



To:

**Councillor Andrea Lewis, Cabinet Member
for Service Transformation**

**Councillor David Hopkins, Cabinet Member
for Corporate Services and Performance**

**Councillor Cyril Anderson, Cabinet Member
for Community (Services)**

and

**Councillor Andrew Stevens, Cabinet
Member for Environment and Infrastructure**

BY EMAIL

cc Cabinet Members

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11 June 2024

Summary: This is a letter from the Climate Change and Nature Scrutiny Performance Panel to the relevant Cabinet Members following the meeting of the Panel on 14 May 2024. It covers Climate Change, Nature and Biodiversity and Panel Review. A formal written response is required.

Dear Cllrs Lewis, Hopkins, Anderson and Stevens

The Panel met on 14 May 2024 and received updates on Climate Change and Nature and Biodiversity, including achievement against corporate priorities, and discussed the Panel's Review of the Year 2023-24.

We would like to thank Cllr Lewis, Cllr Hopkins, Cllr Anderson, Mark Wade, Rachel Lewis, Paul Meller and Jane Richmond for attending to present the items and answer the Panel's questions. We appreciate your engagement and input.

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY / TROSOLWG A CHRAFFU

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We are writing to you to reflect on what we learned from the discussion, share the views of the Panel, and, where necessary, raise any issues or recommendations for your consideration and response.

Climate Change Update

Cabinet Members Andrea Lewis and Cyril Anderson together with relevant officers attended to update the Panel and answer questions.

We asked what the biggest challenges are in terms of both Climate Change and Nature to achieving our goals apart from money, and if there is anything else the Panel could do to help. We were informed there are several challenges. We heard that for 2030, for example, in terms of greening the fleet, with a fleet of 900 vehicles if all electric vehicles were purchased there would be difficulties in terms of infrastructure. Also, the cost of a hydrogen refuse vehicle is 3 times the cost of diesel and you are waiting for industry and economies of scales to make those vehicles more affordable. Another example given was public electric vehicle charging infrastructure and the challenges around people living in terraced properties. We heard the Panel has helped on these issues with its input, debate and discussion, which is really valuable.

In terms of 2050, we heard there will be opportunity for wider engagement and councillors as community leaders can support this by engaging with communities about reducing energy usage, rollout of greener technologies and potential grants which could be accessible. Also many councillors are governors and have strong links to schools and there is an educational toolkit you are keen for councillors to champion, looking at energy usage within public buildings. We heard it was suggested in the Community Growing Working Group held the previous day about encouraging schools to have a dedicated 'green' governor to champion climate change, energy efficiency and biodiversity. We as a Panel are very keen on this idea and would make this recommendation to Cabinet Members that this is taken forward. Cabinet Members present stated they fully support this.

We heard that 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 are going to be held in the community on climate adaptation and mitigation, and councillor participation would be appreciated.

We discussed Public Electric Vehicle Charging 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, for example, at the front of the car, and if so, what effect this will have on installation of charging points. Cllr Andrea Lewis agreed to provide a full written response following the meeting. We noted you are keeping a watching eye on emerging technologies and are trying to plan but have to be flexible as things are changing quickly.

We asked about battery recycling. We are aware of the excellent scheme for household batteries, but wanted to know what happens to vehicle batteries. We were informed by Cllr Cyril Anderson that there has been no discussion nationally about disposal of EV batteries so you cannot provide any more information on this currently. We noted the Waste Strategy 2024 will not include anything about EV batteries. A Panel Member stated there is a company in Llanelli that repurposes EV batteries and this might be worth you looking into.

We heard from Cllr David Hopkins that in terms of nature and biodiversity locally, it is not just the Council's responsibility and there is a need to get across to the public that little things can make a difference for biodiversity and nature enhancement. We also heard the Council works very closely with lots of schools and needs to do more of that. Nationally, there needs to be policy changes made by Government and procurement changes.

We are happy the Council is committed to buying green energy but must remember this does not guarantee the energy used to charge our cars comes from renewable energy sources. In the long term we think there is a need to consider producing our own energy.

