



To:
Councillor Andrea Lewis
Cabinet Member for Housing and Energy

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Date 14 May 2018
Dyddiad:

Summary: This is a letter from the Renewable Energy Working Group to the Cabinet Member for Housing and Energy following the meeting of the Working Group on 26 March 2018.

Dear Cllr Lewis

The Renewable Energy Scrutiny Working Group met on 26 March to look at the Council's aims and objectives, development projects/initiatives and progress in promotion and use of renewable energy and benefits. This letter provides you with feedback from that meeting.

We would like to thank you, Nigel Williams and Terri Shaw for attending to present the report and answer questions. We appreciate your engagement and input.

Whilst the Working Group found the meeting informative and interesting, it did have some concerns and we would like to make the following comments:

- A member of the public attended the meeting and asked a question about private housing developments. They queried whether planning rules could be changed so that a standard efficiency rating had to be achieved which encompassed solar energy. We heard that building regulations are devolved to Welsh Government and they are looking to increase standards in the future. It was noted that a number of developers have already introduced a higher energy efficiency rating than they are required too.
- Private house builders – issue around viability and deliverability as private developers are in business to make a profit. It is positive that standards could

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be increased but this has to be looked at alongside the deliverability for developers.

- It was mentioned that the Authority wants to lower its carbon impact. We were informed that the Authority has had a carbon strategy for a number of years. We wanted to know how we currently measure this and were told that there are guidelines in legislation which every Authority has to follow and figures are worked out based on this. Since 2010 Swansea has reduced its carbon footprint by 42% based on the requirements given.
- We informed you that there is no direct reference to global warming in the report provided. The Working Group was surprised at this as it is mentioned in the Corporate Plan and Wellbeing Plan and the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act. You acknowledged that this was an oversight.
- We heard that other strategies also impact on this, for example, the Authority's agile working strategy. You encouraged the Working Group to read Natural Resources Wales' report on carbon reduction.
- We felt there is a danger of just waiting for the outcome of the Tidal Lagoon proposal and that the Authority should look at other ways to produce hydro power. You confirmed that it is in the Corporate Energy Plan to investigate this, however, it is not straightforward and little progress has been made. One example is a possible hydro turbine at the Marina and the Authority is currently looking at options through a feasibility study and costing up to identify if this is possible. We gave an example of a small private one which is currently operating at Penllergaer Woods.
- We expressed our concerns about wind energy and the long term damage to the environment. Examples include large amounts of concrete put into the ground, removal of areas of pristine peat which stops water running and pollution from lorry's back and fore to the sites. There is a need to explore other options to wind farms on top of hills. We mentioned the possibility of a huge one on the sea front and we heard that this is being explored. The Working Group feels solar energy is the way forward for lots of reasons.
- We stated how we would like to see the Authority benefit from wind and solar energy farms and that community benefit is currently the only benefit. We heard that there is a possibility of the Authority having solar panels on its buildings in the future and owning its own wind farms and solar energy farms. You told us that you would like to bring a report back on this to scrutiny in the future.
- The Authority's Corporate Energy Plan states it will look into having its own local energy company. We feel this would be an asset for the people of Swansea but are aware this is a huge piece of work and has not started yet.

- The Working Group would be interested to learn more about the Authority's Energy Venture and if this applies only to Council homes or all properties.
- We requested a timeline for providing us with information on asset valuation. You agreed to provide this following the meeting.
- We queried why so few schools currently have solar panels on their roofs and you informed us that it was funded by the Council Community Energy Scheme and depended on the shape, position and condition of roofs and this limited the number.
- We discussed the Authority's overall energy strategy – the aim is to become fossil free. We heard that there is a detailed action plan but it is a work in progress and that there is a lot the Authority could do if we had the resource. There is a long way to go but the path is to help people to reduce their usage.
- We noted that the Authority has a small allocated budget for renewable energy. - £200 thousand in total was allocated to the corporate development team in 2017/18, some of which was for renewable energy, and therefore each proposed project has to be evaluated as the business case has to stack up before going ahead.

Following the meeting, we discussed progress and made the following conclusions:

1. We feel there should be more focus on global warming. This is why we are doing all this work with renewable energy.
2. We would like to see the people of Swansea benefit from any new renewable energy schemes including planning and housing development schemes.
3. We were encouraged that the Authority is looking at a number of renewable energy schemes currently. We feel that 'Homes as Power Stations' is good way to lift people out of poverty.
4. We are aware that it is not in your remit but we feel the Welsh Government should provide incentives for organisations to produce their own energy as micro generation is a good way to move forward.
5. We think the Authority should consider putting out information on energy efficiency to the public, for example, on line. We also suggest information is provided to new Council tenants.
6. In relation to solar energy, we feel it is important that the Authority considers productivity and impact on the natural environment of wind farms and solar panels if it decides to go ahead with purchasing its own. The Working Group has concerns about wind energy. Solar energy is our preferred option (subject to planning permission).

7. We feel the Authority should explore other options for using hydro power more not just wait for the outcome of the Tidal Lagoon proposal. For example, there could be incentive schemes introduced.
8. We understand that some schools have benefited from installing solar panels on their roofs. We feel the Council should encourage other schools and community buildings to take advantage of this.
9. We are aware that it is not in your remit but the Working Group feels national government should be setting requirements on all new build – private and Council owned – to encourage energy generation and conservation.
10. Biggest investment in Swansea currently is City Deal. Consideration needs to be given as to how renewable energy is going to be incorporated into this and also how Swansea is going to deal with the greater demand for energy for the City Deal.
11. In 2017/18 budget a corporate development team was funded which included renewable energy but the Authority needs to think about resource going forward. There is a need for more resource as this department grows in responsibility in order for it to be sustainable.
12. We understand that there are a lot of new projects in the pipeline. We feel that once these new projects are underway a follow up working group should be held as there will be a lot more to scrutinise.

Your Response

We hope you find this letter useful and informative. We are interested in hearing your thoughts about the issues raised and would ask that you respond by 4 June 2018.

Yours sincerely

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