



City and County of Swansea

Notice of Meeting

You are invited to attend a Meeting of the

Scrutiny Performance Panel - Natural Environment

At: Remotely via Microsoft Teams

On: Wednesday, 12 January 2022

Time: 10.00 am

Convenor: Councillor Peter K Jones

Membership:

Councillors: E W Fitzgerald, S J Gallagher, J A Hale, O G James, M H Jones, H Lawson, I E Mann, H M Morris, C Richards, B J Rowlands, M Sherwood, W G Thomas and L J Tyler-Lloyd

Agenda

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Next Meeting: Tuesday, 15 March 2022 at 10.00 am



Huw Evans
Head of Democratic Services
January 5, 2022

Contact: Scrutiny Officer - 07980757686

Agenda Item 4



City and County of Swansea

Minutes of the **Scrutiny Performance Panel - Natural Environment**

Remotely via Microsoft Teams

Wednesday, 6 October 2021 at 10.00 am

Present: Councillor P K Jones (Chair) Presided

Councillor(s)
E W Fitzgerald
O G James
I E Mann

Councillor(s)
S J Gallagher
M H Jones
H M Morris

Councillor(s)
M Sherwood
H Lawson
C Richards

Other Attendees

Deborah Hill	Nature Conservation Team Leader
Sarah Bennett	Natural Resources Wales
Hamish Osborn	Natural Resources Wales
Emily-Jayne Davies	Scrutiny Officer
Sam Naylor	Pollution Control Officer
Stuart Davies	Head of Highways & Transportation
Paula Livingstone	Divisional EHO, Pollution Control and Private Sector Housing
Tom Price	Team Leader - Pollution Control
Mike Sweeney	Principal Engineer
Mark Wade	Head of Housing & Public Health
David Hopkins	Cabinet Member - Delivery & Operations (Deputy Leader)
Mark Thomas	Cabinet Member - Environment Enhancement & Infrastructure Management

Apologies for Absence

Councillor(s): J A Hale, B J Rowlands, W G Thomas and L J Tyler-Lloyd

59 Disclosure of Personal and Prejudicial Interests

In accordance with the Code of Conduct adopted by the City and County of Swansea, no interests were declared.

60 Prohibition of Whipped Votes and Declaration of Party Whips

In accordance with the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011, no declarations of Whipped Votes or Party Whips were declared.

61 Minutes of Previous Meeting(s)

The minutes of the Natural Environment Scrutiny Performance Panel meeting, held on 26 August 2021, were agreed as an accurate record.

62 Public Questions

There were no public questions.

63 Water Pollution

The Panel received an update from Cllr David Hopkins, Cabinet Member for Delivery & Operations, and Tom Price, Team Leader Pollution Control, regarding the Council's management of water pollution. Mark Wade, Head of Housing and Public Health, Paula Livingstone, Divisional EHO, and Sam Naylor, Pollution Control Officer, also attended to aid discussions on this topic.

In addition, Sarah Bennett and Hamish Osborn attended on behalf of Natural Resources Wales, to provide further information to the Panel.

Discussion focussed on:

- Joint approach and good working relationship between Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and Swansea City Council (SCC).
- Eight designated bathing water areas in Swansea. Samples are taken throughout the bathing season (May-September) giving results to enable classification of excellent, good, insufficient and poor.
- Swansea Council is the owner of Swansea Bay and therefore Beach Manager. Swansea Bay has been designated as *good*, the remaining seven areas designated as *excellent*.
- Abnormal situation recently highlighted in media, focused on River Tawe, which came about via sewage entering the River. Levels were significant enough to take a precautionary approach, recommending against bathing at that time. Welsh Water started tracing the pollution to a collapsed sewer entering a surface water drain. Problem now rectified.
- Provision in regulations that allows reaction to circumstances that may impact upon water quality, for example informing public about recommendations not to bathe during times of pollution.
- Some concern over recreational use of the River Tawe during such incidents, signage erected to inform public to avoid recreational use.
- 2011 collaborative project: SCC undertook an intensive water sampling survey. The result was a computational model to predict water quality on an hourly basis at Swansea Bay. This model initially ran as a manual input; now automated robotisation process linked with signage and Twitter.
- SCC – Non-designated beaches also sampled at Rhossili and Broughton Bay. Main influence here is the estuary and livestock run off.
- Media coverage recently has highlighted discharge into beaches, i.e emergency discharge events. The system is designed to have an emergency overflow, allowing for surface water run-off / storm discharge.

