

**Councillor Mary Jones**  
**Acting Convener – Natural Environment**  
**Scrutiny Performance Panel**

**BY EMAIL**

*Please ask for:* Councillor Mark Thomas  
*Direct Line:* 01792 63 6141  
*E-Mail:* [cllr.mark.thomas@swansea.gov.uk](mailto:cllr.mark.thomas@swansea.gov.uk)  
*Our Ref:* MT/KH  
*Your Ref:*  
*Date:* 17 December 2019

Dear Councillor Jones

**Re: Natural Environment Scrutiny Performance Panel – 22 October: Gull Nuisance**

Thank you for your letter, dated 27<sup>th</sup> November 2019, regarding officers attendance at the Natural Environment Scrutiny Performance Panel. Please find the responses to the issues you raised below: -

1. **Waste Storage:** *minimising the potential for gulls to get access to food waste left out for collections. In particular consider whether waste storage / disposal at properties such as flats or HMOs may be attracting gulls and need to be improved e.g. there may be insufficient number of plastic food waste caddies available for the waste generated, where either food waste bags may left outside or food waste may continue to be disposed of in black bags. Also, consider the replacement of any existing open top public waste bins that may be attracting gulls.*

The Council provides food waste bins and 'kitchen caddies' to residential properties across its area. Both the waste Enforcement Team and the Private Sector Housing Team carry out proactive work and respond to complaints to address areas of concern relating to the disposal of food waste and black bag waste.

2. **Changing Behaviour/Early Engagement with Residents:** *an education programme for all residents about the nuisance of urban gulls and actions that will prevent nuisance. We would suggest a general advisory letter / information pack is prepared which, amongst other things, would:*
  - *strongly discourage the feeding of gulls, making use of the '10 reasons not to feed seagulls' poster which has been promoted by Mumbles Community Council at the request of Mayals Friends & Residents Group*
  - *highlight the issue of ground-feeding and promote the use of 'bird- feeders'*
  - *highlight the importance of proper disposal of food waste, and food containers**(consider whether such packs could be passed to local councillors for circulation in their community, to avoid postage costs, and perhaps enable them to determine how best to distribute e.g. targeting problem areas, circulation more*

*widely in addition to residents, e.g. schools, parks, community centres, other businesses etc.)*

The Council's response to this point must be proportionate. Our enforcement teams in have a limited amount of resource to deal with a high volume of complaint work, all of which must be prioritised. Whilst I understand the concerns around individuals behaviour and the possible outcomes, given the content of the 'Ten Reasons Not to Feed Seagulls' document, that has been produced by the Mayals Friends and Residents Group', I do not feel that the Council is in a position to promote the publication. For example, the reference put forward stating that 'Swansea was ranked the 6<sup>th</sup> most rat infested area in Britain' is misleading. The high level of calls in Swansea is linked to the fact that the Council, in recognition of the potential public health risk, carries out domestic rat visits for free whereas as other authorities charge for the visit; charging for visits can lead to a 50% reduction in complaints received.

As an outcome of the discussions that took place, it is felt that an appropriate and manageable method for providing information to the public would be to create an 'Informational Webpage' by Spring 2020 linked to the current Pest Control webpage. The webpage could be referred to in appropriate correspondence and would provide impartial information to advise residents about the potential issues with feeding birds in general and the powers available to the Council to help manage this

3. **Public Notices:** *Widen the existing 'feed the bins, not the birds' promotion beyond the city centre, with public signage / notices displayed at parks, beaches (and takeaway food shops in the vicinity), and other known or reported hot-spots.*

The Council currently provides signage in areas regarding the 'Feed the Bins, Not the Birds' initiative as well as littering offences. The proposal to increase the number of signs and the area is not deliverable within current resources.

4. **Enforcement Action:** *Consider taking stronger action (e.g. warning letter around anti-social behaviour or other powers available such as CPNs) in respect of any person found to be responsible for excessive feeding of gulls, and ignoring advice.*

The Pollution Control and Private Sector Housing Team already considers the enforcement actions available when investigating complaints of this nature. In this particular instance, the options were assessed and the evidence to support formal action was not obtained.

The Council will continue to investigate complaints received and act accordingly in-line with the appropriate legislation. I can assure you appropriate enforcement action will be taken where circumstances warrant formal intervention.

5. **Co-Production:** *To work with the Mayals Friends & Residents Group (or other complainants), RSPB, and other relevant people or organisations in preparing any advice information for residents and useful content, or other action / practical measures either proposed as a result of this scrutiny activity or identified by yourself, to minimise the problem. This should also consider learning from the experience of other Councils.*

In complaints of this nature, the Council is required to remain impartial in its role as the regulator. Whilst obtaining information from bodies such as the RSPB can assist in

ensuring appropriate advice to the public; the Council must ensure that its publications are factually correct and remain impartial as formal proceedings may occur. Officers are part of a variety of expert groups nationally and these are used to share best practice between Councils.

The Council will of course consider all the information it has researched and received in preparation of the 'Informational Webpage' to be published in Spring 2020.

6. **Monitoring:** *To monitor future complaints about nuisance gulls and feeding to help inform the type and location of deterrent activities.*

The Pollution Control and Private Sector Housing Team monitors all types of complaints received as part of the process in developing their work plan and associated targets; this is a process that will continue to take place.

Yours sincerely



**Y Cyngorydd / Councillor Mark Thomas**  
Aelod Y Cabinet Dros Wasanaethau'r Amgylchedd  
Cabinet Member for Environment Services