



City and County of Swansea

Minutes of the **Scrutiny Performance Panel - Natural Environment**

Remotely via Microsoft Teams

Wednesday, 6 October 2021 at 10.00 am

Present: Councillor P K Jones (Chair) Presided

Councillor(s)

E W Fitzgerald
O G James
I E Mann

Councillor(s)

S J Gallagher
M H Jones
H M Morris

Councillor(s)

M Sherwood
H Lawson
C Richards

Other Attendees

Deborah Hill	Nature Conservation Team Leader
Sarah Bennett	Natural Resources Wales
Hamish Osborn	Natural Resources Wales
Emily-Jayne Davies	Scrutiny Officer
Sam Naylor	Pollution Control Officer
Stuart Davies	Head of Highways & Transportation
Paula Livingstone	Divisional EHO, Pollution Control and Private Sector Housing
Tom Price	Team Leader - Pollution Control
Mike Sweeney	Principal Engineer
Mark Wade	Head of Housing & Public Health
David Hopkins	Cabinet Member - Delivery & Operations (Deputy Leader)
Mark Thomas	Cabinet Member - Environment Enhancement & Infrastructure Management

Apologies for Absence

Councillor(s): J A Hale, B J Rowlands, W G Thomas and L J Tyler-Lloyd

59 Disclosure of Personal and Prejudicial Interests

In accordance with the Code of Conduct adopted by the City and County of Swansea, no interests were declared.

60 Prohibition of Whipped Votes and Declaration of Party Whips

In accordance with the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011, no declarations of Whipped Votes or Party Whips were declared.

61 Minutes of Previous Meeting(s)

The minutes of the Natural Environment Scrutiny Performance Panel meeting, held on 26 August 2021, were agreed as an accurate record.

62 Public Questions

There were no public questions.

63 Water Pollution

The Panel received an update from Cllr David Hopkins, Cabinet Member for Delivery & Operations, and Tom Price, Team Leader Pollution Control, regarding the Council's management of water pollution. Mark Wade, Head of Housing and Public Health, Paula Livingstone, Divisional EHO, and Sam Naylor, Pollution Control Officer, also attended to aid discussions on this topic.

In addition, Sarah Bennett and Hamish Osborn attended on behalf of Natural Resources Wales, to provide further information to the Panel.

Discussion focussed on:

- Joint approach and good working relationship between Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and Swansea City Council (SCC).
- Eight designated bathing water areas in Swansea. Samples are taken throughout the bathing season (May-September) giving results to enable classification of excellent, good, insufficient and poor.
- Swansea Council is the owner of Swansea Bay and therefore Beach Manager. Swansea Bay has been designated as *good*, the remaining seven areas designated as *excellent*.
- Abnormal situation recently highlighted in media, focused on River Tawe, which came about via sewage entering the River. Levels were significant enough to take a precautionary approach, recommending against bathing at that time. Welsh Water started tracing the pollution to a collapsed sewer entering a surface water drain. Problem now rectified.
- Provision in regulations that allows reaction to circumstances that may impact upon water quality, for example informing public about recommendations not to bathe during times of pollution.
- Some concern over recreational use of the River Tawe during such incidents, signage erected to inform public to avoid recreational use.
- 2011 collaborative project: SCC undertook an intensive water sampling survey. The result was a computational model to predict water quality on an hourly basis at Swansea Bay. This model initially ran as a manual input; now automated robotisation process linked with signage and Twitter.
- SCC – Non-designated beaches also sampled at Rhossili and Broughton Bay. Main influence here is the estuary and livestock run off.
- Media coverage recently has highlighted discharge into beaches, i.e emergency discharge events. The system is designed to have an emergency overflow, allowing for surface water run-off / storm discharge.

