



City and County of Swansea

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

Remotely via MS Teams

Tuesday, 29 June 2021 at 10.00 am

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

**Councillor(s)**  
E W Fitzgerald  
M H Jones  
B J Rowlands

**Councillor(s)**  
S J Gallagher  
H Lawson  
M Sherwood

**Councillor(s)**  
O G James  
I E Mann  
W G Thomas

### **Other Attendees**

Mark Thomas	Cabinet Member – Environment Enhancement & Infrastructure Management
Mark Wade	Head of Housing and Public Health
Tom Price	Team Leader, Pollution Control
Victoria Seller	Research Officer, Swansea University
Emily-Jayne Davies	Scrutiny Officer

### **Apologies for Absence**

Councillor(s): H M Morris, C Richards and L J Tyler-Lloyd

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#### **46 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.

#### **47 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.

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

The minutes of the Natural Environment Scrutiny Performance Panel meeting, held on 19 May 2021, were agreed as an accurate record.

#### **49 Public Questions**

There were two public questions, focused on (a) domestic wood burning and (b) use of national air quality data to inform Council strategy.

The Panel discussed question (a) in the context of Air Pollution and the monitoring of same. Cllr Mark Thomas outlined the Council's approach and highlighted that a city-wide approach to monitoring/enforcement is not achievable at present, however, the Council is making continuous improvements to Air Quality standards and policies, in line with Government guidelines. Officers confirmed that under statutory nuisance provisions, the Council has powers to respond to complaints regarding smoke control, and will do so if a complaint is received.

Cllr Mark Thomas acknowledged question (b) as a wider policy issue, both locally and nationally, and undertook to provide a full written answer in due course.

## 50 Air Quality Management

The Panel held a discussion on the Council's current *Air Quality Management* strategies. The Panel heard from lead Cabinet Members and relevant officers on the policies and plans currently in place.

Panel Members raised questions regarding the report presented, interested to know more about the technology and available resources supporting the work of the Council's Pollution control Team, such as the PM<sub>2.5</sub> analyser on Fabian Way. The Panel also heard about the Green Screen which has been installed on Fabian way, and the work of the Council looking at results, both during and after lockdown, helping to identify and measure benefits to mitigate some exposure to engine pollution.

Discussion focussed on:

- Clean Air Advisory Panel has been set up with Welsh Government, to advise on matters arising from air quality.
- Scope to engage schools / pupils in green infrastructure projects – need for engagement of children at a young age, shifting traditional behaviours.
- Transboundary effects – some increased pollutants during lockdown in the wider context.
- Traffic counter / traffic flow data: Capability exists to look into specific days/events and the effect of higher density traffic on the data. Swansea University plan to research major events in Swansea, and any subsequent impact on air quality.
- Engine idling – for example, school collections. Matter of concern that children are subject to concentrated exposure during these times. Buses should not be running too long with idle engines. The Panel heard that buses under contract with the Council have a limited idling period, anything beyond that should be reported. Councillors acknowledged that it is difficult to monitor/enforce cars at pick up times outside schools. Panel Members suggested bus operators are encouraged to install monitoring technology to measure engine idling times.
- Education – exists a need to better inform public to a greater extent as to consequences of certain behaviours.
- Councillors acknowledged the increased workload and strains put on the team during the period of the pandemic response.

The Panel also received a presentation from Victoria Seller, of Swansea University, covering an overview of Air Quality strategies in Wales. Discussion focused on:

- RCPCH Report (2016) estimated 40,000 early deaths each year attributed to air quality in the UK.
- Air quality has been linked to a huge range of health issues, including nanoparticles crossing the blood/brain barrier.
- Guidelines and standards may not be protecting the health of everybody in society.
- Nitrogen Dioxide gas is traffic related, occurring locally in discrete pockets.
- Air pollution is linked to health and deprivation, disproportionately affecting some communities.
- Air Qualities Guidelines (WHO) are due to be updated imminently.
- The Well-Being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015 places responsibility on public bodies to work in a cohesive way to manage Air Pollution.
- Automatic Urban and Rural network (AURN) – 11 sites across Wales, 2 in rural areas, not a good spread of monitor density due to cost of monitors and time intensive operation. These monitors, plus data predictions, demonstrate issues with Nitrogen Dioxide.
- 40 automated monitors across Wales, in addition to 11 AURNs.
- 12 Authorities have diffusion tubes, small simple technology, measuring long term concentration of Nitrogen Dioxide.
- The University is to undertake a new piece of work / research surrounding the impact of reduced traffic, during lockdown, on air quality. The Hypothesis is that the reduction in traffic will correlate with a reduction in NO<sub>2</sub> and PM<sub>2.5</sub>.

The Panel also took the opportunity to ask about the policies relating to the Local Development Plan / increased house building, and the subsequent increase on traffic/air pollution. Cllr Thomas highlighted a clear defined need for more housing nationally, acknowledging the balance needed between housing demands and impacts upon surrounding services.

