



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

cc: Cabinet Members

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SPC/2021-22/4

14 October 2021

Summary: This is a letter from the Scrutiny Programme Committee to the Cabinet Member following the meeting of the Committee on 14 September 2021. It is about Litter and Community Cleansing. A response is required by 4 November.

Dear Councillor Thomas,

### **Scrutiny Programme Committee – 14 September**

We are writing to you following our Scrutiny session, which focussed on a specific aspect of your wide-ranging cabinet portfolio, namely Litter and Community Cleansing.

We wanted to gain a greater understanding of what this meant in terms of specific responsibilities, your priorities, resources, performance measures, key headlines / achievements against objectives, and overall assessment (including how we compare with others, challenges / risks) and impact / difference made.

We thank you and officers for attending the meeting and providing a written report on these responsibilities and the Council's work. The Committee asked questions in order to explore this work and provide challenge on actions and performance, as well as future thinking.

This letter reflects on what we learnt from the information presented, questions, and discussion. It shares the views of the Committee, and highlights any outstanding issues / actions for your response - main issues summarised below.

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## **Litter and Community Cleansing**

You highlighted the impact of the pandemic on the service and staff involved in litter and community cleansing, dealing with unprecedented amounts of litter and restrictions such as limits on the number of staff members who could travel together in a vehicle. We noted that the service was still playing an element of catch up and extra staff have been employed to deal with the issues and improve the service. The Committee joined you in thanking all staff for their continued work and efforts during such a challenging period. We also recognised the efforts of individual councillors helping to tackle litter in their wards. Specific aspects to our discussion noted below.

### Performance & Trends

The Committee was interested in the LEAMS (Local Environmental Audit & Management System) survey, its role in measuring performance and how it was used to inform improvement.

We understood that it was a monitoring method used across Wales for Councils to grade the cleanliness of their streets but was independently checked and verified by Keep Wales Tidy. It therefore enabled comparison with other Welsh Councils. The pandemic meant the most recent survey results were from 2018/19 and the figures in your report indicated Swansea ranked very well with comparable authorities, with 96.4% of streets graded B or above which meant they were predominantly free of litter and refuse. We noted the survey could only provide a 'snapshot' of the situation and remarked at the difficulty in measuring performance and reliance on the survey, particularly as councillors commonly received complaints about litter.

You undertook to provide the Committee with more information in writing about the LEAMS survey that would help us to better understand this work and its use.

### Councillors' Community Budgets

The Committee queried the use of Councillor Community Budgets in certain wards for additional cleaning services, and what impact this had on overall service delivery across other Council areas perhaps not able to do the same. You assured the Committee that any services being paid for from community budgets were for additional work over and above the standard cleaning regime delivered by the Council across the City and County, and did not reduce the level of service provision in other areas.

We noted that Castle and Morrison were amongst the areas where some of the community budget was being utilised for additional cleansing operatives. We remarked on the ability of multi-councillor wards to pool resources to enable such use but you stated that there was no reason why councillors in different wards could not collaborate in order to afford additional cleaning. You

stated that the department would consider any requests from councillors if they were interested in enhanced cleaning in their area. It was explained to the Committee that there was otherwise no specific difference in the provision of cleaning services across Swansea. In relation to service response to litter and community cleansing issues we were told the service aimed to deal with urgent requests within 1 day and standard requests within 5 days, and that these targets were being met.

The Committee would appreciate further information about the opportunities for additional cleansing and costs, as other councillors may be interested who may not be aware that community budgets could be used in this way.

### Litter and Waste Enforcement

You emphasised the fact that the level of enforcement or amount of prosecutions does not tell the whole story in terms of efforts to engage with people and challenge them on their actions. The approach was one of education, engagement and enforcement, and significant work on engagement has been done in 'hot spot' areas. Warning would be given in the first instance but fines would be issued where necessary or other action (including court proceedings) taken depending on the severity of the offence or repeat offending. We noted the difficulties around enforcement when having to catch people in the act, but we welcomed news that more officers have been trained to become authorised to issue Fixed Penalty Notices to anyone they witness dropping litter or failing to pick up their dog's waste.

