

ECONOMY & CULTURE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

12 DECEMBER 2023

Present: Councillor Wong(Chairperson)
Councillors Berman, Henshaw, Jenkins, Lloyd Jones, Shimmin
and Thomson

55 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Cllr Jackie Jones.

56 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr Henshaw declared a prejudicial interest in item 5 as her employment related to the Public Health (Wales) Act in Special Procedures, and left the meeting for the duration of the item.

57 : MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 21st November 2023 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

58 : TREE PLANTING & COED CAERDYDD

The Chair advised that this item provided Members with background information on the council's work to plant trees, including those funded through the Coed Caerdydd project funding.

For this item, the Chair welcomed Cllr Jennifer Burke (Cabinet Member for Culture, Parks & Events), Jon Maidment (Head of Cardiff Harbour Authority and Parks) and Chris Engel (Project Manager, Coed Caerdydd).

The Cabinet Member was invited to make an opening statement after which Members were provided with a presentation from Officers.

The Cabinet Member was pleased to report remarkable progress since the project's inception in 2021-22, made possible by officers' and volunteers' deep commitment to the cause. Key accomplishments included the planting of more than 50,000 trees thanks to more than 5,000 volunteer hours, and the establishment of 28 sites where volunteer tree guardians oversaw tree stocks. 178 planting events had taken place as well as 16 community tree giveaway days, with 916 trees given to community groups and schools. This was backed by two public consultations and had seen real depth of engagement from local communities and ward members. She noted that in addition to the environmental benefits, the project had helped to nurture a sense of shared responsibility and pride in Cardiff's green legacy.

During the presentation, officers noted that a comprehensive consultation programme had taken place to identify the most suitable places for trees, and developed strong partnerships between funders, volunteers, companies and ward members. They highlighted the phenomenal number of volunteers and noted the opportunity to train

and upskill those involved as well as the positive impact on wellbeing. Schools were a key part of the project, and it was good to get young people involved in educational, hands-on work.

Officers sought to ensure diversity of species to suit a changing climate and help the trees cope with unpredictable weather, and were developing a tree nursery feeding supply pipeline. Key targets for 2023/24 included scheduling 170 events, seeking to arrange 2,750 volunteer hours, and 30,000 plantings in total across 170 sites. This year, tree guardians had been organised at 80 sites and 20 new schools had been engaged with the project. The success rate of trees surviving was around 80% due to some vandalism, poor weather conditions and unsuitable sites, but it had largely been very successful.

Officers added that the goal now was to build on community engagement to date and develop an employee volunteer programme to engage future generations. They also sought to increase engagement with private landowners, as there was a need to capitalise on opportunities on private land as well as council-owned sites. It was also important to increase their stock of local provenance and measure and benchmark more widely, especially on aspects that were not easily quantifiable, such as social benefits.

The key challenges were related to climate change (i.e. planting in unusual weather conditions), finances (with support guaranteed until the end of the 2025/26 financial year, but not after that), project management resource (with a high workload for lead officers), competing demands for land use, pests and diseases like ash dieback, and the need to make a visible impact in the 'hard' public realm, which included more difficult sites to plant in, including streets.

The Chair invited questions and comments from Members.

Members noted the impressive level of volunteer recruitment and asked how Cardiff compared to other cities for resources and spend. Officers noted that there was a not a lot of data out there around tree planting, but they hoped to have more by the Spring. At present they estimated that they were second behind Belfast among the other cities doing this. Officers explained they were leading a Core Cities benchmarking working group, with results expected in Spring 2024.

Members asked about the feasibility of the target to reach 25% canopy cover by 2030. Officers acknowledged that this was a challenging target considering competing demands for land use, but one that planning regulation changes could help with, as could working more innovatively, such as greening buildings upwards. 25% canopy cover would require some 839 hectares to be covered by trees, which was about the size of three large wards. Another tree survey would be undertaken in 2025/26 to give them a clearer picture of progress towards the target.

The Committee discussed the need for creative solutions to bring trees to inner-city and street sites which were harder to plant in. Officers noted the difficulty of planting in areas with narrow footways, but suggested that portable or containerised trees were one solution to this, like the ornamental pears on Castle Street. Members suggested that the project could be linked to other departments, such as when roads were narrowed due to planning developments, and noted the cost involved in moving

portable trees around. Officers highlighted they had developed an Action Plan to increase tree canopy coverage in urban streets and would share this with Members via email after the meeting.

Members noted the importance of community consultation given the tensions between different ways to use open space. Officers explained that written consultations were undertaken, including leafletting in the immediate vicinity. It was not always possible to reach everyone, but they did what they could to accommodate residents' views.

