



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

BY EMAIL

cc Cabinet Members

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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 3 October 2023. It covers Water Quality and Planning Enforcement. A formal written response is required.

Dear Cllr Hopkins

The Panel met on 3 October 2023 and received an update on Water Quality, Management and Pollution Control and a briefing on Planning Enforcement: Nature and Biodiversity.

We would like to thank you, Carol Morgan, Tom Price, Ian Davies and Hamish Osborn and Sarah Bennett from Natural Resources Wales (NRW) for attending to present the items and answer the Panel's questions. 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.

Water Quality, Management and Pollution Control

We heard NRW are the key player on this issue, but the Council works very closely with them.

We stated we had heard a lot about rising water temperatures over the Summer and asked if this makes it more likely to have problems with bacteria in sea water. We

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heard it is potentially an issue and would warrant some investigations in the future, probably by the scientific community.

We queried what interaction there is between Welsh Water, the Council and NRW regarding sewerage discharges and how Swansea is performing compared to other parts of the UK. We were informed that there is a lot of interaction, NRW liaises with Welsh Water over the number and duration of spills from sewer overflows, with the aim of reducing them, and where there are problems NRW will take action. We heard Swansea Bay itself has improved but NRW is still dealing with issues, for example in the Tawe, and is asking Welsh Water if they should prioritise some of their assets for more work under the asset management programme. We also heard that on the Gower coast, where the majority of bathing waters are, there are not many potential spillers and NRW is working with Welsh Water on some of these. We noted it is not as good as NRW want it to be, but this area does not have the same level of problems as some areas in the UK.

We discussed how new suburban housing developments damage wildlife habitats and can also create pollution and asked what measures should be taken by the Council to ensure surface water drainage solutions do not pollute existing local environmental amenities such as ponds and water courses. We heard that from NRW perspective there are two sides to this. Firstly, it is important to have a sustainable strategy for dealing with surface water on any site and that is why there is Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS) legislation and NRW would urge developers, and as far as possible the Council to encourage developers, to include this in their plans. Secondly, the construction phase, which we heard NRW is particularly concerned about. We were informed many of the large construction projects in Swansea put a lot of pressure on local water courses during the construction phase. Silty water leaving site in an uncontrolled manner causes repeated small pollutions. We heard NRW feels the Council could, in the planning process, make sure pollution prevention provisions in the construction environmental management plan are as good as can be and it is something NRW would like improvement from the industry on.

We stated there has been a lot in the press about water leaks and the amount of time to repair them and asked if there is a major leak from a clean water main how long the response time is and how long before they want to get it under control. We heard NRW does not have direct control over this. Water companies are responsible for controlling leaks and the questions would need to be addressed to Welsh Water directly.

Planning Enforcement: Nature and Biodiversity

We were informed there is a requirement in Future Wales, the national development framework, that action is taken to secure the maintenance and enhancement of biodiversity to provide net benefit, to ensure resilience of eco systems and green infrastructure assets and that the Local Development Plan supports this and provides a clear planning framework.

We heard that in addition the Council has provided Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) 'Biodiversity and Development' to provide clarity and this is available on the Council website and that maildrops have been sent out to developers to inform them

about the SPG. We also heard that other advice is provided on the website, for example, on Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS).

We discussed how it is a reactive service as there is no legislative requirement for developers to notify Planning when starting a development, and the Council does not have enough resources to proactively monitor every development. We heard however that there are powers available if the Council is aware of a breach. You emphasized that the public have a very important role to play in reporting issues, therefore public awareness raising is essential going forward.

We felt it would be useful to get something out on the Council's social media pages giving contact details for reporting issues, and you gave a commitment to liaise with the Communications Team to see what they can do proactively to communicate this message.

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 16 November 2023 to the following:

- Cabinet Member to liaise with Communications Team regarding publicising message to the public about reporting issues, and feed back to the Panel.

Yours sincerely

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