

Natural Environment Scrutiny Inquiry Panel

Terms of Reference

Key Question

The panel has agreed that the primary focus for the inquiry is to be the natural environment and biodiversity in Swansea. The key question, therefore, is:

‘What should Swansea Council be doing to maintain and enhance its natural environment and biodiversity, and in so doing promote the resilience of ecosystems?’

The two main legislative guides will be the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

The inquiry will look in particular at how council planning processes and development will need to take into account duties and requirements in Part I the Environment Act, and the importance of the natural environment and biodiversity in strategic decision making.

Reasons to carry out this piece of work

There is considerable international evidence from a wide spectrum of leading academics and practitioners that the natural environment and its biodiversity are essential for future resilience and environmental sustainability. These natural assets also have substantial benefits to health and are linked to the prosperity and well-being of communities. It is essential that these issues are at the forefront of decision making processes throughout the whole Council.

“Nature is not a drag on growth. Its protection is an unavoidable prerequisite for sustaining economic development” - Tony Juniper, sustainability and environment adviser (2013)

Lines of Inquiry

The inquiry will look in particular at how the natural environment and biodiversity are considered at planning stages and during development projects and how attitudes and culture impact on success. It will also consider what the Council does well and what can be improved. This will include the following key lines of inquiry:

- **What is meant by maintaining, enhancing and promoting?** What is involved in the day to day activities of Swansea Council and its partners to achieve this? What is being done well that can be expanded and what needs to change to achieve the goal?
- **Cause and effect:** What are the causes of natural environment and biodiversity depletion in Swansea? What are the effects of natural environment and biodiversity depletion in Swansea? How do we tackle these issues? What are the consequences (environmental/legal/financial/economic/social/political) if we do not meet the requirements under the relevant Acts?

- **Partners/professional relationships:** Who is involved in maintaining, enhancing and promoting the natural environment and biodiversity in Swansea, and how do we work together effectively to achieve this aim, particularly in relation to meeting the requirements under the relevant Acts?
- **Working with other service areas:** How are services working together to ensure that all parts of Swansea Council are aiming for the same level of success in relation to the natural environment and biodiversity?
- **Impact:** What have been the impacts of those initiatives that help maintain, enhance and promote the natural environment and biodiversity?
- **Good Practice (Internal and External):** What guidance and examples of good practice in improving the maintenance, enhancement and promotion of the natural environment and biodiversity are there, and can these be adopted by Swansea Council?

Intended Impact and Contribution

This inquiry intends to support the work of the Council by:

- Providing a councillor perspective on how the current approach to the maintenance and enhancement of biodiversity is working
- Drawing together operating principles and practices for the maintenance and enhancement of biodiversity in Swansea, together with the promotion of ecosystem resilience
- From the above, making recommendations for improvement to current operating principles and practices in the long, medium and short term
- Pointing to good practice examples
- Summarising and considering the ideas and suggestions both of Council officers and of external organisations