

Improving Street Scene Services

**An Inquiry by the Street Scene Inquiry Panel
City and County of Swansea - Dinas a Sir Abertawe**

August 2014



Why This Matters



Convener
Councillor John Bayliss

FOREWORD

Street scene services are and remain critical services for the people of Swansea. It's the one side of the Council that every citizen uses and interacts with on a daily basis, so we treated our scrutiny role very seriously.

I would like to thank those Councillors who joined me on this particular panel, as I sincerely believe we have brought together a comprehensive report that the Council's Cabinet should use as a guide to reforming street scene services so they are in line with tax payers expectations.

That being said, the very serious financial restrictions facing the Council mean service delivery will become increasingly difficult. When we invited representations from resident groups and individuals there was a general consensus that services would need to change to meet such a changing financial settlement.

In fact, this panel's efforts to consult with taxpayers was extensive and should guide scrutiny work in the future. I would like to thank the scrutiny officers in particular who worked hard in getting such a high level of responses (although relatively small compared with Swansea's total population) to our online survey and representatives of residents groups to our public engagement meeting.

The panel felt that refuse collections, as one example, should become a one stop shop for street cleansing. The Council currently has cleansing teams following up after bin collections, sometimes as long as a day or two after, which the panel found to be a waste of resources. If sacks and debris were cleared together in one go, the problems reported by residents would resolve themselves and costs would decrease. Residents told us that this practice was commonplace in other Councils across the UK.

Residents want clean and well-designed streets, we heard that loud and clear. We sincerely hope the cabinet now takes on board our wide ranging recommendations and puts them into practice

Summary

1. Aims of the Review

- To understand how budget reductions will affect the provision of street scene services
- To consider alternative models of service delivery
- To examine the Cabinet Members policy commitments in this area and to understand how they will be achieved
- To review the impact of the environmental enforcement initiative
- To understand residents experiences of street scene services and their views on how to improve their experiences
- To examine the working relationship between street cleansing and waste management

2. Evidence Considered

- Service briefing paper
- Budget reductions and alternative models of provision report
- Cabinet Members policy commitments
- Environmental enforcement initiative report
- Public engagement – consultation with residents
- A report on the working relationship between street cleansing and waste management

3. Conclusions

- 3.1 Alternative models of service delivery and community development initiatives have the potential to reduce service demand and provide additional service delivery resources; these should be identified, developed and supported where possible.
- 3.2 The Highways & Transportation and Waste Management services are currently facing significant budgetary pressures and this will continue into the future.
- 3.3 Maintaining a clean and safe street scene environment is important to residents and for the Council's reputation.
- 3.4 Residents, tenants, community groups are important stakeholders; they value good quality communication and information and are a good source of feedback on services.

4. Recommendations

The Panel recommends to Cabinet that it:

- 4.1 Promotes the Welsh Government public toilet scheme and increases sign up from local businesses to make their toilets available for public use
- 4.2 As a minimum, the Cabinet Member maintains the current level of provision for the NEATs programme and identifies additional sources of funding to support the continuation and development of the NEATs programme

- 4.3 Promotes and encourages communities to take up the Winter Warden Scheme by reducing the bureaucratic burden on the communities and individuals who want to sign up to the scheme
- 4.4 Identifies and investigates invest to save opportunities and community development initiatives and provides support for this
- 4.5 Reports on the outcome of the APSE review
- 4.6 Ensures that all future planning applicants are made aware of the highway adoption process via a checklist and that they are aware of the implications
- 4.7 Ensures that the highway adoption process is as efficient and economical as possible to meet the expectations of Swansea residents
- 4.8 Publicises and promotes the new Highways Asset Management Plan to councillors and residents groups and includes in it the pothole repair schedule and the highways and footways inspection timetable
- 4.9 Extends the environmental enforcement scheme across Swansea and into district areas
- 4.10 Closely monitors the environmental enforcement scheme to ensure it remains a cost neutral scheme
- 4.11 Takes steps via the Highways Inspection service to minimise the proliferation of street signage
- 4.12 Allocate resources to the Waste Management teams to enable them to clean up split bag residue
- 4.13 Provides information to commercial waste customers on waste collection and recycling services provided by the Council
- 4.14 Ensures that agency provided refuse collectors receive the same training as Council employed refuse collectors
- 4.15 Reviews how replacement refuse and recycling bags are supplied and where they are available with a view to reducing the cost of provision
- 4.16 That the operational waste management team seek to minimise breakages and damage to food waste caddies provided to residents
- 4.17 Considers the effectiveness to date of public information campaigns and education programmes designed to increase recycling of all household waste including food
- 4.18 Enforces planning conditions for litter picking for fast food outlets and ensure that these planning conditions are contained in all new planning applications for food outlets
- 4.19 Considers new ways of managing household waste generated by residential developments in the city centre which are efficient, effective and economical
- 4.20 Increase the license fee for Houses of Multiple Occupation to reflect the scale and cost of the clean up undertaken by the Council

