



To:

**Councillor David Hopkins, Cabinet Member
for Corporate Services and Performance**

and

**Councillor Andrew Stevens, Cabinet
Member for Environment and Infrastructure**

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15 April 2024

BY EMAIL

cc Cabinet Members

Summary: This is a letter from the Climate Change and Nature Scrutiny Performance Panel to the relevant Cabinet Members following the meeting of the Panel on 19 March 2024. It covers Local Flood Risk and Air Quality. A formal written response is required.

Dear Cllr Hopkins and Cllr Stevens

The Panel met on 19 March 2024 and received its annual update on Local Flood Risk Management and a briefing on Air Quality Management.

We would like to thank you both, Mark Wade, Stuart Davies, Carol Morgan, Mike Sweeney and Tom Price for attending to present the items and answer the Panel's questions. We appreciate your engagement and input.

We are writing to you to reflect on what we learned from the discussion, share the views of the Panel, and, where necessary, raise any issues or recommendations for your consideration and response.

Local Flood Risk Management

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY / TROSOLWG A CHRAFFU

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You both attended to provide an update and answer questions along with relevant officers.

We heard the Local Flood Risk Strategy is currently being produced which will incorporate the Flood Risk Action Plan. We noted that this will place an additional financial burden on the Authority and increase workload, and that introduction of the new Technical Advice Note (TAN) 15 and demand on delivery of the Sustainable Drainage Systems (SUDS) Approving Body (SAB) function will also increase workload.

We were pleased to hear that construction of flood defence walls at Mumbles is well underway with completion anticipated early 2025, and we praised everyone involved for a really good job.

We queried if the Authority is looking to have such things as 'catchment tanks' in Swansea Valley to prevent flooding by holding back water from the river Tawe and releasing it when suitable to do so, for example at Pontardulais. We heard that attenuation features and storage schemes are being used in many schemes to alleviate flooding and that all new developments will have attenuation installed. You confirmed that in Pontardulais there is a Natural Resources Wales scheme where attenuation has been put in to restrict flows.

We believe that the way attenuation ponds are constructed on large development sites could be a danger to children, and there needs to be some kind of supplementary planning guidance. We were informed there is legislation and standards that the Authority uses to approve such schemes in terms of construction.

We queried when the new TAN 15 will be approved and heard the Welsh Government is currently gathering further evidence and working on the detail, but it is expected to be approved soon. We were pleased to hear this.

We believe people should be encouraged to use water butts on the outside of their homes to catch rainwater, and to add water tanks into housing so it can be used to flush toilets. We heard there is already a process in place through Planning and the Local Development Plan to encourage use of water butts etc. and that both of you very much support this and it is something the public can do themselves.

We queried if there is a priority list for the capital drainage budget and if consideration is given to paths that are flooding as well as infrastructure and roads, as active travel is a Welsh Government priority. We heard much of it is reactive work and there is priority given to where highway flooding is a serious concern and risk to highway users or risk to property. We noted you are not aware of money being funded towards active travel schemes in terms of prevention of flooding to paths. We feel this is worth looking at if funding ever becomes available.

We noted planning consent has been given for Blackpill but expressed concern about issues at the bottom of Mill Lane where there is something happening under the road, possibly a burst pipe or sink hole, and asked if this is being investigated. Officers expressed great concern about this and asked to meet the relevant Panel Member on site to discuss it.

We discussed how the river Tawe is in the top 20 most polluted rivers in the country and asked what is being done regarding pollution going directly into the Tawe. We were informed Natural Resources Wales is the regulator and is constantly engaging with Welsh Water with the aim of reducing some of the inputs and overflows into the Tawe, and that over the years through investment by Welsh Water in Swansea Bay water quality has improved and currently it is good.

We queried if there is a way of finding out from the Met Office if total rainfall is rising and heard there is good data on the Met Office website on monthly, seasonal and annual precipitation. We noted that for Swansea there are signs that there is increasing rainfall and you offered to share the link with the Panel.

We discussed the issue of flooding on Mumbles Road whenever there is heavy rain, and that it doesn't seem to be improving and asked if anything is being done. We were informed the Department has had concerns over the last 12 months. We heard there has been a lot of flooding outside the university entrance due to a blocked outflow, which has been rectified; the maintenance team is currently on-site cleaning gulleys from Brynmill Lane to Blackpill Lido and the Department will be checking the outflow by Ashley Road to ensure it is not blocked again.