Members queried how the dangers of invasive tree diseases were mitigated. Officers explained that they used a wide range of species, which the UK climate could fortunately tolerate, and tried to ensure they used British seeds, and were checking their supply chain sources to ensure these used good quality native stock.

Members highlighted the value of getting schools involved, as it provided pupils with valuable experiences and could fit in with the curriculum becoming more environmentally conscious. They also noted the associated social benefits and the need to gather feedback as part of the evaluation process. Officers added that the next consultation would ask more open questions and give space for more in-depth responses to ensure this.

The Chair added that it would be helpful to have a visual representation of where planting had taken place and where it was planned in the future. Officers stated they had a map showing where trees had been planted and were scheduled to be planted, and were happy to provide this to Members.

AGREED: that the Chairperson, on behalf of the Committee, writes to the Cabinet Member conveying the observations of the Committee when discussing the way forward.

59 : SHARED REGULATORY SERVICES

The Chair advised that this item provided Members with background information on the Shared Regulatory Services (SRS), including setting out which areas fell within this committee's terms of reference.

For this item, the Chair welcomed Cllr Michael Michael (Chair of the Licensing and Public Protection Committees and member of the SRS Joint Committee), Helen Picton (Head of Shared Regulatory Services), Jason Bale (Operational Manager for Enterprise and Specialist Services), Christina Hill (Operational Manager for Commercial Services) and Will Lane (Operational Manager for Neighbourhood Services).

Cllr Michael was invited to make an opening statement, after which Members were provided with a presentation from Officers.

During the presentation, officers explained that the SRS was a fully integrated service delivering Environmental Health, Trading Standards and Licensing functions across Bridgend, Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan. 175 staff served a combined population of 640,000 and regulated more than 100,000 businesses. It was the first and only

such arrangement in Wales, and had been in place for 9 years, delivering statutory requirements and supporting each council's strategic themes. It was overseen by a joint committee comprising two Members from each council, with Cllrs Michael and De'Ath representing Cardiff.

Officers explained their work on food safety, health and safety, trading standards, Enterprise and Specialist Services and Neighbourhood Services, with both proactive and reactive work undertaken to achieve compliance. They noted the key challenges ahead, which included difficulties in recruitment and retention, new areas of regulation and lost ground on inspections and investigations due to the Covid pandemic.

The Chair invited questions and comments from Members.

In response to Member questions, officers reported that the recruitment situation was improving, with some staff returning to the service, but there was still work to do. They had been working for the last few years to set up apprenticeships, which were a good way to get young people into the profession, and it was hoped these would be available mid-late 2024.

Members queried whether growing the commercial side could help to subsidise some of the service's other functions, and heard that while income generation was a key part of the business model, there were limitations that only allowed them to recover costs, not make a profit. For example, the Primary Authority system was enabled via statute on a cost recovery basis only.

The Committee discussed underage smoking and asked about test purchases of tobacco from local shops. Officers clarified that volunteers were sent under very controlled circumstances to specific premises to which the regulatory services had already been alerted, so the process was intelligence-led rather than shops being randomly selected.

Members highlighted that the service must come across examples where new or revised regulation was required, and advocated sharing this information with the Welsh Government to inform future regulation. Officers responded that this was already being done, for example via consultations and working groups, such as that regarding building safety regulation.

Members highlighted the recent ban on single use plastics and asked how they could ensure businesses were set up to deal with this. Officers noted that as phase 1 had come into effect in Wales after England and Scotland, a lot of preparatory work had already been done, and national companies in particular were generally complying well. Phase 2 was due to commence in Spring 2025, and Members highlighted that there was an opportunity for the service to offer preparatory training, assisting businesses to comply and generating income. Officers thanked Members for this suggestion, which they felt warranted exploration.

AGREED: that the Chairperson, on behalf of the Committee, writes to the Cabinet Member conveying the observations of the Committee when discussing the way forward.

60 : RLDP TASK GROUP REPORT

The Chair advised that the Committee was asked to note the final draft of the Joint Scrutiny Inquiry on Cardiff's Replacement Local Development Plan (RLDP).

The Chair invited questions and comments from Members.

AGREED: that Members note the proposed Final Joint RLDP Inquiry report.

61 : CORRESPONDENCE UPDATE

The Principal Scrutiny Officer gave an update on the correspondence sent and received since the last meeting, which was noted.

62 : URGENT ITEMS (IF ANY)

There were none.

63 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

16th January 2024 at 4:30pm.

The meeting terminated at 6.45 pm.

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