

ENVIRONMENTAL & PUBLIC PROTECTION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

5 MARCH 2021

PRESENT: Councillor J.D. James (Chair)

Councillors:

J.M. Charles, T.A.J. Davies, J.A. Davies, K. Davies, S.J.G. Gilasbey, T.M. Higgins, E. Morgan, B.D.J. Phillips, J.S. Phillips, A.D.T. Speake, D. Thomas and A. Vaughan Owen.

Councillor K. Lloyd - Substitute for Councillor P. Edwards.

Also in attendance:

Councillor C.A. Campbell, Executive Board Member for Communities and Rural Affairs;
Councillor H.A.L. Evans, Executive Board Member for Environment;
Councillor P.M. Hughes, Executive Board Member for Public Protection.

The following Officers were in attendance:

R. Mullen, Director of Environment,
N. Daniel, Head of I.C.T. and Corporate Policy,
J. Morgan, Head of Homes & Safer Communities,
S. Pilliner, Head of Transportation & Highways,
A. Williams, Head of Waste and Environmental Services,
G. Ayers, Corporate Policy and Partnership Manager,
R. Carmichael, Rural Conservation Manager,
R. Edmunds, Consumer and Business Affairs Manager,
K. Davies, Sustainable Development Manager,
S.E. Watts, Environmental Protection Manager,
H. Neil, Senior Consumer Protection Officer,
M. Evans Thomas, Principal Democratic Services Officer,
S. Rees, Simultaneous Translator,
J. Corner, Technical Officer,
E. Bryer, Democratic Services Officer,
J. Owen, Democratic Services Officer.

Virtual Meeting - 10.00 am - 12.43 pm

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Penny Edwards.

2. DECLARATIONS OF PERSONAL INTEREST INCLUDING ANY PARTY WHIPS ISSUED IN RELATION TO ANY AGENDA ITEM.

There were no declarations of any prohibited party whips.

Councillor	Minute Item(s)	Nature of Interest
K. Lloyd	Item 6 – Net Zero Carbon Plan	Councillor Lloyd is a member and a shareholder of Carmarthen Energy Ltd

3. PUBLIC QUESTIONS (NONE RECEIVED)

The Chair advised that no public questions had been received.

4. CORPORATE STRATEGY 2018/23 - UPDATE APRIL 2021

The Committee received a report presented by Councillor C. Campbell, Executive Board Member for Communities and Rural Affairs providing an update on the Council's Corporate Strategy for 2018-23, as at April 2021.

The report detailed the progress being achieved against the Council's Well Being objectives adopted in June 2018, as amended to reflect developing priorities and the impact of the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, Brexit and climate change.

The Committee noted that while it was considered good practice to ensure the Corporate Strategy was up to date and resources allocated to priorities, the Improvement Objectives must be published annually in accordance with both the Local Government (Wales Measure 2009) and The Well-being of Future Generations Act.

Supporting presentations were also made by Executive Board Members Councillors H. Evans, Executive Board Member with responsibility for Environment and P.M. Hughes, Executive Board Member for Public Protection in relation to their specific portfolios.

The following questions/issues were raised on the report:-

- Reference was made to Well-being objective 8 - Support community cohesion, resilience & safety. In relation to the statistic that five years ago 73% of Carmarthenshire residents felt they lived in a cohesive community, concern was expressed that this had reduced to half (51.5%). It was asked, if there was an explanation for the significant reduction? The Executive Board Member for Communities and Rural Affairs explained that a report was recently presented to Executive Board on work surrounding social cohesion. Following extensive consultation, it was evidenced that tensions had arisen around the Brexit debate, which had divided families, friends and communities. In addition, the report recognised that the Covid-19 pandemic was also a contributing factor as well as the public debate on the Black Lives Matter movement.

It was requested that the abovementioned report to Executive Board be forwarded to Committee Members. This was duly noted and would be actioned accordingly.

- Reference was made to Community Resilience (WBO 8). Whilst acknowledging that the pandemic was a significant challenge which brought communities together, however there was an escalating issue in Carmarthenshire due to climate change, the consequences of which had resulted in reoccurring examples of flooding. It was asked if the Council was able to learn from this period in order to build more community resilience? The Executive Board Member for Communities and Rural Affairs explained that during the pandemic many communities worked together to help the most vulnerable. In relation to flooding specifically, it was accepted that flooding incidents were occurring more frequently, highlighting that due to the complexity of the of the issues it was suggested that the best way to tackle the reoccurring issues would be to develop a strategic long-term solution by working together with the Welsh Government, Natural Resource Wales (NRW), Carmarthenshire Council and Farmers Unions.