- Effect of climate change on intensifying rain events will impact upon storm overflow incidents. NRW have worked to significantly reduce the number of such events, although this is an ongoing challenge.
- NRW / SCC joint approach – the Council operates a 24hr service for emergency call out, such as the Llangennech Rail incident in 2020, maintaining presence in tactical command group, and responses such as shellfish sampling and recovery plans.
- Septic tanks / cesspits - an NRW regulated process. Private sewage discharge requires permit or exemption. Swansea has a significant number of septic tanks. NRW deal with environmental impacts, and SCC deals with the public health aspect.
- The Panel queried allowing new build properties to have septic tanks, especially located within clay soil and therefore affecting the process of percolation and resulting in increased levels of run-off.
- Officers highlighted the aeration system on the River Tawe, active during summer months, where the salt water overtops the barrage. The saline wedge can have an effect on river life, so the system acts to mix fine bubbles of air into the water column. SCC monitors salinity and once every two years carries out a dredge of the navigable channel.
- Private Water Supplies Regulations – over 125 suppliers in Swansea, of which eight - nine are 'Category 9', are tested more frequently. Risk assessment approach in place, enabling action to be taken if drinking water is affected at point of consumption.
- SCC also monitor swimming pool water.
- Panel Members questioned the frequency of storm drain events affecting the River Tawe.
- Members queried the bathing season duration (May-September) and whether the duration of this season should be extended. Officers highlighted that this season was designated under statutory regulations.
- EU revised the bathing water regulations - NRW and Welsh Water had to work to improve water quality in Swansea Bay, reducing storm discharges.
- The River Tawe has no current designation as a 'bathing water' and therefore no account taken of bacterial standards in the water. There is currently no 'recreational water' standard for non-bathing water.
- Members commented on the odour around the Port-Tennant treatment works. Officers confirmed that discussions are on-going with regard to future intentions. Officers undertook to circulate the link to an e-diary to log such comments.
- The Panel also raised the issue of residential front gardens being converted into hard standings, acting to increase surface run-off. Officers commented that any new builds over 100 sq/m require sustainable drainage systems to be implemented. New features are often incorporated to aid drainage through permeable surfaces.
- Members raised concerns over urban areas and surface water run-off, citing the Sandfields area as an example. Officers also highlighted that this particular area accepts run-off from higher ground. Officers explained that good gully maintenance would help alleviate this issue.
- These points about surface run-off and the impact upon water pollution / drainage systems are also relevant in the context of the following item – Flood Risk Management.

- Officers commented on the excellent working relationship between NRW and SCC and praised the teams involved in this area of work.

64 Local Flood Risk Management

The Panel received an update from Cllr Mark Thomas, Cabinet Member for Environment Enhancement & Infrastructure Management, and Mike Sweeney, Team Leader, Highways and Transportation. Stuart Davies, Head of Highways and Transportation also attended to aid discussions on this topic.

Discussion focussed on:

- Cllr Thomas acknowledged that this issue can affect all wards at some point, highlighting that the Council is heavily reliant on Welsh Government funding to manage this issue.
- Sandbags – sometimes difficult to utilise resources to deliver sandbags to effected areas during times of crisis/emergency flooding, when resources are being directed to immediately deal with the flooding situation.
- Procurement process ongoing to add new gully maintenance vehicles.
- Preventative measures continue to be developed to mitigate flood risk.
- Officers are creating a new initiative for a reactive gully crew, aiming to quickly respond to individual flood incidents.
- Extra staff may also be on hand to deliver sandbags and to support critical culverts.
- Members commented on Paragraph 4.1 of the report, regarding two full time vacancies and the impact of these vacant positions. Officers acknowledged that recruitment of technical staff was a challenge.
- Officers reiterated that the intensity of rainfall and downpours means there would be occasions where the current drainage system will become overwhelmed. Accommodating extreme rainfall periods will be a challenge.
- Members commented on using their environmental budget within individual wards to procure gully teams on an ad-hoc basis.
- Officers explained that the current figure of 5 properties, as threshold for a locally significant incidents, will possibly be raised to 20 properties in line with other Authorities across Wales.
- Cllr Mark Thomas cited Crofty as an example of vast flood prevention intervention by NRW, noting, however, that factors such as prolonged heavy rainfall, high tides and strong winds can overtop drainage systems regardless of all interventions in place.
- Coastal Risk Management Programme – update on Mumbles flood defence: public appears to be supportive, general acceptance that scheme is needed. Circa £12M investment from Welsh Government. Evidence that flood risk is reduced for over 120 properties over 100yr modelling.
- Development Advice Maps – TAN 15: Officers explained that the Council will need to provide defence around certain City Centre sites, now to include surface water run-off risk.
- Officers highlighted the relevance of nature-based solutions such as the sand dunes created at the Civic Centre site, having had a positive impact on reducing wave energy and subsequent storm flooding.

