



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

Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Climate Change, Frontline Services & Prosperity Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday, 18 January 2024 at 5.00 pm.

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

Councillor C Middle (Chair)

Councillor G L Warren Councillor P Binning
Councillor V Dunn Councillor G Holmes
Councillor W Hughes Councillor G Jones
Councillor A O Rogers Councillor R Yeo
Councillor P Evans

Officers in attendance:-

Mr C Hanagan, Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication
Mr A Stone, Head of Flood Risk Management and Strategic Projects
Mr S Williams, Director for Highways, Streetcare and Transportation Services

Apologies for absence

Councillor J Barton Councillor E L Dunning
Councillor G O Jones

33 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.

34 Apologies

Apologies of absence were duly noted from County Borough Councillors Geraint Jones, E. Dunning and J. Barton.

35 Declaration of Interest

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

36 Minutes

The minutes of the 22nd November 2023 were **APPROVED** as an accurate record.

37 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.

38 Pre Scrutiny of the Revised Local Flood Risk Management Strategy (LFRMS) and Action Plan

The Service Director, Democratic Services & Communications advised Members that the purpose of the report was to pre scrutinise the Local Flood Risk Management Strategy (LFRMS) and that Members comments will be fed back to Cabinet. Following this, the Head of Flood Risk Management presented his report to Members and advised that the strategy will subsequently be presented to Welsh Government for Ministerial approval.

Following this, Members had the opportunity to ask questions. The Chair thanked Officers for a detailed overview and praised the strategy. Another Member queried if the wind can exacerbate flooding. The Head of Flood Risk Management confirmed that the wind brings down so much debris that it can block culverted watercourses, but it can also affect the tidal areas etc and increase flood risk.

Discussions ensued and a Member commented that it would be useful if the report contained less abbreviations and more detail of the wording being used. The Head of Flood Risk advised that this is always a challenge and that the summary document, which is currently in draft, will not contain acronyms at all. The summary document will be aimed at members of the public.

Another Member queried how the Council encourages residents to adopt more flood prevention schemes by themselves for example in their own gardens and also how does the Council encourage private developers to adopt more flood prevention strategies. The Head of Flood Risk identified that there are two areas; the already built and the areas to be built. In respect of the areas already built, the Head of Flood Risk identified that communication is key as well as web resources and ease of access. There is also the enforcement side, which is the rules and regulations on existing infrastructure. The main focus has to be education. In terms of building houses, everything has to meet with the Welsh Government standards for sustainable drainage which effectively comes under green infrastructure. The Head of Flood Risk confirmed that this is contained within the LFRMS. There is also a planning guidance being looked through the Local Development Plan and it is also embedded in the Council's Climate Change Strategy. In respect of this, the Chair queried whether there was provision being made within the build of a project for maintenance. The Head of Flood Risk advised that Standard 6 of the Welsh Government Standards is all about the Construction phase and maintainability and Members were reassured

that all of this is now embedded in the LFRMS.

Discussion continued and a Member advised that it would be helpful if the document contained a breakdown of the vulnerability of each ward to the risk of flooding. The Member also queried what responsibility private companies have to ensure that residents properties are safe from flooding and also queried how the residents are being prepared for flood warnings. In respect of graphics by ward, the Head of Flood Risk advised that a ward breakdown is in the current plan on the website, but it does not align with the current data and catchment thinking (water does not obey ward boundaries for example) and that the current LFRMS works in strategic areas and that this is so that RCT can work with larger companies like NRW and Welsh Water can work in a more strategic and targeted way. In respect of private companies and their liability, Members were advised that some companies such as TfW do have an obligation for managing flood risk and that private companies main liabilities are with negligence and they have liabilities under civil law. Further, in respect of communication with the public, the Council's webpage is being upgraded to provide further information about flooding awareness and within those resources are links that will take the user to the NRW's website. The Member further queried how this is communicated to residents to ensure up to date awareness. The Senior Flood Risk Officer advised that as well as the web page, the Council is piloting community sub plans and also encouraging more campaigning and participation events.

