



City and County of Swansea

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

Remotely via Microsoft Teams

Tuesday, 1 September 2020 at 10.30 am

Present: Councillor P K Jones (Chair) Presided

Councillor(s)
E W Fitzgerald
I E Mann
M Sherwood

Councillor(s)
S J Gallagher
H M Morris
W G Thomas

Councillor(s)
M H Jones
C Richards
L J Tyler-Lloyd

Other Councillor Attendees

Mark Thomas	Cabinet Member – Environment & Infrastructure Management
David Hopkins	Cabinet Member – Delivery & Operations
Paxton Hood-Williams	Minute No. 28 only
Yvonne Jardine	Minute No. 28 only
Jeff Jones	Minute No. 28 only

Officer(s)

Chris Howell	Head of Waste, Cleansing & Parks
Paul Meller	Strategic Planning and Natural Environment Manager
Deb Hill	Team Leader, Nature Conservation
Bob Fenwick	Group Leader, Highways Maintenance
Mike Sweeney	Team Leader, Highways Maintenance
Brij Madahar	Scrutiny Team Leader

Apologies for Absence

Councillor(s): B J Rowlands

23 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.

24 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.

25 Minutes.

The minutes of the Natural Environment Scrutiny Performance Panel meeting, held on 16 December 2019, were agreed as an accurate record.

26 Public Questions.

There were no public questions.

27 Discussion on COVID-19 Service Specific Impacts / Environmental Lessons.

The Panel held a discussion on the environmental impacts of the pandemic and any issues and environmental lessons that have arisen during the period of lockdown. The Panel heard from lead Cabinet Members and a number of relevant officers on the experience over the last six months.

The numerous side effects of the pandemic included some positive aspects such as reduced air pollution from less travel and activity, increased use of cycle routes and general benefits to biodiversity and enjoyment of local outdoor space.

The Panel also discussed issues around weed management and how, in the absence of cutting grass verges and parks, an increase in wildlife sightings by the public were reported during lockdown.

Discussion focussed on:

- The importance of local green spaces
- General weed spraying activity, resources and possible alternatives to the use of glyphosate
- Less frequent cutting of grass verges and some meadow areas of parks, to enhance the natural environment, habitats, and biodiversity.
- Public engagement on weed and verge management and possible Community Council involvement
- The Council's wildflower planting programme
- Increased use of cycle routes
- General littering and education surrounding this issue

The Panel also took the opportunity to ask about the recent train derailment at Llangennech and extent of diesel spillage into the Loughor Estuary and environmental / ecological impact. The Panel noted that it was too early to tell as assessments were still being carried out by relevant lead agencies.

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.

28 Follow Up - Implementation of Natural Environment Scrutiny Inquiry Recommendations.

The Panel followed up on the implementation of the Natural Environment Scrutiny Inquiry recommendations. The Cabinet Member for Delivery & Operations provided a report to help the Panel assess the impact of the scrutiny inquiry report and show progress against each of the agreed recommendations, since Cabinet decision in July 2019. The Panel also heard from lead officers, Paul Meller, Strategic Planning and Natural Environment Manager, and Deb Hill, Nature Conservation Team Leader.

The Panel was pleased to note from the Cabinet Member's report specific contributions to change as a direct result of the inquiry, and impact made. For example, there is much sharper focus on the natural environment, resources, and biodiversity and the scrutiny report has been a catalyst for change.

It was noted that the majority of recommendations had been implemented fully and will remain a long-term commitment. Some actions were outstanding and subject to the appointment of specific grant-funded project officers.

Discussion focussed on:

- Progress with the recruitment of a Section 6 Biodiversity Officer and project officers
- The appointment of a part-time temporary Planning Ecologist
- The need for greater collaboration between the Council and Community Councils
- The visibility of the work of the Corporate Biodiversity Working Group
- Our work with schools and training on biodiversity awareness

AGREED that:

1. good progress has been made with the implementation of recommendations, and to conclude formal monitoring of the inquiry report; and
2. the Panel will pick up on any specific issues of concern through the Panel's ongoing monitoring activities.

29 Local Flood Risk Management - Annual Update.

The Panel held a discussion on local flood risk management, which will now be the subject of regular monitoring through this Scrutiny Panel.

The Cabinet Member for Environment Enhancement & Infrastructure Management, along with lead officers, reported to the Panel on the experience over the past year, giving examples of significant flooding occurrences, progress with flood risk management, and challenges.

Discussion focussed on:

- The impact of climate change - prevalence of flooding and increase in frequency and severity
- Flood investigations

- The Council's responsibilities in relation to flooding on non-council owned land
- Gully / drain cleansing and frequency – noted purchase of extra gully machine
- Synergy between highways and cleansing operations
- Whether the Council was spending more on reactive emergency responses rather than preventative maintenance
- Communications / public information about flood risk and flooding
- Resources

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 Member for Environment Enhancement & Infrastructure Management with its views and recommendations on the issue of local flood risk management.

30 Letters.

The Panel received the correspondence sent by the Panel and response received following the meeting of the Panel held on 16 December 2019:

- Letter to / from Cabinet Member for Environment & Infrastructure Management.

The meeting ended at 12.49 pm

Chair