



City and County of Swansea

Minutes of the **Scrutiny Performance Panel - Natural Environment**

Remotely via Microsoft Teams

Wednesday, 6 October 2021 at 10.00 am

Present: Councillor P K Jones (Chair) Presided

Councillor(s)
E W Fitzgerald
O G James
I E Mann

Councillor(s)
S J Gallagher
M H Jones
H M Morris

Councillor(s)
M Sherwood
H Lawson
C Richards

Other Attendees

Deborah Hill	Nature Conservation Team Leader
Sarah Bennett	Natural Resources Wales
Hamish Osborn	Natural Resources Wales
Emily-Jayne Davies	Scrutiny Officer
Sam Naylor	Pollution Control Officer
Stuart Davies	Head of Highways & Transportation
Paula Livingstone	Divisional EHO, Pollution Control and Private Sector Housing
Tom Price	Team Leader - Pollution Control
Mike Sweeney	Principal Engineer
Mark Wade	Head of Housing & Public Health
David Hopkins	Cabinet Member - Delivery & Operations (Deputy Leader)
Mark Thomas	Cabinet Member - Environment Enhancement & Infrastructure Management

Apologies for Absence

Councillor(s): J A Hale, B J Rowlands, W G Thomas and L J Tyler-Lloyd

59 Disclosure of Personal and Prejudicial Interests

In accordance with the Code of Conduct adopted by the City and County of Swansea, no interests were declared.

60 Prohibition of Whipped Votes and Declaration of Party Whips

In accordance with the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011, no declarations of Whipped Votes or Party Whips were declared.

61 Minutes of Previous Meeting(s)

The minutes of the Natural Environment Scrutiny Performance Panel meeting, held on 26 August 2021, were agreed as an accurate record.

62 Public Questions

There were no public questions.

63 Water Pollution

The Panel received an update from Cllr David Hopkins, Cabinet Member for Delivery & Operations, and Tom Price, Team Leader Pollution Control, regarding the Council's management of water pollution. Mark Wade, Head of Housing and Public Health, Paula Livingstone, Divisional EHO, and Sam Naylor, Pollution Control Officer, also attended to aid discussions on this topic.

In addition, Sarah Bennett and Hamish Osborn attended on behalf of Natural Resources Wales, to provide further information to the Panel.

Discussion focussed on:

- Joint approach and good working relationship between Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and Swansea City Council (SCC).
- Eight designated bathing water areas in Swansea. Samples are taken throughout the bathing season (May-September) giving results to enable classification of excellent, good, insufficient and poor.
- Swansea Council is the owner of Swansea Bay and therefore Beach Manager. Swansea Bay has been designated as *good*, the remaining seven areas designated as *excellent*.
- Abnormal situation recently highlighted in media, focused on River Tawe, which came about via sewage entering the River. Levels were significant enough to take a precautionary approach, recommending against bathing at that time. Welsh Water started tracing the pollution to a collapsed sewer entering a surface water drain. Problem now rectified.
- Provision in regulations that allows reaction to circumstances that may impact upon water quality, for example informing public about recommendations not to bathe during times of pollution.
- Some concern over recreational use of the River Tawe during such incidents, signage erected to inform public to avoid recreational use.
- 2011 collaborative project: SCC undertook an intensive water sampling survey. The result was a computational model to predict water quality on an hourly basis at Swansea Bay. This model initially ran as a manual input; now automated robotisation process linked with signage and Twitter.
- SCC – Non-designated beaches also sampled at Rhossili and Broughton Bay. Main influence here is the estuary and livestock run off.
- Media coverage recently has highlighted discharge into beaches, i.e emergency discharge events. The system is designed to have an emergency overflow, allowing for surface water run-off / storm discharge.

