

## **Panel Craffu Perfformiad – Yr Amgylchedd Naturiol**

**Lleoliad:** O bell drwy Microsoft Teams

**Dyddiad:** Dydd Mawrth, 15 Mawrth 2022

**Amser:** 10.00 am

**Cynullydd:** Y Cynghorydd Peter K Jones

**Aelodaeth:**

Cynghorwyr: E W Fitzgerald, S J Gallagher, J A Hale, O G James, M H Jones, H Lawson, I E Mann, H M Morris, C Richards, B J Rowlands, M Sherwood, W G Thomas a/ac L J Tyler-Lloyd

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### **Agenda**

**Rhif y Dudalen.**

- 1 Ymddiheuriadau am absenoldeb**
- 2 Datgeliadau o fuddiannau personol a rhagfarnol**  
[www.abertawe.gov.uk/DatgeluCysylltiadau](http://www.abertawe.gov.uk/DatgeluCysylltiadau)
- 3 Gwahardd pleidleisiau Chwip a Datgan Chwipiau'r Pleidiau**
- 4 Cofnodion y Cyfarfod(ydd) Blaenorol** **1 - 4**  
Derbyn nodiadau'r cyfarfod(ydd) blaenorol a chytuno eu bod yn gofnod cywir.
- 5 Cwestiynau gan y Cyhoedd**  
Rhaid cyflwyno cwestiynau'n ysgrifenedig, cyn hanner dydd ar y diwrnod gwaith cyn y cyfarfod fan bellaf. Rhaid i gwestiynau ymwneud ag eite mau ar yr agenda. Ymdrinnir â chwestiynau o fewn cyfnod 10 munud.
- 6 Tîm Cadwraeth Natur - y Diweddaraf am Brosiectau** **5 - 17**  
*Wedi'u gwahodd i fynychu:*  
*Y Cyng. Andrea Lewis – Aelod y Cabinet dros Newid yn yr Hinsawdd a Thrawsnewid Gwasanaethau*  
*Paul Meller – Rheolwr yr Amgylchedd Naturiol*  
*Deborah Hill – Arweinydd y Tîm Cadwraeth Natur*
- 7 Adolygiad Panel y Flwyddyn 2021-22** **18 - 21**
- 8 Llythyrau** **22 - 24**

*Huw Evans*

**Huw Evans**

**Pennaeth Gwasanaethau Democrataidd**

**Dydd Mawrth, 8 Mawrth 2022**

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**Cyswllt: Swyddog Craffu - 01792 637314 / 07980 757691**

# Agenda Item 4



City and County of Swansea

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

Remotely via Microsoft Teams

Wednesday, 12 January 2022 at 10.00 am

**Present:** Councillor P K Jones (Chair) Presided

**Councillor(s)**  
E W Fitzgerald  
M H Jones  
C Richards  
W G Thomas

**Councillor(s)**  
S J Gallagher  
H Lawson  
B J Rowlands

**Councillor(s)**  
O G James  
H M Morris  
M Sherwood

### **Other Attendees**

Mark Thomas                                      Cabinet Member - Environment Enhancement & Infrastructure Management

### **Officer(s)**

Mark Barbour                                      Biodiversity Officer  
Emily Davies                                        Scrutiny Officer  
Jeremy Davies                                      Group Leader Parks and Cleansing  
Chris Howell                                        Head of Waste Management

### **Apologies for Absence**

Councillor(s): J A Hale, I E Mann and L J Tyler-Lloyd

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#### **67 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.

#### **68 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.

#### **69 Minutes of Previous Meeting(s)**

The minutes of the Natural Environment Scrutiny Performance Panel meeting, held on 6 October 2021, were agreed as an accurate record.

## 70 Public Questions

There were no public questions.

## 71 Management of Green Space / Weed & Verge Management

The Panel received an overview from Cllr Mark Thomas, Cabinet Member for Environment Enhancement & Infrastructure Management. Officers also attended to aid discussions and answer questions.