We asked about resources to tackle fly tipping and how we compared with neighbouring Councils, particularly Carmarthenshire, with regard to fines / prosecutions, and how we were dealing with repeat offenders of fly tipping and unlicensed waste carriers. You felt that direct comparisons with other Councils was difficult as different Councils had different approaches to litter and waste, and some Councils may well focus more of their resources on enforcement.

We noted that the 'Don't be a Tosser' campaign against litter has got people's attention, but the Committee suggested that you consider even more public messaging to deter people from littering to show how serious the Council is about litter. For example being proactive with notices / warnings on the side of Council vehicles and stories in the media about the work the Council does, and penalties. You talked about the efforts being made to tackle fly tipping including a recent joint operation with South Wales Police the results of which were due to be publicised shortly, that should send a strong message out to would-be fly tippers.

## Litter & Drainage

We were pleased to hear that clearing tops of drain covers was being incorporated into routine street cleansing rounds. The removal of surface leaves and detritus would help to keep drains functioning but also free up the gully teams to focus on blocked drains, rather than what might appear to be blocked drains. We noted the outcome of a significant service review over the last year that meant cleansing operatives are expected to be proactive and deal with everything they see and can clear, or otherwise report issues to other specialist teams. We also welcomed the ongoing introduction of digital solutions to link up information across services, e.g. so that operatives are able to distinguish fly-tipping from organised bulky waste collections, etc. and therefore better placed to identify waste and take action where necessary.

## Litter and its impact on the Natural Environment and Biodiversity

The Committee was pleased to see reference in your report to the Council's Corporate Priority on 'Maintaining And Enhancing Swansea's Natural Resources and Biodiversity', and recognition that tackling and reducing litter has a direct impact on the enhancement and growth of plant and animal species. We asked to what extent beach litter is considered, especially in relation to its effects on wildlife, and how we are making the public aware of the impact on the environment of their littering.

You told us that there are high levels of beach litter picking especially during the summer season, with additional resources deployed during the last 2 summers during the pandemic with extra visitors and numerous parties on beaches. In addition to Council operations, we noted the contribution made by volunteer litter pickers and groups in ensuring our beaches are clean and safe for all.

We heard that there has been no specific local PR activity about litter and wildlife but you referred to national and local media reporting on things like plastic sea pollution that has helped to educate people and change behaviour. However, you agreed to look at what the Council could do, such as signs on the beach or photographic displays, to alert people to the impact of litter on wildlife reinforcing existing messages about personal responsibility and people taking their litter home, etc. We were concerned to see greater efforts in public awareness raising as people may not realise the consequences of their actions regarding litter and its impact on nature and biodiversity. There was also some discussion on the possibility of litter picking at an earlier time so the beaches were clean for the early morning swimmers, and creating a better impression for early visitors.

## Neighbourhood Environment Action Team (NEAT)

We asked for an update on the Neighbourhood Environmental Action Team and resumption of this popular service. You informed us that although everyone was keen to see a re-start of this successful project there was no plan to do so at present, in the midst of the pandemic, until Social Services could confirm it was possible and safe for the Teams to do so. The Cleansing Service Area had to be mindful of the vulnerable nature and needs of the people involved, their safety and ability to work alongside employees at a time of restrictions and health concerns, and risks, so it remained a challenge to resume this activity.

### **Your Response**

We hope that you find the contents of this letter useful and would welcome comments on any of the issues raised within. We would be grateful, however, if you could specifically consider and respond on the following:

- Provide more information about the LEAMS survey that would help the Committee to better understand this work and its use.
- Provide further information about the opportunities for additional cleansing and associated costs, which could be paid for from Councillor Community Budgets.
- Give consideration to ways in which even more public messaging can be put out to deter people from littering to show how serious the Council is about litter.
- Look at what the Council could do to alert people to the impact of litter on wildlife.

Please provide your response to this and any other comments about our letter by 4 November. We will then publish both letters in the agenda of the next available Committee meeting.

Yours sincerely,



**COUNCILLOR PETER BLACK**

Chair, Scrutiny Programme Committee

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