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.

## 51 Letters

The Panel received the correspondence sent following the meeting of the Panel held on 19 May 2021.

The meeting ended at 11.55 am



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

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Overview & Scrutiny

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22 July 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 29 June 2021 and the updates received regarding Air Quality Management.

Dear Councillor Thomas,

On 29 June, the Panel met to discuss the Council's current strategies regarding *Air Quality Management*. The Panel are grateful to yourself for attending to discuss the report and answer questions. We also thank Mark Wade, Head of Housing and Public Health, and Tom Price, Pollution Control Team Leader, for their attendance and contributions. We also extend our thanks to Victoria Seller, Research Officer at Swansea University, who attended to present an overview regarding the impact of air quality on human health.

The Panel received an update report regarding air quality in Swansea and the strategies currently implemented by the Council. Our discussions predominantly focused on the following aspects:

### Green Infrastructure

It was pleasing to hear about the installation of a 'Green Screen' along Fabian Way in March 2020, along with the PM<sub>2.5</sub> analyser. We understand this was a collaboration with the Nature Conservation Team, with the aim of mitigating exposure to engine pollution. We would be interested to hear updates regarding the analysis of data surrounding this project, which will take place to assess whether the installation has had an impact on air quality and noise.

Officers highlighted that there remains much scope to engage schools and young pupils in Green Infrastructure projects, acknowledging the need for engagement of

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children at a young age, helping to shift traditional behaviours. Members also elaborated on the need to better educate the public regarding consequences of certain behaviours and the impact of such on air pollution.

## **Air Pollution Monitoring**

The Panel heard about the *transboundary effects* on Air Quality in Swansea, including the increased levels of air pollution during lockdown, resulting from wider events beyond localised borders.

Officers explained to us that Swansea Council utilises both automatic and non-automatic monitoring methods when undertaking Local Air Quality Management duties. Panel Members were interested to know more about the technology and available resources supporting the work of the Council's Pollution Control Team.

We heard that traffic flow data is collected and analysed, to help understand air quality measurements across Swansea. The Panel queried whether data is collected at specific times, such as dates of major events. Officers explained to us that, although not currently a focus, the capability exists to look into specific days/events and the effect of higher density traffic on localised pollution measurements. We also understand that Swansea University plan to research the impacts of major events in the area, such as the Wales National Air Show, and any subsequent influence on air quality.

Panel Members raised the issue of engine idling at school collection points and concerns that children are subject to concentrated exposure during these times. You reiterated that buses should not be running too long with idle engines, and it was pleasing to hear that this is a stipulation within contracts of bus providers. Panel Members suggested that bus operators are encouraged to install monitoring technology to measure engine idling times, a suggestion which you took on board as a possibility for inclusion within the next tender process.

The Panel also received a presentation from Victoria Seller, of Swansea University, covering an overview of air quality strategies in Wales. It was concerning to hear that air quality has been linked to a huge range of health issues and is attributable to a large number of early deaths in the UK each year. We also heard evidence that air pollution is linked to deprivation, disproportionately affecting some communities.

It was explained to us that, across Wales, there is a minimal spread of automatic monitor density due largely to the cost of monitors and the time-intensive operating requirements. We heard that in total there are forty automated monitors across Wales.

The Panel also heard that a total of twelve Local Authorities use diffusion tubes, a low cost and effective tool for measuring long term concentrations of Nitrogen Dioxide. We understand that Swansea Council also utilise diffusion tubes, although data collected is limited to mean annual concentrations.

## Public Question Time

The Panel is looking to engage the public, and relevant organisations, in its work and was pleased to receive public questions on Air Pollution. Two questions were put forward during our Public Question Time item, both relating to aspects of Air Pollution.

You were asked, and responded to, the following:

- 1) *Will the council include the monitoring and control of pollution from domestic wood burners as a part of its measures to reduce particulate air pollution?* In response to this question, you highlighted that a city-wide approach to monitoring/enforcement is not achievable at present, however, the Council is making continuous improvements to Air Quality standards and policies, in line with Government guidelines. Officers confirmed that under statutory nuisance provisions, the Council has powers to respond to individual complaints regarding smoke control, and will investigate valid complaints received.
- 2) *Who in Swansea Council is responsible for developing a strategy to address this serious problem (air pollution)? When will it be given the priority it deserves, in order to save human life and address the costs of taking no action?* In response to this question, you acknowledged this as a wider policy issue and undertook to provide a full written answer in due course. I would be grateful if you could copy Scrutiny into your response.

## Impacts of the LDP

The Panel took the opportunity to ask about the policies relating to the Local Development Plan (LDP) and the subsequent increase in traffic/air pollution as a result of an increase in house building. You highlighted a clear and defined need for more housing nationally, acknowledging the balance needed between housing demands and impacts upon surrounding services.

## Your Response

The Panel acknowledged the increased workload experienced by the Pollution Control Team during the period of the pandemic response, and thank all those involved for their hard work and commitment.

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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