*Discussion focussed on:*

- Increasing Biodiversity through management programmes.
- Reduce reliance and use of glyphosate throughout Council services.
- The Highways department is the biggest user of glyphosate, not the Parks department (although some use on Japanese Knotweed).
- The Highways department manage weeds on roads, therefore responsibly falls outside of the Parks department.
- Current programme is run on a 3-year contract with an external company, completing work via machine operation. This has been the most effective and efficient method to date.
- Members raised concerns that some cul-de-sacs were being missed by contractors.
- The Panel heard that the contractors can be asked to return and re-spray should the service in a particular area not be satisfactory.
- Contract renewal is underway, having regard to any other applicable methods available, to minimise glyphosate use.
- Council trials of new technologies / treatments have not yet resulted in a more effective programme.
- It was explained that in 2021 the programme faced a setback due to rain / storms. Weeds became difficult to manage and complaints were received regarding overgrown weeds.
- The Highways department has extra budget allowance to create a team, focusing on hotspot areas.
- The Panel are aware of risks and aspects of concern relating to the use of glyphosate. Members acknowledged that there are few other effective options to manage weeds along the highways network.
- Cllr Thomas reiterated that Glyphosate is a fully-licensed product and the Council is not using un-safe products.
- Members discussed the consequences of weeds left to damage walls and pavements, including the potential for community members to take part in weeding programmes.
- Members raised the option of wards opting out of weed-spraying, citing the example of 'Uplands Living Streets', a group interested in reduced glyphosate treatment.
- The Panel heard that, although individual houses cannot opt out, wards or streets could opt out of the weed spraying programme.
- The Panel heard that, in terms of improving biodiversity, there will be some areas of grass that are left to grow longer.

- Members queried how to report unidentifiable weeds/plants to the Council. Officers advised a photo record could be submitted, or use of external identification apps. Officers undertook to provide links to such apps for information.
- Panel Members raised some concerns over potential sale of green space areas to members of the public.
- Members cited Lougher castle as an example of green space being successfully left to meadow, encouraging wildflower growth.
- It was highlighted that wildflower growth is promoted via nutrient-reduced soil. Grass cuttings left on the land is therefore counter-productive to wildflower growth.
- The removal of grass cuttings (from wildflower sites) has required specialist equipment. Welsh Government funding has recently enabled the purchase of specialist 'cut and collect' machinery.
- Members commented on the grass cuttings left following verge-cutting and the nutrients being left to aid future growth, noting the cuttings can also sometimes contribute to gully blockages.
- Officers explained that the time/costs spent in collecting general grass-cuttings would not likely be effective in making a significant difference to the number of cuts.
- The report highlighted the challenges faced, such as large-scale grass removal.
- The Panel heard that areas left to meadow were sometimes viewed by the public as having been unattended. Members understood that communication needs to be improved to ensure the public understand where/why certain areas become managed meadows.
- Members suggested that temporary signage be erected at meadow sites to better inform the public.
- Members raised concerns over the city entrance points and the first impressions for visitors.
- Members commented favourably on the steps taken in Singleton Park to improve biodiversity.
- Members queried whether grant funding would be available to provide plants/tress for local areas.
- Officers explained that two part-time posts were being funded to work within ward areas to support biodiversity, habitat creation and general wildflower management.
- Members were pleased to hear that a biodiversity officer had been appointed since this recommendation by the Natural Environment Scrutiny Inquiry Panel, however, raised concerns over the part-time nature of this post, given demands. Members agreed that a long-term commitment to funding a full-time post would be beneficial.
- Members raised queries over the 'Draft Questions for Consultation', suggesting alternative phrasing of questions to accommodate broader answers.

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

## 72 Work Programme

The Panel discussed prospective topics for forthcoming meetings.

- Update from Nature Conservation Team (March)
- Members suggested inclusion of the topic Planning Enforcement (biodiversity) in future work plans.

**73 Letter(s)**

The Panel received the correspondence sent following the meeting of the Panel held on 6 October 2021.

The meeting ended at 11.45 am

**Chair**

# Agenda Item 6



## Report of the Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Service Transformation

### Natural Environment Scrutiny Performance Panel 15 March 2022

#### **NATURE CONSERVATION TEAM PROJECT UPDATE REPORT**

<b>Purpose</b>	The Panel will receive an update on current and future planned projects of the Nature Conservation Team
<b>Content</b>	A 'Biodiversity and Green Infrastructure Action Log' is provided to the Panel, showing main project activity and progress.
<b>Councillors are being asked to</b>	Consider the project update report (Action Log) and raise any questions relating to the content
<b>Lead Councillor(s)</b>	Councillor Andrea Lewis Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Service Transformation
<b>Lead Officer(s)</b>	Phil Holmes - Head of Planning and City Regeneration
<b>Report Author</b>	Paul Meller - paul.meller@swansea.gov.uk

#### **1. Introduction**

1.1 The Panel will receive an update on main project work currently identified as actions for delivery by the Council's Nature Conservation Team under the Corporate Plan Natural Resources and Biodiversity Objective and also arising out of the Natural Environment Scrutiny Inquiry Recommendations.

