



To:
Councillor Andrea Lewis, Cabinet Member
for Service Transformation

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Date 16 February 2023
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BY EMAIL

cc Cabinet Members

Summary: This is a letter from the Climate Change and Nature Scrutiny Performance Panel to the Cabinet Member for Service Transformation following the meeting of the Panel on 10 January 2023. It covers Climate Change, Green Vehicle Adoption and Electric Vehicle Charging.

Dear Cllrs Lewis,

The Panel met on 10 January 2023 and received an update on Climate Change and discussed Green Vehicle Adoption and Public/Residential Electric Vehicle Charging.

We would like to thank you, the Chief Executive and relevant officers for attending to present items and answer the Panel's questions. We appreciate your engagement and input.

We are writing to you to reflect on what we learned from the discussion, share the views of the Panel, and, where necessary, raise any issues or recommendations for your consideration and response.

Climate Change Update

We received confirmation from you that the Council has responded to all recommendations from the Wales Audit Office, has a fully costed delivery plan for Net Zero by 2030 and has received the bronze One Planet Standard accreditation (the first within the UK). We were very pleased to hear this.

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY / TROSOLWG A CHRAFFU

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We felt that in terms of renewable energy, things that could work include use of micro hydro and we also mentioned that there is a company that re-purposes car batteries for use in homes. We heard that the Council is looking at all opportunities regarding renewable energy, micro hydro generation for rivers is being explored, particularly the River Tawe and that there has been a successful project at Penllergaer Woods. We also heard the Council supports the re-purposing of car batteries for use in homes and this is something the Council can explore further and possibly undertake a pilot on. Officers added that there is a paper going to the Climate Change Corporate Delivery Committee shortly on the Council's requirement to produce a local area energy plan, which will cover all aspects about 'greening the grid' and they would welcome Cllr Evans' comments on it if he is available.

A Member of the public queried why the tidal lagoon is not yet up and running in Swansea Bay. We heard that previously there wasn't any national or Welsh Government funding for it, but the Council is currently working with a third party developer who intends to deliver the project entirely with private sector investment and it will not need public subsidy. We noted that the intention is for a report to go to Cabinet in February 2023 which will set out next steps and timeline for delivery, for planning applications to be launched later this year and a start on site within 18 months. We heard that it is a phased programme and the lagoon itself is a much longer delivery timeline, due to the statutory process required to achieve a development consent order but it looks very positive. We noted that further details will be brought to Scrutiny when you are at the point of taking the report to Cabinet.

A member of the public queried why the Council pension fund cannot be used to fund the tidal lagoon so the people of Swansea can benefit from the project. You stated that there is no need for public investment as there is enough private investment. Officers added that pension schemes had been approached regarding investment in the previous tidal lagoon schemes and they were positive to the opportunity but had to consider it in terms of what was in the best interest for the pension fund itself and its members rather than the Council. We heard that they have not been approached for this new scheme as the private sector has come forward with what appears to be a fully funded project, but this does not mean the pension fund won't have the opportunity to invest as it broadens its portfolio. We were pleased to hear that any developer will be required to ensure that the opportunity for green and cheaper electricity would benefit the residents of Swansea and the surrounding area. We were informed that the Welsh Government has indicated it is supportive of the project, but no direct request has been made from the developer for financial support to fund the project.

Green Vehicle Adoption

Officers gave a short briefing on this and informed us that the Council has one of the biggest public sector fleets in Wales and is facing a significant challenge to 'green' them. We heard that progress is being made and by March 2023, 10% of the fleet will be zero emission and it will be the largest public sector green fleet in Wales, with supporting infrastructure being installed across Council depots. We noted that a £55m cost has been estimated between now and 2030 and that this is indicative, that the Local Authority is a couple of years behind where it would like to be but is ahead of most and that it is being supported by the Welsh Government.

We queried if all Council vehicles (945) will become battery electric and how the Council will be able to charge them all. We believe this would have a huge impact on the grid if everyone were to move to electric vehicles by 2030, and the public sector by 2025, and there is also the problem of battery disposal to consider. We heard that battery electric is not the solution to all zero carbon problems. Officers believe it fits the car and van sector which is 60% of the Council's fleet in terms of carbon emissions and that you are aware of the impact on the grid and are exploring renewables and 'private wire'. We noted that the real carbon emitters are heavy goods vehicles and there are developments in the hydro motive sector with hydrogen and low carbon emission fuels. We heard the Council anticipates it will probably need a couple of hundred charge points in its estate and then needs to come up with viable alternative fuel solutions and change its ways of working to fit the fact it now has to 'take the pump to the van'.

The Panel agreed that as you were unable to be present for this item, and would like to be, it will be included under the item 'Climate Change Update' at the 2 May meeting, so that you can be present for further discussion and questions.

Public / Residential Electric Vehicle Charging

We stated that people who choose an electric car but do not have off road parking are forced to use public chargers which are three times more expensive, so they are seriously financially disadvantaged. We feel very strongly about this and queried if the Council could consider installing various devices that are available, which allow people to charge on the road from their own properties. We were informed that as with other local authorities, the Council has installed a number of public charge points so people have the opportunity to charge within their local community and that this is part of a wider provision of charge points offered by commercial operators. We heard the Council currently has a contract with a third party commercial operator and the charge cost is 75p per KWh for a 22kW 'fast' charge and is based on open market comparisons of 'fast' charging costs, whilst domestic rates are currently capped at 34p per KWh but will generally be charging at a much slower rate of between 3.4kW and 7kW. We heard people are not allowed to use private electric vehicle charging cables to charge vehicles on street locations in Swansea due to the risk this poses to the public, which is the norm, but the Council is keeping abreast of new developments that could potentially make that possible in the future.

We feel this is a particular problem in certain parts of Swansea where lots of people do not have their own drives. We heard the Council intends to install on street charging in Uplands, Sketty and Killay and hope to continue developing this to wider areas of Swansea. We believe one solution is to introduce community charging hubs as well as introducing more reliable and cheap public transport so people can move away from using cars.

We expressed concern about the amount of street furniture currently, which affects people with mobility issues and discourages walking, and that this could increase if on street charging was introduced. We mentioned a pilot scheme in Plymouth where charging points come up out of the street, which would prevent adding to street furniture. A Panel Member agreed to provide a photo of this to relevant officers (which has been done). Officers agreed to investigate the project in Plymouth and consider this in options for future infrastructure of this nature if funding becomes available.

Your Response

We hope you find this letter useful and informative. We would welcome your comments on any of the issues raised, however in this instance, a formal written response is not required.

Yours sincerely

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