



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

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19 November 2018

BY EMAIL

Summary: This is a letter from the Air & Noise Pollution Scrutiny Working Group to the Cabinet Member for Environment & Infrastructure Management following the meeting of the Working Group on 6 November 2018. It is about Air and Noise Pollution Control in Swansea.

Dear Councillor Thomas,

Air & Noise Pollution Scrutiny Working Group on 6 November 2018

We thank you and the officers representing the Pollution Control Division for attending the Air & Noise Pollution Scrutiny Working Group on 6 November 2018 and answering our questions around the impact, monitoring and reduction of pollution levels.

Please find below the key points we noted and our resulting thoughts and suggestions:

We understand that there is now irrefutable evidence that air and noise pollution causes great harm to child development, cardiovascular systems, lung capacity, the central nervous system, mental health as well as environmental and ecological issues. We felt that this was an important public health issue which should be given a greater public profile with awareness raised.

You told us that the Pollution Control Division receive over 5000 complaints a year, with the majority of these being noise related and that the service gets as many complaints out of hours as it does in normal working hours. We heard that the Council's work to protect people from unreasonable nuisance is much more reactive than some other areas of the Division and can generate litigation. We were pleased to hear that the Council's ombudsman complaints are very low in comparison with other local authorities which is mainly due to offering an out-of-

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hours service. Councillors were also pleased the night time service was still being delivered when some other councils had removed this service. Whilst recognising the budget constraints of the Council the Working Group would like to see this service in Swansea continue to be 24 hour.

We heard that much more attention has been paid to air quality at central government level with increased media coverage on the public health impacts and increasing medical evidence. This has all helped to focus attention on the main issue, which we heard is fundamentally down to the proliferation of the car culture and road vehicle emissions particularly in congested areas. However, whilst the pressure has increased from Welsh Government we heard that the resources available to local councils have shrunk, and there are fewer local initiatives as the focus is on delivering statutory activities which are already very demanding.

We heard that the issue of air pollution is so big, so complex and difficult to address that it has been identified by some as a public health emergency and is a worldwide issue. We recognised the need for a whole societal shift from high polluting activity. The Working Group agreed that all levels of government need to engage with this major problem and that it will require a shift in behaviour by everyone. We heard that Scotland has introduced more charging which has not been developed here by Welsh Government because it was felt that charging is only a temporary fix and some examples of this have just caused the problem to move or spread to different areas of towns or cities.

We understand that there is a large amount of detailed and quite complex information online on the Council website which receives a lot of hits but mostly from other professionals, academics and students. Whilst publishing information is good we felt that it may not be very accessible by the public. We agreed that work needed to be done to look at tailoring the website to make information more accessible to the public. Councillors were also pleased to hear about the university developing a possible 'app'. The Air Pollution monitoring system currently shows every highway and real time air quality but is not easy to use at present.

A member of the public attending the meeting gave a medical analogy about the effects of poor air quality saying that 'as a council you can diagnose the problem but have no way of treating it'. You responded by saying that this is not entirely true and that 'we cannot carry out the operation but we can give some medicine'. The working group discussed a number of things the Council is doing to influence air pollution like, for example through:

- Green Fleet (biggest purchase of electronic vehicles by any Local Authority in Wales)
- Renewable energy initiatives and own energy company development
- Championing the Lagoon as renewable energy of future
- Biodiversity Corporate Priority recently agreed with associated policies
- Highways and traffic management measures

We were pleased to hear that this year there has been an improvement in air-quality, with the overall concentrations of pollutants down and the number of sites measured which fail a target reduced.

The Working Group congratulated the Division for the work they are doing and also the wider work being done by the Council to address air pollution in Swansea in conjunction with our partners and the public but felt it was vital that council departments co-ordinate and work together to that end.

We agreed that we need to start making small steps towards trying to address air pollution, where we can. Firstly we felt it is important to recognise it as a fundamental health issue. One key issue the Working Group discussed was the need to monitor and take action where possible to address pollution around Swansea schools. We wanted to find out more about how this issue is being dealt with and how it is feeding into and being addressed through council policies and strategies. We felt that Swansea needs to be more proactive and innovative in its approach to this issue. A local authority in England deciding to close the road outside one school during pick up and drop off times was cited as an example of a tough stance. We heard that this has also been discussed at Scrutiny Programme Committee when they completed their Q&A with Cllr Raynor on the 8 October. They have written to the Cabinet Member about this, we would therefore like to reinforce this message. She has been asked to communicate with governing bodies about reducing the health risk caused by vehicle exhaust emissions around schools and asking them to cascade the message in their communities.

We also wished to highlight our concern about the increase in traffic pollution and noise that will come from the increase in the numbers of new homes as identified in the Local Development Plan. It appears that a 20% increase in uptake of public transport has been predicted but we are not confident that this will happen as car culture is so strong and some of the new developments will be car dependant.

We felt that the development of a good efficient public transport system in Swansea is key to addressing the air and noise pollution particularly in busy and congested parts of Swansea. We heard that this is a challenge as local authorities are constrained as to what they can do because public transport is deregulated. The Council therefore has little or no control or influence over, for example bus services in Swansea, though has enabled the running of some non-commercial routes via a subsidy. The Council has to work with operators to influence and exert pressure to try to bring about change as it does not have control.

We discussed the need for a central government national pollution control strategy that is funded centrally and implemented at a more local level through Wales Government and Local Authorities. The Working Group agreed that there needs to be a holistic approach to this issue but understand that progress with improvements nationally has stalled. Nevertheless we felt that it would be a step forward if we develop a clear multi-agency plan to reduce air pollution, involving all stakeholders, even if we are not yet able to fund its delivery yet.

We also agreed that we need to think much more about nature based solutions to air quality issues like for example planting trees that absorb CO2 like Birch trees. We also expressed concern about new developments not having any areas of green space, which could help absorb pollutant in urban areas like for example breakout areas, living walls or roof gardens.

At the close of the meeting the working group agreed to suggest to the Scrutiny Programme Committee that there should be an annual meeting to look at Air and Noise Pollution.

Your response

We are interested in hearing your thoughts about the issues raised in our letter but would ask that you respond to the following issues by the 10 December 2018.

1. We felt that this is an important public health issue which should be given a greater public profile, and that awareness should be raised more widely. This should be done in conjunction with health colleagues.
2. We would like to see the noise control service continue to be 24 hour.
3. We would like to see the air pollution webpages tailored to make information more accessible to the public.
4. Can you provide us with more information about how pollution around schools affecting children is being dealt with and how it is feeding into and being addressed through council policies and strategies?
5. Develop a clear vision and strategy for addressing and mitigating the effects of air pollution that involves not only the council but partner organisation, the university, schools and the public more widely.
6. Look into more innovative nature based solutions to air quality issues like for example planting trees that absorb CO2 like Birch trees, more green space planting in urban area as exemplified by roof gardens and living walls.

Yours sincerely,

COUNCILLOR JOE HALE

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