4.21 Produces a publicly available organisational chart for each area of Swansea with contact details for relevant officers

Full Report

1. Aim of the Inquiry

- 1.1 The aim of the inquiry was to examine how well the Council maintains and keeps clean the roads and footways in Swansea and what improvements can be made

2. Evidence Considered

- 2.1 The inquiry was carried out in by the Street Scene Scrutiny Inquiry Panel over a period of 8 months. The panel held 6 evidence gathering sessions, and 2 additional sessions, one to consider the findings of the inquiry and the final meeting to agree the final report.
- 2.2 The following evidence was considered by the Inquiry Panel between December 2013 and July 2014

Date	Evidence considered
December 2013	Inquiry pre-briefing
February 2014	Budget reductions and alternative models of provision report
March 2014	Cabinet Member's policy commitments
June 2014	Environmental enforcement initiative report
June 2014	Public engagement – consultation with residents
July 2014	The working relationship between street cleansing and waste management

3. Conclusions

3.1 **Alternative models of service delivery and community development initiatives have the potential to reduce service demand and provide additional service delivery resources; these should be identified and developed and supported where possible**

3.1.1 The panel felt that the Welsh Government scheme that encouraged businesses to make their toilet facilities available for public use by providing an annual grant of £500 per year was a good scheme. At the time of the inquiry 16 businesses had signed up to the scheme and the panel was informed that a total of 40 businesses could be funded by the Welsh Government scheme. It was suggested that if more than 40 businesses wanted to sign up to this scheme then the authority may consider financing the additional businesses. Recently, the Council had closed a number of public toilets and the panel felt that this scheme could help minimise the impact of public toilet closures. The panel agreed that businesses should be encouraged to sign up to this scheme to increase the number of toilets available for public use across Swansea.

3.1.2 The panel was impressed by the success of the NEATs programme and individual councillors on the panel reported positive feedback on the NEATs teams. The panel felt that the NEATs programme offered value for money and should be continued and opportunities for expansion should be explored.

3.1.3 The panel supported the Winter Warden scheme which encouraged local citizens to become Winter Wardens. This meant local residents would take some responsibility for winter maintenance in their local area, such as locating and using a salt bin in their area. Some councillors on the panel had feedback from constituents who reported that the process for this was considered bureaucratic which had discouraged them from engaging with the scheme. The panel felt that sign up to this scheme needed to be encouraged and suggested that it is made as easy as possible for local residents to become Winter Wardens.

3.1.4 The panel agreed that these types of community development initiatives and alternative ways to provide services had the potential to reduce service demand and provide additional service delivery resources by moving some of the Council's focus towards facilitating and supporting. The panel acknowledged that this type of delivery model could take significant resources to set up and manage but it felt that investment in this type of delivery model had the potential to save the Council money in future budgets.

3.1.5 The panel welcomed the APSE review which looked at delivery of operational services and focused on goals rather than activities and delivery and was interested to know the outcome of this review.

3.1.6 The panel therefore recommends to Cabinet that it:

- Promotes the Welsh Government public toilet scheme and increases sign

up from local businesses to make their toilets available for public use

- As a minimum, the Cabinet Member maintains the current level of provision for the NEATs programme and identifies additional sources of funding to support the continuation and development of the NEATs programme
- Promotes and encourages communities to take up the Winter Warden Scheme by reducing the bureaucratic burden on the communities and individuals who want to sign up to the scheme
- Identifies and investigates invest to save opportunities and community development initiatives and provides support for this
- Reports on the outcome of the APSE review

3.2 The Highways & Transportation and Waste Management services are currently facing significant budgetary pressures and this will continue into the future