Discussions continued and a Member queried how does this strategy compare with other Local Authorities and queried what more the Authority would do if the resources were available. The Member also queried if we have the resources to enforce building and planning flood risk regulations during the planning process. The Head of Flood Risk Management advised that he had a very good Flood Risk Management team and advised that we are in a very good position as an Authority. In respect of extra resources, Members were advised that within the limits of Welsh Government spend, we are in a very good position and that RCT Council is very supportive of allocating the resources needed to manage flood risk. In respect of enforcement, Members were advised that an enforcement officer has been allocated to the team and that since the officer joined the team there has been a clear increase in our enforcement activities as a Council. Matters pertaining to planning enforcement sit with the planning authority. The Director of Frontline Services supported this assessment and advised that as an Authority we have a lot of in house expertise, which puts us in a really good position in respect of flood risk. It was also emphasised that sometimes flooding is outside of the Council's responsibility and will sometimes be the responsibility of other risk management authorities such as NRW.

Discussions ensued and a Member referred back to the abbreviations used in the report and recommended using a glossary of terms at the beginning of the strategy to ensure that it is user friendly for the public to read. The Member queried what is the legal position on the use of abbreviations in a statutory document. The Head of Legal Services advised that abbreviations are needed to make the document more manageable or otherwise the document would become far too lengthy and repetitive. The Head of Legal Services advised that the glossary of terms is at the back of the document and bringing it to the front of the strategy would be a good option. Members supported this recommendation.

Another Member queried whether Officers think the strategy is fit for purpose going forward, particularly as the climate changes at such a fast speed and

particularly in light of budget cuts and austerity measures. The Director of Frontline Services acknowledged that areas that are not currently effected might become at risk of flooding in the future and that resources are limited, however it was emphasised that the document sets out the Council's overarching strategy and puts us in a good position going forward. The Head of Flood Risk Management advised that the Strategy is fixed for approx. 5-6years but the Action Plan isn't and will be amended to reflect up to date funding grants etc. It was also emphasised that the risk analysis data, especially the maps, are updated every 6 months by NRW.

The Chair further queried if all the Section 19 actions have been incorporated into this strategy and action plan. The Head of Flood Risk Management advised that all outstanding actions have now been incorporated into the Action Plan.

Another Member queried if there could be a situation in the future where the Council could store the excess water to get residents through the dry Summer months. The Head of Flood Risk Management advised that the water supply is actually managed by Welsh Water, however, the Officer did acknowledge that in the future this may be a possibility. The Chair further queried how the LFRMS aligns with the Council's Climate Change Strategy. The Senior Flood Risk Officer advised that Chapter 4 in the Strategy is a dedicated chapter incorporating the challenges of Climate Change and Flood Risk. There is also detail in the strategy on how the Council will maximise biodiversity benefits going forward etc.

Discussions ensued and a Member queried whether we are working collaboratively with other Local Authorities to tackle similar issues. The Head of Flood Risk Management advised that RCT has the highest surface water flood risk in Wales. In respect of working collaboratively with partners, Members were advised that neighbouring Local Authorities and partner organisations meet every few months to discuss cross cutting issues and have joint policies/guidance documents. Another Member queried whether RCT has mapping of culverts throughout the County Borough. The Member also queried the Council's response time when the Council does become aware of a flooding issue. In respect of the culverts, Members were advised that over 60% are currently privately owned. The intention is that where there is an issue, the Council will target resources to pick up and collate that information. In terms of response times, Members were advised calls have to be prioritised and that the team has to work within the resources available. The Director of Frontline Services advised Members that they would be welcome to visit the Council's control room and were advised to arrange this through the Council Business Unit team.

Another Member referred the Committee towards reference in the report to the Public Health Act 1946 and noted that this legislation has been repealed. Officers advised that they would email the Member separately to advise on the specific section of the legislation that is being referred to in the Strategy. The Chair further queried if the Council had contingency plans and if these plans involve working with outside emergency services. The Head of Flood Risk advised that the Strategy includes emergency planning and emergency contingency plans.

Following discussion, Members **RESOLVED:**

- i. To undertake pre scrutiny on the Council's Revised Local Flood Risk Management Strategy and Action Plan attached at Appendix A; and,

- ii. To provide comment on the report and for feedback to be provided to the Cabinet, at its meeting to be held on the 24th January 2024.

39 Urgent Business

There was no urgent business to report.

40 Chairs Review & Close

The Chair thanked Members and Officers for attending. The Service Director, Democratic Services & Communications confirmed that Members comments would be fed back to Cabinet and that a letter would be drafted summarising tonight's recommendations.

This meeting closed at 6.13 pm

**Councillor C Middle
Chair.**