- The Panel heard that there is scope to mitigate flood risk through green infrastructure and nature-based solutions, such as increased tree planting to help slow water flow.

The Panel considered the information provided, asked questions, and gave views on the way forward. The Chair thanked all for their input.

AGREED that the Panel write to the Cabinet Members with its views and recommendations.

65 Work Programme

The Panel discussed prospective topics for forthcoming meetings.

- Green Space / Weed Management to remain scheduled for January, feeding into any PDC discussions.
- Update from Nature Conservation Team (January / March TBC)
- Climate & Nature Action Plan (March TBC)

66 Letter(s)

The Panel received the correspondence sent following the meeting of the Panel held on 26 August 2021.

The meeting ended at 12.00 pm

Agenda Item 6



Report of the Cabinet Member for Environment Enhancement & Infrastructure Management

Natural Environment Scrutiny Performance Panel – 12 January 2022

Management of Green Space / Weed & Verge Management

Purpose:	To brief/update the Panel on Swansea Council's management of green space / weed & verge management
Content:	A briefing/update on progress and overview of future aims
Councillors are being asked to:	Consider the information provided and give views
Lead Councillor:	Councillor Mark Thomas, Cabinet Member for Environment Enhancement & Infrastructure Management
Lead Officer & Report Author:	Jeremy Davies, Group Leader Parks & Cleansing Bob Fenwick, Group Leader Highway Maintenance

1. Management of Green Spaces and Verges

- 1.1 The Parks Service is responsible for maintaining the diverse range of Parks and Open Spaces within the City and County of Swansea. This service offers the community and visitors to Swansea locations the opportunity to enjoy recreational activities, improve health and well-being, participate in sports, relax, learn and play. The service is sub-divided into sections each with a commitment to deliver a high quality, cost effective service. The Nature Conservation Team also manage a range of Council owned nature reserves and wildlife sites.
- 1.2 The report at Appendix A is the report on Management and Maintenance of Open Space (Biodiversity) presented to the PDC on 16 December 2021 as an update on progress on the review of the management of our grass verges and open spaces balancing needs of both biodiversity and people, with an aim of increasing wildflower diversity and habitat for pollinators as well as maintaining space for recreation.
- 1.3 The PDC process will continue with consideration of how highway verges and associated grassed areas could be managed to increase biodiversity, and further trials of cut and collect operations across a wide range of parks and verges.

2. Weed Management

- 2.1 The Highways Service area is responsible for management of weeds on the adopted highways and have provided this update.
- 2.2 Highways Weed spraying is carried out by contractors on a routine programmed basis. This allows for 3 sprays each year of the whole Highway network. The amount of weed spraying chemical used is minimised and scanning technology is employed to ensure only areas where weeds are present are sprayed. The contract is currently being renewed and the option for alternative treatments has been included. Currently there are not thought to be any viable alternatives to using Glyphosate on a wide area programme. The requirements for the scheduling of the sprays has been reviewed as the delay in a single spray this year caused by inclement weather led to a number of issues. The success will remain partially dependant on weather patterns.
- 2.3 The Highways service have introduced a weeding hotspot team to tackle reported issues, this is in place working on areas prioritised through Officer knowledge and will be publicised in the new year, initially via Members and then rolling out to the public. A joint task force with Cleansing has been working weekends and early mornings to clear overgrowth and vegetation build up on major thoroughfares.

3. Integrated Assessment Implications

- 3.1 The Council is subject to the Equality Act (Public Sector Equality Duty and the socio-economic duty), the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure, and must in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need to:
- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Acts.
 - Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
 - Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
 - Deliver better outcomes for those people who experience socio-economic disadvantage
 - Consider opportunities for people to use the Welsh language
 - Treat the Welsh language no less favourably than English.
 - Ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.
- 3.1.1 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 mandates that public bodies in Wales must carry out sustainable development. Sustainable development means the process of improving the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales by taking action, in accordance with the sustainable development principle, aimed at achieving the 'well-being goals'.

3.1.2 Our Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) process ensures we have paid due regard to the above. It also takes into account other key issues and priorities, such as poverty and social exclusion, community cohesion, carers, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and Welsh language.

3.2 An IIA Screening has been opened however is not required until all trials with regards increasing biodiversity are completed and a set of proposals reported.