- 3.2.1 The panel found that un-adopted areas of the highway that have been turned over to the Highways department to manage had led to a substantial increase in the resource needed to maintain highways in Swansea. The panel agreed that this was exerting additional pressure on an already stretched budget and that this practice needed to be minimised. The panel felt that this issue could be addressed through the planning process and felt that this should form part of the adoption criteria.
- 3.2.2 The incidence and maintenance of pot holes was considered by the panel and the public, to be a serious and important issue. During the inquiry an online survey was available for residents and interested parties to contribute their views to the inquiry. The survey found that the maintenance of roads was rated good by just 20% of the 128 local residents who completed the survey. When asked what improvements could be made to street scene type services 44% of respondents said improvements could be made to road maintenance, particularly pot holes.
- 3.2.3 The panel was also informed of the backlog of over £130m of work required to highway assets and an estimated annual funding requirement of £19m to stand still in terms of highway condition. With the current and projected future (reduced) level of funding this concerned the panel. For 2012/15 additional funding via prudential borrowing was approved, which provided an extra £10.45m investment in highways asset, the majority of which was targeted at energy reduction in street lighting. A further £1m capital funding was agreed for 2014/15 and a programme of works will focus on the target areas
- 3.2.4 The Cabinet Member identified the failure to adequately maintain the structural integrity of highway assets as a financial risk to the authority and acknowledged that some of the highways infrastructure was in a poor condition due to a lack of investment and factors such as the weather. The Cabinet Member informed the panel that efficient use of limited revenue, capital and grant funding was in place.

Improved investment in the highway network was targeted to areas of greatest risk, the inspection regime exceeds the code of practice for maintenance management and an improved inspection system has proved effective in the identification of problems and rectification of faults. The Cabinet Member also informed the panel that there was a capital programme of small scale planned patching works this year with a visit to each ward.

3.2.5 The community councils, residents and community groups, who attended an evidence gathering workshop held during the inquiry felt that pot holes and pot hole repair was an important health and safety issue. There was agreement from the groups present that patching pot holes often didn't repair the holes well enough. The groups also reported that they were not aware of the schedule of repair work for potholes, inspections and ward visits. Some groups present acknowledged that the Council had limited resources and that the budget for highway maintenance was stretched. However, there was broad agreement that as far as repair works went, investing now be financially beneficial to the Council in the future.

3.2.6 The panel acknowledged the difficulties of the highway maintenance team in trying to balance budgetary pressures with health and safety concerns, performance measures and the expectations of the public. The panel felt that steps could be taken to improve the management of public and stakeholder expectations around pot hole and highways repairs and this would help the public and stakeholders understand the resource pressures faced by the Highways team.

3.2.7 The panel therefore recommends to Cabinet that it:

Ensures Future planning applicants are made aware of highway adoption via a checklist to ensure they are fully aware of the adoption process and its implications.

Ensures the highway adoption process is as efficient as possible in terms of cost and timescale so as to meet the expectations of Swansea residents

Publicises and promotes the new Highways Asset Management Plan to councillors and residents groups and includes in it the pothole repair schedule and the highways and footways inspection timetable

3.3 Maintaining a clean and safe street scene environment is important to residents and for the Council's reputation

3.3.1 The survey asked residents to identify the street scene type services they felt were the most important to them. Residents chose refuse collection, the maintenance of roads and the maintenance of pavements as the three most important street scene type services. 80% of respondents rated the waste collection service as very good or good but only 20% and 31% of residents rated maintenance of roads and the maintenance of pavements as good. The three that were seen as least important by survey respondents were the provision of dog fouling facilities, cutting of grass verges and the provision of street name plates and signs.

- 3.3.2 Residents, groups and associations who attended the public engagement also identified the maintenance of roads and pavements as two important areas that caused them concerns, particularly the health and safety aspect of keeping roads and pavements well maintained. However, they acknowledged the difficult financial position of the Council and said that they understood that the Council has less money in its budget.
- 3.3.3 The panel was impressed by the effects of the environmental enforcement pilot scheme which was a partnership between the Council and a private company, 3GS. The pilot scheme, which ran for 12 months, reduced littering in Swansea during this time. The panel learned that the scheme generated no profit for the Council and that the drive behind it was clean, litter free streets. Increased enforcement was a preventative measure which contributed to clean streets and was considered more preferable to street cleaning.
- 3.3.4 The panel learned that the service was run on a nil-cost model but that at the time of the evidence gathering the scheme was £12k in the red because of a number of outstanding fixed penalty notices still to be paid. This concerned the panel, but the panel was confident that the enforcement collection process would recover the outstanding charges. The panel supported this scheme and its continuation but suggested that the Cabinet Member kept a close eye on the finances of the scheme to ensure it was cost neutral to the Council.
- 3.3.5 Survey respondents, residents groups and associations and councillors all agreed that split bag residue was an unsightly problem and that the waste residue should be cleaned up immediately. The panel was informed that split bag residue was not cleaned up by the waste management teams because of the speed of the operation that was required to ensure that the teams completed the full collection route. The panel was also informed that there was no room on the waste collection trucks for brushes to clean up residual waste however, Street Cleansing teams cleaned up the residual waste the following day. The panel was not persuaded that this was the best way to deal with residual waste and suggested that the waste management teams should be provided with brushes and the like so that split bag residue could be cleaned up immediately.
- 3.3.6 The Council had a target of 58% of all waste collected to be recycled, this included both household and commercial waste and it would be achieved by:
- Targeted door knocking, especially for households that didn't recycle food waste
 - Enforcing the 3 bag limit per household
 - Increase the amount of recycled commercial waste
 - Mandatory food separation for local food businesses
 - New sorting line at the recycling plant
- 3.3.7 The panel found that residents valued the replacement waste, recycling and food waste bag service. The panel was informed by residents that often replacement bags were not left in appropriate places which resulted in residents taking multiple rolls of bags at locations where bags were available. The panel was informed by officers that this presented a significant cost to the Council and that