1.2 The attached Action Log has been provided to the Panel and highlights relevant progress since last reported to Panel in March 2021. The Panel should note that this long-term project work is undertaken alongside daily statutory duties.

Background Papers: None

Appendices: Appendix 1 – Biodiversity and Green Infrastructure Action Log (March 2022)

### Biodiversity and Green Infrastructure Action Log (March 2022)

Ref	Project	Comment/Update	Target date
1.	Facilitate, co-ordinate, deliver and monitor the steps in the Corporate Plan Objective for Maintaining and Enhancing Swansea's Natural Resources and Biodiversity	Steps monitored by Climate Change and Nature Steering Group and Programme Board. Currently being reviewed for 22/23 Corporate Plan.	Completed  Monitored every 6 weeks and reviewed annually
2.	Prepare Corporate Section 6 Biodiversity Duty Action Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First 3 year Section 6 duty monitoring report agreed and submitted to Welsh Government Dec 2019.</li> <li>• Action Plan to Dec 2023 in preparation</li> </ul> <p>Links with other relevant cross organisational policies at a strategic level being monitored by Climate Change and Nature Steering Group which includes representatives dealing with</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Natural Environment</li> <li>• Green Infrastructure</li> <li>• Local Development Plan</li> <li>• Sustainable Development Policy</li> <li>• Sustainable Transport Plan</li> <li>• Energy Strategy</li> <li>• Waste Management</li> <li>• Parks</li> <li>• Housing</li> <li>• Education</li> </ul>	Completed  Dec 2022  Bi-monthly meetings



		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Procurement</li> </ul>	
3.	Preparation of Swansea Local Nature Recovery Action Plan	Preparation of draft plan commenced – work to be taken forward by Local Nature Partnership Officer – 2x part time officers taking up post April 2022.	March 2023
4.	Adopt Swansea Central Area Green Infrastructure (GI) Strategy and Green Space Factor Tool	<p>Approved by Cabinet Feb 21.</p> <p>The Green Space Factor Tool provides practical guidance to help assess the level of green space required for developments in urban areas. The tool is now being used by applicants for planning applications in the city centre. Advice is being given regarding GI throughout the planning process, including how to meet target GSF tool scores.</p>	Completed Feb 2021
5.	Prepare a County wide GI Strategy	<p>Public Engagement on the draft strategy delayed by Covid, recommencing in March 2022</p> <p>However GI assessments and strategies are being submitted with planning applications throughout the County, for minor and major applications, in order to comply with LDP policies.</p>	March 2023
6.	Develop and adopt a Council tree policy	<p>Suite of tree policies/protocols developed over the past couple of years, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protected Tree Protocol</li> <li>• Ash Die-back guidance</li> <li>• City Centre GI Strategy</li> <li>• Tree Planting checklist and consultation protocol</li> </ul>	Completed Feb 2022

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local Development Plan Tree protection policy</li> <li>• Supplementary Planning Guidance ( Trees, Hedgerows and Woodlands)</li> </ul> <p>More recently (Feb 2022) a Tree Management Strategy has been approved by Cabinet setting out protocols relating to management of trees on /affecting property land in Council ownership and setting out the Council's duties in relation to protected trees. All above documentation is cross referenced in this document  <a href="https://www.swansea.gov.uk/article/13807/17-February-2022">https://www.swansea.gov.uk/article/13807/17-February-2022</a></p> <p>Ongoing work in support this year includes mapping all sites on Council land that may be suitable for tree planting as well as mapping all trees planted in celebration of designation as a Queen's Green Canopy Champion City.</p>	
7.	Prepare and adopt Trees and Development Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG)	Guidance prepared and adopted by Planning Committee <a href="https://www.swansea.gov.uk/">https://www.swansea.gov.uk/</a> The SPG is referred to in consults on planning applications, including the requirement to use the Tree Replacement Standard where necessary.	Completed Oct 2021
8.	Prepare and adopt Biodiversity Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG)	SPG Adopted by Planning Committee <a href="https://www.swansea.gov.uk/biodiversityspg">https://www.swansea.gov.uk/biodiversityspg</a>	Completed Feb 2021

