



**To/
Ms Lesley Griffiths
Minister for Environment, Energy
and Rural Affairs**

BY EMAIL

*Please ask for:
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Overview & Scrutiny

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4th October 2019

Summary: This is a letter from the Natural Environment Scrutiny Performance Panel from the meeting on 25th September 2019. This letter concerns a lack of funding for work relating to the natural environment and a lack of deterrent for biodiversity damage in legislation.

Dear Ms Griffiths,

A new Natural Environment Scrutiny Performance Panel has been set up in Swansea Council to monitor and contribute to issues around biodiversity. On the 25th September 2019 the Panel held their first meeting to discuss the Terms of Reference of the new Natural Environment Performance Panel and receive an overview of current Council commitments in relation to this. The discussion focussed mainly on activity over the last 3 years, but we are aware that Swansea Council has been doing work in relation to this for the last 50-60 years.

We felt as a Panel the discussions from the meeting warranted a letter to you to highlight our concerns.

We were told that 80% of Swansea is green space and is extremely diverse with over 50% of the County having significant ecological value. Although there is protection for the environment via a range of site designations and legislation, biodiversity loss and species extinction is a challenge and a risk and more awareness raising is needed.

Recent legislation such as the Resilient Wales Goal in the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 and the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 requires specific actions by bodies and biodiversity should be embedded in all policies so it is everyone's business. As a Council we need to submit a Section 6 plan and submit a plan on progress to Welsh Government every 3 years.

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY / TROSOLWG A CHRAFFU

SWANSEA COUNCIL / CYNGOR ABERTAWE

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We feel as a Council we are amongst leaders in relation to natural environment maintenance and enhancement. There is a Working with Nature objective within the Public Services Board Well-being Plan and we have a new biodiversity Corporate Priority in the Corporate Plan. We have also declared a Climate Emergency.

As you can see, we at Swansea Council are dedicated to maintaining and enhancing the natural environment but we have two substantial issues which continue to stifle and restrict our efforts;

1. A lack of funding from Welsh Government for Local Authorities and other relevant agencies to undertake environmental maintenance, enhancement and enforcement work.
2. A lack of penalties within legislation to deal with and deter people who breach the law and contribute to biodiversity loss

A lack of funding from Welsh Government for Local Authorities and other relevant agencies to undertake environmental maintenance, enhancement and enforcement work

We have dedicated and passionate officers and ward members in this Council who work every day to improve the green spaces of Swansea. This does not include the plethora of volunteers and other agency workers who work closely with us.

There have been various requirements placed on public bodies recently (noted in the legislation above) which require urgent and substantial work, and yet no funding has been made available to help achieve this.

We also lack capacity relating to enforcement and need to be able to fund Enforcement Officers who can deal with issues as they arise, because after the damage is done, it is too late. We need to maintain and enhance the environment and be able to provide enforcement for breaches.

Can you provide us with an outline of your plans to immediately fund work in relation to the Natural Environment so Councils and other organisations can deal with this emergency?

A lack of penalties within legislation to deal with and deter people who breach the law and contribute to biodiversity loss

We, along with other organisations work within legislative frameworks but these frameworks do not empower us to deal with those who breach the legislation. We need to be able to provide effective enforcement in relation to the natural environment.

We need the legislation to be a sufficient deterrent so we can deal with things like planning ecology enforcement swiftly and firmly. There do not appear to be implications for those choose to damage the environment.

Can you provide information on how you plan to deal with the lack of consequence and deterrent within the legislation itself?

The Panel do feel strongly that the issue of biodiversity loss is an emergency and should be treated as such. There can no longer be an economic priority over ecology and we hope to see swift and substantial progress on the issue in the immediate future.

I look forward to your response concerning the issues raised in this letter

Yours sincerely,

Councillor Peter Jones

Convener, Natural Environment Scrutiny Performance Panel

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