



Report of the Cabinet Member for Delivery

Cabinet – 18 July 2019

Natural Environment Scrutiny Inquiry Cabinet Member Response and Action Plan

Purpose:	To outline a response to the scrutiny recommendations and to present an action plan for agreement.
Policy Framework:	Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act (2015), Environment (Wales) Act (2016). Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act (2006)
Consultation:	Legal, Finance, Access to Services
Recommendation(s):	It is recommended that: 1) The response as outlined in the report and related action plan be agreed.
Report Author:	Paul Meller
Finance Officer:	Aimee Dyer
Legal Officer:	Debbie Smith
Access to Services Officer:	Rhian Millar

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Natural Environment Scrutiny Inquiry report was submitted to Cabinet on the 21 March 2019 after the Natural Environment Scrutiny Inquiry Panel completed a detailed inquiry. The scrutiny report is attached as **Appendix A**.
- 1.2 Having considered the contents of the scrutiny report, and specific recommendations made, advice to Cabinet on whether it should agree, or not agree, with each recommendation is detailed in this report.
- 1.3 Cabinet is also asked to consider, for each of the responses, any relevant policy commitments and any other relevant activity.

2.0 Response to Scrutiny Recommendations

Recommendation 1
<i>Development and implementation of a Corporate Biodiversity Action Plan to take this forward (Medium Term)</i>
Relevant Policy Commitments: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Protecting Swansea's unique natural and built environment• Ensuring Swansea is an attractive place for investment and development
Action already being undertaken: <p>To ensure compliance with the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 - Part 1, Section 6 Biodiversity and Resilience of Ecosystems Duty (Section 6 Duty), the Council must prepare and submit to Welsh Government by the end of 2019 a report (Corporate Biodiversity (Section 6) Action Plan) outlining what it has done to comply with the duty and then provide a progress update every three years after this date. A draft Action Plan is currently being prepared.</p> <p>In October 2018 the Council adopted an additional corporate well-being objective "to maintain and enhance Swansea's Natural Resources and Biodiversity."</p> <p>Initial actions/steps have been identified with reference to this objective.</p>
New actions following from the recommendation: <p>It is proposed that progress on meeting the corporate biodiversity objective actions could be monitored and reported on a quarterly basis by means of the establishment of a Corporate Biodiversity Working Group. This Group would more effectively support and encourage all Service Areas to take ownership of Section 6 duties.</p> <p>The Group would comprise representatives from all relevant service areas and be chaired by the Director of Place. Proposed terms of reference have been drafted and a first meeting is planned for July 2019.</p> <p>Under the new business planning and reporting regime, all Service Areas will be required to report on progress made and planned future actions to meet the new Corporate priority for the Natural Environment and biodiversity.</p>
Cabinet Member Comments: Support actions already being undertaken and proposed
Recommendation is AGREED

Recommendation 2

Ensure the Biodiversity Action Plan links with other relevant cross organisational policies at a strategic level, for example: the Local Well-being Plan, Area Statements, Local Development Plan, Green Infrastructure Strategy, Open Space Strategy, Nature Recovery Action Plan, Play Strategy, Destination Management Plan, Gower Management Plan, Economic Development Plan, etc (Medium Term)

Relevant Policy Commitments:

- Protecting Swansea's unique natural and built environment
- Ensuring Swansea is an attractive place for investment and development
- A joined up approach to public expenditure and more imaginative community use of public assets
- Working in partnership to explore collaborative and innovative ways in which services can be financed and delivered

Action already being undertaken:

The Action Plan under preparation involves collaboration with other Public Service Board (PSB) partners to deliver actions which contribute to achieving the PSB Well-being Plan Working with Nature priority. It also provides a more integrated approach that will contribute to the delivery of the other corporate wellbeing goals.

Inclusion of the Corporate Biodiversity Objective and actions arising within Service/Business Plans.

Nature Conservation Team represented on PSB Working with Nature Group and leading on the development of the Local Nature Recovery Plan and supporting the Local Nature Partnership.

Working with Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and drawing upon Area Statement evidence base, to promote the sustainable management of natural resources at the local level, enabling joined-up collective action and identification of innovative new solutions, for example the City Centre Green Infrastructure Strategy.

New actions following from the recommendation:

Establishment of a Corporate Biodiversity Working Group that will explore further opportunities for collaborative cross-service and external partnership initiatives /projects that deliver multiple benefits across the well-being goals.

Nature Conservation Team participation in the PSB Working With Nature working group.

Cabinet Member Comments: Support actions already being undertaken and proposed

Recommendation is **AGREED**

Recommendation 3
<i>Develop a clear and enthusiastic vision and message for maintaining and enhancing biodiversity to ensure a consistent 'buy-in' from each service (Quick Win)</i>
<p>Relevant Policy Commitments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protecting Swansea's unique natural and built environment • Ensuring Swansea is an attractive place for investment and development • Enhance and sustain our parks and natural habitats
<p>Action already being undertaken:</p> <p>The Council has a duty under the Environment (Wales) Act to embed the consideration of biodiversity into its early thinking and business planning, including any policies, plans and projects as well as day to day activities.</p> <p>Each Council function/Service Area should now be considering where and how they can maintain and enhance biodiversity and promote resilience through their service/business plans.</p> <p>The Corporate Biodiversity working group will provide a vehicle for raising awareness and encouraging best practice</p>
<p>New actions following from the recommendation:</p> <p>The Section 6 Plan will become an integral part of any business planning, asset management and/or corporate planning processes, as this will demonstrate how the consideration of biodiversity is being embedded.</p>
<p>Cabinet Member Comments</p> <p>Needs additional officer advice and support</p> <p>Recommendation is AGREED</p>

