



City and County of Swansea

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

Remotely via Microsoft Teams

Monday, 22 March 2021 at 10.00 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

Officer(s)

Emily-Jayne Davies
Deb Hill
Paul Meller

Scrutiny Officer
Nature Conservation Team Leader
Natural Environment Section Manager

Apologies for Absence

Councillor(s): B J Rowlands

31 Confirmation of Convener

AGREED that Councillor Peter Jones be re-appointed as convener of the Panel for the 2020/21 municipal year.

32 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.

33 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.

34 Minutes of previous meeting(s)

The minutes of the Natural Environment Scrutiny Performance Panel meeting, held on 1 September 2020, were agreed as an accurate record.

35 Public Questions

There were no public questions.

There was some discussion by Panel Members about opportunities to raise awareness of the work of the Panel with the public and stakeholders, including local environmental organisations, which would hopefully lead to improved engagement with the Panel.

36 Nature Conservation Project Update

The Panel held a discussion on the work of the Council's Nature Conservation Team.

The Panel welcomed the information update with a Biodiversity and Green Infrastructure Action Log provided showing current and planned work. The report focused on the actions under the Corporate Plan Natural Resources and Biodiversity Objective and work arising out of the Natural Environment Scrutiny Inquiry recommendations. It was noted that this long-term project work did not cover all activities, and was in addition to the delivery of daily statutory duties.

The Panel considered the main project activity, delivery timescales and progress, as shown in the Action Log.

Discussion focused on:

- Monitoring of the Corporate Plan Objective for Natural Resources and Biodiversity.
- Preparation of the Next Section 6 Corporate Biodiversity Duty Action Plan. The last Section 6 Biodiversity Duty Monitoring Report would be re-circulated to Panel Members. Panel Members were keen to see greater promotion of the work the Council is doing in delivering the Duty.
- The role and work of the Climate Change Programme Board – the Panel was interested in learning more about this.
- Swansea Central Area Green Infrastructure Strategy.
- The development of a Council Tree Policy - Members were interested in progress and highlighted the importance of public consultation and engagement to inform the policy, querying how wide the consultation will be and for how long. There was discussion on the issue of tree felling and the number of mature trees being cleared across Swansea, including communication with local residents to ensure awareness.
- Ash Dieback – officers are finalising some guidance on this in relation to biodiversity, to ensure biodiversity is taken into account when dealing with this issue – to be circulated when finalised
- Biodiversity Supplementary Planning Guidance – this was adopted by Planning Committee in February and would be circulated to the Panel for information.
- Plan to appoint a new Section 6 Duty Biodiversity Officer and new Planning Ecologist.
- Development / delivery of Biodiversity training – to be actioned by newly appointed officer.

- Support to Local Nature Partnership (LNP) meetings – funding secured through Welsh Government for biodiversity posts across Wales, making a huge difference to work being covered.
- Grant funding from both Natural Resources Wales and Welsh Government for delivery of programmes.
- New tree initiatives - this is a corporate performance indicator, contributing to national forest targets. Officers have produced a guidance note on planting trees (Right Tree in the Right Place) – copy to be shared with Panel Members.
- Wildflower meadow planting initiatives and management - Officers have identified strategic pollinator corridors to target for new planting. Grants from Welsh Government have enabled purchase of 'cut and collect' machinery to support the ecological management of wildflower meadows / verges
- Efforts to reduce mowing / spraying in parks and verges. Members raised concerns about continued use of glyphosate, which will be a topic for future discussion. The Panel would be following up to see what changes have been made to support biodiversity.
- Supporting community biodiversity projects – impact of Covid has been remarkable on appreciation of green areas discovered during lockdown. Volume of requests for information/help has increased dramatically this year.
- Biodiversity and Green Infrastructure auditing and mapping work.
- School biodiversity awareness activities – a recommendation originating from the Natural Environment Scrutiny Inquiry.

The Panel took the opportunity to acknowledge the hard work and efforts of the Nature Conservation Team, covering a broad range of issues, particularly during the last year of lockdown. The Panel considered the information provided, asked questions, and gave views on the activities discussed and progress. The Chair thanked all for their input.

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

37 Draft Work Plan 2021/22

The Panel considered the focus of future meetings and priorities, and agreed the draft work plan presented by the Convener. He added that the work plan will remain flexible and subject to ongoing review by the Panel to ensure focus on the right topics.

The next Panel meeting would be taking place on 19 May, moved from April, to discuss progress on action on Climate Change including feedback following a public consultation exercise by the Council.

38 Climate Change Action Plan Consultation

The Convener referred to the Council's current public consultation on Climate Change and encouraged Panel Members to respond to the Climate Survey which was ending on 28 March.

Minutes of the Scrutiny Performance Panel - Natural Environment (22.03.2021)
Cont'd

The meeting ended at 11.40 am