4. Financial Implications

4.1 There are no financial implications associated with this report.

5. Legal Implications

5.1 There are no legal implications associated with this report.

Background Papers: None

Appendices:

Appendix A Report to the Economy, Environment & Infrastructure Policy
Development Committee - 16 December 2021
“Management and Maintenance of Open Space (Biodiversity)”



**Report of the Director of Place
Economy and Infrastructure Policy Development Committee meeting
16 December 2021**

Management and Maintenance of Open Space (Biodiversity)

Purpose:	A progress update on the review of the Council's management of its green spaces
Policy Framework:	Swansea Council Corporate Priority: Maintaining and enhancing Swansea's natural resources and biodiversity
Consultation:	Access to Services, Finance, Legal, Cabinet Member for Environment Enhancement & Infrastructure Management, Cabinet Member for Investment, Regeneration & Tourism, Nature Conservation Team
Recommendation(s):	It is recommended that: 1) The Committee note the progress to date and direction of travel; and 2) The consultation recommendations are approved.
Report Author: Jeremy Davies	
Finance Officer: Paul Roach	
Legal Officer: Scott Dummett	
Access to Services Officer: Rhian Miller	

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Parks Service is responsible for maintaining the diverse range of Parks and Open Spaces within the City and County of Swansea. This service offers the community and visitors to Swansea locations the opportunity to enjoy recreational activities, improve health and well-being, participate in sports, relax, learn and play. The service is subdivided into sections each with a commitment to deliver a high quality, cost effective service. The Nature Conservation Team also manage a range of Council owned nature reserves and wildlife sites.

- 1.2 Biodiversity is declining globally, with rates of loss and extinction unprecedented in human history and accelerating. The impact on our biodiversity in Wales and Swansea is no different, with 1 in 6 species at risk of extinction, and 73 species lost from Wales since the 1970s.
- At the all Wales scale the State of Natural Resources Report (SoNaRR), tells us that many of our ecosystems are not resilient to unexpected or unforeseen change.
 - Grassland habitats are especially vulnerable to a lack of management because of how rapidly sites can deteriorate in the absence of favourable management or fragmentation. There has been an astonishing 97% loss of lowland semi-natural grasslands in England and Wales in the 20th century.
- 1.3 All public bodies must maintain and enhance biodiversity and promote the resilience of ecosystems under the Section 6 Duty of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016. The Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to halt the loss of biodiversity, promote healthy resilient ecosystems, and increase and enhance green infrastructure to adapt to and mitigate for the impacts of climate change, and ensure that our natural environment and the benefits and services it provides are protected for the benefit of future generations. Maintaining and enhancing Swansea's natural resources and biodiversity is a key objective in the Council's corporate plan and is also a priority in Swansea's Well Being Plan. Specific actions under this corporate priority include:
- Continue to deliver a programme of wildflower planting and management.
 - Engage with local communities to encourage volunteering and to support them taking action to enhance and maintain their local greenspaces and wildlife sites.
- 1.4 This report provides an update on progress in managing our grass verges and open spaces for both biodiversity and people with an aim of increasing wildflower diversity and habitat for pollinators as well as maintaining space for recreation.

2. Progress to Date

2.1 Working Group

Following the PDC on 22nd April 2021 a working group was brought together, chaired by Head of Waste, Parks & Cleansing, with the aim of ensuring appropriate expertise is engaged to deliver the expectations from the original approved report. Officers from the Parks Operations and Nature Conservation service areas have met at least monthly, to ensure the key principles are maintained as they explore options relating to the

review of the Council's greenspace maintenance regimes. This group has made good progress facilitating the detail in this update report and conducted an extended meeting in October 2021 to plan activities for 2022.

The outcome of the 2022 planning meeting was an agreement on:

- Identifying numerous sites in addition to those already trialled to expand the trial and utilise different regimes for assessing outcomes.
- Agree cutting options for these sites ranging from cut, collect and remove to zero cutting and consider alternative use such as tree planting.
- Assigning a maintenance plan to each identified site based on their unique topography versus frequencies and equipment.
- Exploring use of contractors for various operational needs.
- Commence categorisation of roadside verges prior to considering the maintenance options for them.

2.2 Purchase of Equipment:

To enable the various trials and pieces of work to progress a number of purchases have been made to the sum of ~£140k, funded by Welsh Government grants, which include:

- Cut and collect flail units complete with medium sized tractors for cutting and collecting long grass in open park areas.
- Various walk behind pedestrian tractor and attachments for smaller sites including local nature reserves.
- A further purchase of a £36k ride on cut and collect mower is in progress, also funded by Welsh Government grant monies, which will cut areas of intermediate size.

2.3 Engagement with Environmental Bodies

The Nature Conservation Team have been engaging with grassland management experts, including Plantlife, to understand how other councils have been successfully switching to 'cut and collect', and 'cut less, cut later' methodologies. A representative of Butterfly Conservation presented to this working group and the Swansea Nature Partnership, and the main message was that you strive to reduce soil fertility in order to allow native wildflowers to flourish. Cut and collect is key to this, to take away the nutrients in the grass cuttings. Over time the volume of biomass will reduce, leading to reduced frequency of cutting.