Recommendation 4
<i>Embed the new corporate priority by developing and delivering relevant training. The Nature Conservation Team could roll out training at the appropriate level and could undertake a service appropriate assessment with ideas and input coming from that service to encourage involvement. (Medium Term)</i>
<p>Relevant Policy Commitments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investing in our people
<p>Action already being undertaken:</p> <p>Biodiversity training for Members/ a limited number of Service Areas</p>
<p>New actions following from the recommendation:</p>

- Identify and address biodiversity training needs for all Service Areas
- Identification of opportunities and actions within each relevant Service Area to maintain and enhance biodiversity
- Identify Service Areas where advisory support could be provided by the Nature Conservation Team
- Development of on and offline training packages
- Development and implementation of a Comms Strategy for biodiversity
- Refresh of Nature Conservation/Biodiversity webpages

Cabinet Member Comments: Whilst the recommendation is fully supported it is not able to be delivered within current resources. It therefore accepted in principle but can only be delivered in full if additional resources are made available within future budget provisions or successful grant applications

Recommendation is **AGREED IN PART**

Recommendation 5

Make information available to the public to encourage participation and understanding, including continuing to develop the Natural Environment web pages e.g. explain why some verges are wild or why projects which have a green aspect are taking place. Public promotion is vital. (Quick Win)

Relevant Policy Commitments:

- Enhance and sustain our parks and natural habitats
- Working with 'friends of parks ' organisations
- Development of Green Infrastructure in our estates

Action already being undertaken:

- Improving awareness and understanding of our natural environment through provision of information, training and events. An annual Environmental Events programme is published which provides details of hundreds of free or low cost environmental events taking place around Swansea
<https://www.swansea.gov.uk/environmentalevents>
- In August 2018, the Nature Conservation Team was awarded two grants from Natural Resources Wales to fund two temporary (18 month) part-time posts: Our Nature Our Schools project officer and a Wildlife Volunteering co-ordinator
- In April 2019 the Council's Nature Conservation Team were successful in securing grants from Welsh Government in partnership with other agencies. These grants will fund 3 part time posts for 3 years: a Nature Partnership Officer, a Place based Project, and a volunteer Co-ordinator. Job descriptions need to be prepared and evaluated for these posts and approval to advertise and appoint obtained

New actions following from the recommendation:

- Provide opportunities for schoolchildren to access and learn about their natural environment (Our Nature Our Future project).
- Engage with local communities to encourage volunteering and to support them taking action to enhance and maintain their local greenspaces and wildlife sites
- Development and implementation of a Comms Strategy for biodiversity
- Refresh of Nature Conservation/Biodiversity webpages
- Develop and publish Programme of Environmental Events

Cabinet Member Comments: Support actions already being undertaken and proposed

Recommendation is **AGREED**

Recommendation 6

Complete and publicise the ward mapping exercise. This would provide each ward and the Councillor Representatives with information specific to that ward. It would include information about important species, protected sites and other relevant ecological information as well as potential opportunities for improving biodiversity within the ward. A link to the ward mapping should appear on planning applications when completed. This would help when it comes to planning applications and empower ward councillors and residents to be able to respond to issues which threaten these special features of their ward and encourage maintenance of biodiversity. It would also contribute to the enforcement activity of the Council. (Long Term)

Relevant Policy Commitments:

- Enhance and sustain our parks and natural habitats
- Development of Green Infrastructure (GI) in our estates
- Ensuring development complies with sustainable development principles
- Develop a natural environment that encourages higher levels of physical activity
- Encourage greater use of public access land for informal recreation

Action already being undertaken:

- ‘Wild about your ward’ profiles drafted for a few pilot wards highlighting ecological information
- Enhancements to greenspace being undertaken as part of an environmental works programme to meet the Council’s commitment to the Welsh Housing Quality Standard
- GI enhancements undertaken as part of a Welsh Government funded multi-GI project with Neath Port Talbot and Bridgend Councils

<p>New actions following from the recommendation:</p> <p>Complete mapping of existing Biodiversity and Green Infrastructure assets and ecosystem service provision on a ward by ward basis working with Members to identify areas which provide the best opportunities for improvement and, where appropriate, maximise match funding opportunities afforded by Members' community fund.</p> <p>In April 2019 the Council was awarded a grant to fund a temporary (3 year) part-time (3 days/week) post to deliver the above project. The post needs to be agreed, advertised and an appointment made.</p>
<p>Cabinet Member Comments: Members are encouraged to support local GI improvement projects through their community budget.</p>
<p>Recommendation is AGREED</p>

<p>Recommendation 7</p>
<p><i>Maintain support for volunteers, Community Councils and groups managing both Council owned and non-Council owned land. There are important areas of natural environment in Swansea that may be managed by trusts or owned privately. The links to these areas need to be maintained to ensure best practice is shared and any relevant information/policy can be applied across Swansea, improving nature-based connectivity overall. (Long Term)</i></p>
<p>Relevant Policy Commitments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance and sustain our parks and natural habitats • Working with 'friends of parks' organisations • Development of Green Infrastructure in our estates
<p>Action already being undertaken:</p> <p>The Scrutiny Inquiry identified that there are currently 3 Council officers supporting 40 sites and 27 'Friends of' groups.</p>
<p>New actions following from the recommendation:</p> <p>See recommendation 5 above. Grant funding for a temporary volunteer coordinator post has been obtained for the next three years. They will assist volunteers, groups and Community Councils to make the work carried out by them more effective and appropriate. They will also recruit, train and engage with new volunteers, for example, through social prescribing, corporate social responsibility, etc</p>
<p>Cabinet Member Comments: Members are encouraged to support volunteer projects in their wards</p>
<p>Recommendation is AGREED</p>