We feel very strongly that relevant staff and councillors need to do SUDS training. Officers stated they are happy to arrange another training course for Members if they are interested. Cllr Hopkins you stated all planning officers have had SUDS training and added that SUDS is there to protect the drainage system and has positive opportunities but there is a need to educate more people about what it does and the reason for it. You agreed there is a need to get more training in place particularly for the Planning Committee on use of SUDS and that you are more than happy to facilitate this.

We asked if there is a list to show which watercourses/drains are on the red list and heard the Department has no issues with sharing the red list on the maintenance of grids, water courses, gully hotspots etc.

We commented that the increase of cleansing is to be welcomed and where drains have been cleansed it shows an improvement from flooding in that area. We queried if cleansing is carried out more times in the autumn because of leaf fall or if it is throughout the year and heard it is ongoing but is increased in autumnal months to clear leaf fall.

We discussed coastal flooding and particularly the walkway on Trafalgar Bridge which was closed off due to flooding last winter and asked if anything can be done to alleviate this. We were informed investigations are being carried out to identify what is happening in that area, and there could be a localised solution which gets implemented. We also heard that in terms of coastal risk, planners have just commissioned a strategic flood consequence assessment for that area of Swansea, which looks at climate change projections and will feed into thoughts going forward about how to protect communities in coastal regions of Swansea.

In the report under Operation Update (paragraph 4), it states the Authority offers paid service which has been taken up by a small number of councillors. We asked for clarification on what the offer is and heard it is a scheme where ward members pay for

a gully team to be onsite over weekends where gully attention is needed. This is useful to know.

We asked if there is legislation in place stating that when people dig up drives and put down artificial hard surfaces that it must be permeable. Cllr Hopkins agreed to provide a full written response on this.

Air Quality Management

Cllr Hopkins and relevant officers briefed the Panel on this issue.

We queried if the trend for pollution from motor vehicles is going down and heard there are two main pollutants linked with motor vehicles. Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂) is seeing a long-term downward trend in concentration driven by fuel types, progression in vehicle technology and road layouts etc., for example, there is evidence to confirm the effect Morfa distributor road has had on air quality. We heard that for particulate, this travels a lot further so can be impacted by other sources, and although you are seeing a slight downward trend, it is too early to state what is driving it. We also heard that target thresholds that have been set are being reviewed but it is accepted there is no safe limit for pollution.

We commented that outside Bishop Gore School, particularly at pick up time, school buses leave their engines idling for up to half an hour, which is causing issues for residents as well as children coming out of school, and asked if there is anything that can be done about this. Cllr Hopkins stated that when the Authority procures it insists buses should not do this and offered to take this back through the procurement chain to ensure it does not happen anymore. We also heard that NO₂ has been monitored along De La Beche Road for several years and has demonstrated compliance with the annual mean. We were pleased to hear this but added that there is the same problem outside all schools. We noted that a new act came into force recently giving local authorities increased powers on engine idling.

We noted a point made about the closer properties are located to the road, the bigger the impact of pollution from motor vehicles, and referred to a block of flats being built close to the road by Sketty Cross where there are continual queues of traffic. We queried if proximity of residential properties to busy roads should be considered before planning permission is given and heard that through the planning process, it is taken case by case and applicants are required to submit an air quality assessment for the particular environment. In respect of Sketty Cross, data has shown achievement of this objective, at almost half the annual mean concentration on nitrogen dioxide.

We queried if research shows whether tree-lined streets make a meaningful difference to air quality and if there is a material difference in air quality between roundabouts and traffic lights. We heard there is some research on trees and green infrastructure and that in Swansea, it will take time to carry out monitoring and analyse data, for example, green screens at a school, to see if there is any impact of green infrastructure. We were informed results from this will be considered as part of the green infrastructure strategy. We heard you will provide a written response on whether roundabouts or traffic lights are best in terms of air quality.

Your Response

We hope that you find the contents of this letter helpful and would welcome comments on any of the issues raised within. However, on this occasion, a formal written response is required by Monday 6th May 2024 to the following:

- Link to Met Office website to be shared with the Panel
- Training on SUDS to be arranged for Planning Committee
- Red list on the maintenance programme to be shared with the Panel
- Information on legislation relating to permeable surfaces to be provided
- Comments on engine idling outside schools to be taken back through procurement chain
- Information on whether roundabouts or traffic lights are best for air quality to be provided to Panel.

Yours sincerely

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