

PLACE, SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

4 OCTOBER 2022

PRESENT: (In Person) Councillor J.D. James (Chair)

Councillors (In Person):

P. Cooper, K. Davies, G.B. Thomas.

Councillors (Virtually):

S.M. Allen, N. Evans, T.M. Higgins, G.R. Jones,
B.D.J. Phillips, N. Lewis. A. Evans.

Also in attendance:

Councillor A. Vaughan Owen, Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Decarbonisation and Sustainability.

The following Officers were in attendance (In Person):

N. Daniel, Head of ICT and Corporate Policy;
S. Pilliner, Head of Transportation and Highways;
J. Edwards, Business Improvement Manager;
D.W. John, Environmental Services Manager;
S. Rees, Simultaneous Translator;
J. Owen, Democratic Services Officer [Minute Taker].

The following Officers were in attendance (Virtually):

R. Griffiths, Head of Place and Sustainability;
J. Morgan, Head of Housing,
K. Davies, Sustainable Development Manager;
R. Carmichael, Rural Conservation Manager.

Chamber, County Hall, Carmarthen, SA31 1JP and remotely: 10:00am - 11:40am

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor A.D.T. Davies and Councillor C. Evans.

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.
There were no declarations of interest made.

3. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

The Chair advised that no public questions had been received.

4. ENVIRONMENTAL AND PUBLIC PROTECTION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - ANNUAL REPORT 2021/22

The Committee received the Environmental and Public Protection Scrutiny Committee Annual Report on the work undertaken during the 2021/22 municipal year. It was noted that the report had been prepared in accordance with Article 6.2 of the Council's Constitution and provided an overview of the work programme and key issues addressed, whilst also incorporating any issues referred to, or from, the Cabinet, Task and Finish reviews and development sessions.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the Environmental and Public Protection Scrutiny Committee Annual Report 2021/22 be received.

5. ENVIRONMENTAL AND PUBLIC PROTECTION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - ACTIONS - 2021/22

The Committee received the actions arising from the Environmental and Public Protection Scrutiny Committee from its work during 2021/22 and considered the progress made in relation to actions, requests or referrals recorded during previous meetings of the Committee.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the Environmental and Public Protection Scrutiny Committee Actions Report for 2021/22 be received.

6. FORWARD WORK PLAN FOR 2022/23

The Committee, in accordance with Article 6.2 of the Council's constitution, considered its draft 2022/23 Forward Work Plan. The Committee also considered its Task and Finish arrangements for the 2022/23-24.

The Committee, at its informal Forward Work Plan development session on 21st September, 2022 began the process of formulating the forward work plan for 2022/23. The outcome of the development session was now presented to the Committee in the Forward Work Plan for confirmation.

Members developed the Committee's Forward Work Plan considering the issues subjects of concern within the remit of the Place, Sustainability and Climate Change Scrutiny Committee, managing the agenda by way of the Gateway Methodology.

In addition, throughout the year Members noted that they would be considering the Cabinet's Forward Work Plan to identify pre-decision reports they wish to place on the Scrutiny Forward Work Plan.

The report highlighted that the Committee at its meeting on 2nd July, 2021 formally agreed that the Task and Finish arrangements for 2021/22-2023 be carried out in the following order:-

- 1) To review the Management of Fly Tipping within Carmarthenshire
- 2) To review dog breeding within Carmarthenshire.

The Committee was asked to note the previously agreed arrangements for the Task and Finish reviews for 2022/2023-2024.

In considering the arrangements for the Task and Finish reviews, a concern was raised regarding the time it would take to undertake the dog breeding review. The Chair advised that Scrutiny Committee was to only undertake one Investigative Review (Task and Finish) within a scrutiny municipal year, however it was hoped that the review of the Management of Fly Tipping within Carmarthenshire be completed by April 2023, allowing the review on dog breeding within Carmarthenshire to commence in the 2023-2024 municipal year.

In addition, in relation to the Task and Finish Group review of the Dog Breeding in Carmarthenshire, the Head of Housing informed the Committee that the conditions and legislation in regard to dog breeding was yet to be received from the Welsh Government and therefore it would be better timed to commence the review next year.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that:

- 6.1 the Place, Sustainability and Climate Change Forward Work Plan the 2022/22 be endorsed.**
- 6.2 the Place, Sustainability and Climate Change Forward Work Plan Forward Work Plan 2022/23 with the addition of the pre-decision reports identified from the Cabinet Forward Plan be brought to the next meeting for approval.**
- 6.3 The arrangements for the Task and Finish reviews for 2022/23 – 2023/2024 as stated within the report be noted.**

7. REVIEW OF CARMARTHENSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL ENVIRONMENT ACT FORWARD PLAN 2020-2023

The Committee received a report which appended the Carmarthenshire County Council's Environment (Wales) Act Forward Plan 2020-23 for consideration. The report presented by the Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Decarbonisation and Sustainability outlined the progress the Council was making in delivering its legal obligation with reference to the Act. The Plan covers the period January 2020 to December 2022.