Recommendation 8
<p><i>Insert a relevant biodiversity clause into service level agreements, licences etc which relates to land use and land management and land use and ensure that the importance of these clauses is made clear to the land managers/occupiers and the implications of not meeting them are highlighted.(Quick Win)</i></p>
<p>Relevant Policy Commitments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A joined up approach to public expenditure and more imaginative community use of public assets • Enhance and sustain our parks and natural habitats
<p>Action already being undertaken:</p> <p>As a consequence of discussion of this matter during the Scrutiny inquiry a clause has been inserted into the service level agreement for community groups managing green spaces</p>
<p>New actions following from the recommendation:</p> <p>To work with Estates and other relevant Service Areas to ensure that more detailed and relevant biodiversity clauses are inserted into all service level agreements, licences, etc, which relate to land use and land management. For example, those relating to grazing sites and also in those entered into with external event organisers which require Council consent before certain activities (e.g. clearing land, special events, etc) are undertaken to prevent loss of biodiversity.</p>
<p>Cabinet Member Comments: Support actions already being undertaken and proposed</p>
<p>Recommendation is AGREED</p>

Recommendation 9
<p><i>Assess the verges in Swansea that can stop being mowed and sprayed. Give these over to nature and allow for self-seeding, which will encourage native plants and pollinator species. This can also save money as less frequent mowing is required. There could be signs erected to highlight the project to help change the culture. (Medium Term)</i></p>
<p>Relevant Policy Commitments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A joined up approach to public expenditure and more imaginative community use of public assets • Enhance and sustain our parks and natural habitats
<p>Action already being undertaken:</p> <p>An annual programme of wildflower planting and management within verges.</p>

New actions following from the recommendation:

- To work with Parks, Highways and other relevant Service Areas (e.g. Housing , Education) to identify those locations in Council ownership which can be given over to self-seeding, less intensive mowing and/or seeding with perennial species mixes
- Develop a Comms plan in relation to proposed biodiversity actions.

Cabinet Member Comments: Support actions already being undertaken and proposed

Recommendation is **AGREED**

Recommendation 10

Where appropriate, plant native wildflowers and trees. Non-native species do not benefit pollinators to the same extent as native species. (Long Term)

Relevant Policy Commitments:

- A joined up approach to public expenditure and more imaginative community use of public assets
- Enhance and sustain our parks and natural habitats

Action already being undertaken:

An annual programme of wildflower planting and management within verges which includes non-native species.

Over 5000 native trees planted by Nature Conservation Team.

New actions following from the recommendation:

- Include more native species within wildflower planting programme
- Develop and adopt a Council tree policy which encourages planting of native species trees where appropriate.
- Plans for new tree planting to include native species
- Identification of suitable sites for further woodland planting with support from Trees for Cities
- Investigate additional sources of funding for woodland planting e.g. Glastir and Carbon Credits

Cabinet Member Comments: Support actions already being undertaken and proposed

Recommendation is **AGREED SUBJECT TO ACTIONS BEING CONTAINED WITHIN CURRENT BUDGETS**

Recommendation 11

Encourage green projects for well-being such as gardening projects, outdoor green-space activities and volunteering opportunities for adults and children across all relevant services. This includes linking with

Community Councils. Communities can make use of the 'Community Green Space Toolkit' which can be found online at <http://swanseacommunitygreenspaces.weebly.com> (Long Term)

Relevant Policy Commitments:

- Enhance and sustain our parks and natural habitats
- Working with 'friends of parks' organisations
- Development of Green Infrastructure in our estates
- Promote greater use of allotment and garden sharing

Action already being undertaken:

Swansea Environmental Forum and Swansea Council for Voluntary Services' Swansea Community Green Spaces project helps people make greater use of green spaces within their communities and become more involved in how they are managed.

Nature Conservation Team Wildlife Volunteer Co-ordinator project.

New actions following from the recommendation:

See recommendation 5 above. Grant funding for a temporary volunteer coordinator post and a Place based project officer and a Nature Recovery Project Officer has been obtained for the next three years. They will liaise with all relevant Service Areas, Ward members and external organisations such as community councils to encourage and provide volunteering opportunities for adults and children.

Cabinet Member Comments: Support actions already being undertaken and proposed

Recommendation is **AGREED**

Recommendation 12

Employ a Section 6 Officer to co-ordinate, support and promote the consideration and delivery of a range of environmental projects across Swansea and also ensure the Council are meeting the requirements of the Environment Act (Section 6). This includes the development of a Corporate Natural Environment Working Group. This should stop us breaching the legislation and potentially facing fines/restricted grant access/reputational damage. (Quick Win)

Relevant Policy Commitments:

- Working in partnership to explore collaborative and innovative ways in which services can be financed and delivered
- Enhance and sustain our parks and natural habitats
- Protecting Swansea's unique natural and built environment

<p>Action already being undertaken:</p> <p>The Council does not currently have a Section 6 officer. An officer fulfilling a similar role in a temporary grant funded post left the Council in March 2019 when the grant funding ended. Requests to Welsh Government for further funding for a Section 6 officer post have been declined.</p>
<p>New actions following from the recommendation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See recommendation 1 above. A Corporate Biodiversity Working Group is in the process of being set up. Part of the ongoing work of the group would be to identify additional or reallocation of resources to meet the Council's Section 6 duties, although this is expected to be a medium to longer term solution rather than a quick win. • See recommendations 5 and 6 above. Provided appointments are made to these three temporary posts they will fulfil a few, but by no means all, of the duties that a Section 6 officer would be expected to undertake.
<p>Cabinet Member Comments: The need for a Section 6 officer is recognised and notwithstanding the recommendation response below it is expected that all possible funding streams for creation of this post will continue to be explored.</p>
<p>Recommendation is NOT AGREED</p>

