

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CABINET

15 NOVEMBER 2022

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR - COMMUNITIES

BRIDGEND BIODIVERSITY DUTY PLAN, 2022-2025

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to update Cabinet on the Bridgend Biodiversity and Ecosystem Resilience Progress Report, 2018-21 and to seek Cabinet approval for the adoption of the Bridgend Biodiversity Duty Plan, 2022-25 and the implementation of resulting actions.

2. Connection to corporate well-being objectives / other corporate priorities

- 2.1 This report assists in the achievement of the following corporate well-being objectives under the **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015**:-

- **Helping people and communities to be more healthy and resilient** – taking steps to reduce or prevent people from becoming vulnerable or dependent on the Council and its services. Supporting individuals and communities to build resilience, and enable them to develop solutions to have active, healthy and independent lives.
- **Smarter use of resources** – ensuring that all resources (financial, physical, ecological, human and technological) are used as effectively and efficiently as possible and support the creation of resources throughout the community that can help to deliver the Council's well-being objectives.

3. Background

- 3.1 The Environment (Wales) Act 2016 introduced an enhanced biodiversity and ecosystem resilience duty (the Section 6 Duty) for all public authorities in Wales. The duty requires that public bodies must seek to:

'maintain and enhance biodiversity, so far as consistent with the proper exercise of their functions and in doing so promote the resilience of ecosystems.'

- 3.2 As required by the Environment (Wales) Act 2016, Bridgend County Borough Council (the Council) prepared and published its first plan, entitled the Biodiversity and Ecosystems Resilience Forward Plan (BER Plan), setting out how it would meet this duty and detailing the approach and actions to be taken. The BER Plan was approved by Cabinet on 24 April 2018, for the period 2018 to 2022. The legislation also requires the Council to report on implementation of the BER Plan every three years, demonstrating compliance with the Section 6 Duty.

- 3.3 Delivery of the BER Plan in response to the Section 6 Duty is the responsibility of the Council as a whole. There are a number of Council activities which are of relevance for biodiversity, however, it should be noted that other Council activities

may well meet the legislative requirements of the Section 6 Duty. Whilst responsibility for advice, support and collation of reporting data for the BER Plan has been delegated to the Economy Natural Resource and Sustainability Team, which sits within the Communities Directorate, responsibility for delivering against the BER Plan sits with the Council as a whole.

- 3.4 In contributing to the BER Plan targets, and recognising its duties to protect and enhance biodiversity, the Council recently became a signatory to the Edinburgh Declaration which demonstrates the commitment of subnational authorities across the world to deliver for nature and will inform the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of Parties (COP15) negotiations at the Phase 2 meeting at the end of 2022.

4. Current situation/proposal

- 4.1 A review has been carried out of the Council's delivery against the BER Plan 2018-21. This review included a series of workshops with relevant departments throughout the Council. As part of the workshops, each of the actions set out in the BER Plan were reviewed, providing the opportunity for multiple departments to collectively inform progress in delivery, whilst also providing feedback on challenges in delivery and opportunities for improved ways of working.

- 4.2 The outcome of the review has been presented as the Bridgend Biodiversity and Ecosystem Resilience Progress Report, 2018-21 and can be seen at **appendix 1**. The review identified many examples of positive action for biodiversity and ecosystem resilience, however, it also set out a number of recommendations for improvements in delivery, to be addressed in the updated version of the plan to be known as the Biodiversity Duty Plan, 2022-2025.

- 4.3 Some key achievements made in the delivery against the BER Plan include:

- **Project Delivery** – there are a number of regional and landscape scale projects that have been delivered in Bridgend County Borough which make a significant contribution to the Council's delivery of its Section 6 Duty. These include:

(i) biodiversity enhancement activities at the disused coal washery site at the Ogmere Washeries, Ogmere Vale, which has resulted in new priority species being identified on site, such as the Brown Banded Carder bee; and

- (ii) the Dunes 2 Dunes project which formed a collaboration of nature reserve managers, volunteers and landowners to sustainably manage the habitats along the coastline of Bridgend County Borough.

- **Internal Engagement and Collaborative Working** – there is evidence of positive engagement between the Council's Countryside Team and many other Council departments, leading to good examples of BER Plan outcomes being delivered through collaborative working. An example of this is the establishment of the Public Service Board (PSB) Asset Board which is a delivery vehicle for the Council's Well-being Plan, focusing on the environment and community engagement and benefit. Another good example is the established, positive working relationship with the Council's Planning Department, with examples provided of biodiversity requirements being positively supported throughout the Planning process.

- **Awareness Raising and Engagement** – there are dedicated and well-resourced biodiversity pages on the Council’s website which provide engaging and detailed information on places to visit, how to get involved with volunteering and events, fact sheets and signposting to relevant organisations and websites.