		<p>The SPG is referred to in consults on planning applications, including the requirement to provide ecological enhancements.</p> <p>The requirement for biodiversity conservation and enhancement has also been included in the following SPG which have been adopted over the past year:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gower AONB Design Guide</li> <li>• Placemaking Guidance for Residential Development</li> <li>• Placemaking Guidance for Infill and Backland Developments</li> <li>• Placemaking Guidance for Householder Developments</li> </ul> <p>All available to view here:  <a href="https://www.swansea.gov.uk/spg">https://www.swansea.gov.uk/spg</a></p>	
9.	Prepare and upload Biodiversity SPG guidance notes onto Council webpages	Guidance available on Council webpages <a href="https://www.swansea.gov.uk/biodiversityspg">https://www.swansea.gov.uk/biodiversityspg</a>	Completed Nov 2021
10.	Develop and deliver biodiversity training for Council staff, elected Members and PSB Members	Ongoing action for biodiversity officer and others. Includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify and address biodiversity training needs (including specific training session for new Members post- election )</li> <li>• Identification of opportunities and actions within each relevant Service Area to maintain and enhance biodiversity</li> <li>• Identify Service Areas where advisory support could be provided by the Nature Conservation Team</li> </ul>	Ongoing  June/July 2022

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of on and offline training packages including further development of web pages</li> <li>• Development and implementation of a Comms Strategy for biodiversity</li> <li>• Ecological advice and support provided for Development Management Section on planning and SUDs applications ranging from advice on the installation of bird and bat boxes to carbon literacy training</li> <li>• Other specific training delivered includes grassland management of parks/verges; cut and collect; right tree in right place; nature emergency</li> </ul>	
11.	Develop, promote and deliver a programme of public environmental events and activities	Annual programme of events published on line to improve awareness and understanding of our natural environment	Completed May annually
12.	Appoint new Section 6 Duty Biodiversity Officer	Permanent appointment made to 0.5 Post	Completed June 2021
13.	Appoint new Planning Ecologist	<p>Additional Planning Ecologist now in permanent full time post to complement previous 0.8 post on the structure. Nature Conservation Team now have capacity to respond to planning application consults within the 14/21 day deadlines.</p> <p>Planning Ecologist has weekly open session with Planning Officers for the officers to raise any</p>	Completed June 2021

		<p>biodiversity queries when needed. Queries being used to determine further training requirements.</p> <p>Planning Ecologists also provide services and advice to Council Highways, Parks, Drainage and Housing teams as well as local councillors, external developers, ecologists and planning applicants. Fee-earning works has been undertaken for Highways team – surveys to inform Active Travel routes.</p> <p>Planning ecologists attend Local Nature Partnership meetings, Association of Local Government Ecologist (ALGE) meetings and Welsh Govt Biodiversity &amp; Planning Forum meetings.</p>	
14.	Facilitate and support the Local Nature Partnership (LNP) meetings and projects	Meetings held quarterly on an ongoing basis. Covered by temporary appointment to LNP post during 21/22. Permanent appointment now made commencing April 2022 ( 2 x part time posts)	Completed Feb 2022
15.	Co-ordinate and deliver the Local Places for Nature Grant programme (2020-2023)	<p><u>2020/21</u> Successfully bid for and delivered capital projects worth over £190k, including tree planting in various parks and other sites, green infrastructure enhancements e.g. green roofs and walls, establishment of a new tree nursery; as well as local events, habitat management and flood alleviation works</p> <p><u>2021/22</u> Successfully bid for projects worth over £240k, including request for additional £53k to cover</p>	To be completed by March 2023