The council employed a Biodiversity Officer in mid-June, a new part-time role to implement the Section 6 Biodiversity and Resilience of Ecosystems Duty under the Environment (Wales) Act 2016. This officer has taken a leading role in reviewing how we manage our green spaces for wildlife and has been utilising Plantlife's expertise and guides as well as drawing on the experience of other local authorities.

2.4 Surveys

Our Biodiversity Officer has undertaken an initial audit of parks and verges that have 'long grass' areas. These are areas of amenity grasslands that are only cut once a year, but the arisings are not collected. This audit highlighted which sites may be suitable for cut & collect, and which sites needed more detailed surveys. A local botanical consultant was then contracted to undertake fine scale plant surveys of a selection of sites. This report will provide a baseline for ongoing monitoring and inform how best to manage the variation across these locations.

It's important that long term monitoring is undertaken to understand how our grass areas are changing as part of this trial. We want to see an increase in biodiversity, which equates to an increase of wildflower species and an increase in nectar source for pollinators. Transects and plots will be set up across a small selection of sites and methodologies are being designed so non-plant experts (park staff / Friends of parks volunteers) can monitor key indicator species and count nectar availability.

2.5 Operational Trials

Initial trials were conducted in Singleton Park which proved logistically challenging and therefore yielded valuable lessons regarding the length of grass and the volumes of arisings having to be removed for composting, further trials were conducted in Morriston Park also. Cut grass removed amounted to approximately:

- Singleton Park 90,000sqm cut and collected 80 tonnes removed
- Morriston Park 22,500sqm cut and collected 40 tonnes removed

There is an associated cost to transporting and disposing of this material when sending for composting. Cut and collect sites are being monitored on a monthly basis with photographic records being kept.

Timing of the cut this year was dictated by the delayed delivery of the newly procured equipment and not ideal therefore in 2022, supported by the external advice received and surveying, we would seek to cut in April, July and September.

Other sites used with the pedestrian tractor cut and bale sites (all bales left on site with various benefits such as new habitats) were:

- Picket Mead.
- Newton open space.
- Mumbles Hill Local Nature Reserve, 2 meadows.

Arisings from these sites equated to:

Picket Mead = 11 bales @ 22.5kg = 247.5 kg

Mumbles Hill = 45 bales @ 22.5kg = 1012.5 kg

2.6 Preparation for expansion of Trials next Season

Informed by the surveys mentioned above and the practicalities of using the currently available machinery, the working group is formulating which sites should be prioritised for further trials next season.

The aim is to undertake 3 cut and collect operations in 2022 during April, July and September, following the external advice received, thus enabling nutrient removal in a manageable way. The grass length in April will be considerably less than during the cut and collect trials this year, and be more manageable.

Following further Welsh Government funding, a smaller ride-on type mower, with cut and collect for use on urban verges, is being purchased.

Each site will, over time, be required to be managed uniquely dependent on the way it responds to the changed maintenance regimes.

It is intended to continue to cut collect with pedestrian baler at Picket Mead and Mumbles Hill LNR whilst investigating new sites.

2.7 Information and raising awareness

The importance of explaining the reasons for changing grassland management regimes in our parks and roadside verges cannot be underestimated. As a start to this the Nature Conservation Team commissioned new bilingual interpretation signs to explain to local communities the biodiversity benefits of undertaking the changes in grassland management. This includes a poster/sign that is placed around the trial sites when the management is undertaken, a flyer for council staff to hand out to interested members of the public, and large signage attached to the new machines as they drive around. All of this is linked to a webpage providing more detail - <https://swansea.gov.uk/cutandcollect>

Signage



Fig1: Example of signage



2.8 Community Consultation

In addition to awareness raising, meaningful consultation and engagement with our local communities is important to ensure that any changes in the management of our parks and verges take into account the views of by residents. This could be undertaken at a strategic/county wide level and /or at a site specific level.

The timing of the former could be linked to other strategic consultations for example: the County wide Green Infrastructure Strategy, the Nature Recovery Action Plan and/or Section 6 Duty Action Plan.

Appendix A contains suggested questions for a strategic consultation.

At a local site level this could best be achieved through direct consultations with local residents, ward members and 'Friends of Groups' based around specific options and outline location/proposals maps. Timings for this will depend on the programme of works planned for each site. This could also be an opportunity to engage local people in the ongoing survey and monitoring work.

Any consultations would require additional resources.

3. General Issues

There is a general perception that reduction in cutting regimes or alteration of practices yields an obvious saving, this is not necessarily the case.