<p>Recommendation 13</p>
<p><i>Employ an additional Planning Ecologist/Ecological Enforcement Officer to work with Council services with a specific duty to help ensure the environmental conditions and section 106 obligations on planning consents are met, whilst also contributing to maintaining biodiversity, and meeting the requirements of the new Sustainable Drainage System (SUDs) legislation. (Quick Win)</i></p>
<p>Relevant Policy Commitments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protecting Swansea's unique natural and built environment
<p>Action already being undertaken:</p> <p>The Council currently has one (0.8) Planning Ecologist post. An additional grant funded (0.5) temporary Planning Ecologist position expired April 2019. Welsh Government/NRW have confirmed that there is no funding to renew this position and that monies cannot be diverted from other grants to fund such a post.</p>
<p>New actions following from the recommendation:</p> <p>There is currently no direct funding available to appoint an additional full/part time Planning Ecologist (Quick win).</p>

However roles and responsibilities will be reviewed when posts become vacant within the Planning and City Regeneration Service. In addition a review of budget is taking place where current external advice is being sought to see if this can be redirected accordingly on a full cost recovery through charging basis (see recommendations 14 & 15 below)

To be effective and have the capacity to ensure the increasing number of environmental conditions on planning applications, etc, plus the requirements of the new SUDs legislation are met the post needs to be a full-time position.

Cabinet Member Comments: The need for an additional Planning Ecologist post is recognised and notwithstanding the recommendation response below it is expected that all possible funding streams for creation of this post will continue to be explored as a matter of urgency.

Recommendation is **NOT AGREED**

Recommendation 14

Share natural environment and biodiversity costs across services. Much of the work completed in relation to biodiversity is funded by a single team's budget with significant external funding/grant aid. Considering both the Council as a whole, and certain specific services, benefit from a thriving environment, it seems appropriate that other services should be contributing financially to this work. (Long Term)

Relevant Policy Commitments:

- Working in partnership to explore collaborative and innovative ways in which services can be financed and delivered

Action already being undertaken:

Some major developments have been approved subject to Section 106 agreements providing financial contributions towards practical on/off site mitigation and/or compensation measures against biodiversity loss and also in support of maintenance agreements.

See also response to recommendation 15 below

New actions following from the recommendation:

It is proposed that the Corporate Biodiversity Working Group carry out a review of how Service Areas have been impacted by the Environment (Wales) Act, Section 6 Biodiversity duty and Well-Being of Future Generations Act Resilient Wales goal and identify the additional demands arising in terms of provision of ecological/biodiversity advice. This should be taken into consideration as part of any Department/Service budget review particularly in regard to externally commissioned advice.

Cabinet Member Comments: Support actions already being undertaken and proposed within department/service

Recommendation is **PARTLY AGREED**

Recommendation 15

Renew the South East Wales Biodiversity Records Centre (SEWBReC) service level agreement for 2019/20 (with a plan in place to achieve this in subsequent years) the approximate cost is between £8,000 and £10,000 per annum. The relevant departments (Development Management, Highways, Corporate Buildings and Corporate Property) should be contributing to the costs of accessing this information, using this resource regularly and, where necessary, asking the Council's ecologists to interpret the data. (Quick Win)

Relevant Policy Commitments:

- Working in partnership to explore collaborative and innovative ways in which services can be financed and delivered

Action already being undertaken:

The cost of the SEWBReC Service Level Agreement (SLA) is currently taken from the Nature Conservation Team's budget, however there is no budget allocated for this purpose. The SLA has been previously funded through grant aid, but this is no longer available.

Some Service Areas are carrying out projects, asset disposal, etc without reference to SEWBReC/relevant ecological records which has the potential to result in outcomes that are in breach of the Council's Section 6 duty.

New actions following from the recommendation:

It is proposed that the Corporate Biodiversity Working Group carry out a review of which Service Areas benefit from the SEWBReC data and if the arrangement continues to prove value for money review how this agreement is funded in line with the various recommendations above.

Cabinet Member Comments: Support actions already being undertaken and proposed

Recommendation is **AGREED**

Recommendation 16

Continue to nurture good working relationships with external agencies and encourage other services to do the same. This should not be limited to national organisations but should also include local ones such as Swansea Environmental Forum, the Swansea Biodiversity Partnership and the Swansea Environment Centre. (Long Term)

Relevant Policy Commitments:

- Working in partnership to explore collaborative and innovative ways in which services can be financed and delivered
- Working in partnership with public and private sector partners to develop green infrastructure in our buildings and estates

Action already being undertaken:

The Council's Nature Conservation Team already has excellent working relationships with all relevant external agencies both national and local, and play a key role in supporting a number of partnerships e.g. Local Nature Partnership (LNP) and Swansea Environmental Forum

New actions following from the recommendation:

Existing external working relationships/ networking to be further developed to include other Service Areas through training, shared knowledge /good practice at Corporate Biodiversity Working Group meetings, etc.

New Temporary part time LNP officer to be appointed with Welsh Government funding.

Cabinet Member Comments: Support actions already being undertaken and proposed

Recommendation is **AGREED**

Recommendation 17

Invite environmental voluntary groups and Community Council representatives to regular liaison meetings e.g. Friends of parks and wildlife sites. This would allow them some support and access to specialist advice from relevant officers (e.g. Parks Team, Nature Conservation Team, Education Link Officer), whilst allowing them a forum to discuss concerns and success. The loss of these groups would have a severely detrimental impact on the management of Council land and finances, so there needs to be ongoing and meaningful engagement and support from the Council. (Medium Term)

Relevant Policy Commitments:

- Working with 'friends of parks' organisations
- Working in partnership to explore collaborative and innovative ways in which services can be financed and delivered

Action already being undertaken:

The Scrutiny Inquiry identified that there are currently 3 Council officers supporting 40 sites and 27 'Friends of' groups.

New actions following from the recommendation:

See recommendation 5 above. Grant funding for a temporary volunteer coordinator post has been obtained for the next three years. They will regularly meet with external organisations such as environmental voluntary groups and Community Councils and enable them to access support and specialist advice from various Council services.