Whilst understanding the challenges, it was raised that it would be beneficial for more opportunities to be available for communities to work alongside 3 sector organisations, particularly in the recovery process.

- Reference was made to WBO 10. It was raised if the role of 'Plastic Free Carmarthenshire' should be present in this objective as a Healthy and Safe Environment and is the Council still working towards this? The Executive Board Member for Communities and Rural Affairs stated that the Council had passed a policy to cease 'Single Use Plastics' and that whilst there were discussions currently taking place with other public bodies it was acknowledged that there was still a lot of work to be achieved. However, it was further reported that by now, many of the schools throughout Carmarthenshire would be plastic free. The Executive Board Member for Environment added that following a brief hiatus on this matter due to the pandemic the Council was now actively working towards the goal of discontinuing sourcing all Single Use Plastic. In relation to the question of including with WBO 10 this would be considered.
- In reference to WBO 11 and the section of improving transport to school, it was asked if there had been any progress made with the Welsh Government on changing the distances for home to school transport? The Executive Board Member for Environment explained that the Welsh Government had asked all Local Authorities for detailed feedback and that she was waiting for the results to be published.
- It was asked if the Committee would consider setting up a climate commission similar to some other councils who were working with the Climate Foundation. It was suggested that a feasibility study could be undertaken to look into forming a climate commission

- Reference was made to WBO 7 – Live Well – Help people live health lives. In relation to substance misuse it was asked if consideration had been made into looking into safe places/rooms for individuals to go to in desperate need. Executive Board Member for Public Protection stated that there were a number of safe places available for individuals who substance misuse to utilise. The Executive Board Member for Community and Rural Affairs explained that there was a very effective organisation called DDAS who provide support for drug users and provide safe places. Following a recent meeting with the Chief Superintendent specifically about drugs where it was reported that there was a significant problem with County lines all across Carmarthenshire. In light of this information, the importance of DDAS and other such organisations who currently provide invaluable support was highlighted.
- With regard to the flooding issues, it was commented that in years gone past gravel was removed from the riverbeds to prevent rivers overflowing. It was suggested that reintroducing dredging of the rivers to make room for the water would serve as preventative measure to avoid further flooding incidents. The Executive Board Member for Environment stated that NRW were currently investigating the possibility of reintroducing the method of dredging rivers.
- In response to a query raised regarding the impact that the Covid-19 pandemic has had on the air quality in Carmarthenshire, the Executive Board Member of Public Protection stated there had been a significant improvement in the air quality since the beginning of the pandemic. A report will be presented to the Committee at the next meeting which will refer to this information.
- Reference was made to the key success measures of WBO 10 located on page 34 of the report. It was suggested to include an additional key success measure in relation to the energy reduction. The Executive Board Member for Communities and Rural Affairs agreed with the suggestion as a significant amount of work had been undertaken to reduce carbon emissions and the inclusion of this key measure would show the success in many aspects of the work.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the Corporate Strategy 2018/23 Update April 2021 report be received.

5. COVID 19 AND THE FINANCIAL EXPLOITATION SAFEGUARDING SCHEME (FESS)

The Committee received a report which was introduced by the Chair of the Task and Finish Group currently reviewing the Financial Exploitation Safeguarding Scheme (FESS). The Task and Finish Group, which was conducting a review of the wider interventions the team operate under FESS, proposed that the information provided in the report would be beneficial to all members of the Committee.

The aim of the report was to raise awareness and inform the Committee members of the proactive work undertaken by the Trading Standards team on financial exploitation and its work in protecting those vulnerable to exploitation during the Covid-19 Pandemic.

The report included the following information:-

- Covid-19 No Cold Calling Zones support flyer, Rogue Training, Fraud and Scams
- Digital infographics - details of the interventions that Trading Standards offer
- Business Advice infographic - containing examples of common business scams and other essential information
- Information on the Buy with Confidence scheme
- Statistical information in relation to the innovative trueCall© device monitoring tool

The report was presented by Councillor Philip Hughes, Executive Board Member for Public Protection supported by the Consumer and Business Affairs Manager.