		<p>increased costs. These projects to be delivered by end of financial year include the City Centre Pop up Park; green wall at Pier Street; green bin shelters; and tree planting.</p> <p><u>2022/23</u>          Bid worth further £377k submitted Feb 2022 including revenue costs. Includes proposals to restore existing and create new natural capital assets within Swansea focussing on urban and peri-urban areas. The aim is to facilitate, support and deliver an increase in biodiversity and ecological resilience across Swansea by increasing the diversity, extent condition, connectivity and adaptability of Swansea's natural assets and contributing to the enhancement of Swansea's Nature Network.</p>	
16.	Co-ordinate and deliver the NRW grant programmes	<p>NRW grant programme coordinated by AONB team and split between AONB, Countryside Access and Nature Conservation Teams. Claim for 21/22 schemes currently submitted to NRW</p> <p>Full year funding not allocated until Oct 2021 which caused issues with project delivery and a revised programme of works which has included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Habitat Restoration ( Killay Marsh, Mumbles Hill, Port Eynon and Pwlldu) – mainly scrub removal £10k</li> <li>• Production of interpretative panels (Penclawdd, Port Eynon, Horton) £6k</li> <li>• Improved public access within Council Local Nature Reserves £3k</li> </ul>	Completed March annually

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ecosystem resilience mapping project £9k</li> <li>• Cultural Heritage interpretation Mumbles Hill £5k</li> <li>• Access improvements to Public Rights of Way Network and Coastal Path £22.5k</li> <li>• Gower Landscape and Sensitivity and Capacity Study for caravan and camping £8k</li> <li>• Fixed point photo monitoring survey of AONB £4.5k</li> <li>• Hedgerow management £3k</li> <li>• Interpretative panels and environmental events £2k</li> <li>• Practical works with Cadw - £2k</li> </ul>	
17.	Co-ordinate and deliver the ENRAW Green Infrastructure grant programmes	<p>Grant finally awarded in full Nov 2021. Part time Coed Cymru Officer recruited Dec 2021.</p> <p>Currently recruiting to 3 temporary posts to deliver programme :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 x Community Green Space Officers to work with local communities to develop and delivery green infrastructure improvements</li> <li>• Natural Environment Volunteer Co-ordinator to develop and support opportunities for environmental volunteering</li> <li>• Interviews arranged for mid- March</li> </ul>	Until March 2023
18.	Plan, support and deliver new tree / woodland/hedgerow/orchard planting initiatives	No. of trees planted on Council land is a Corporate Performance Indicator Measured annually. During 20/21 a total of 230 heavy standard trees and 2800 whips were planted on Council land.	Ongoing Monitored end of March annually

		Through 21/22 up to 1000 trees and over 5600 whips are planned to be planted across all Council land by various services and departments.	
19.	Deliver new wildflower meadow planting and management initiatives	<p>Extent of wildflower planting is an annual Performance Indicator</p> <p>On the ground the Council's wildflower planting programme has now extended to around 40,000sq.m (about 6 football pitches) of wildflowers across approximately 190 sites. IN support of this new grant funded cut and collect machinery has been trialled to help better manage grass cutting and help boost wildflowers and pollinators by maintaining species-rich vegetation. Plans are being prepared for extending this method of cutting next season using lessons learned and further public and stakeholder engagement.</p>	Ongoing. Monitored end of March annually
20.	Undertake a preliminary biodiversity audit of Council owned land and where possible manage our corporate assets for the benefit of biodiversity and natural resources	<p>Initial work in hand to undertake a desktop audit of all More Homes sites as a pilot project for wider roll out – the planning ecologist reviews preliminary ecological reports where surveys have been undertaken and advises on what surveys need to be undertaken.</p> <p>Planning Ecologist and Nature Conservation Team Leader co-wrote paper in Jan 2022 which summarised the results of a questionnaire sent to all ALGE Wales members regarding their SINC's. Reported to Welsh Govt Biodiversity &amp; Planning</p>	March 2023



		Forum to call on WG for support to enhance the protection of SINC, e.g. in updates to Planning Policy Wales (PPW), producing guidance on designating SINC, consistency on allowing mapped/non-mapped SINC in Local Development Plans. .	
21.	Promote and support community biodiversity projects /initiatives, green projects for well-being , facilitate environmental voluntary groups, etc	<p>Despite the impact of the pandemic, considerable support for, and collaboration with, community groups and other partners has been maintained and increased over the past year. This includes support for the Swansea Local Nature Partnership, Clyne Community Volunteers, Rosehill Quarry, various Friends of Parks Groups, the Environment Centre, etc.</p> <p>The recent award of ENRAW GI grant will enable greater engagement with local communities to encourage volunteering and to support them taking action to enhance and maintain and enjoy their local greenspaces and wildlife sites</p>	Ongoing annually through grants and volunteer work
22.	Develop a set of 'Wild about your Ward ' maps and packs	<p>To be delivered through ENRAW GI grant by Community and Nature Project officers once in post. Includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mapping existing Green Infrastructure assets and ecosystem service provision, and identifying areas, which provide the best opportunities for improvement and, where appropriate, maximise match funding opportunities afforded by Member's community fund</li> </ul>	March 2023