Financial implications are generally unidentified at present due to surveying required prior to management planning, however several local authorities in Wales have undertaken or are in the process of undertaking

trials and the consensus to date is that any alterations in maintenance regimes usually require capital investment initially. Revenue cost neutrality or savings vary depending on scale and type of open space.

Any changes need to be communicated effectively with engagement, social media and signage to educate the public and reduce complaints.

The public were very curious/interested as to what the pedestrian cut/baler was doing and were pleased to be informed about how it worked and what the aims of the work were. There was a benefit in taking the effort to stop and talk to them however this also used operative time. The magnetic panel and information boards produced provided valuable information.

4. Integrated Assessment Implications

The Council is subject to the Equality Act (Public Sector Equality Duty and the socio-economic duty), the Well-being and Future Generation Act 2015 Welsh Language (Wales) Measure, and must in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Acts.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Deliver better outcomes for those people who experience socio-economic disadvantage.
- Consider opportunities for people to use the Welsh language.
- Treat the Welsh language no less favourably than English.

All public bodies must maintain and enhance biodiversity and resilience of ecosystems under the Section 6 Duty of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016.

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2005 mandates that public bodies in Wales must carry out sustainable development. Sustainable development means the process of improving the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales by taking action, in accordance with the sustainable development principle, aimed at achieving the 'well-being goals'.

Our Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) process also takes into account other key issues and priorities, such as poverty and social exclusion,

community cohesion, carers and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and Welsh language

4.2 An IIA Screening has been opened however is not required until all trials are completed and a set of proposals reported. IIAs will need to be considered for any proposed amendments to policies and procedures as an essential part of the review. The purpose of an impact assessment is to consider:

- Sustainability - analyse whether a proposal balances immediate needs with the well-being of future generations; and
- Equality - help officers and elected members to analyse policies and practices to determine whether they are likely to discriminate or disadvantage people. mitigation - if proposals will result in adverse impacts

5. **Financial Implications**

Three successful bids have been made to Welsh Government for a total of £176K for the purchase of cut and collect equipment.

6. **Legal Implications**

There are no Legal issues arising from this report.

Background Papers:

- Plantlife's: Managing Grassland Road Verges
- NPT Council Verge Management

Note: Background Papers are not printed. However, they are open for public inspection and must therefore be made available on request by the Report Author. Background Papers are those documents relating to the subject matter of the report which:

- a) Disclose any facts or matters on which, in the opinion of the Proper Officer, the report or an important part of the report is based; and
- b) Have, in his opinion, been relied on to a material extent in preparing the report.

Appendices: These will be included within the report.

Appendix A Draft Questions for Consultation

Appendix A – Draft Questions for Consultation

1. On average, how often do you visit your local park or greenspace?
 - Every day
 - Once a week
 - Once a month
2. Which site/s do you visit?
3. Why do you visit?
 - Exercise
 - Sport (tennis, football, basketball etc.)
 - Dog walking
 - Contact with nature
 - Relaxation (peace and quiet)
 - To meet friends
 - Walking to work/school etc
 - Other
4. On a scale of 1-10, how important is access to green space for your mental and physical health and well-being?
5. What improvements would you like to see made to your local park/greenspace? (For example):
 - More trees
 - More wildflowers
 - More biodiversity
 - More places to sit
 - A community orchard
 - More spaces for food growing
6. Are you interested in joining a local community group to assist with surveying your areas?

Agenda Item 7

Natural Environment Scrutiny Performance Panel

Work Plan 2021-22

Meeting 1 22 nd March 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Confirmation of Convener• Nature Conservation – Project updates <i>Invited to attend:</i> Deborah Hill – Nature Conservation Team Leader Paul Meller – Natural Environment Section Manager Cllr David Hopkins – Cabinet Member for Delivery and Operations• Agree Work Plan topics 2021-22• For information only - Climate Change Action Plan consultation (link to papers)
Meeting 2 May 19 th 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Climate Change Action Plan consultation feedback• Climate Emergency Declaration – Council Action Plan Progress <i>Invited to attend:</i> Cllr Andrea Lewis - Cabinet Member for Homes, Energy and Service Transformation Martin Nicholls – Director of Place Rachel Lewis – Directorate Project Manager Suzy Richards – Sustainable Policy Officer
Meeting 3 29 th June 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Air Quality Management <i>Invited to attend:</i> Cllr Mark Thomas – Cabinet Member for Environment Enhancement & Infrastructure Management Tom Price – Team Leader, Pollution Control Victoria Seller - Swansea University, Research Officer
Meeting 4 26 th August 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ash Dieback <i>Invited to attend:</i> Jeremy Davies – Group Leader Parks and Cleansing Cllr Mark Thomas – Cabinet Member for Environment Enhancement & Infrastructure Management
Meeting 5 6 th October 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Local Flood Risk Management <i>Invited to attend:</i> Stuart Davies – Head of Highways and Transportation Bob Fenwick – Group Leader Highways Maintenance Mike Sweeney – Team Leader, Highways and Transportation Cllr Mark Thomas – Cabinet Member for Environment Enhancement & Infrastructure Management• Water Pollution <i>Invited to attend:</i> Tom Price – Team Leader, Pollution Control Paula Livingstone – Divisional EHO