- Effect of climate change on intensifying rain events will impact upon storm overflow incidents. NRW have worked to significantly reduce the number of such events, although this is an ongoing challenge.
- NRW / SCC joint approach – the Council operates a 24hr service for emergency call out, such as the Llangennech Rail incident in 2020, maintaining presence in tactical command group, and responses such as shellfish sampling and recovery plans.
- Septic tanks / cesspits - an NRW regulated process. Private sewage discharge requires permit or exemption. Swansea has a significant number of septic tanks. NRW deal with environmental impacts, and SCC deals with the public health aspect.
- The Panel queried allowing new build properties to have septic tanks, especially located within clay soil and therefore affecting the process of percolation and resulting in increased levels of run-off.
- Officers highlighted the aeration system on the River Tawe, active during summer months, where the salt water overtops the barrage. The saline wedge can have an effect on river life, so the system acts to mix fine bubbles of air into the water column. SCC monitors salinity and once every two years carries out a dredge of the navigable channel.
- Private Water Supplies Regulations – over 125 suppliers in Swansea, of which eight - nine are 'Category 9', are tested more frequently. Risk assessment approach in place, enabling action to be taken if drinking water is affected at point of consumption.
- SCC also monitor swimming pool water.
- Panel Members questioned the frequency of storm drain events affecting the River Tawe.
- Members queried the bathing season duration (May-September) and whether the duration of this season should be extended. Officers highlighted that this season was designated under statutory regulations.
- EU revised the bathing water regulations - NRW and Welsh Water had to work to improve water quality in Swansea Bay, reducing storm discharges.
- The River Tawe has no current designation as a 'bathing water' and therefore no account taken of bacterial standards in the water. There is currently no 'recreational water' standard for non-bathing water.
- Members commented on the odour around the Port-Tennant treatment works. Officers confirmed that discussions are on-going with regard to future intentions. Officers undertook to circulate the link to an e-diary to log such comments.
- The Panel also raised the issue of residential front gardens being converted into hard standings, acting to increase surface run-off. Officers commented that any new builds over 100 sq/m require sustainable drainage systems to be implemented. New features are often incorporated to aid drainage through permeable surfaces.
- Members raised concerns over urban areas and surface water run-off, citing the Sandfields area as an example. Officers also highlighted that this particular area accepts run-off from higher ground. Officers explained that good gully maintenance would help alleviate this issue.
- These points about surface run-off and the impact upon water pollution / drainage systems are also relevant in the context of the following item – Flood Risk Management.

- Officers commented on the excellent working relationship between NRW and SCC and praised the teams involved in this area of work.

64 Local Flood Risk Management

The Panel received an update from Cllr Mark Thomas, Cabinet Member for Environment Enhancement & Infrastructure Management, and Mike Sweeney, Team Leader, Highways and Transportation. Stuart Davies, Head of Highways and Transportation also attended to aid discussions on this topic.

Discussion focussed on:

- Cllr Thomas acknowledged that this issue can affect all wards at some point, highlighting that the Council is heavily reliant on Welsh Government funding to manage this issue.
- Sandbags – sometimes difficult to utilise resources to deliver sandbags to effected areas during times of crisis/emergency flooding, when resources are being directed to immediately deal with the flooding situation.
- Procurement process ongoing to add new gully maintenance vehicles.
- Preventative measures continue to be developed to mitigate flood risk.
- Officers are creating a new initiative for a reactive gully crew, aiming to quickly respond to individual flood incidents.
- Extra staff may also be on hand to deliver sandbags and to support critical culverts.
- Members commented on Paragraph 4.1 of the report, regarding two full time vacancies and the impact of these vacant positions. Officers acknowledged that recruitment of technical staff was a challenge.
- Officers reiterated that the intensity of rainfall and downpours means there would be occasions where the current drainage system will become overwhelmed. Accommodating extreme rainfall periods will be a challenge.
- Members commented on using their environmental budget within individual wards to procure gully teams on an ad-hoc basis.
- Officers explained that the current figure of 5 properties, as threshold for a locally significant incidents, will possibly be raised to 20 properties in line with other Authorities across Wales.
- Cllr Mark Thomas cited Crofty as an example of vast flood prevention intervention by NRW, noting, however, that factors such as prolonged heavy rainfall, high tides and strong winds can overtop drainage systems regardless of all interventions in place.
- Coastal Risk Management Programme – update on Mumbles flood defence: public appears to be supportive, general acceptance that scheme is needed. Circa £12M investment from Welsh Government. Evidence that flood risk is reduced for over 120 properties over 100yr modelling.
- Development Advice Maps – TAN 15: Officers explained that the Council will need to provide defence around certain City Centre sites, now to include surface water run-off risk.
- Officers highlighted the relevance of nature-based solutions such as the sand dunes created at the Civic Centre site, having had a positive impact on reducing wave energy and subsequent storm flooding.

- The Panel heard that there is scope to mitigate flood risk through green infrastructure and nature-based solutions, such as increased tree planting to help slow water flow.

The Panel considered the information provided, asked questions, and gave views on the way forward. The Chair thanked all for their input.

AGREED that the Panel write to the Cabinet Members with its views and recommendations.

65 Work Programme

The Panel discussed prospective topics for forthcoming meetings.

- Green Space / Weed Management to remain scheduled for January, feeding into any PDC discussions.
- Update from Nature Conservation Team (January / March TBC)
- Climate & Nature Action Plan (March TBC)

66 Letter(s)

The Panel received the correspondence sent following the meeting of the Panel held on 26 August 2021.