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improving access to and maintaining the quality of our parks and greenspaces.</li> <li>Mapping of ecosystem services</li> </ul>	
23.	Deliver and provide support for school biodiversity awareness activities and practical initiatives and opportunities for schoolchildren to access and learn about their natural environment	<p>Funding from the ENRAW GI grant will enable this support to continue</p> <p>All school governing bodies to identify an environmental link e.g. premises committee or schools eco-committee, etc – task for Communities and Nature Project Officers once in post</p>	<p>March 2023</p> <p>Sept 2022</p>
24.	Investigate and secure grant funding for tackling biodiversity and climate emergencies	Action for Biodiversity Officer. Amount of funding secured and schemes delivered to be reported annually	March annually
25.	Targeted Regeneration Investment (TRI) funding of GI projects	<p>GI Projects undertaken: Completed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coastal Office High Street - green roof</li> <li>Potter's Wheel - green roof</li> </ul> <p>Being delivered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dragon Hotel - green walls</li> </ul> <p>Green roof bin shelters around the city centre</p>	Completed March 2022
26.	City Centre GI improvements	Wind St: Public realm improvements include additional tree planting and large planting beds along whole length of street with a mixture of trees shrubs and pollinator attracting herbaceous species	March 2022
27.	External Environment Enhancement on Council owned Housing land	Enhancements to greenspace as part of an environmental works programme to meet the Council's commitment to the Welsh Housing Quality	Ongoing until March 2024

		<p>Standard and to address deficiencies in access to natural greenspace</p> <p>Swift bricks have been installed and will continue to be installed on all new More Homes houses. Planning ecologist involved in plans for future More Homes sites in order to further conserve and enhance biodiversity on the sites.</p>	
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Note: Grey shaded = completed project or part of ongoing business as usual

# Agenda Item 7



## Report of the Convener

Natural Environment Scrutiny Performance Panel – 15 March 2022

### Annual Work Plan Review

<b>Purpose:</b>	As the municipal year ends, it is good practice to reflect on the Panel's work, experience, and effectiveness.
<b>Content:</b>	A summary of the year's activities is provided.
<b>Councillors are being asked to:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reflect on the year's work; and</li><li>• Share ideas to improve the effectiveness of scrutiny</li></ul>
<b>Lead Councillor:</b>	Councillor Peter Jones, Convener of the Natural Environment Scrutiny Performance Panel
<b>Lead Officer &amp; Report Author:</b>	Liz Jordan, Scrutiny Officer E-mail: <a href="mailto:liz.jordan@swansea.gov.uk">liz.jordan@swansea.gov.uk</a>

#### 1. Background

- 1.1 As this is the final meeting of this municipal year, the Panel is invited to reflect on the year's scrutiny work, experience and effectiveness. Any ideas that will improve the effectiveness of the scrutiny of Natural Environment, and scrutiny generally, are welcome.
- 1.2 To aid Panel members, a summary of the year's work is attached (appendix 1).
- 1.3 Some of the questions the Panel may want to consider:
  - Have things worked well?
  - Has the Panel's work focused on the right things?
  - What, if anything, could be done better?
  - What have we learnt that will help us to improve and develop future scrutiny?

#### 2. Panel Overview

- 2.1 The Natural Environment Scrutiny Performance Panel is responsible for ongoing monitoring of Council performance in relation to the natural environment. The Panel monitors delivery of the Council's work, commitments and implementation of agreed plans, and assesses progress.