The following questions/issues were raised on the report:-

- A member expressed that as a victim of fraud, the support provided by the Trading Standards team throughout the ordeal was invaluable and advocated the departments work on FESS.
- It was commented that with cold calling on the increase it was good to note that the Trading Standards team were working together with the police.

The Executive Board member wished to extend his sincere thanks to all the officers of the Trading Standards team for their excellent work.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the Covid-19 and the Financial Exploitation Safeguarding Scheme report be received.

6. NET ZERO CARBON PLAN - UPDATE REPORT (DRAFT)

[Note: Councillor K. Lloyd having earlier declared a personal interest in this item remained in the meeting, participated in the consideration but did not partake in the decision thereof].

Following the approval of the Net Zero Carbon (NZC) Plan by County Council on 12th February 2020, the draft Net Zero Carbon Plan update was developed in accordance with Action NZC-28 of the Plan that required performance reports on progress towards becoming a net zero carbon local authority by 2030 to be published annually.

The Committee received the draft progress report presented by Councillor Cefin Campbell, the Executive Board Member for Communities and Rural Affairs. The draft report comprised of detailed information within following sections:-

- High Level Summary including Progress against Actions
- COVID-19 and Climate Change
- Progress Update
- Future Actions
- Wider Response to Climate Emergency (Appendix 1)

The following questions/issues were raised on the report:-

- In terms of flooding matters, a query was raised how the Council was going to work with the farming unions? The Executive Board for Communities and Rural Affairs stated that the Rural Affairs Working Group had considered slurry management which had noted that river pollution had decreased, however there were a number of other factors involved not just farming industry. Farmers were required to adhere to set regulations, whereby breaches of the regulations could be a better measurement.
- Reference was made to the funding that had been awarded by Welsh Government to install an electric vehicle superfast charging hub at Crosshands, it was asked if more information on this could be received? The Executive Board Member for Communities and Rural Affairs stated that there were currently 26 charging points across the County and the ambition was to install more. The Head of Transportation & Highways provided an update confirming that a grant bid had been submitted to the Welsh Government to install a further 14 charging points next year. In terms of development of the Crosshands superfast charging hub, it was confirmed that this was on schedule to ready for commission in April this year.
- It was asked if electric vehicle charging points should be included as a planning condition for large developments e.g., supermarkets? The Head of Highways and Transportation explained that Welsh Government were currently developing a national strategy on electric vehicle charging for release later this year. Following the release of this strategy, the Council's electric vehicle strategy could potentially seek a developer's commitment regarding electric charging infrastructure.
- In response to a query on whether Western Power Distribution had any plans to improve the capacity of the local electricity distribution network system (Grid), the Executive Board Member for Communities and Rural Affairs stated that he was aware of discussions with Western Power Distribution on this matter. The Sustainable Development Manager confirmed that Officers were in discussions with Western Power Distribution and Welsh Government Energy Service. It was reported that Western Power Distribution had recently issued a call for evidence to identify 'ready to go' low carbon projects should there be sufficient Grid capacity. The Council would be responding to this call for evidence in conjunction with the Welsh Government Energy Service prior to the 19th March 2021 deadline.

In response to a further query, the Director of Environment stated that there was an example of a scheme that had been put forward by the Council's waste and disposal company Cwm Environmental Ltd who had worked with Welsh Government Energy Service to introduce a second wind turbine at Nantycaws. Initial discussions with Western Power Distribution had indicated that it would be possible to install a wind turbine of a certain size to export to the Grid. However, upon further discussion it was disappointing to learn that the proposed wind turbine would have to be downsized due to the Grid not having sufficient capacity to accept the electricity generated by the proposed wind turbine. This demonstrated that there were Grid constraint issues in connecting even a single wind turbine. However, it was reported that the scheme was ready, and this would be fed back into Western Power Distribution's recently issued call for evidence.