Cabinet Member Comments: Support actions already being undertaken and proposed

Recommendation is **AGREED**

Recommendation 18

Create environmental link Councillor Governors on school governing bodies who can take relevant information and projects to their school. They can also report back on a school's activities and this can be used to contribute to the 3 yearly section 6 report to Welsh Government on the Council's performance. (Medium Term)

Relevant Policy Commitments:

- Ensuring schools are accessible and available for community activities
- Encouraging schools to provide a safe and supportive environment

Action already being undertaken:

None

New actions following from the recommendation:

It is proposed that the Nature Conservation Team liaise with the School and Governor Unit to ensure that all governing bodies appoint an environmental link governor. It is expected that these will primarily be local ward Members given the synergy with recommendation 6. The ward mapping exercise will include school grounds within the assessment of opportunities for improvement and it also supports the policy commitment to make schools more accessible and available for community activities.

Cabinet Member Comments: Support actions already being undertaken and proposed

Recommendation is **AGREED**

Recommendation 19

Encourage better use of school grounds and local wildlife sites for biodiversity. For example, gardens, growing schemes, tree planting, wildlife ponds and habitat creation. This can be done by linking in with relevant organisations such as RSPB and sharing good practice with schools who are already doing such activities. 'Making the Most of School Grounds' guidance booklet. (Long Term)

<p>Relevant Policy Commitments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring schools are accessible and available for community activities • Promoting schools as a resource for the whole community • Encouraging schools to provide a safe and supportive environment
<p>Action already being undertaken:</p> <p>Improving awareness and understanding of our natural environment through provision of information, training and events. An annual Environmental Events programme is published which provides details of hundreds of free or low cost environmental events taking place around Swansea https://www.swansea.gov.uk/environmentalevents</p> <p>Our Nature Our Schools project which runs until December 2019 connecting schools to local Wildlife Sites and supporting school grounds environmental improvements.</p>
<p>New actions following from the recommendation:</p> <p>As recommendations 5, 6 and 18 above.</p>
<p>Cabinet Member Comments: Support actions already being undertaken and proposed</p>
<p>Recommendation is AGREED</p>

<p>Recommendation 20</p> <p><i>Employ a dedicated outdoor learning officer who can provide the tailored support, training and delivery that will enable Swansea schools to fully realise the potential of outdoor learning, to deliver educational and wellbeing benefits, from the varied natural resources which Swansea possesses. (Medium Term)</i></p>
<p>Relevant Policy Commitments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring schools are accessible and available for community activities • Promoting schools as a resource for the whole community • Encouraging schools to provide a safe and supportive environment
<p>Action already being undertaken:</p> <p>Improving awareness and understanding of our natural environment through provision of information, training and events. An annual Environmental Events programme is published which provides details of hundreds of free or low cost environmental events taking place around Swansea https://www.swansea.gov.uk/environmentalevents</p> <p>The Nature Conservation Team also employs a part-time project officer at the Bishops Wood Local Nature Reserve who delivers at this location low-cost training for schools within Swansea and wider afield.</p>

Our Nature our Schools project which runs until December 2019 connecting schools to local Wildlife Sites and supporting school grounds environmental improvements.
New actions following from the recommendation:
See recommendation 5 above.
Cabinet Member Comments: Support actions already being undertaken and proposed
Recommendation is AGREED

2.1 An action plan for the agreed recommendations is attached as **Appendix B**.

3.0 Equality and Engagement Implications

3.1 The Council is subject to the Public Sector Equality Duty (Wales) 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 Act.
- 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.

Our Equality Impact Assessment process ensures that we have paid due regard to the above.

3.2 The Scrutiny Inquiry considered which groups might be particularly affected and how they might be engaged with. As a result a blog and survey was published asking for feedback and ensured that this was available in alternative formats; this was sent to forums that represent people with protected characteristics.

4.0 Legal Implications

4.1 There are no legal implications associated with this report. All Council departments and service areas have a duty to maintain and enhance the natural environment and biodiversity within the County in order to meet the Council's duties under the Well-being of Future Generations Act and the Environment (Wales) Act. Welsh Government guidance recommends that Local Authorities must have sufficient ecological expertise to meet their Biodiversity duties under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006.

5.0 Financial Implications

5.1 There are no additional financial implications associated with this report as only recommendations that can be supported within existing budgets are recommended for approval. Any further budget amendments linked to

the recommendations or additional grant funding opportunities would be in accordance with the relevant grants and FPR requirements at that time. The three temporary posts identified are 100% externally grant funded and any actions linked to grants would have to be reviewed if those sources of grants were to end.

Background Papers:

None

Appendices

Appendix A – Original Scrutiny Report

<https://democracy.swansea.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=124&MId=7946&Ver=4&LLL=0>

Appendix B – Proposed Cabinet Action Plan

Scrutiny Inquiry into the Natural Environment – Cabinet Action Plan

Recommendation	Action already being undertaken	New Action Proposed	Timescale	Responsible Officer	
<p>1.</p>	<p>Development and implementation of a Corporate Biodiversity Action Plan to take this forward (Medium Term)</p>	<p>To ensure compliance with the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 - Part 1, Section 6 Biodiversity and Resilience of Ecosystems Duty (Section 6 Duty), the Council must prepare and submit to Welsh Government by the end of 2019 a report (Corporate Biodiversity (Section 6) Action Plan) outlining what it has done to comply with the duty and then provide a progress update every three years after this date. A draft Action Plan is currently being prepared.</p> <p>In October 2018 the Council adopted an additional corporate well-being objective “to maintain and enhance Swansea’s Natural Resources and Biodiversity”</p> <p>Initial actions/steps have been identified with reference to this objective</p>	<p>It is proposed that progress on meeting the corporate biodiversity objective actions could be monitored and reported on a quarterly basis by means of the establishment of a Corporate Biodiversity Working Group. This Group would more effectively support and encourage all Service Areas to take ownership of Section 6 duties.</p> <p>The Group would comprise representatives from all relevant service areas and be chaired at a senior level. Proposed terms of reference have been drafted and a first meeting is planned for June 2019.</p> <p>Under the new business planning and reporting regime, all Service Areas will be required to report on progress made and planned future actions to meet the new Corporate priority for the Natural Environment and biodiversity</p>	<p>June 2019 (Corporate Working Group to meet) and quarterly thereafter</p> <p>Dec 2019 Action Plan submission and review every three years</p>	<p>Paul Meller/ Deb Hill</p>