Panel Member stated the University has been running a Green Impact Project to help reduce energy usage and encourage employee behaviour change, and asked if the Council would consider doing something similar, where every section of the Council is looking at energy and water usage and ways to save energy and money, and it is undertaken by the departments themselves. Cllr Andrea Lewis stated that it is really important as public sector partners that we share good practice, and this is a really good example of this. Cllr Lewis confirmed you are interested and will look at it in more detail to see how the Council could potentially roll it out itself.

We have concerns about the new recycling receptacles for glass and cans, in terms of the weight of them when they are full, as it could cause problems for people with a disability or who live in a flat etc. We were informed the department can work with residents who are disabled by adding them to the 'Assist' list which is already in place. We would like to find out more about the Waste Strategy and Recycling and will be adding an item on this to the Panel's work plan for 2024-25.

Nature and Biodiversity Update

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

We heard the scrutiny inquiry on Nature Recovery in 2018 made a number of recommendations which have been implemented, including Climate Change and Nature Recovery becoming a corporate objective. 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. We noted that probably the best way of doing this, given the Local Nature Recovery Section 6 Action Plan is now in place (and monitored annually), is to bring these reports to the Panel to look at progress of work across the County as a Council and with partners. An item on this will be added to the work plan for the new municipal year.

We stated we would like to see 'no mow May' rolled out across the County and were informed this was tried last year but equipment was damaged as the grass had grown so long. As a result, only a few areas were picked this year for 'no mow May'. We heard the Department has now managed to secure funding for new cut and collect vehicles and new plant which will be able to do the job. We were very pleased to hear this. We were informed that a full response will be provided by the relevant Cabinet Member following the meeting.

We asked why the Council cannot stop using weed killers and added that some councillors have asked for it not to be done in their wards this year. Cllr Hopkins stated this has been debated at the Panel many times and ward members now have the opportunity to opt out wherever possible. We were informed this is ongoing, there is a commitment by the Council to look for alternatives wherever it can, and it is still looking at different technologies. We stated that we keep bringing it up because it is such an important issue as we are losing lots of insects every year due to spraying. We were informed that a full response will be provided by the relevant Cabinet Member following the meeting.

We asked about the Council's approach to the design and implementation of rain gardens and were informed a full response will be provided by the relevant Cabinet Member following the meeting.

We asked how the Council would know if nature recovery is working and if there is biodiversity gain. We were informed this is currently being looked at and that net biodiversity gain needs to be monitored whether it is through planning applications or generally as part of the Council's work. We heard it needs to be done in a consistent way across Authorities but there is currently no agreed way of doing it from Welsh Government or nationally. We suggested Friends of Parks Groups across Swansea could help locally with monitoring net biodiversity gain if something structured is put in place, for example, by identifying if any new species of insects are present etc before and after 'no mow May'. We suggested that schools could also get involved.

We noted the Local Development Plan (LDP) consultation is underway and queried if biodiversity protections will be improved as part of the LDP. We heard that enforcement is always a problem and the Department is looking to see what can be done.

We feel the Panel has been talking for a number of years about biodiversity with regards planning applications, but there has been little progress. We believe if every planning application includes a simple question about enhancing biodiversity it would make people think more about what they can do. Cllr Hopkins stated you are working towards value added to biodiversity in all planning applications at this time.

In terms of the LDP, we suggested that if a greenfield site is used for housing it would have a significant impact on biodiversity which can never be compensated for. We 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.

Panel Review of the Year 2023-24

Panel Members reviewed their year on the Panel. The comments are noted below for your information:

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. Do not 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.
- Work Programme for 2024-25 will be drafted and circulated to Panel Members. Final version to be agreed at first meeting of new municipal year on 16 July 2024.

Your Response

We hope that you find the contents of this letter helpful and would welcome comments on any of the issues raised within. However, on this occasion, a formal written response is required by Tuesday 2nd July 2024 to the following:

- Information to be provided on new legislation regarding location of charging points on cars, and effects of this.
- Further information on 'no mow May' to be provided to the Panel.
- Further information on use of weed killers to be provided to the Panel.
- Further information on the installation of rain gardens to be provided to the Panel.

Yours sincerely

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