Welsh Government in December 2021.

One member was pleased with the efforts taken in the report; however, raised a query regarding litter pollution in the routes and urged the Council to develop litter prevention strategies to tackle this problem. The member suggested the Council utilise community-based groups to prevent litter pollution and raise awareness across the Borough. This was encouraged by members as they recognised the significance of community-based groups as a huge resource to the Council. Another member mentioned the opportunity of the Council collaborating with Transport for Wales initiative 'Green Valley' as another potential avenue to tackle litter pollution.

The Group acknowledged the opportunities that engaging with local community groups regarding litter picking can have on tackling the issue and one Member highlighted the work of the Public Service Delivery, Communities and Prosperity Scrutiny Committee and the work that they are carrying out to look into this issue further.

Members thanked officers for their passionate involvement regarding community consultation and ensuring that they are proactive in getting as many views as possible on the matter.

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

- To note the contents of this report for information and the progress made by the Council implementing its active travel strategy.

This meeting closed at 11.45 am

**COUNCILLOR R LEWIS
CHAIR.**