4.4 Some of the key challenges that have been identified in delivering against the BER Plan include:

- Progress on some actions has been limited, however this didn’t necessarily mean there has been no progress in these areas of work, rather that the actions themselves were challenging in the way they were worded. Recommendations for revision of the BER Plan include a review of these actions, to ensure they deliver the best outcome for biodiversity with the available resources.
- Whilst there are positive examples throughout many departments of collaborative working with the Countryside Team and embedding of biodiversity requirements into their functions, such processes are not formalised and are reliant on existing working relationships. Similarly, there is little evidence of delivery against the BER Plan being monitored or reported at a corporate level. This increases the risk of a biodiversity issue being missed, particularly if there is a change in personnel or new activity being undertaken.
- The Countryside Team is a relatively small team which results in there being limited scope to increase the level of ecological support that is available for the Council. Ongoing delivery against the BER Plan, especially if efforts are to be made to embed a consistent approach to meeting the Section 6 Duty, requires a review of current staff resources with a view to increasing capacity, subject to funding being identified.

4.5 An updated version of the plan, the Bridgend Biodiversity Duty Plan 2022-25, which can be seen at **appendix 2**, has been developed and includes new and revised actions which address the above recommendations and further actions and activities to safeguard and enhance biodiversity and its resilience throughout Bridgend County Borough. It provides an enhanced organisational approach to the BER Plan within the context of a wider delivery system for BER Plan outcomes in the County Borough. The actions within the BER Plan have been developed and agreed with relevant departments and a lead department for each action has been identified to ensure clarity on who is responsible for delivering and reporting against each action. There are also actions which relate to the Biodiversity Champion and will be supported by the Countryside Team. Further detail can be found in **appendix 2**.

3.6 A monitoring process is being developed and will include a guidance pack to be accessed by all Council employees via the Intranet. Annual reporting by all relevant departments will be a requirement, and this information will be collated by the Biodiversity Policy and Management Officer to inform the implementation report to Welsh Government every three years, as well to monitor delivery against the actions and identifying any support or training requirements. Further detail can be found in **appendix 2**.

5. Effect upon policy framework and procedure rules

5.1 There is no effect upon the Council's policy framework or procedure rules as a result of this report.

6. Equality Act 2010 implications

6.1 An initial Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) screening has identified that there would be no negative impact on those with one or more of the protected characteristics, on socio-economic disadvantage or the use of the Welsh Language. It is therefore not necessary to carry out a full EIA on this proposal.

7. Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 implications

7.1 The Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 provides the basis for driving a different kind of public service in Wales, with five ways of working to guide how the Council should work to deliver wellbeing outcomes for people. The following is a summary to show how the five ways of working to achieve the well-being goals have been considered in this report.

- Long Term – the Bridgend Biodiversity Duty Plan 2022-25 sets out long term goals and actions to safeguard biodiversity and prevent, and reverse, decline in species and habitats.
- Prevention – actions within the Bridgend Biodiversity Duty Plan 2022-25 will help to prevent biodiversity decline.
- Integration – the responsibility of delivering against the Bridgend Biodiversity Duty Plan 2022-25 sits with the Council as a whole. This is set out within this updated plan with relevant actions for each service area.
- Collaboration – the Bridgend Biodiversity Duty Plan 2022-25 will be delivered by the Council as a whole and encourages collaboration with external partners and stakeholders to ensure biodiversity is considered and protected wherever possible.
- Involvement – the Bridgend Biodiversity Duty Plan 2022-25 will provide a responsive and preventative approach to how biodiversity is considered and integrated into Council functions. This will be achieved through effective partnership working with partners such as wildlife and environmental organisations, charities, schools, and volunteers, as well as service areas cross-Council.

8. Financial implications

8.1 There are no additional direct financial implications beyond existing service budgets across the Council that are associated with the Bridgend Biodiversity Duty Plan 2022-25. However, each action has measures identified to assist with monitoring against the delivery of that action. Some of these measures may be dependent on or enhanced if or when external resources are available and will need to be assessed on an action by action basis.

9. Recommendations

9.1 It is recommended that Cabinet note the Bridgend Biodiversity and Ecosystem Resilience Progress Report, 2018-21 (**appendix 1**) and approve the adoption of the Bridgend Biodiversity Duty Plan, 2022-2025 (**appendix 2**).

Janine Nightingale
Corporate Director Communities
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Contact Officer: Jess Hartley
Biodiversity Policy and Management Officer

E-mail: jess.hartley@bridgend.gov.uk

Postal Address: Bridgend County Borough Council, Communities Directorate, Angel Street, Bridgend, CF31 4WB

Background documents:
N/A