	Cllr David Hopkins – Cabinet Member for Delivery & Operations
Meeting 6 12 th January 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management of Green Space / Weed & Verge Management <i>Invited to attend:</i> Cllr Mark Thomas – Cabinet Member for Environment Enhancement & Infrastructure Management Jeremy Davies – Group Leader Parks and Cleansing Mark Barber – Biodiversity Natural Environment Officer Chris Howell – Head of Waste Parks and Cleansing
Meeting 7 15 th March 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (TBC) Nature Conservation Team – Project Updates <i>Invited to attend:</i> Cllr Andrea Lewis - Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Service Transformation Paul Meller – Natural Environment Manager Deborah Hill – Nature Conservation Team Leader

Agenda Item 8



To:
Councillor David Hopkins
Cabinet Member for Delivery and Operations

BY EMAIL

Please ask for:
Gofynnwch am:

Direct Line:
Llinell Uniongyrochol:

e-Mail
e-Bost:

Date
Dyddiad:

Overview & Scrutiny

01792 637732

scrutiny@swansea.gov.uk

27 October 2021

Summary: This is a letter from the Natural Environment Scrutiny Performance Panel to the Cabinet Member for Delivery and Operations. The letter concerns the meeting held on 6 October 2021 and the updates received regarding Water Pollution.

Dear Councillor Hopkins,

On 6 October 2021, the Panel met to discuss the update regarding the Council's management of Water Pollution. The Panel were grateful to all who attended to provide information and answer questions. We are writing to you to reflect on what we learnt from the discussion and to share the observations of the Panel.

The Panel heard about the joint approach to this area of work, and the good working relationship between Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and Swansea City Council (SCC).

Officers explained to us that there are eight designated bathing water areas in Swansea. We understand that water samples are taken throughout the bathing season (May-September) giving results to enable classification within one of the four categories; being excellent, good, insufficient and poor.

Members queried the bathing season duration (May-September) and whether the duration of this season should be extended. Officers highlighted that this seasonal period was designated under statutory regulations.

We heard that the Council is the owner of Swansea Bay and therefore responsible as Beach Manager. Officers highlighted to us that Swansea Bay has been designated as 'good', the remaining seven bathing areas designated as 'excellent'.

We discussed the River Tawe water quality situation, recently highlighted in the media, which came about via sewage entering the River further upstream. Officers explained to us that pollutant levels were significant enough to take a precautionary approach, recommending against bathing at that time. We also heard how Welsh Water started

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tracing the pollution to a collapsed sewer entering a surface water drain; a problem which has since been rectified.

We discussed general concerns over recreational use of the River Tawe during such abnormal incidents, and how signage is erected to inform the public and advise against recreational use.

Officers explained that the River Tawe has no current designation as a 'bathing water' area and therefore no account is currently taken of bacterial standards in the water. The Panel heard that there is currently no 'recreational water' standard for non-bathing water.

The Panel also discussed other recent media coverage relating to discharge into beaches during emergency discharge events. Officers explained to us that the drainage system is designed to have an emergency overflow, allowing for surface water run-off and storm discharge during such events.

The Panel raised concerns over the effect of climate change on intensifying rainfall and how such events will impact upon storm overflow incidents. We heard that NRW have worked to significantly reduce the number of such events, although officers acknowledged that this is an ongoing challenge.

The Panel heard about the 2011 collaborative project between SCC and NRW, when officers undertook an intensive water sampling survey, resulting in a computational model to predict water quality on an hourly basis at Swansea Bay. We understand that this model is now an automated process, enabling fast and effective information sharing via signage and Twitter.

The Panel heard that installation of septic tanks / cesspits is an NRW regulated process, requiring a permit or exemption. The Panel was told that Swansea has a significant number of septic tanks; NRW dealing with the environmental impacts, and SCC dealing with the public health aspects.

Panel Members queried allowing new build properties to have septic tanks, especially located within clay soil and therefore affecting the process of percolation and resulting in increased levels of run-off.