- Effect of climate change on intensifying rain events will impact upon storm overflow incidents. NRW have worked to significantly reduce the number of such events, although this is an ongoing challenge.
- NRW / SCC joint approach – the Council operates a 24hr service for emergency call out, such as the Llangennech Rail incident in 2020, maintaining presence in tactical command group, and responses such as shellfish sampling and recovery plans.
- Septic tanks / cesspits - an NRW regulated process. Private sewage discharge requires permit or exemption. Swansea has a significant number of septic tanks. NRW deal with environmental impacts, and SCC deals with the public health aspect.
- The Panel queried allowing new build properties to have septic tanks, especially located within clay soil and therefore affecting the process of percolation and resulting in increased levels of run-off.
- Officers highlighted the aeration system on the River Tawe, active during summer months, where the salt water overtops the barrage. The saline wedge can have an effect on river life, so the system acts to mix fine bubbles of air into the water column. SCC monitors salinity and once every two years carries out a dredge of the navigable channel.
- Private Water Supplies Regulations – over 125 suppliers in Swansea, of which eight - nine are 'Category 9', are tested more frequently. Risk assessment approach in place, enabling action to be taken if drinking water is affected at point of consumption.
- SCC also monitor swimming pool water.
- Panel Members questioned the frequency of storm drain events affecting the River Tawe.
- Members queried the bathing season duration (May-September) and whether the duration of this season should be extended. Officers highlighted that this season was designated under statutory regulations.
- EU revised the bathing water regulations - NRW and Welsh Water had to work to improve water quality in Swansea Bay, reducing storm discharges.
- The River Tawe has no current designation as a 'bathing water' and therefore no account taken of bacterial standards in the water. There is currently no 'recreational water' standard for non-bathing water.
- Members commented on the odour around the Port-Tennant treatment works. Officers confirmed that discussions are on-going with regard to future intentions. Officers undertook to circulate the link to an e-diary to log such comments.
- The Panel also raised the issue of residential front gardens being converted into hard standings, acting to increase surface run-off. Officers commented that any new builds over 100 sq/m require sustainable drainage systems to be implemented. New features are often incorporated to aid drainage through permeable surfaces.
- Members raised concerns over urban areas and surface water run-off, citing the Sandfields area as an example. Officers also highlighted that this particular area accepts run-off from higher ground. Officers explained that good gully maintenance would help alleviate this issue.
- These points about surface run-off and the impact upon water pollution / drainage systems are also relevant in the context of the following item – Flood Risk Management.

- Officers commented on the excellent working relationship between NRW and SCC and praised the teams involved in this area of work.

64 Local Flood Risk Management

The Panel received an update from Cllr Mark Thomas, Cabinet Member for Environment Enhancement & Infrastructure Management, and Mike Sweeney, Team Leader, Highways and Transportation. Stuart Davies, Head of Highways and Transportation also attended to aid discussions on this topic.

Discussion focussed on:

- Cllr Thomas acknowledged that this issue can affect all wards at some point, highlighting that the Council is heavily reliant on Welsh Government funding to manage this issue.
- Sandbags – sometimes difficult to utilise resources to deliver sandbags to effected areas during times of crisis/emergency flooding, when resources are being directed to immediately deal with the flooding situation.
- Procurement process ongoing to add new gully maintenance vehicles.
- Preventative measures continue to be developed to mitigate flood risk.
- Officers are creating a new initiative for a reactive gully crew, aiming to quickly respond to individual flood incidents.
- Extra staff may also be on hand to deliver sandbags and to support critical culverts.
- Members commented on Paragraph 4.1 of the report, regarding two full time vacancies and the impact of these vacant positions. Officers acknowledged that recruitment of technical staff was a challenge.
- Officers reiterated that the intensity of rainfall and downpours means there would be occasions where the current drainage system will become overwhelmed. Accommodating extreme rainfall periods will be a challenge.
- Members commented on using their environmental budget within individual wards to procure gully teams on an ad-hoc basis.
- Officers explained that the current figure of 5 properties, as threshold for a locally significant incidents, will possibly be raised to 20 properties in line with other Authorities across Wales.
- Cllr Mark Thomas cited Crofty as an example of vast flood prevention intervention by NRW, noting, however, that factors such as prolonged heavy rainfall, high tides and strong winds can overtop drainage systems regardless of all interventions in place.
- Coastal Risk Management Programme – update on Mumbles flood defence: public appears to be supportive, general acceptance that scheme is needed. Circa £12M investment from Welsh Government. Evidence that flood risk is reduced for over 120 properties over 100yr modelling.
- Development Advice Maps – TAN 15: Officers explained that the Council will need to provide defence around certain City Centre sites, now to include surface water run-off risk.
- Officers highlighted the relevance of nature-based solutions such as the sand dunes created at the Civic Centre site, having had a positive impact on reducing wave energy and subsequent storm flooding.

- The Panel heard that there is scope to mitigate flood risk through green infrastructure and nature-based solutions, such as increased tree planting to help slow water flow.

The Panel considered the information provided, asked questions, and gave views on the way forward. The Chair thanked all for their input.

AGREED that the Panel write to the Cabinet Members with its views and recommendations.

65 Work Programme

The Panel discussed prospective topics for forthcoming meetings.

- Green Space / Weed Management to remain scheduled for January, feeding into any PDC discussions.
- Update from Nature Conservation Team (January / March TBC)
- Climate & Nature Action Plan (March TBC)

66 Letter(s)

The Panel received the correspondence sent following the meeting of the Panel held on 26 August 2021.

The meeting ended at 12.00 pm