



City and County of Swansea

## Notes of the **Scrutiny Working Group - Air / Noise Pollution**

Committee Room 5 - Guildhall, Swansea

Tuesday, 6 November 2018 at 10.30 am

**Present:** Councillor J A Hale (Chair) Presided

**Councillor(s)**  
E W Fitzgerald

**Councillor(s)**  
P K Jones

**Councillor(s)**  
S Pritchard

### **Other Attendees**

Mark Thomas

Cabinet Member - Environment & Infrastructure Management

### **Officer(s)**

Mark Wade  
Huw Morgan  
Tom Price

Head of Housing & Public Health  
Divisional EHO Pollution Control  
Team Leader Pollution Control

### **Apologies for Absence**

Councillor(s): R V Smith

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## **1 Disclosures of Personal and Prejudicial Interest**

Cllr Peter Jones declared a personal interest.

## **2 Overview of Air Quality and Noise Control**

In attendance to discuss the subject with the panel were Cllr Mark Thomas, Cabinet Member for Environment and Infrastructure Management, Mark Wade, Head of Housing and Public Protection, Huw Morgan, Divisional Officer Pollution Housing and Public Health and Tom Price, Team Leader Pollution Control.

Councillor Hale outlines the reasons for this piece of work saying concerns have been raised with regard to the increase in development across Swansea including housing developments (which are needed) and the impact these have on the environment particularly in relation to noise and air pollution;

The following issues were discussed:

- The Division have a traditional regulatory function in terms of dealing with Clean Air Act offences in domestic or industrial settings, as well as issuing permits for certain specific industrial activities. The pane were told that the main change in emphasis is to move from monitoring air pollution on a piecemeal basis across

the country towards a proper assessment of air-quality targets based on public health evidence.

- Noise control is still fundamentally delivering a service to protect people from unreasonable nuisance. This is more reactive work and generates some regular litigation. An environmental noise Directive has influence the work in the noise and planning field.
- Receive over 5000 complaints a year with the majority of these noise related, service gets as many complaints out of hours as those in normal working hours. Most are resolved without Court action, usually small number prosecuted with the bulk dealt with by Caution. We do not experience as many ombudsman complaints and this is mainly due to having an out-of-hours service.
- Local air-quality management was established early in Swansea as we were one of the few pilot authorities back in 1995. Increasing attention has been paid to air-quality at central government level. Increased media coverage on the public health impacts and the ever increasing medical evidence across a broad field has all help to focus attention on the main issue, which is road vehicle emissions in congested areas.
- This area of work is highlighted in service and corporate plans. It is an issue which involves Highway and planning as well as cutting across other public health plans.
- As the pressure has increased from Welsh Government and resources available to local Councils have shrunk, there are fewer local initiatives as focus is put on delivering statutory activities which in themselves are very demanding.
- There is a continuous assessment and reporting cycle and those reports are public documents which state the position for Swansea in terms of all pollutants of interest.
- Apart from the many statutory duties contained in legislation the Council follows, the is now irrefutable evidence that air and noise pollution cause great harm to child development, cardiovascular systems, lung capacity, the central nervous system, mental health as well as many of environmental and ecological issues.
- Input from the Division is also made into other statutory plans like for example the Local Development Plan.
- There are currently no performance indicators in this area although very details reports are submitted to government based on national guidance.
- This year there has been an improvement in air-quality. Overall concentrations of pollutants are down and the number of sites measured which fail a target are reduced.
- Vast amount of information online on the Council website but a lot of info and quite complex. It has a lot of hits but this is probably by other professionals, academics and students mainly. Panel agreed that need to find a way to simplify this information for better monitoring and access by the public. Development of an app is being considered for development in conjunction with the University.
- The issue of air pollution is so big, so complex and difficult to address. Identified as a public health emergency and is a worldwide issue. Fundamental to it is road transport, the car culture is here. Need a whole societal shift from high polluting activity.
- Need to start to make small steps towards this where we can, firstly it is important to recognise it as a fundamental health issue. Examples cited included in around school areas and the effects of the young people's development.

- The Panel congratulated the Division for the work they are doing and also the wider work being done to address air pollution across the Council including for example:
  - Green Fleet (biggest purchase of electronic vehicles by any LA 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
- Concerns about the increase in the numbers of new homes for many areas as identified in the LDP and the associated increase in traffic. 20% increase in uptake of public transport predicted but confident this will happen as car culture is so strong and many of new developments are car dependant.
- Public transport is key. Need to be more proactive in developing a really good public transport system. The Working Group heard that this is a challenge as LA's are constricted as to what they can do because public transport is deregulated. So Council has little or no control over for example bus services in Swansea. Swansea has enabled the running of some non-commercial routes via a subsidy but limited influence. So have to try and work with operators as we do not have control ourselves.
- The working group agreed that all levels of government need to engage in the major problem that is air pollution. It will require a shift in behaviour by everyone. Scotland has introduced more charging which has not been developed by Welsh Government. This in itself would only be a temporary fix and some example have just caused the spread of the problems to different areas of cities.
- Need central government national strategy that is funded centrally and carried out at a more local level through Wales Government and Local Authorities. The Working Group agreed that progress with improvements nationally has stalled. What can be done locally, do we need to have a clear plan to reduce air pollution even if we are not yet able to fund it, at least by having a plan in place it can be moved forward as and when funding may become available, a clear strategy that involved all stakeholders, not just local authority.
- It was felt that Council departments need to work more closely together on this matter and that a strategy would help to ensure this.
- Global issues cannot tackle in isolation, need sign up from all countries, but councillors felt that Swansea is doing a lot and wanted to thank and show their appreciation to officers for the work they do. Councillors were also pleased the night time service was ongoing when some other councils had not. Whilst recognising the budget constraints of the Council the working group would like to see this service continue to be 24 hours.
- Good detailed information on the website but only downside to this it is not very accessible by the public, they can be drowned out by the sheer amount of information. The working group agreed that work needed to be done to look at tailoring the website to make information more accessible to the public. They 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 so accessible to use at present.
- Need to monitor and take action where possible to address pollution around Swansea schools, the panel asked what is the knowledge of this issues within schools, with parents and how is this issue feeding to council policies and

strategies. Group heard about some of the work in and with schools for example walking routes to schools etc. Some issues that may affect this include children not always going to local school to travel home to school more difficult.

- More awareness and action by schools governors was also discussed.
- Work needed widely to change mind sets, work and research on this is being done by Swansea University.
- The working group heard about the Swansea University bike scheme, students cycling to lectures and how it is having a real impact.
- Councillors agreed that we need to be also thinking about nature based solutions to air quality issues like for example planting trees that absorb CO2 like Birch trees.
- Working Group expressed concerns 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.
- A member of the public attending the meeting gave a medical analogy about the effects of poor air quality saying that 'we as a council can diagnose the problem but have no way of treating it'. Cabinet Members said this is not entirely true and that 'we cannot carry out the operation but we can give some medicine'. Whereby we are doing a number of things to influence air pollution like, for example purchasing the Green Fleet of vehicles, renewable energy projects and own energy company.
- Pleased to hear about the positive working relationship with Swansea University on Air Quality matters.
- Working Group recognised that there is a need for a holistic approach to this issue, working across organisation and for co-ordination with the council. They also recognised that need to plan with others in the longer term, need to be talking about how to solve this problem in order to start to address it.
- They agreed that this is an important health issue and should have a greater public profile.

### **3 Next Steps**

Councillors agreed to write to the Cabinet Member giving their views via a Conveners letter.

The meeting ended at 12.10 pm

**Chair**