Officers drew our attention to the aeration system on the River Tawe, active during summer months, in place to deal with situations where the salt water overtops the barrage. Officers explained that the saline wedge can have an effect on river life and the system acts to mix fine bubbles of air into the water column. SCC monitors salinity and once every two years carries out a dredge of the navigable channel.

Members commented on the odour around the Port-Tennant treatment works. Officers confirmed that discussions are on-going with regard to future intentions at that site, however, in the meantime an e-diary is available online to log such comments or complaints.

The Panel raised the issue of residential front gardens being converted into hard standings, acting to increase surface water run-off. Officers commented that any new builds over 100 sq/m require sustainable drainage systems to be implemented, explaining that new features are often incorporated to aid drainage through permeable surfaces.

Members raised concerns over urban areas and surface water run-off, citing the Sandfields area as an example. Officers also highlighted that this particular area accepts run-off from higher ground. Officers explained that good gully maintenance would help alleviate this issue.

Panel Members commented on the excellent working relationship between NRW and SCC and praised the teams involved in this collaborative area of work.

We are interested in any thoughts you may have on the contents of this letter but, in this instance, we require no formal written response.

Yours sincerely,

Councillor Peter Jones

Convener, Natural Environment Scrutiny Performance Panel

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To:
Councillor Mark Thomas
Cabinet Member for
Environment Enhancement &
Infrastructure Management

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Overview & Scrutiny

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27 October 2021

BY EMAIL

Summary: This is a letter from the Natural Environment Scrutiny Performance Panel to the Cabinet Member for Environment Enhancement & Infrastructure Management. The letter concerns the meeting held on 6 October 2021 and the updates received regarding Flood Risk Management.

Dear Councillor Thomas,

On 6 October, the Panel met to hold discussions around Flood Risk Management. The Panel were grateful to all who attended to provide information and answer questions. We are writing to you to reflect on what we learnt from the discussions and to share the observations of the Panel.

You acknowledged that the issue of flooding could affect all wards at some point, highlighting that the Council is heavily reliant on Welsh Government funding to manage this issue.

You explained to us that the demand for delivery of sandbags cannot always be met, and it is especially difficult to utilise resources to deliver sandbags during times of crisis/emergency flooding, when resources are being directed to immediately deal with the flooding situation.

The Panel heard that the procurement process is underway to add new gully maintenance vehicles. Officers also explained to us that they are creating a new initiative for a reactive gully crew, aiming to quickly respond to individual flood incidents. Officers outlined aspirations to have extra staff on hand to deliver sandbags and to support critical culverts during flood incidents.

Panel Members commented on Paragraph 4.1 of the update report, regarding two full time vacancies, and queried the impact of these vacant positions. Officers acknowledged that recruitment of technical staff is an on-going challenge.

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Officers explained to us that that the increasing intensity of rainfall and downpours means there will be occasions where the current drainage system will become overwhelmed. We heard that accommodating extreme rainfall periods will be a challenge, and that preventative measures continue to be developed to mitigate flood risk.

Members commented on recent use of environmental budget allowances within individual wards to procure gully teams on an ad-hoc basis, suggesting that this become wider practice when needed.

The Panel heard that currently, the flooding of five properties is the threshold for a 'locally significant incident'. Officers explained that this figure will possibly be raised to twenty properties in line with some other authorities across Wales.

You cited the North Gower village of Crofty as an example of vast flood prevention intervention by Natural Resources Wales (NRW), explaining to us, however, that factors such as prolonged heavy rainfall, high tides and strong winds can overtop drainage systems regardless of all interventions in place. The Panel acknowledged and understood that it will not always be possible to overcome flooding events in particular circumstances.

Members questioned the latest update on the Coastal Risk Management Programme in relation to the Mumbles flood defence wall. You explained to us that public perception appears to be supportive, and that there is a general acceptance that this scheme is needed. We heard that circa £12million will be invested from Welsh Government and that evidence suggests flood risk will be reduced for over 120 properties.

Officers highlighted the relevance of nature-based solutions such as the sand dunes created at the Civic Centre site, having had a positive impact on reducing wave energy and subsequent storm flooding. The Panel heard that there is scope to mitigate flood risk through green infrastructure and nature-based solutions, such as increased tree planting to help slow water flow.

The Panel queried the Development Advice Maps in relation to Technical Advice Note 15 (TAN 15). Officers explained that the Council would need to provide defence around certain City Centre sites, with the additional requirement to take account of surface run-off risk.

Overall, the Panel were pleased to hear about the on-going work of the teams involved in all aspects of Council Flood Risk Management. We thanked all involved for their input and contributions.

We are interested in any thoughts you may have on the contents of this letter but, in this instance, we require no formal written response.

Yours sincerely,

Councillor Peter Jones
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