- 2.2 The development of this Panel followed a scrutiny inquiry, which looked at how the Council manages its responsibilities in relation to the natural environment in Swansea, including statutory requirements under the Environment (Wales) Act 2016, and subsequent introduction of a new Corporate Priority of Maintaining and Enhancing Swansea's Natural Resources and Biodiversity. This also links with the Climate Emergency, declared by the Council in June 2019, and the recent declaration by the Council in November 2021 of a Nature Emergency.
- 2.2 The Panel has a membership of 14 councillors. Overall Councillor attendance at the Panel for the year has been 73% to end of February 2022.
- 2.3 In accordance with the agreed Scrutiny Work Programme, the Panel has met every two months. During the 2021/22 municipal year, 6 meetings were held. Meeting discussions have regularly been reported on by the local press, indicating the Panel has been focussed on issues of public interest.
- 2.5 The Panel has written to relevant Cabinet Members, to convey its views including suggested action, arising from meeting discussions. Letters, and responses where requested, were reported back to the Panel for comments and discussion as necessary.

### **3. Future Scrutiny Work Programme**

- 3.1 The future work programme will be discussed at the first Natural Environment Scrutiny Performance Panel in the new municipal year, or otherwise other arrangement, following the Council elections in May.

**Background Papers:** None

**Appendices:**

Appendix 1 - Completed Work Plan 2021-2022

## Natural Environment Scrutiny Performance Panel Work Plan 2021-22

22 <sup>nd</sup> March 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Confirmation of Convener</b></li> <li>• <b>Nature Conservation – Project updates</b> <i>Invited to attend:</i> Deborah Hill – Nature Conservation Team Leader Paul Meller – Natural Environment Section Manager Cllr David Hopkins – Cabinet Member for Delivery and Operations</li> <li>• <b>Agree Work Plan topics 2021-22</b></li> <li>• <b>For information only - Climate Change Action Plan consultation</b> (<a href="#">link</a> to papers)</li> </ul>
2021-22	
19 <sup>th</sup> May 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Climate Change Action Plan consultation feedback</b></li> <li>• <b>Climate Emergency Declaration – Council Action Plan Progress</b> <i>Invited to attend:</i> Cllr Andrea Lewis - Cabinet Member for Homes, Energy and Service Transformation Martin Nicholls – Director of Place Rachel Lewis – Directorate Project Manager Suzy Richards – Sustainable Policy Officer</li> </ul>
29 <sup>th</sup> June 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Air Quality Management</b> <i>Invited to attend:</i> Cllr Mark Thomas – Cabinet Member for Environment Enhancement &amp; Infrastructure Management Tom Price – Team Leader, Pollution Control Victoria Seller - Swansea University, Research Officer</li> </ul>
26 <sup>th</sup> August 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Ash Dieback</b> <i>Invited to attend:</i> Jeremy Davies – Group Leader Parks and Cleansing Cllr Mark Thomas – Cabinet Member for Environment Enhancement &amp; Infrastructure Management</li> </ul>
6 <sup>th</sup> October 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Local Flood Risk Management</b> <i>Invited to attend:</i> Stuart Davies – Head of Highways and Transportation Bob Fenwick – Group Leader Highways Maintenance Mike Sweeney – Team Leader, Highways and Transportation Cllr Mark Thomas – Cabinet Member for Environment Enhancement &amp; Infrastructure Management</li> <li>• <b>Water Pollution</b> <i>Invited to attend:</i> Tom Price – Team Leader, Pollution Control Paula Livingstone – Divisional EHO Cllr David Hopkins – Cabinet Member for Delivery &amp; Operations</li> </ul>

12 <sup>th</sup> January 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Management of Green Space / Weed &amp; Verge Management</b>  <i>Invited to attend:</i>  Cllr Mark Thomas – Cabinet Member for Environment Enhancement &amp; Infrastructure Management  Jeremy Davies – Group Leader Parks and Cleansing  Mark Barber – Biodiversity Natural Environment Officer  Chris Howell – Head of Waste Parks and Cleansing</li> </ul>
15 <sup>th</sup> March 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Nature Conservation Team – Project Updates</b>  <i>Invited to attend:</i>  Cllr Andrea Lewis - Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Service Transformation  Paul Meller – Natural Environment Manager  Deborah Hill – Nature Conservation Team Leader</li> </ul>

# Agenda Item 8



**To:**  
**Cllr Mark Thomas,**  
**Cabinet Member for Environment**  
**Enhancement & Infrastructure**  
**Management**

**BY EMAIL**

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Overview & Scrutiny

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28<sup>th</sup> January 2022

**Summary:** This is a letter from the Natural Environment Scrutiny Performance Panel to the Cabinet Member for Environment Enhancement and Infrastructure Management. The letter concerns the meeting held on 12<sup>th</sup> January 2022 and the updates received regarding Green Space / Weed and Verge Management.