a number of plans were in place to make improvements to this. Namely that a trial of a reusable and weighted recycling bag will commence in the autumn, the number of outlets which supplied replacement bags would be reduced and operational teams would need to ensure that replacement bags were supplied correctly and appropriately to households.

- 3.3.8 The panel welcomed and supported these developments and made a number of suggestions around the provision of information, replacement waste and recycling bags and food caddies and recycling (contained in the recommendations below) which it felt would help the Council achieve its target and maintain clean streets.
- 3.3.9 Councillors on the panel reported that A-Frames and signs erected on highways and streets was a problem in many of their wards. The panel understood that the Council had been in communication with companies and businesses that had set up these signs; when a sign was reported to the Council, it was removed; this was a reactive service with just one employee. The panel felt that more could be done via the Highways Inspection service to prevent the proliferation of street signage.
- 3.3.10 The panel understood that there was a range of frequency of waste collections amongst commercial waste customers and the panel was informed that the types of waste collections needed to be more efficient. The panel welcomed this and supported the suggestion that a process of re-engineering may help to make trade waste collections more efficient and would ensure that streets were kept clean and free of waste.
- 3.3.11 The panel also drew attention to litter generated by takeaway and fast food outlets and considered this an important area to address if streets were to be kept clean and litter free. The panel agreed that planning conditions and planning applications could be used to ensure that food outlets undertook litter picking to clean up litter generated by their food businesses.
- 3.3.12 The panel found that in areas of high concentration of Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs) residents felt that landlords needed to do more to keep the external areas of the property free from refuse and rubbish. Residents also felt that more enforcement patrols should take place in areas such as Brynmill and Uplands and that the Council should work more productively with landlords and agents to ensure they take more responsibility for clearing rubbish from their properties. The panel felt that the scale of the challenge and cost of the clean up in areas of HMOs should be reflected in the HMO licence fee.
- 3.3.13 Some panel members and residents who attended the engagement workshop felt that the Council should increase the frequency with which verges were cut and maintained. In the public survey when respondents were asked to rate various Council services 68% of respondents rated the Council good at cutting grass verges, while 26% rated the Council as poor and 6% didn't know. The survey also asked respondents to suggest improvements to street scene type services and 8% of respondents suggested an increase to the frequency with which grass verges were cut and maintained.

3.3. The panel therefore recommends to Cabinet that it:

Extends the environmental enforcement scheme across Swansea and into district areas

Closely monitors the environmental enforcement scheme to ensure it remains a cost neutral scheme

Takes steps via the Highways Inspection service to minimise the proliferation of street signage

Allocate resource to the Waste Management teams to enable them to clean up split bag residue

Provides information to commercial waste customers on waste collection and recycling services provided by the Council

Ensures that agency provided refuse collectors receive the same training as Council employed refuse collectors

Reviews how replacement refuse and recycling bags are supplied and where they are available with a view to reducing the cost of provision.

That the operational waste management team seek to minimise breakages and damage to food waste caddies provided to residents

Considers the effectiveness to date of public information campaigns and education programmes designed to increase recycling of all household waste including food

Considers new ways of managing household waste generated by residential developments in the city centre which are efficient, effective and economical

Enforces planning conditions for litter picking for fast food outlets and ensure that these planning conditions are contained in all new planning applications for food outlets

Increase the license fee for Houses of Multiple Occupation to reflect the scale and cost of the clean up undertaken by the Council

3.4 Residents, tenants, community groups are important stakeholders, they value good quality communication and information and are a good source of feedback on services

3.4.1 The panel was pleased with the level of public engagement and interest in this inquiry. The survey was well responded to and a wide range of groups and individuals attended the public engagement workshop to share their views and provide their suggestions for improvements. The panel acknowledged the important role residents, tenants and community groups had in providing feedback to the Council on its services. However, residents and groups often found that communication with the Council could be a frustrating experience.