2.	<p>Ensure the Action Plan links with other relevant cross organisational policies at a strategic level, for example, the Local Well-being Plan and Area Statements (Medium Term)</p>	<p>The Action Plan under preparation involves collaboration with other Public Service Board (PSB) partners to deliver actions which contribute to achieving the PSB Well-being Plan Working with Nature priority. It also provides a more integrated approach that will contribute to the delivery of the other corporate wellbeing goals.</p> <p>Inclusion of the Corporate Biodiversity Objective and actions arising within Service/Business Plans.</p> <p>Nature Conservation Team represented on PSB Working with Nature Group and leading on the development of the Local Nature Recovery Plan and supporting the Local Nature Partnership.</p> <p>Working with Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and drawing upon Area Statement evidence base, to promote the sustainable management of natural resources at the local level, enabling joined-up collective action and identification of innovative new solutions, for example the City Centre Green Infrastructure Strategy.</p>	<p>Establishment of a Corporate Biodiversity Working Group that will explore further opportunities for collaborative cross-service and external partnership initiatives /projects that deliver multiple benefits across the well-being goals.</p> <p>Nature Conservation Team participation in the PSB Working With Nature working group.</p>	<p>June 2019 (Corporate Working Group to meet) and quarterly thereafter</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Paul Meller/ Deb Hill</p>
3.	<p>Develop a clear and enthusiastic vision and message for maintaining and enhancing biodiversity to ensure a consistent 'buy-in' from each service (Quick Win)</p>	<p>The Council has a duty under the Environment (Wales) Act to embed the consideration of biodiversity into its early thinking and business planning, including any policies, plans and projects as well as day to day activities.</p>	<p>The Section 6 Plan will become an integral part of any business planning, asset management and/or corporate planning processes, as this will demonstrate how the</p>	<p>March/April annually - Annual Service Plans</p>	<p>Heads of Service</p>

		<p>Each Council function/Service Area should now be considering where and how they can maintain and enhance biodiversity and promote resilience through their service/business plans.</p> <p>The Corporate Biodiversity working group will provide a vehicle for raising awareness and encouraging best practice</p>	consideration of biodiversity is being embedded.		
4.	Embed the new corporate priority by developing and delivering relevant training. The Nature Conservation Team could roll out training at the appropriate level and could undertake a service appropriate assessment with ideas and input coming from that service to encourage involvement. (Medium Term)	Biodiversity training for Members/ a limited number of Service Areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify and address biodiversity training needs for all Service Areas Identification of opportunities and actions within each relevant Service Area to maintain and enhance biodiversity Identify Service Areas where advisory support could be provided by the Nature Conservation Team Development of on and offline training packages Development and implementation of a Comms Strategy for biodiversity 	Ongoing Comms Strategy – Summer 2019	Paul Meller/ Deb Hill
5.	Make information available to the public to encourage participation and understanding, including continuing to develop the Natural Environment web pages e.g. explain why some verges are wild or why projects which have a green aspect are taking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improving awareness and understanding of our natural environment through provision of information, training and events. An annual Environmental Events programme is published which provides details of hundreds of 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide opportunities for schoolchildren to access and learn about their natural environment (Our Nature Our Future project). Engage with local communities to encourage 	Dec 2019 (Our Nature Our Future) Comms Strategy – Summer 2019	Deb Hill/ Penny Gruffydd

	<p>place. Public promotion is vital. (Quick Win)</p>	<p>free or low cost environmental events taking place around Swansea https://www.swansea.gov.uk/environmentalevents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In August 2018, the Nature Conservation Team was awarded two grants from Natural Resources Wales to fund two temporary (18 month) part-time posts: Our Nature Our Schools project officer and a Wildlife Volunteering co-ordinator • In April 2019 the Council's Nature Conservation Team were successful in securing grants from Welsh Government in partnership with other agencies. These grants will fund 3 part time posts for 3 years: a Nature Partnership Officer, a Place based Project, and a volunteer Co-ordinator. Job descriptions need to be prepared and evaluated for these posts and approval to advertise and appoint obtained 	<p>volunteering and to support them taking action to enhance and maintain their local greenspaces and wildlife sites</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development and implementation of a Comms Strategy for biodiversity • Refresh of Nature Conservation/Biodiversity webpages • Develop and publish Programme of Environmental Events 	<p>Webpages update (Dec 2019)</p> <p>Programme of Events (March annually)</p> <p>March 2022 (3 grant funded projects)</p>	<p>Project Officers (to be appointed)</p>
<p>6.</p>	<p>Complete and publicise the ward mapping exercise. This would provide each ward and the Councillor Representatives with information specific to that ward. It would include information about important species, protected sites and other relevant ecological information as well as potential opportunities for improving biodiversity within the ward. A link to the ward mapping should appear on planning applications when</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Wild about your ward' profiles drafted for a few pilot wards highlighting ecological information • Enhancements to greenspace being undertaken as part of an environmental works programme to meet the Council's commitment to the Welsh Housing Quality Standard 	<p>Complete mapping of existing Biodiversity and Green Infrastructure assets and ecosystem service provision on a ward by ward basis working with Members to identify areas which provide the best opportunities for improvement and, where appropriate, maximise match funding opportunities afforded by Members' community fund.</p>	<p>March 2022</p>	<p>Project Officer</p>

