



City and County of Swansea

Minutes of the **Scrutiny Performance Panel - Climate Change and Nature**

Multi-Location Meeting - Lilian Hopkin Room, Guildhall / MS

Teams

Tuesday, 14 May 2024 at 10.00 am

Present: Councillor S E Keeton (Chair) Presided

Councillor(s)

M W Locke
B J Rowlands
W G Thomas

Councillor(s)

C M J Evans
O G James

Councillor(s)

E W Fitzgerald
M H Jones

Other Attendees

Cyril Anderson
David Hopkins
Andrea Lewis

Cabinet Member for Community (Services)
Cabinet Member for Corporate Service and Performance
Cabinet Member for Service Transformation

Officer(s)

Liz Jordan
Rachel Lewis
Paul Meller
Jane Richmond
Mark Wade

Scrutiny Officer
Directorate Project Manager
Natural Environment Section Manager
Project Manager Strategic Climate Change
Director of Place

Apologies for Absence

Councillor(s): J A Hale
Other Attendees: A H Stevens

1 Disclosure of Personal and Prejudicial Interests

No disclosures of interest were received.

2 Prohibition of Whipped Votes and Declaration of Party Whips

No declarations were made.

3 Minutes of Previous Meeting(s)

Panel agreed the Minutes of the meeting on 19 March 2024 as an accurate record of the meeting.

4 Public Question Time

No questions were received.

5 Climate Change Update (including achievement against corporate priorities/objectives/policy commitments)

Andrea Lewis, Cabinet Member for Service Transformation and Cyril Anderson, Cabinet Member for Community (Services) together with relevant officers attended to update the Panel and answer questions.

Discussion Points:

- Panel asked what the biggest challenges are, in terms of both Climate Change and Nature to Council achieving its goals apart from money, and if there is anything else the Panel could do to help. Informed there are several challenges. It was suggested in the Community Growing Working Group the day before about encouraging schools to have a dedicated 'green' governor to champion climate change, energy efficiency and biodiversity. Panel very keen on this idea and agreed to make this recommendation to Cabinet Members. Cabinet Members fully supported this.
- Other examples where the Panel can help include:
 - Through partnerships, by championing that work and encouraging partners to have greater input.
 - Signposting people to the energy efficiency hub on High Street
 - There is a small pot of money in the Environmental Partner Framework, and councillors should talk to officers if there are small projects in their wards which could benefit.
 - Workshops going to be held in the community on climate adaptation and mitigation, and councillor participation would be appreciated.
- Panel discussed Public electric vehicle points and asked if new legislation has been brought in that all new cars will have to have the charging point in the same place, and if so, what effect this will have on installation of charging points. Cabinet Member agreed to provide a full written response following the meeting.
- Panel asked about battery recycling. Aware of excellent scheme for household batteries, but what happens to vehicle batteries. Informed by Cabinet Member that there have been no discussion nationally about disposal of EV batteries so they cannot provide any more information on this currently.
- Panel heard in terms of nature and biodiversity locally, it is not just the Council's responsibility and need to get across to the public that little things can make a difference for biodiversity and nature enhancement.
- Panel happy Council is committed to buying green energy but need to remember this does not guarantee the energy used to charge our cars comes from renewable energy sources.
- Panel Member stated University has been running Green Impact Project to help reduce energy usage and encourage employee behaviour change, and asked if the Council would consider doing something similar. Cabinet Member confirmed they are interested and will look at it in more detail to see how the Council could potentially roll it out itself.

- Panel has concerns about the new recycling receptacles for glass and cans, in terms of the weight of them when they are full, as could cause problems for people with a disability or who live in a flat. Informed the department can work with residents who are disabled by adding them to the 'Assist' list which is already in place.

Actions:

- Information to be provided to Panel on new legislation regarding location of charging points on cars, and effects of this.
- Waste Strategy and Recycling to be added to work plan for new municipal year.

6 Nature and Biodiversity Update (including achievement against corporate priorities/objectives/policy commitments)

David Hopkins, Cabinet Member for Corporate Service and Performance and Paul Meller, Natural Environment Section Manager attended to update the Panel and answer questions.

Discussion Points:

- Panel heard the scrutiny inquiry on Nature Recovery in 2018 made a number of recommendations which have been implemented. Officers stated this work has very much become business as usual for the Nature Conservation Team and suggested that going forward the Panel may want to look at the picture across the Council. Panel noted that probably the best way of doing this, given the Local Nature Recovery Section 6 Action Plan is now in place is to bring these reports to the Panel annually.
- Panel would like to see 'no mow May' rolled out across the County. Full response to be provided by relevant Cabinet Member following the meeting.
- Panel asked why the Council cannot stop using weed killers, stating that some councillors have asked for it not to be done in their wards this year. Cabinet Member this has been debated at the Panel many times and ward members now have the opportunity to opt out wherever possible. Full response to be provided by relevant Cabinet Member following the meeting.
- Panel queried why the Council cannot plant more rain gardens. Full response to be provided by relevant Cabinet Member following the meeting.
- Panel asked how we know if nature recovery is working and there is biodiversity gain. Informed this is currently being look at, net biodiversity gain needs to be monitored whether it is through planning applications or generally as part of the Council's work.
- Panel noted Local Development Plan (LDP) consultation is underway and queried if biodiversity protections will be improved as part of the LDP. Informed enforcement is always a problem and the Department is looking to see what can be done.
- Panel stated it has been talking for a number of years about biodiversity with regards planning applications, and asked if there has been any progress. Panel feels if every planning application included a simple question about enhancing biodiversity it would make people think more about what they can

do. Cabinet Member stated they are working towards value added to biodiversity in all planning applications at this time.

- In terms of the LDP, Panel suggested that if a greenfield site is used for housing it would have a significant impact on biodiversity which can never be compensated for. Heard there are different types of greenfield sites, not all are rich in biodiversity and a site can be enriched, for example with rain gardens and trees.

Actions:

- Item on 'Local Nature Recovery Section 6 Action Plan' to be added to work plan for next municipal year.

7 Panel Review of the Year 2023-24

Panel Members reviewed their year on the Climate Change and Nature Scrutiny Panel and made the following comments:

What went well?

- Think everything went well. Looked in depth at a lot of topics and made some very good recommendations.
- One of the best bits of scrutiny was Local Flood Risk Management – highlighted a number of issues and hopefully the Department took on board what was said.
- It is good to have Natural Resources Wales at the Panel from time to time so can ask them questions directly. The Panel should continue with this.

What, if anything, could be done better?

- Panel could maybe highlight SUDS issues more. Need to do more on this.
- Been asking for a number of years for questions to be added about biodiversity to planning applications. Don't think the Panel has made any real progress, and it is probably where the Council could make the most change in this area. As a Panel need to spend a bit more time looking at this in the future.

What have we learnt that will help us to improve and develop future scrutiny?

- Need to constantly revisit issues of concern and ask about progress.

The Work Plan for 2024-25 will be drafted and circulated to Members. Final version to be agreed at next meeting on 16 July 2024.

The meeting ended at 10.55 am