Some reported that the reporting process could be complicated and not very transparent. In fact, many residents groups were not aware that Area Managers existed and that these could be contacted to report repairs and the like and they did not use their local councillor for assistance with repairs reporting matters. The groups and residents said that better information which detailed the relevant officer and their contact details for each type of repair or other matters would be helpful. The panel agreed with the residents and groups and felt that an organisational chart with contact details would be quick and easy to produce and would be helpful not just to residents but to councillors too.

3.4.2 The panel therefore recommends to Cabinet that it:

Produces a publicly available organisational chart for each area of Swansea with contact details for officers

3.5 Cabinet Member Policy Commitments

3.5.1 The Cabinet Member's policy commitments in this area are:

- Examination of the feasibility of comprehensive city centre parking
- Flexible charging in local authority car parks
- Installation of modern car parking, software and payment systems in the city centre
- Introduction of 20mph speed limits outside schools across the City & County of Swansea
- Adoption of the Wheelrights Manifesto to increase access to safe and cost effective cycle and walking routes
- Implementation of the City Centre Cycle Network
- Introduction of an eco-street light replacement programme to reduce the Council's carbon footprint
- Supporting and working with voluntary and community initiatives to make Swansea a Tidy City

3.5.2 The panel welcomed the Cabinet Member's policy commitments in this area. The panel felt that these policy commitments would help the Council improve its street scene services. The panel therefore endorses and supports the Cabinet Member's policy commitments in this area.

4. Recommendations

The Board commends Cabinet to consider all issues and ideas raised by this inquiry and, in particular, the recommendations set out below.

The Board recognises that the Authority

- (a) will need to ensure that any subsequent actions are legal and meet the requirements of any relevant legislation;
- (b) has a responsibility to make the best use of limited resources and that any additional costs will need to be considered carefully as part of the annual budget setting process.

The Board has kept these principles in mind in the course of its investigations.

The Board recommends to Cabinet that it:

- 4.1 Promotes the Welsh Government public toilet scheme and increases sign up from local businesses to make their toilets available for public use
- 4.2 As a minimum, the Cabinet Member maintains the current level of provision for the NEATs programme and identifies additional sources of funding to support the continuation and development of the NEATs programme
- 4.3 Promotes and encourages communities to take up the Winter Warden Scheme by reducing the bureaucratic burden on the communities and individuals who want to sign up to the scheme
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- 4.5 Reports on the outcome of the APSE review
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- 4.7 Ensures that the highway adoption process is as efficient and economical as possible to meet the expectations of Swansea residents
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- 4.17 Considers the effectiveness to date of public information campaigns and education programmes designed to increase recycling of all household waste including food
- 4.18 Enforces planning conditions for litter picking for fast food outlets and ensure that these planning conditions are contained in all new planning applications for food outlets
- 4.19 Considers new ways of managing household waste generated by residential developments in the city centre which are efficient, effective and economical
- 4.20 Increase the license fee for Houses of Multiple Occupation to reflect the scale and cost of the clean up undertaken by the Council
- 4.21 Produces a publicly available organisational chart for each area of Swansea with contact details for relevant officers

Acknowledgements

The Board is very grateful to the following people for their participation and contribution to the review:

Bob Fenwick, Group Leader, Highways and Transportation, CCS

Stuart Davies, Head of Highways and Transportation, CCS

Chris Howell, Head of Waste Management, CCS

Councillor June Burtonshaw, Cabinet Member, Place

Morrison Residents' Association

Mumbles Community Council

Swansea Civic Society

Sandfields Community Association

Ilston Community Council

Grovesend & Waungron Community Council

Swansea Sustainable Community Initiative

Maritime Quarter Residents' Association

Welsh Tenants

About the Street Scene Scrutiny Inquiry Panel

The **Street Scene Scrutiny Inquiry Panel** is a body of Councillors who are not members of the Cabinet. Their role is to scrutinise the performance of Council services and to make recommendations about how services can be improved.

Members of the Panel

John Bayliss

Ann Cook

Lesley Walton

Mary Jones

Mike White

Lynda James

Wendy Fitzgerald

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