



City and County of Swansea

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

Remotely via Microsoft Teams

Wednesday, 12 January 2022 at 10.00 am

Present: Councillor P K Jones (Chair) Presided

Councillor(s)
E W Fitzgerald
M H Jones
C Richards
W G Thomas

Councillor(s)
S J Gallagher
H Lawson
B J Rowlands

Councillor(s)
O G James
H M Morris
M Sherwood

Other Attendees

Mark Thomas Cabinet Member - Environment Enhancement & Infrastructure Management

Officer(s)

Mark Barbour Biodiversity Officer
Emily Davies Scrutiny Officer
Jeremy Davies Group Leader Parks and Cleansing
Chris Howell Head of Waste Management

Apologies for Absence

Councillor(s): J A Hale, I E Mann and L J Tyler-Lloyd

67 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.

68 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.

69 Minutes of Previous Meeting(s)

The minutes of the Natural Environment Scrutiny Performance Panel meeting, held on 6 October 2021, were agreed as an accurate record.

70 Public Questions

There were no public questions.

71 Management of Green Space / Weed & Verge Management

The Panel received an overview from Cllr Mark Thomas, Cabinet Member for Environment Enhancement & Infrastructure Management. Officers also attended to aid discussions and answer questions.

Discussion focussed on:

- Increasing Biodiversity through management programmes.
- Reduce reliance and use of glyphosate throughout Council services.
- The Highways department is the biggest user of glyphosate, not the Parks department (although some use on Japanese Knotweed).
- The Highways department manage weeds on roads, therefore responsibly falls outside of the Parks department.
- Current programme is run on a 3-year contract with an external company, completing work via machine operation. This has been the most effective and efficient method to date.
- Members raised concerns that some cul-de-sacs were being missed by contractors.
- The Panel heard that the contractors can be asked to return and re-spray should the service in a particular area not be satisfactory.
- Contract renewal is underway, having regard to any other applicable methods available, to minimise glyphosate use.
- Council trials of new technologies / treatments have not yet resulted in a more effective programme.
- It was explained that in 2021 the programme faced a setback due to rain / storms. Weeds became difficult to manage and complaints were received regarding overgrown weeds.
- The Highways department has extra budget allowance to create a team, focusing on hotspot areas.
- The Panel are aware of risks and aspects of concern relating to the use of glyphosate. Members acknowledged that there are few other effective options to manage weeds along the highways network.
- Cllr Thomas reiterated that Glyphosate is a fully-licensed product and the Council is not using un-safe products.
- Members discussed the consequences of weeds left to damage walls and pavements, including the potential for community members to take part in weeding programmes.
- Members raised the option of wards opting out of weed-spraying, citing the example of 'Uplands Living Streets', a group interested in reduced glyphosate treatment.
- The Panel heard that, although individual houses cannot opt out, wards or streets could opt out of the weed spraying programme.
- The Panel heard that, in terms of improving biodiversity, there will be some areas of grass that are left to grow longer.

- Members queried how to report unidentifiable weeds/plants to the Council. Officers advised a photo record could be submitted, or use of external identification apps. Officers undertook to provide links to such apps for information.
- Panel Members raised some concerns over potential sale of green space areas to members of the public.
- Members cited Lougher castle as an example of green space being successfully left to meadow, encouraging wildflower growth.
- It was highlighted that wildflower growth is promoted via nutrient-reduced soil. Grass cuttings left on the land is therefore counter-productive to wildflower growth.
- The removal of grass cuttings (from wildflower sites) has required specialist equipment. Welsh Government funding has recently enabled the purchase of specialist 'cut and collect' machinery.
- Members commented on the grass cuttings left following verge-cutting and the nutrients being left to aid future growth, noting the cuttings can also sometimes contribute to gully blockages.
- Officers explained that the time/costs spent in collecting general grass-cuttings would not likely be effective in making a significant difference to the number of cuts.
- The report highlighted the challenges faced, such as large-scale grass removal.
- The Panel heard that areas left to meadow were sometimes viewed by the public as having been unattended. Members understood that communication needs to be improved to ensure the public understand where/why certain areas become managed meadows.
- Members suggested that temporary signage be erected at meadow sites to better inform the public.
- Members raised concerns over the city entrance points and the first impressions for visitors.
- Members commented favourably on the steps taken in Singleton Park to improve biodiversity.
- Members queried whether grant funding would be available to provide plants/tress for local areas.
- Officers explained that two part-time posts were being funded to work within ward areas to support biodiversity, habitat creation and general wildflower management.
- Members were pleased to hear that a biodiversity officer had been appointed since this recommendation by the Natural Environment Scrutiny Inquiry Panel, however, raised concerns over the part-time nature of this post, given demands. Members agreed that a long-term commitment to funding a full-time post would be beneficial.
- Members raised queries over the 'Draft Questions for Consultation', suggesting alternative phrasing of questions to accommodate broader answers.

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

The Panel discussed prospective topics for forthcoming meetings.

- Update from Nature Conservation Team (March)
- Members suggested inclusion of the topic Planning Enforcement (biodiversity) in future work plans.

73 Letter(s)

The Panel received the correspondence sent following the meeting of the Panel held on 6 October 2021.

The meeting ended at 11.45 am

Chair