Dear Councillor Thomas,

The Natural Environment Scrutiny Performance Panel met on January 12<sup>th</sup> to discuss the topic of Green Space / Weed and Verge Management. We were grateful to yourself and to officers for attending to aid discussions and answer questions.

The Panel received an overview of the issues of Council weed management and the management of green open space, including the aims of increasing Biodiversity through management programmes and the reduced use of glyphosate throughout Council services.

## **Weed Management**

You explained to us that the Highways department is the biggest user of glyphosate, as opposed to the Parks department, although we understand that regular use manages areas of Japanese Knotweed. We heard that the Highways department are responsible for managing weeds on the road network, therefore responsibly falls outside of the Parks department.

It was also explained to us that the current management programme is run on a three-year contract with an external company. We understand that, to date, this has been the most effective and efficient method of weed management. Panel Members did raise concerns that some cul-de-sacs were being missed by contractors, and acknowledged the system in place to ask contractors to return and re-spray should the service in a particular area not be satisfactory.

**OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY / TROSOLWG A CHRAFFU**

**SWANSEA COUNCIL / CYNGOR ABERTAWE**

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We heard that in 2021, the programme faced a significant setback due to rain and adverse weather conditions. Weeds became difficult to manage and complaints were received regarding overgrown weeds.

You explained to us that the Highways department now has extra budget allowance to create a dedicated team, focusing on hotspot areas for weed management and control.

The Panel raised some concerns over the City's entrance points and the first impressions for visitors where overgrown weeds may be viewed as unattended or neglected.

The Panel expressed concern regarding glyphosate use and risk posed both to human health and to the well-being of some insect and bird species, especially in relation to weed control on roadside verges. Members acknowledged that there are currently few other effective options to manage weeds along the highways network. We understood that Council trials of new technologies / treatments have not yet resulted in a more effective programme. You did reiterate that glyphosate is a fully-licensed product and the Council is not using un-safe products in the weed control programme.

Panel Members discussed the current option of wards opting out of weed-spraying, citing the example of 'Uplands Living Streets', a group interested in reduced glyphosate treatment. You explained to the Panel that, although individual houses could not opt out, wards or streets could opt out of the weed spraying programme.

## **Management of Green Space**

The Panel heard that, in terms of improving biodiversity, there will be some areas of grass that are left to grow longer. The Panel heard that such areas left to meadow were sometimes viewed by the public as having been unattended. Members understood that communication needs to be improved to ensure the public understand where/why certain areas become managed meadows. Members suggested that temporary signage be erected at meadow sites to better inform the public.

The Panel cited Lougher castle as an example of green space being successfully left to meadow, encouraging wildflower growth. Officers highlighted that wildflower growth is promoted via nutrient-reduced soil, and that grass cuttings left on the land are therefore counter-productive to wildflower growth.

Officers explained to us that the removal of grass cuttings (from wildflower sites) has required specialist equipment. We heard that Welsh Government funding has recently enabled the purchase of specialist 'cut and collect' machinery, which is successfully helping to manage this aspect of the programme.

Panel Members did comment on grass cuttings left following verge-cutting, and the nutrients being left to aid future growth - observing that the cuttings can also sometimes contribute to gully blockages. Officers explained that the time/costs spent in collecting general grass-cuttings would not likely be effective in making a significant difference to the number of cuts.

Panel Members raised some concerns over potential sale of green space areas to members of the public. We would be interested to hear more about this aspect of our discussion, and the process in place for sale of such sites to the public.

The report presented to us highlighted the challenges faced, for example large-scale grass removal.

The report also outlined the 'Draft Questions for Consultation', about which Members raised queries regarding wording, suggesting alternative phrasing of questions to accommodate broader answers.

## **Resources**

Panel Members queried whether grant funding would be available to support this area of work within individual wards, including to provide plants/tress for local areas.

Officers explained to us that two part-time posts were being funded to work within ward areas to support biodiversity, habitat creation and general wildflower management.

We were pleased to hear that a Biodiversity Officer has now been appointed, since this recommendation by the Natural Environment Scrutiny Inquiry Panel; however, we raised concerns over the part-time nature of this post. Members agreed that a long-term commitment to funding a full-time post would be beneficial.

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**  
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