



To:
**Councillor David Hopkins, Cabinet Member
for Corporate Service and Performance**

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Date 13 April 2023
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BY EMAIL

cc Cabinet Members

Summary: This is a letter from the Climate Change and Nature Scrutiny Performance Panel to the Cabinet Member for Corporate Service and Performance following the meeting of the Panel on 8 March 2023. It covers Nature Conservation - Project Updates and Air Quality Management.

Dear Cllrs Hopkins,

The Panel met on 8 March 2023 and discussed Nature Conservation - Project Updates and Air Quality Management.

We would like to thank you and relevant officers for attending to present the items and answer the Panel's questions. We would also like to thank Professor Paul Lewis of Swansea University for attending for the item on Air Quality Management. We appreciate your engagement and input.

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.

Nature Conservation – Project Updates

Paul Meller, Natural Environment Section Manager updated us on progress and confirmed that all recommendations from the scrutiny inquiry in 2019 are now complete or part of other projects. We were pleased to hear this.

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY / TROSOLWG A CHRAFFU

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We queried if three granted funded temporary posts are still running - Community Green Space Officers and Natural Environment Volunteer Coordinator. We heard that grant funding was only received for one year, that currently no alternative funding has been found so the posts are not being continued after June 2023 and it is limited in terms of what can be rolled out. You and the Director reassured us that this work remains a priority and officers will continue to look at all avenues of funding.

We requested confirmation of where in Swansea the poly tunnel for community growing has been installed and officers agreed to provide this information. [Officers confirmed following the meeting that it is within the grounds of Friends of the Young Disabled building, Gordon Moor Centre at Cwmbwrla.]

The report you provided, mentions developing maps and pack for the 'Wild about your ward' project and that so far schemes are being prepared for Townhill and Morriston. We felt it would be a good idea to consider schemes in some of the wards where new large scale housing developments are being built, as there will be a significant impact on wildlife and green space. We were informed that this work is linked to the grant funding that is coming to an end, that a lot of ground work has been done for preparing the maps and you have started to roll it out but there will be no resources to continue after June. A Member of the Panel added that Castle Ward was also identified as a priority but not included due to an administration error and queried if there are any plans to remedy this. We heard it will be limited as to what can be delivered in the next few months due to lack of resource. You agreed to discuss this further with the Panel Member outside of the meeting.

We asked what the priorities are between now and June in terms of work being carried out with the remaining time and capacity for this particular grant. Officers advised the remaining time will be spent on some ongoing projects in Townhill and Morriston in terms of greening up certain areas and improving woodland area in Morriston and that these schemes are being discussed with relevant ward members at this time.

We expressed concern that the Environment Centre is currently struggling for resource to continue and that it really needs support especially at a time when we have a climate emergency.

We asked for confirmation that environmental links have been made within all school governing bodies to receive support for biodiversity activities and initiatives. We heard that progress is being made on this through the Climate Change and Nature Recovery Programme Board and Steering Group and that there are good contacts with some schools but not all schools and what you can do is limited by resources. Officers agreed to provide a generic nature conservation link which schools/governors can use to get involved.

Air Quality Management

Tom Price, Team Leader Pollution Control attended to brief the Panel. Paul Lewis, Professor Emeritus at Swansea University Medical School was also present to answer questions. We heard that Professor Lewis is involved in research on behalf of the University and collaborates with the Council on this issue.

We heard that there has been a delay in submission of the Annual Progress Report to Welsh Government (WG), that you will shortly be submitting the Report for the last three years and that it will then be circulated to us. We were pleased to hear that draft conclusions reached suggest the Council is currently compliant ie not exceeding any threshold concentrations set in legislation, main ones being nitrogen dioxide and particulate matter PM10.