In order to evidence delivery of this duty, under the Environment Act, all public bodies in Wales had a statutory duty to prepare and deliver its Section 6 Biodiversity Duty which is placed on it by this Act. The plan covers a period of three years. In addition, it is a statutory requirement that every three years Carmarthenshire County Council reports on the delivery of its Environment Act Forward Plan to the Welsh Government with the next report due in December 2022.

Members noted that Carmarthenshire's approach to developing and delivering its Forward Plan had involved engagement with officers in looking at their working practices, plans and projects whilst assisting them in identifying present opportunities for maintaining and enhancing biodiversity and promoting ecosystem resilience, alongside the delivery of their other obligations and objectives.

The report highlighted that the actions set out in the Forward Plan were linked to the Council's Well-being Objectives (WBO10) and target dates for delivery of each action and the posts responsible were identified.

The following queries were raised in relation to the report:-

- Reference was made to the 'By When or EOY Target' column. An observation was raised regarding the inconsistent reporting in regard to the action targets. Some had no targets, others had past dates further with some stating ongoing, it was raised that further clarity in regard to targets would be beneficial going forward. The Head of ICT and Corporate Policy in explaining the description of the targets, acknowledged that it would be beneficial for the targets to be more descriptive in order to provide better clarity and understanding for the reader. In addition, the Rural Conservation Manager provided a verbal update on the progress made in respect of section 3 of the plan.
- In response to a query raised regarding the process to replace the Ash trees that have been removed due to being affected with the Ash Dieback disease, the Rural Conservation Manager explained that new tree planting was an integral part of the Ash Dieback plan stating last 2 winters 200+ new trees had been planted close to Parc Dewi Sant, Carmarthen with more going being planted this coming winter. In addition, it had been identified that in regard to property that had been annually let for grazing, 3 sites had been identified for planting this winter with Glastir Woodland Creation grants from the Welsh Government. It was reported that these grants took 2 years to be agreed and in that respect a programme of grant applications was in place following the identification of suitable land with no existing biodiversity value for the planting of new trees. Members were informed that new areas for planting was being sought across the County under the strategic land review.

It was asked if the new trees planted on Local Authority land was fed into the Welsh Government existing targets in regard to the number of acres within a specific time period? The Rural Conservation Manager stated that new tree planting was funded by the Glastir Woodland Creation Scheme which would then be counted towards the Welsh Government targets.

The Head of Place and Sustainability added that this year a tree strategy would be developed which would include how the Council invests and manages its tree portfolio across the County. In addition, it was explained that in order to manage the Council's assets, a portal / management tool would be developed to assist with the management of Ash Dieback within the grounds of the Council.

In response to a further query on the replacement of the Ash trees, the Rural Conservation Manager stated that Ash trees were not being planted as nurseries were not producing the species. Many other native species were being planted which included Oak, Aspen, Alder, Birch and Wild Cherry to name a few in order to make woodlands resilient to future challenges attributed to tree diseases.

The Rural Conservation Manager explained that the permanent post of a Tree Safety Officer was involved at a national level in Wales in regard to the Ash Dieback and reported that Carmarthenshire was leading the Local Authorities in Wales in respect to the management of the disease.

- It was asked if any assistance was available for smaller projects within Town and Community Councils? The Rural and Conservation Manager stated that links were in place through the Local Places for Nature grants and there are many other funding streams available to Town and Community Councils for tree planting such as the Woodland Trust. Close links with One Voice Wales to provide information and where to access project funding was maintained. However, the Conservation and Biodiversity team would be happy to respond to requests for advice and ideas.

In addition, in commenting that there seemed to be limited support to Town and Community Councils, it was asked if there was any scope to provide assistance to help maintain assets in the longer term. It was felt that local Community Councils were cautious in getting involved with small projects due to potential budget implications in the longer term. The Rural Conservation Manager, in acknowledging the concern, agreed that there was no solution at present as a lot of the funding for Local Places for Nature is from capital budgets. Emphasis on keeping future maintenance costs as low as possible from the design phase of a project was advised.

- In response to a query raised in regard to the number of hectares the Council had planned for the new tree planting under Glastir Woodland Creation Scheme, the Rural Conservation Manager stated that this winter the plan was to plant circa 4.5 hectares with Glastir Woodland Creation Scheme and next year, subject to acceptance of the proposals a further 2.5 hectares was planned.
- In response to a query regarding the maintenance of trees through the period of growing, the Rural Conservation Manager explained that Glastir provided annual payments for the areas under that scheme.

The Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Decarbonisation and Sustainability, subject to Committee approval, offered to collate the feedback obtained from the Climate Change Advisory Panel, officers and Members in respect of the actions related to the Carmarthenshire County Council's Environment (Wales) Act Forward Plan and report to the Committee. This proactive approach would help inform and formulate the next 3-year plan.