	<p>completed. This would help when it comes to planning applications and empower ward councillors and residents to be able to respond to issues which threaten these special features of their ward and encourage maintenance of biodiversity. It would also contribute to the enforcement activity of the Council. (Long Term)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> GI enhancements undertaken as part of a Welsh Government funded multi-GI project with Neath Port Talbot and Bridgend Councils 	<p>In April 2019 the Council was awarded a grant to fund a temporary (3 year) part-time (3 days/week) post to deliver the above project. The post needs to be agreed, advertised and an appointment made.</p>		
7.	<p>Maintain support for volunteers, Community Councils and groups managing both Council owned and non-Council owned land. There are important areas of natural environment in Swansea that may be managed by trusts or owned privately. The links to these areas need to be maintained to ensure best practice is shared and any relevant information/policy can be applied across Swansea, improving nature-based connectivity overall. (Long Term)</p>	<p>The Scrutiny Inquiry identified that there are currently 3 Council officers supporting 40 sites and 27 'Friends of' groups.</p>	<p>See recommendation 5 above. Grant funding for a temporary volunteer coordinator post has been obtained for the next three years. They will assist volunteers, groups and Community Councils to make the work carried out by them more effective and appropriate. They will also recruit, train and engage with new volunteers, for example, through social prescribing, corporate social responsibility, etc.</p>	<p>March 2022</p>	<p>Project Officer</p>
8.	<p>Insert a relevant biodiversity clause into service level agreements, licences etc which relates to land use and land management and land use and ensure that the importance of these clauses is made clear to the land managers/occupiers and the implications of not meeting them are highlighted.(Quick Win)</p>	<p>As a consequence of discussion of this matter during the Scrutiny inquiry a clause has been inserted into the service level agreement for community groups managing green spaces</p>	<p>To work with Estates and other relevant Service Areas to ensure that more detailed and relevant biodiversity clauses are inserted into all service level agreements, licences, etc, which relate to land use and land management. For example, those relating to grazing sites and also in those entered into with external event organisers which require Council consent before certain activities (e.g. clearing land, special events, etc) are</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Deb Hill/Judith Oakley</p>

			undertaken to prevent loss of biodiversity.		
9.	Assess the verges in Swansea that can stop being mowed and sprayed. Give these over to nature and allow for self-seeding, which will encourage native plants and pollinator species. This can also save money as less frequent mowing is required. There could be signs erected to highlight the project to help change the culture. (Medium Term)	An annual programme of wildflower planting and management within verges.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To work with Parks, Highways and other relevant Service Areas (e.g. Housing , Education) to identify those locations in Council ownership which can be given over to self-seeding, less intensive mowing and/or seeding with perennial species mixes Develop a Comms plan in relation to proposed biodiversity actions. 	March 2020 Comms Strategy – Summer 2019	Deb Hill/Judith Oakley
10.	Where appropriate, plant native wildflowers and trees. Non-native species do not benefit pollinators to the same extent as native species. (Long Term)	An annual programme of wildflower planting and management within verges which includes non-native species. Over 5000 native trees planted by Nature Conservation Team.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Include more native species within wildflower planting programme Develop and adopt a Council tree policy which encourages planting of native species trees where appropriate. Plans for new tree planting to include native species Identification of suitable sites for further woodland planting with support from Trees for Cities Investigate additional sources of funding for woodland planting e.g. Glastir and Carbon Credits 	Ongoing	Paul Meller/ Deb Hill

11.	<p>Encourage green projects for well-being such as gardening projects, outdoor green-space activities and volunteering opportunities for adults and children across all relevant services. This includes linking with Community Councils. Communities can make use of the 'Community Green Space Toolkit' which can be found online at http://swanseacommunitygreenspaces.weebly.com (Long Term)</p>	<p>Swansea Environmental Forum and Swansea Council for Voluntary Services' Swansea Community Green Spaces project helps people make greater use of green spaces within their communities and become more involved in how they are managed.</p> <p>Nature Conservation Team Wildlife Volunteer Co-ordinator project.</p>	<p>See recommendation 5 above. Grant funding for a temporary volunteer coordinator post and a Place based project officer and a Nature Recovery Project Officer has been obtained for the next three years. They will liaise with all relevant Service Areas, Ward members and external organisations such as community councils to encourage and provide volunteering opportunities for adults and children.</p>	March 2022	Project Officer
12.	<p>Employ a Section 6 Officer to coordinate, support and promote the consideration and delivery of a range of environmental projects across Swansea and also ensure the Council are meeting the requirements of the Environment Act (Section 6). This includes the development of a Corporate Natural Environment Working Group. This should stop us breaching the legislation and potentially facing fines/restricted grant access/reputational damage. (Quick Win)</p>	Not Agreed			
13.	<p>Employ an additional Planning Ecologist/Ecological Enforcement Officer to work with Council services with a specific duty to help ensure the environmental conditions and section 106 obligations on planning consents are met, whilst also contributing to maintaining biodiversity, and meeting the requirements of the new Sustainable Drainage System legislation. (Quick Win)</p>	Not Agreed			

