



**To:**  
**Councillor Alyson Anthony**  
**Cabinet Member for Wellbeing**

*Please ask for:* Scrutiny  
*Gofynnwch am:*

**Councillor Cyril Anderson**  
**Cabinet Member for Community**

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*Date* 28 May 2024  
*Dyddiad:*

Summary: This is a letter from the Community Growing Scrutiny Working Group to the Cabinet Members for Wellbeing and Community. The letter concerns the meeting held on 13 May 2024. A response is requested by 18 June.

Dear Councillors Anthony and Anderson,

On the 13 May, a Scrutiny Working Group was discuss Community Growing. We are grateful to Cllr Anderson and several officers for attending and giving an overview of some of the work being carried out by the Council around Community Growing. We note that the report is a summary of 5 areas of the Council which were the Tackling Poverty Development Team, Local Area Coordination, Cultural Services, Nature Conservation and AONB team and Property Services.

We received three questions from the public. They asked for the definition of community growing used by the Council. Officers responded to say that the report did not seek to establish a definition of community growing and that officers are involved in supporting community growing projects in different ways. Further public questions included asking how the Council will spread community growing further than the current involved groups. Officers informed that this would mainly come from distributing several grants that community groups can apply for. Grants are promoted through relevant organisations and other channels like social media. Officers noted their role is more reactive but the Council work closely with partners who are more proactive. It was also asked if there was a clear departmental/organisational framework for the development of new projects. Whilst there is a lot of work in community growing within the Council there was no established framework. Officers felt having a “no wrong front door” approach was advantageous as interested individuals and groups could contact the Council via a range of avenues.

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The report provided us with several areas where the Council support community growing, these include, community grants, Welsh Government grants, community engagement and skills building funding. The Council work with organisations like the race council, community gardens, men sheds projects and sustainable food partnerships. Numerous examples were given of groups which have benefited from funding accessed via the Council. You also highlighted the benefits of this work, including contributing to food security, education and environmental stewardship, health and environmental benefits, improved health and well-being, sustainable land usage, enhanced soil health, biodiversity, conservation, support for local economies, community engagement and fostering sustainable food systems.

We were interested in community orchards and received more information about the Orchard Project and the training they offer though there were concerns over future funding. We asked if work has ever been carried out to identify potential sites for community orchards. Officers reported that this mainly comes from interested parties getting in touch. We were informed about the "Wild about our Ward" project which we were not aware of, which will highlight areas of biodiversity value and accessible natural green space. Officers are also finalising maps which show existing orchards and there is potential for wards currently without community growing space to be a target for future work if funding is maintained. It was also mentioned that there may be farmers who no longer maintain orchards on their land and may be interested in local groups or volunteers providing support. Work could be carried out on this in the next few years. Whilst community growing requires community interest and funding it would be useful to alert Councillors and ward members to the potential of a site to make them aware of opportunities. Regarding current community orchards on Council land, we queried whether there was any support for collecting and using the fruit as often the cleansing team were being used to clear up the sites. Officers were able to provide details of a 3rd sector organisation that offer this.

We asked if any schemes exist where people who are unable to maintain or use their own gardens for growing can offer them to other members of the community or community groups for growing in return for a share in the produce. We felt that this could be a way of bringing communities together and support those who are unable to look after their own gardens. We heard that whilst the Council doesn't operate such a scheme, there are schemes like Lend and Tend and a small initiative being piloted in Clase coordinated by Cae Tan CSA which provides support, advice, and guidance to encourage people who live in council houses to grow food in their own gardens.

We asked if the Council have launched any community growing spaces on any of their large estates, similar to the project on the Penrhys estate in Rhondda. The officers felt that the most successful community projects start initially from community interest, especially as community gardens need long term maintenance. Officers noted that support for new community growing projects is currently provided by the Environment Centre and the Swansea Green Spaces Project who have links with the Council. Examples were given of two successful community growing schemes, Cae Tan CSA and Big Meadow CSA which the Council has provided set up support and grant funding.

Regarding allotments, we are aware that they are now self-managed by allotment associations. We asked if there is any form of annual report or mechanism for monitoring. We heard that whilst there are allotment support grants, support from the National Allotment Society and contact with the allotment sites no formal monitoring system is in place. We saw benefit in some short annual feedback from the associations. It may highlight empty plots that could then be advertised locally and identify where support might be needed.

We asked if the Council have considered their offer to support to farmers if the Welsh Government Sustainable Farming Scheme goes ahead, particularly whether local groups and ward members can partner with farmers to utilise these spaces. Officers reported that the Council may offer advice, but the scheme is likely to require additional resources from Welsh Government due to the scale of this scheme.

We are keen to encourage growing projects in schools and suggested the potential for a biodiversity/nature conservation champion on school governing boards who could promote and encourage projects within the school or highlight grant opportunities. Officers noted the rise of grant applications from schools over the last three to four years.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

From the briefing received and questions asked we held a discussion on progress and made the following conclusions and recommendations:

1. We were pleased to hear about the wide variety of work happening in the different areas of the Council. However, we felt a need for a more joined up approach or strategy for community growing with one department having oversight. Departments are making efforts to work collaboratively but this was happening due to those departments making this happen rather there being an existing structure in place.
2. We recommend the Council consider running a scheme where people who are unable to maintain or use their own gardens for growing can offer them to other members of the community or community groups for growing in return for a share in the produce, offering opportunities for community connection.
3. We encourage the Council to share sites with potential for community growing with Councillors and ward members. This may encourage Councillors to use their budgets towards setting up a local community growing project that they may not have previously considered.
4. We were interested to find out about the “Wild about our Ward” project and request this is shared with other Councillors.
5. We ask the Council to consider a form of annual reporting for all allotment associations. This could help identify any issues or need for support, highlight misuse or regularly vacant plots which could then be advertised on the Councils website allotment page.
6. We recommend that schools are encouraged to have a nature and biodiversity governor appointed at each school. This would be not mandatory but encouraged and would act as a champion for any green space or growing projects within the school.

**Your Response**

We are interested in hearing your thoughts about the issues raised in this letter and would ask that you respond to the points in our conclusions by 18 June.

Yours sincerely,

**Councillor Michael Locke**

Convener, Scrutiny Working Group – Community Growing

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