In welcoming this approach, it was formally proposed that the Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Decarbonisation and Sustainability Committee present the relevant feedback in respect of the actions within the Carmarthenshire County Council's Environment (Wales) Act Forward Plan to the Committee. This was duly seconded.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that:

- 7.1 the review of Carmarthenshire County Council Environment Act Forward Plan 2020-2023 be received and**
- 7.2 the progress the Council is making in delivering its January 2020 to December 2022 Environment Act Forward Plan and fulfilling its legal obligation with reference to the Act be noted.**
- 7.3 the Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Decarbonisation and Sustainability provides the relevant feedback in respect of the actions within the Carmarthenshire County Council's Environment (Wales) Act Forward Plan to the Committee.**

8. NET ZERO CARBON PLAN PROGRESS REPORT

The Committee received the Net Zero Carbon Plan Progress Report presented by the Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Decarbonisation and Sustainability.

The County Council approved a Net Zero Carbon (NZC) Plan on 12th February 2020 and Action NZC-28 of the Plan required performance reports on progress towards becoming a net zero carbon local authority by 2030 to be published annually.

The following queries were raised in relation to the report:-

- Reference was made to the table, summary of progress – Carbon Footprint on page 3 of the report. It was felt that it would be beneficial to include a monetary figure to the table which would show in financial terms how much energy was being saved. The Head of Place and Sustainability stated that the Auditor General of Wales, having recently completed a review on climate change plans in Wales, had identified that the inclusion of financial costs attributed to the carbon footprint would be beneficial. Therefore, the inclusion of financial cost will be included in the next iteration of the plan.

In addition, the Committee was informed of the work that would be injected into developing the plan further making it more informative by including trajectories in consideration of the programmes and plans that the Council had committed to date.

- In commending the content of the report, it was commented that an area of opportunity would be to consider the generation of electricity. It was felt that the rooftop solar panel installations were too small for the energy demand of the buildings they were sited on. It was cited that the overall annual generation of the Council was 1-megawatt hours (MWh) which was 50% less than the community sector currently produced in Carmarthenshire. With this information mind, it was asked if there were any plans to increase the amount of electricity generation through solar panels, batteries and possibly wind turbines? The Sustainable Development Manager explained that getting to 'zero carbon' was impossible and that 'net zero carbon' could only be achieved through compensating by way of offsetting through the increased generation of renewable energy and carbon sequestration. In specific response to rooftop solar panels, the Sustainable Development Manager reported that whilst the Council was amongst the largest local authority producers of rooftop solar energy in Wales, further investment is required in order to reach the goal to be net zero by 2030.

In response to the comments raised, the Head of Place and Sustainability added that there was a significant amount of work being carried out at a strategic level to develop renewable energy sites including the Nantycaws site which was the flagship site around the circular economy.

The Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Decarbonisation and Sustainability acknowledged that there was an urgent need to be more agile with more emphasis on working with the third sector.

- It was asked if there were any grants or support available for local village halls to install solar panels? The Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Decarbonisation and Sustainability that there may be support through the Leader Programme and the Bureau who are rolling out community grants for the installation of renewable energy sources. In the face of the increasing costs of living, it was recognised that this would be an opportune time to communicate the information and the benefits of renewable energy to communities.
- Reference was made to a paragraph on page 13 of the report which stated 'We recently commissioned Land Use Consultants Ltd to deliver a strategy that sets out how to enhance Green and Blue Infrastructure in eight selected towns across the County'. It was asked which eight towns were selected? The Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Decarbonisation and Sustainability reported that the eight towns were Llanelli, Carmarthen, Ammanford/ Crosshands, Cwmmaman, Kidwelly, St Clears, Llandovery and Newcastle Emlyn. In addition, he would share a link to Committee Members on the Green and Blue Infrastructure strategy which was currently out for consultation.

- It was asked if there would be an investigation in respect of connecting the green and blue active travel corridors between the eight towns? The Head of Place and Sustainability stated that Active Travel in and around the eight towns was part of the consultation process and part of the area development plans.
- Following on from an earlier discussion, it was formally proposed that future progress reports of the Net Zero Carbon Plan include the cost of savings. This was duly seconded.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND TO CABINET that:

- 8.1 the draft Net Zero Carbon Plan Progress Report be endorsed;**
- 8.2 delegated authority be granted to Officers to make typographical or factual amendments as necessary to improve the clarity and accuracy of the Net Zero Carbon Plan Progress Report.**
- 8.3 future progress reports of the Net Zero Carbon Plan include the cost of savings.**

9. FORTHCOMING ITEMS

The Committee considered the list of forthcoming items to be placed on the agenda for the next meeting scheduled to take place on 24th November, 2022 and was afforded the opportunity to request for any specific information that Members may wish to include within the reports.

In addition to the reports that were to be presented at the formal Scrutiny Committee on 24th November, Members noted the reports that would also be circulated to them outside of the formal Committee process for scrutiny.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the list of forthcoming items for the Committee meeting to be held on the 24th November 2022 be agreed.

10. TO SIGN AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE HELD ON THE 7TH MARCH 2022

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 7th March, 2022 be signed as a correct record.