14.	<p>Share natural environment and biodiversity costs across services. Much of the work completed in relation to biodiversity is funded by a single team's budget. Considering both the Council as a whole, and certain specific services, benefit from a thriving environment, it seems appropriate that other services should be contributing financially to this work. (Long Term)</p>	<p>Some major developments have been approved subject to Section 106 agreements providing financial contributions towards practical on/off site mitigation and/or compensation measures against biodiversity loss and also in support of maintenance agreements.</p> <p>See also response to recommendation 15 below</p>	<p>It is proposed that the Corporate Biodiversity Working Group carry out a review of how Service Areas have been impacted by the Environment (Wales) Act, Section 6 Biodiversity duty and Well-Being of Future Generations Act Resilient Wales goal and identify the additional demands arising in terms of provision of ecological/biodiversity advice. This should be taken into consideration as part of any Department/Service budget reappropriation exercise.</p>	March 2020	Paul Meller/ Deb Hill
15.	<p>Renew the South East Wales Biodiversity Records Centre (SEWBRc) service level agreement for 2019/20 (with a plan in place to achieve this in subsequent years) the approximate cost is between £8,000 and £10,000 per annum. The relevant departments (Development Management, Highways, Corporate Buildings and Corporate Property) should be contributing to the costs of accessing this information, using this resource regularly and, where necessary, asking the Council's ecologists to interpret the data. (Quick Win)</p>	<p>The cost of the SEWBRc Service Level Agreement (SLA) is currently taken from the Nature Conservation Team's budget, however there is no budget allocated for this purpose. The SLA has been previously funded through grant aid, but this is no longer available.</p> <p>Some Service Areas are carrying out projects, asset disposal, etc without reference to SEWBRc/relevant ecological records which has the potential to result in outcomes that are in breach of the Council's Section 6 duty.</p>	<p>It is proposed that the Corporate Biodiversity Working Group carry out a review of which Service Areas benefit from the SEWBRc data and also those which should be utilising it prior to commencement of any regeneration projects/asset disposal and apportion costs accordingly.</p>	March 2020	Paul Meller/ Deb Hill
16.	<p><i>Continue to nurture good working relationships with external agencies and encourage other services to do the same. This should not be limited to national organisations but should also include local ones such as Swansea Environmental Forum, the</i></p>	<p>The Council's Nature Conservation Team already has excellent working relationships with all relevant external agencies both national and local, and play a key role in supporting a number of partnerships e.g. Local Nature</p>	<p>Existing external working relationships/ networking to be further developed to include other Service Areas through training, shared knowledge /good practice at Corporate</p>	Ongoing	Paul Meller/ Deb Hill

	Swansea Biodiversity Partnership and the Swansea Environment Centre. (Long Term)	Partnership (LNP) and Swansea Environmental Forum	Biodiversity Working Group meetings, etc. New Temporary part time LNP officer to be appointed with Welsh Government funding.		
17.	Invite environmental voluntary group and Community Council representatives to regular liaison meetings e.g. Friends of parks and wildlife sites. This would allow them some support and access to some specialist advice from relevant officers (e.g. Parks Team, Nature Conservation Team, Education Link Officer), whilst allowing them a forum to discuss concerns and success. The loss of these groups would have a severely detrimental impact on the management of Council land and finances, so there needs to be ongoing and meaningful engagement and support from the Council. (Medium Term)	The Scrutiny Inquiry identified that there are currently 3 Council officers supporting 40 sites and 27 'Friends of' groups.	See recommendation 5 above. Grant funding for a temporary volunteer coordinator post has been obtained for the next three years. They will regularly meet with external organisations such as environmental voluntary groups and Community Councils and enable them to access support and specialist advice from various Council services.	March 2022	Project Officer
18.	Create environmental link Governors on school governing bodies who can take relevant information and projects to their school. They can also report back on a school's activities and this can be used to contribute to the 3 yearly section 6 report to Welsh Government on the Council's performance. (Medium Term)	None	It is proposed that the Nature Conservation Team liaise with the School and Governor Unit to ensure that all governing bodies appoint an environmental link governor. It is expected that these will primarily be local ward Members given the synergy with recommendation 6. The ward mapping exercise will include school grounds within the assessment of opportunities for improvement and it also supports the policy commitment to make schools	Dec 2019 (Governor appointment) March 2022 (Mapping exercise)	Paul Meller/Penny Gruffydd/ Deb Hill Project Officer

			more accessible and available for community activities.		
19.	Encourage better use of school grounds and local wildlife sites for biodiversity. For example, gardens, growing schemes, tree planting, wildlife ponds and habitat creation. This can be done by linking in with relevant organisations such as RSPB and sharing good practice with schools who are already doing such activities. 'Making the Most of School Grounds' guidance booklet. (Long Term)	<p>Improving awareness and understanding of our natural environment through provision of information, training and events. An annual Environmental Events programme is published which provides details of hundreds of free or low cost environmental events taking place around Swansea https://www.swansea.gov.uk/environmentalevents</p> <p>Our Nature Our Schools project which runs until December 2019 connecting schools to local Wildlife Sites and supporting school grounds environmental improvements.</p>	As recommendations 5,6 and 18 above	<p>Dec 2019 (Our Nature Our Schools and Governor appointment)</p> <p>March 2022 (Mapping exercise)</p>	<p>Paul Meller/Penny Gruffydd Deb Hill</p> <p>Project Officer</p>
20.	Employ a dedicated outdoor learning officer who can provide the tailored support, training and delivery that will enable Swansea schools to fully realise the potential of outdoor learning, to deliver educational and wellbeing benefits, from the varied natural resources which Swansea possesses. (Medium Term)	<p>Improving awareness and understanding of our natural environment through provision of information, training and events. An annual Environmental Events programme is published which provides details of hundreds of free or low cost environmental events taking place around Swansea https://www.swansea.gov.uk/environmentalevents</p> <p>The Nature Conservation Team also employs a part-time project officer at the Bishops Wood Local Nature Reserve who delivers at this location low-cost training for schools within Swansea and wider afield.</p>	See recommendation 5 above. Grant funding for an Our Nature Our Future school project officer has been obtained for the next three years. They will liaise with Swansea schools within more deprived wards to realise the potential of outdoor learning.	Dec 2019	Deb Hill/Penny Gruffydd

		Our Nature Our Schools project which runs until December 2019 connecting schools to local Wildlife Sites and supporting school grounds environmental improvements.			
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