- In response to a query in relation to whether there was sufficient energy to supply planned large developments, the Sustainable Development Manager stated that Western Power Distribution have an on-line interactive Network Capacity Map which provides information on available Grid capacity in specific areas (a hyperlink was provided on page 20 of the draft Update Report). Western Power Distribution have also produced on-line interactive Distribution Future Energy Scenarios that outline a range of futures for the growth of the Grid.
- Disappointment was expressed that after two years since the Council initially declared a climate emergency in March 2019, the Welsh Government had not yet distributed its reporting guidance to Local Authorities. It was asked if there was any sign of receiving the Wales Carbon Reporting guidance from Welsh Government? The Sustainable Development Manager, in response, reported that it was anticipated that the guidance would be received before the end of March 2021.
- Acknowledging the Grid infrastructure issues, it was asked if there was any high-level plan or strategy for Wales to increase its distribution capacity in order for all Authorities that have declared a climate emergency to meet the 2030 target? The Sustainable Development Manager in response, acknowledged that this issue was not confined to individual Local Authorities stating that Carmarthenshire was just one of the potential developers wishing to invest in renewable energy. It was reported that the Welsh Government were in the process of developing a Decarbonisation Strategy which was likely to be completed before the Climate Change Conference (COP26) in Glasgow, November 2021.
- In response to a query in relation to the Council investing in renewable energy where reinforcement costs were necessary to increase the capacity of the Grid, the Executive Board Member for Communities and Rural Affairs stated that the cost of putting the necessary infrastructure in place could be significant and reassured Members that no money would be committed unless assurances were received that sufficient Grid capacity was available. In addition, the Executive Board Member emphasised that it would be highly unlikely for any Local Authority to be Net Zero Carbon by 2030 unless the Grid had sufficient capacity, therefore it was important for discussions to take place at Welsh Government and a UK Government levels.

- Reference was made to the action regarding working with Carmarthenshire Public Services Board and Swansea Bay City Deal partners. It was asked if any of the partners on the Public Services Board had declared a climate emergency and committed to Net Zero Carbon? The Executive Board Member for Communities and Rural Affairs stated that he was not aware of any other public sector bodies in Carmarthenshire having declared a climate emergency, however the Public Services Board were currently discussing ways of reducing carbon footprint as a County. The Director of Environment added that whilst all members of the Public Services Board were aware of the climate emergency and have objectives in place to reduce their carbon footprint, she would enquire to include this discussion on a future Public Services Board agenda.
- **It was proposed** that this Committee write a letter to the Welsh Government to convey its concern regarding the limited capacity of the local electricity distribution network and to request that Welsh Government work with Local Authorities, and others, to develop a clear plan to address this issue. In addition, the Committee in its letter, convey its disappointment that the Wales Carbon Reporting Guidance has not been published to date. It was further proposed that the Committee request that the Executive Board, in a separate letter to the Welsh Government echo and support the Committee's comments. The proposals were duly seconded.
- In response to queries raised regarding the LED Street Lighting conversion project the Head of Transportation and Highways confirmed that the County road network had been completed with all 15,000 lights that were in the programme being converted to LED saving over 2.3m kilowatt hours of electricity used since 2015. In addition, it was reported that whilst he would need to confirm with Members after the meeting, he believed that the conversion work had been completed for the majority of Town/Community Councils who had signed up to the scheme.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that:

- 6.1 **the Environmental and Public Protection Scrutiny Committee write to the Welsh Government to convey the comments raised stated above;**
- 6.2 **IT BE RECOMMENDED TO THE EXECUTIVE BOARD that the Executive Board write a letter to the Welsh Government in support of and to reaffirm the Committee's comments.**
- 6.2 **the Net Zero Carbon Plan – Update Report be received.**

7. EXPLANATION FOR NON-SUBMISSION OF SCRUTINY REPORT

The Committee received an explanation for the non-submission of the following scrutiny reports:-

- Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) – Future Delivery Plan
- Anti-Social Behaviour Policy
- Departmental Business Plans

The Executive Board Member for Public Protection informed the Committee that with regard to the Anti-Social Behaviour Policy, unfortunately there was a further delay and that this report would now be presented to the Committee next meeting in May 2021 and not April as stated in the report.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that:

- 7.1 the revised date for the Anti-Social Behaviour Policy be accepted;**
- 7.2 the explanation for the non-submission be noted.**

8. FORTHCOMING ITEMS

The Committee noted the number of reports on the agenda for the next meeting which was due to a cumulation of delayed reports over the last few months. However, the Chair explained that it was important to ensure that the Committee was provided to carry out quality scrutiny and therefore proposed to extend the Committee meeting into the afternoon.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that:

- 8.1 the list of forthcoming items to be considered at the next scheduled meeting on the 19th April 2021 be noted;**
- 8.2 the E&PP Scrutiny Committee meeting in April be extended into the afternoon.**

9. TO SIGN AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE HELD ON THE 1ST FEBRUARY 2021

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 1st February, 2021 be signed as a correct record.

CHAIR

DATE