



City and County of Swansea

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

Committee Room 5, Guildhall, Swansea

Wednesday, 25 September 2019 at 10.00 am

### Present:

#### Councillor(s)

E W Fitzgerald  
P K Jones  
B J Rowlands  
L J Tyler-Lloyd

#### Councillor(s)

D H Hopkins  
I E Mann  
M Sherwood

#### Councillor(s)

M H Jones  
C Richards  
W G Thomas

#### Co-opted Member(s)

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#### Other Attendees

David Hopkins

Cabinet Member - Delivery & Performance (Joint-Interim Deputy Leader)

#### Officer(s)

Deb Hill  
Bethan Hopkins  
Paul Meller

Nature Conservation Team Leader  
Scrutiny Officer  
Strategic Planning and Natural Environment Manager

**Apologies for Absence:** None

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### 1 Election of Convener

- Councillor Peter Jones was elected as Convener for the year

### 2 Disclosure of Personal and Prejudicial Interests

- Cllr Mary Sherwood – Member of RSPB, Greenpeace, Woodland Trust
- Cllr Wendy Fitzgerald – Board Member of Penllergaer Trust
- Cllr Peter Jones – Member of RSPB, Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth
- Cllr Brigitte Rowlands – Secretary of West Glamorgan Commoners Association

### 3 Prohibition of Whipped Votes and Declaration of Party Whips

- None

#### **4 Public Questions**

- None

#### **5 Terms of Reference**

- The Panel agreed the Terms of Reference

#### **6 Natural Environment - An Overview**

- Deb Hill gave a presentation to the Panel
- Main focus on what has been happening over the last 3 years but Swansea Council has been doing work relating to the environment for the last 50-60 years
- 80% of Swansea is green space and is very diverse with woodland, wetlands, grassland, heath, meadow, marine, coastland, farmland, urban parks, nature reserves and wildlife corridors
- Over 50% of the County has significant ecological value
- There is protection for the environment via a range of site designations
- The benefits of biodiversity to well-being are becoming more widely recognised
- Recognition of ecosystem services and their role
- Biodiversity loss and species extinction is a challenge and a risk – need to raise awareness and manage land sustainably
- The risks are both local and national
- Various legislative frameworks for protecting biodiversity
- Recent legislation - the Resilient Wales goal in the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 is about ecological resilience. Also the Environment(Wales) Act 2016
- Connectivity between sites is imperative so biodiversity can move where possible
- Biodiversity consideration should be embedded at an early stage and is everyone's responsibility
- As a Council we need to submit a section 6 plan and submit a plan on progress every 3 years in line with legislative requirements
- The Public Services Board Well-being Plan has a Working with Nature objective and we also have the new biodiversity Corporate Priority in the Corporate Plan
- The team have been mapping land use – links with the South East Wales Biodiversity Records Centre (SEWBREC) which collates, manages and disseminates biodiversity information
- The team have also been ward mapping to identify areas of ecological significance etc in each ward and will be increasing this as resources allow
- The Council owns a lot of land in Swansea (e.g. parks, education sites, estates, highways, cemeteries etc) and they have a duty to manage it sustainably
- Team currently producing a green infrastructure strategy which looks at nature based solutions

- Events, procurement, tourism, regeneration, highways, housing, education estates – all teams have major parts to play in relation to biodiversity
- Must support community engagement and volunteers e.g. friends of parks and wildlife volunteers etc
- Looking at next steps – securing additional resources, raising awareness internally and externally and developing plans and reports
- Cabinet Member thanked Deb and the team for the great work they have done. The team is small and needs more support. Needs to be a shared responsibility across the whole Council and training needs to be put in place so like safeguarding, biodiversity is everybody's business
- Town and Community Councils can really help with these issues as small changes can make a big difference – many already have excellent biodiversity awareness but could extend training to them and work together
- Discussed planning issues – confirmed that the relationship with the Nature Conservation Team and Planning is excellent but issues arise outside of the planning process sometimes prior or post planning permission e.g. Tree Preservation Orders ignored or land cleared before planning permission is given and land surveyed
- Lack of capacity not lack of will in planning enforcement
- Enforcement is a major issue. Need additional support to enforce the rights of nature as currently lacking capacity under planning ecology enforcement
- Ongoing internal conflict – ecology value or financial value of green space and biodiversity
- Need a fundamental culture change
- Discussed peat and its role in carbon absorption and value
- Townhill campus an excellent example of green development
- Where development impacts farmland etc aim to try and keep as many natural features as possible
- Common land is also very important
- Some discussion around section 106 agreements – they should be used to 'enhance' biodiversity – ongoing discussion over suitability of amounts requested
- Need to recognise the 'economic value' of biodiversity – for example, trees as flood prevention can be costed against hard engineering projects and enhance biodiversity and climate change at the same time
- Despite some part-time temporary funding for a planning ecologist there is no money from the Council for this role, it is based on grants
- Council declared climate emergency but no funds allocated to the 2 posts required – Planning Ecologist and Section 6 Officer which are essential posts
- Local councils do not have the capacity to deliver this essential work. Teams locally want to do work on these issues but do not have the funding support from Central or Welsh Government to maintain and enhance biodiversity – letter to be written to Welsh Government to highlight the severity of the situation
- Some project work currently funded by Natural Resources Wales including 'Our Nature, Our Future' and Wildlife Volunteers
- Some churches have signed up to be 'Eco Churches'
- Some resistance internally to culture change on this issue – all directors need to imbue this duty in their work

- There needs to be more sanctions for public bodies when this duty is not delivered and a lobby for change on this issue
- Swansea Council are a very engaged Council in relation to biodiversity and want more funding to deliver even more
- Can no longer be economic priority over ecology
- Local issues around littering and young people – if local environment is not respected then global one will not be
- Schools should have a littering policy – schools usually very engaged in ecology issues
- Need more recycling bins within Swansea to help with this issue
- Could look to do more around regional biodiversity working linking in line with other regional working projects
- Green infrastructure strategy developed in City Centre to influence change
- Working with Natural Resources Wales and leading GI consultant to put the policy together
- On street engagement to get people's views
- New vision will be going out to consultation – panel to engage
- Want Swansea to be greener and support biodiversity by;
  1. Leading by example and governance
  2. Supporting learning to improve skills and knowledge
  3. Exploring how to maintain work
- Circulate draft Green Infrastructure document to Panel

## **7 Work Plan 19/20**

- Some items switches within the work plan
- Glyphosate item to be replaced by 'Weed Management'
- Explore whether Air Pollution can be explored via reports rather than a scrutiny item
- 5G to be looked at as part of Scrutiny Programme Committee Q&A with relevant Cabinet Member

The meeting ended at 11.55 am

**Chair**