The meeting ended at 12.00 pm



To:
Councillor Mark Thomas
Cabinet Member for
Environment Enhancement &
Infrastructure Management

Please ask for:
Gofynnwch am:

Direct Line:
Llinell Uniongyrochol:

e-Mail
e-Bost:

Date
Dyddiad:

Overview & Scrutiny

01792 637732

scrutiny@swansea.gov.uk

27 October 2021

BY EMAIL

Summary: This is a letter from the Natural Environment Scrutiny Performance Panel to the Cabinet Member for Environment Enhancement & Infrastructure Management. The letter concerns the meeting held on 6 October 2021 and the updates received regarding Flood Risk Management.

Dear Councillor Thomas,

On 6 October, the Panel met to hold discussions around Flood Risk Management. The Panel were grateful to all who attended to provide information and answer questions. We are writing to you to reflect on what we learnt from the discussions and to share the observations of the Panel.

You acknowledged that the issue of flooding could affect all wards at some point, highlighting that the Council is heavily reliant on Welsh Government funding to manage this issue.

You explained to us that the demand for delivery of sandbags cannot always be met, and it is especially difficult to utilise resources to deliver sandbags during times of crisis/emergency flooding, when resources are being directed to immediately deal with the flooding situation.

The Panel heard that the procurement process is underway to add new gully maintenance vehicles. Officers also explained to us that they are creating a new initiative for a reactive gully crew, aiming to quickly respond to individual flood incidents. Officers outlined aspirations to have extra staff on hand to deliver sandbags and to support critical culverts during flood incidents.

Panel Members commented on Paragraph 4.1 of the update report, regarding two full time vacancies, and queried the impact of these vacant positions. Officers acknowledged that recruitment of technical staff is an on-going challenge.

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY / TROSOLWG A CHRAFFU

SWANSEA COUNCIL / CYNGOR ABERTAWE

GUILDHALL, SWANSEA, SA1 4PE / NEUADD Y DDINAS, ABERTAWE, SA1 4PE

www.swansea.gov.uk / www.abertawe.gov.uk

I dderbyn yr wybodaeth hon mewn fformat arall neu yn Gymraeg, cysylltwch â'r person uchod
To receive this information in alternative format, or in Welsh please contact the above

Officers explained to us that that the increasing intensity of rainfall and downpours means there will be occasions where the current drainage system will become overwhelmed. We heard that accommodating extreme rainfall periods will be a challenge, and that preventative measures continue to be developed to mitigate flood risk.

Members commented on recent use of environmental budget allowances within individual wards to procure gully teams on an ad-hoc basis, suggesting that this become wider practice when needed.

The Panel heard that currently, the flooding of five properties is the threshold for a 'locally significant incident'. Officers explained that this figure will possibly be raised to twenty properties in line with some other authorities across Wales.

You cited the North Gower village of Crofty as an example of vast flood prevention intervention by Natural Resources Wales (NRW), explaining to us, however, that factors such as prolonged heavy rainfall, high tides and strong winds can overtop drainage systems regardless of all interventions in place. The Panel acknowledged and understood that it will not always be possible to overcome flooding events in particular circumstances.

Members questioned the latest update on the Coastal Risk Management Programme in relation to the Mumbles flood defence wall. You explained to us that public perception appears to be supportive, and that there is a general acceptance that this scheme is needed. We heard that circa £12million will be invested from Welsh Government and that evidence suggests flood risk will be reduced for over 120 properties.

Officers highlighted the relevance of nature-based solutions such as the sand dunes created at the Civic Centre site, having had a positive impact on reducing wave energy and subsequent storm flooding. The Panel heard that there is scope to mitigate flood risk through green infrastructure and nature-based solutions, such as increased tree planting to help slow water flow.

The Panel queried the Development Advice Maps in relation to Technical Advice Note 15 (TAN 15). Officers explained that the Council would need to provide defence around certain City Centre sites, with the additional requirement to take account of surface run-off risk.

Overall, the Panel were pleased to hear about the on-going work of the teams involved in all aspects of Council Flood Risk Management. We thanked all involved for their input and contributions.

We are interested in any thoughts you may have on the contents of this letter but, in this instance, we require no formal written response.

Yours sincerely,

Councillor Peter Jones
Convener, Natural Environment Scrutiny Performance Panel
✉ cllr.peter.jones@swansea.gov.uk



To:
Councillor David Hopkins
Cabinet Member for Delivery and
Operations

BY EMAIL

Please ask for:
Gofynnwch am:

Direct Line:
Llinell Uniongyrochol:

e-Mail
e-Bost:

Date
Dyddiad:

Overview & Scrutiny

01792 637732

scrutiny@swansea.gov.uk

27 October 2021

Summary: This is a letter from the Natural Environment Scrutiny Performance Panel to the Cabinet Member for Delivery and Operations. The letter concerns the meeting held on 6 October 2021 and the updates received regarding Water Pollution.

