

CLIMATE CHANGE COMMITTEE
6 SEPTEMBER 2023

Minutes of the Climate Change Committee of Flintshire County Council held as a remote meeting on Wednesday, 6 September 2023

PRESENT: Councillor Alasdair Ibbotson (Chair)

Councillors: Gillian Brockley, Steve Copple, Mared Eastwood, Chrissy Gee, Allan Marshall, Carolyn Preece, Dan Rose, Jason Shallcross and Sam Swash

APOLOGY: Councillor Roz Mansell

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Rob Davies attended as an observer

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Dave Healey (Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Economy), Councillor Dave Hughes (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Streetscene and the Regional Transport Strategy), Chief Officer (Planning, Environment and Economy) and Programme Manager for Climate Change and Carbon Reduction

IN ATTENDANCE: Democratic Services Manager and Democratic Services Officer

19. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

20. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 July 2023 were approved, as moved and seconded by Councillors Carolyn Preece and Dan Rose.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes be approved as a correct record.

21. WELSH GOVERNMENT HEAT STRATEGY CONSULTATION

The Programme Manager for Climate Change and Carbon Reduction introduced the Welsh Government (WG) Draft Heat Strategy for Wales which aimed to develop a decarbonised heat system to deliver on its net zero ambitions. Presentation slides outlined the objectives and questions forming part of consultation on the strategy which was currently taking place. Members were encouraged to make representations to the Programme Manager by 30 September to include in the co-ordinated response to be submitted to WG.

In welcoming reference made to heat sourced from disused coal mines, Councillor Allan Marshall suggested that the extraction of water from streams and rivers to contribute to the cooling of water in the seas could be included in the response.

Whilst Councillor Steve Cople praised the draft Strategy, he raised concerns about the level of funding required for implementing schemes. The Programme Manager gave assurance that the funding mechanism would form part of the response and that more information on this would be shared with the Committee when it was made available.

The Chair praised WG for the level of detail within the document. He spoke about communal heating schemes where service charges were set by companies and said that in the absence of a preferred legal structure, local authorities could become the lead agents supported by the relevant funding. He also highlighted the need for clarity on responsibility for investment to upgrade energy networks to ensure proper use of taxpayers' money.

The Chief Officer (Planning, Environment and Economy) suggested that Members' responses submitted by the end of the month be collated by the Programme Manager to inform a draft response to be delegated to the Chair on behalf of the Committee.

This approach was proposed by Councillor Mared Eastwood who asked that the draft response be circulated to the Committee, which was supported.

22. REVIEW OF CATERING FACILITIES - PLANT-BASED MEALS

The Committee received a report on current school provision and ongoing work by Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) to revise existing statutory guidance on healthy eating in maintained schools.

In moving the recommendation, Councillor Dan Rose provided background and was seconded by Councillor Carolyn Preece.

In response to comments, the Chair clarified that a letter had been sent to schools to encourage pupils to engage with the Committee on general matters.

Whilst acknowledging the impact of emissions from farms, Councillor David Healey said it was important to acknowledge the economic role of agriculture and highlighted local examples, adding that engagement with farmers would help to achieve sustainable practices. He spoke about the sensitivities around school meals and importance of food choices being able to accommodate the needs of all pupils.

Speaking in support of a wider range of school meals, Councillor Mared Eastwood queried how the impact of food choices would be measured. She went on to say that in terms of nutrition, sustainably raised animal protein was more environmentally friendly than plant protein.

Councillor Steve Copple queried the benefits of introducing a meat-free meal option in schools once a month and whether this would be more cost-effective.

In response to a question from the Chair, Councillor Healey confirmed that the report had not been subject to consideration by Cabinet and that the views he had expressed were his own.

Having been moved and seconded, the recommendation was carried.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee notes the content of the report and the ongoing work by Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) to revise the existing statutory guidance on healthy eating in maintained schools.

23. CARBON OFFSETTING - TREE PLANTING

The Programme Manager for Climate Change and Carbon Reduction introduced the report on the current status of carbon offsetting within Flintshire's land assets and to seek support for the development of a land use analysis decision flow chart for the management of its land assets.

Whilst there was a commitment by the Council to take actions to reduce carbon emissions from its assets and services to support the net zero carbon objective set by the Welsh Government (WG), it was accepted that there would still be remaining residual emissions that could not be removed. The Programme Manager gave an overview of opportunities being explored by the Council to offset carbon as detailed in the report.

The recommendation in the report was moved by Councillor Dan Rose who spoke in support of the tree-planting programme. In response to questions, the Programme Manager clarified that reference to available Council land was where a current lease due to expire could be considered for alternative use. In reference to section 1.08 of the report and the survival rate of whips, she confirmed that the carbon output of new planting activities was calculated by land area for the purpose of reporting to WG. In response to comments on measuring the impact of carbon stored on grasslands and meadows, she advised that whilst WG reporting guidance did not currently reflect the wide range of land types, this was being developed for the next reporting cycle to more clearly report on the quality of land held.

Councillor Carolyn Preece asked about the potential for Council land to be used to grow hemp trees which could absorb a greater amount of carbon.

When asked by the Chair about the land disposal process, the Programme Manager advised that each asset should be considered on a case by case basis in terms of its individual features to determine the best use.

Councillor Allan Marshall referred to comments about grassland and spoke about the potential for some grass verges to be cut and processed for use as soil conditioner for housing schemes.

The Chief Officer (Planning, Environment and Economy) drew attention to the recommendation which would enable the flowchart to be brought back to the Committee at a future date. He went on to give an example of the considerations and conflicting priorities involved in considering alternative uses of Council land.

The recommendation in the report was supported.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee supports the development of a land use analysis decision flow chart for the management of its land assets.

24. UPDATE ON INQUIRIES

The Programme Manager for Climate Change and Carbon Reduction advised that the 12 responses to the Clwyd Pension Fund Inquiry and 13 responses to the Flooding Inquiry were being collated into two separate documents to be shared with the Committee. Members were asked to note that unless stipulated otherwise, the responses were for use in the Public Inquiry and were not to be shared externally.

The Chair suggested that the Committee review the evidence before considering the next steps via email communications. He agreed with Councillor Copple's request for a workshop and said that arrangements would be agreed as part of the email communications.

25. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

In considering the current forward work programme, the Programme Manager suggested the following items:

- Invitation for the low carbon Joint Procurement lead officer to attend the November meeting to discuss decarbonising supply chain.
- Carbon Footprint progress report.
- Ability to adapt to a changing climate, identifying risks to the Council and wider County - perhaps delivered as a separate Member workshop.
- Potential site visits for the Committee, for example solar farms, compost facility at Greenfield, Parc Adfer, tree planting projects.

Councillor Dan Rose suggested that the workshop on Climate Adaptation incorporate information from any relevant organisations on their engagement with councils in Wales.

In response to a question, the Chair was advised that the item on contingency planning for extreme heat had not yet been confirmed for November.

He also asked for a report in November on the potential installation of cable ducts to enable householders without off-street parking to safely charge electric vehicles, as discussed at the March meeting.

As requested by Councillor Mared Eastwood, an item on working with third parties on additional charging installations in car parks would be scheduled for a future meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the Forward Work Programme be adopted.

26. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

None.

(The meeting started at 10am and ended at 11.05am)

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Chair