We queried if any legislation is being brought in in Wales regarding wood burning stoves, as this is a problem. We were informed that in Wales it is part of the Clean Air Bill the WG is working on. We heard that wood burning/domestic burning is currently the biggest contributor of PM2.5 so there are strict regulations on suppliers but WG is looking at usage of wood burners as well and strategies for behavioural change in terms of educating people on the health impact. We also heard that Professor Lewis presented the Cross Party Group for Clean Air Act to Assembly Members recently and will share this presentation with us, highlighting what the issues might be and what needs to be addressed in the Clean Air Act which should come out next year.

Regarding garden bonfires, we queried if this will also be included in the Clean Air Act and were informed existing powers are in place under statutory nuisance provisions in the Environmental Protection Act and that outdoor burning is also being considered for the Clean Air Act in terms of increased regulation. We heard fireworks will not be included in the Clean Air Bill consultation but there has been separate consultation regarding fireworks and that this will be circulated to the Panel for information.

We expressed concern about air quality around schools and asked if every school in the County has been checked to ensure they are safe. We were informed that the Council monitors air quality at some schools and is currently compliant across Swansea but that there is no safe limit so is working towards trying to reduce it.

We were pleased to hear that schools are a focus for WG and noted that exposure outside schools is a problem and more evidence is needed for Wales in terms of exposure levels and the health impacts on children. We were informed that the Council is currently involved with two interventions at Morriston and Oystermouth Primaries and is part of a WG support grant received last year. It involves gathering data and looking at installing green screen fencing intervention in the coming months to test its effectiveness. We heard the Council is also undertaking a piece of work on engine idling in collaboration with Professor Lewis and other colleagues at Swansea University and a company called Vindico looking at behavioural change. This study is currently live and analysis should be completed by Clean Air Day in June, and that depending on the results, the Council will be looking at an intervention type approach and having a package of measures to discuss with schools.

We were informed that Routes to School works with schools providing ideas to stop parents bringing children to school. However, the routes children take to get to school also needs to be considered and there is potential for future application to a WG support grant to look at developing existing modelling capability to produce a product for safe routes to school.

We queried how sensitive monitoring of particulate matter is currently and how a school like Oystermouth, which is mostly concrete, can be 'greened up'. We noted that an intervention is currently underway at the school and that evidence is needed of

what happens. We heard it includes a solar panel unit on a lamp post outside the school and one in the playground to test boundary and in the yard particulate matter concentration and that there will also be the proposed trial green screen along the railing area. In terms of how sensitive monitoring is, Professor Lewis added that there is a need to get PM2.5 down as low as possible as there is no safe limit. We heard it is becoming much easier to monitor PM2.5 on lower cost sensors so you can have a wide distribution of monitors.

We discussed the view that the 20mph speed limit will increase the potential for pollution, same as speed humps and vehicles waiting to turn right at lights. We heard that studies on whether speed humps increased or reduced pollution were unclear and there is little evidence on the effect on air quality of 20mph speed limits but the little evidence there is suggests driving at 20mph generally leads to improvement in terms of PM2.5. We noted that the key thing is to get less braking and tyre wear at 20mph. We also heard the key way to reduce pollution is by reducing the volume of source, whether that is by emissions or by the number of vehicles on the road.

We queried if the main cause of idling of vehicles outside schools is parents dropping off children and if it would be worth getting information out to schools to try and educate parents on not doing this. We heard there is legislation for statutory idling offences, and it is written into bus contracts for school transport provision. However, idling outside schools is not just caused by parents and is dependent on the location of the school and there is a need to look at the behaviour of motorists.

Your Response

We hope you find this letter useful and informative. We would welcome your comments on any of the issues raised, however in this instance, a formal written response is required by 4 May 2023, to the following:

- Link to be provided for schools/governors to get support for school biodiversity activities and initiatives.
- Annual Progress Report on Air Quality to be circulated to Panel once submitted to Welsh Government.
- Professor Lewis' presentation to be provided to the Panel for information.
- Welsh Government consultation on fireworks to be circulated to the Panel.

Yours sincerely

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