Dear Councillor Hopkins,

On 6 October 2021, the Panel met to discuss the update regarding the Council's management of Water Pollution. The Panel were grateful to all who attended to provide information and answer questions. We are writing to you to reflect on what we learnt from the discussion and to share the observations of the Panel.

The Panel heard about the joint approach to this area of work, and the good working relationship between Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and Swansea City Council (SCC).

Officers explained to us that there are eight designated bathing water areas in Swansea. We understand that water samples are taken throughout the bathing season (May-September) giving results to enable classification within one of the four categories; being excellent, good, insufficient and poor.

Members queried the bathing season duration (May-September) and whether the duration of this season should be extended. Officers highlighted that this seasonal period was designated under statutory regulations.

We heard that the Council is the owner of Swansea Bay and therefore responsible as Beach Manager. Officers highlighted to us that Swansea Bay has been designated as 'good', the remaining seven bathing areas designated as 'excellent'.

We discussed the River Tawe water quality situation, recently highlighted in the media, which came about via sewage entering the River further upstream. Officers explained to us that pollutant levels were significant enough to take a precautionary approach, recommending against bathing at that time. We also heard how Welsh Water started

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY / TROSOLWG A CHRAFFU

SWANSEA COUNCIL / CYNGOR ABERTAWE

GUILDHALL, SWANSEA, SA1 4PE / NEUADD Y DDINAS, ABERTAWE, SA1 4PE

www.swansea.gov.uk / www.abertawe.gov.uk

I dderbyn yr wybodaeth hon mewn fformat arall neu yn Gymraeg, cysylltwch â'r person uchod
To receive this information in alternative format, or in Welsh please contact the above

tracing the pollution to a collapsed sewer entering a surface water drain; a problem which has since been rectified.

We discussed general concerns over recreational use of the River Tawe during such abnormal incidents, and how signage is erected to inform the public and advise against recreational use.

Officers explained that the River Tawe has no current designation as a 'bathing water' area and therefore no account is currently taken of bacterial standards in the water. The Panel heard that there is currently no 'recreational water' standard for non-bathing water.

The Panel also discussed other recent media coverage relating to discharge into beaches during emergency discharge events. Officers explained to us that the drainage system is designed to have an emergency overflow, allowing for surface water run-off and storm discharge during such events.

The Panel raised concerns over the effect of climate change on intensifying rainfall and how such events will impact upon storm overflow incidents. We heard that NRW have worked to significantly reduce the number of such events, although officers acknowledged that this is an ongoing challenge.

The Panel heard about the 2011 collaborative project between SCC and NRW, when officers undertook an intensive water sampling survey, resulting in a computational model to predict water quality on an hourly basis at Swansea Bay. We understand that this model is now an automated process, enabling fast and effective information sharing via signage and Twitter.

The Panel heard that installation of septic tanks / cesspits is an NRW regulated process, requiring a permit or exemption. The Panel was told that Swansea has a significant number of septic tanks; NRW dealing with the environmental impacts, and SCC dealing with the public health aspects.

Panel Members queried allowing new build properties to have septic tanks, especially located within clay soil and therefore affecting the process of percolation and resulting in increased levels of run-off.

Officers drew our attention to the aeration system on the River Tawe, active during summer months, in place to deal with situations where the salt water overtops the barrage. Officers explained that the saline wedge can have an effect on river life and the system acts to mix fine bubbles of air into the water column. SCC monitors salinity and once every two years carries out a dredge of the navigable channel.

Members commented on the odour around the Port-Tennant treatment works. Officers confirmed that discussions are on-going with regard to future intentions at that site, however, in the meantime an e-diary is available online to log such comments or complaints.

The Panel raised the issue of residential front gardens being converted into hard standings, acting to increase surface water run-off. Officers commented that any new builds over 100 sq/m require sustainable drainage systems to be implemented, explaining that new features are often incorporated to aid drainage through permeable surfaces.

Members raised concerns over urban areas and surface water run-off, citing the Sandfields area as an example. Officers also highlighted that this particular area accepts run-off from higher ground. Officers explained that good gully maintenance would help alleviate this issue.

Panel Members commented on the excellent working relationship between NRW and SCC and praised the teams involved in this collaborative area of work.

We are interested in any thoughts you may have on the contents of this letter but, in this instance, we require no formal written response.

Yours sincerely,

Councillor Peter Jones

Convener, Natural Environment Scrutiny Performance Panel

✉ cllr.peter.jones@swansea.gov.uk