

ENVIRONMENTAL SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

13 JANUARY 2022

Present: Councillor Patel(Chairperson)
Councillors Derbyshire, Owen Jones, Lancaster, Jackie Parry,
Owen and Sandrey

43 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Parkhill and Wong.

44 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

45 : MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 November 2021 were approved by the Committee as a correct record.

46 : MANAGING BIODIVERSITY AND NATURAL ENVIRONMENT IN CARDIFF

The Committee received a report providing an update on the Cabinet response to recommendations made by the Committee's Task and Finish Inquiry entitled 'Managing Biodiversity and the Natural Environment in Cardiff' which was presented to the Cabinet on 23 January 2020.

A full response to the report was agreed by the Cabinet on 19 November 2020. The response was considered at the Environmental Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 2 March 2021. This resulted in a series of observations and requests from the Committee. The report included a total of 39 recommendations; 18 recommendations were accepted; 17 were partially accepted; 3 recommendations were rejected; and one recommendation was noted.

Members were advised that the findings and key recommendations were based around the following six themes:

- Biodiversity & Natural Environment – Context Setting;
- Council Resources;
- Commitment, Structure & Process;
- Communication & Engagement;
- Baseline & Focus;
- Best Practice & Practical Applications

The Committee received a further update on progress made against the inquiry's recommendations.

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Michael Michael, Cabinet Member for Clean Streets, Recycling and Environment; Councillor Peter Bradbury, Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure, Councillor Caro Wild, Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning

and Transport; and officers from the Planning, Transport & Environment Directorate and the Economic Development Directorate. Following statements from the Cabinet Members, the Chairperson invited comments and questions from the Committee. Those discussions are summarised as follows:

- Members welcomed the progress made against the recommendations and the work being undertaken to improve biodiversity in the City.
- A Member considered that the Authority's former ecologist was under a great deal of pressure in terms of his role in the planning application process. Officers were asked to comment on how the Authority's new ecologist could contribute in other areas given that the role will still be within the Planning Department. The Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure accepted that, whilst the ecologist post is within Planning, it is an aim of the One Planet Cardiff Strategy to embed ecologists within other Directorates so the role is not seen as just a planning issue. The Cabinet Member for Clean Streets, Recycling and Environment stated that any decision that requires an ecological report will be accompanied by one. The Operational Manager Parks and Harbour Authority advised that there was considerable collaboration between Council departments in terms of ecological issues. For example, the Park Rangers team have ecological skills.
- Members sought further details in terms of the Cardiff Partnership Board adopting a biodiversity objective and also the work ongoing to embed climate resilience into reports and decision making as part of One Planet Cardiff. The Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure stated that the motion passed by Council recently will direct Cabinet to take more account of biodiversity when making decisions. The Head of Planning advised that work is being undertaken with partners to produce a Well-Being Plan which meets the requirements of the Well-Being of Future Generations Act. The plan is being progressed, updated and reviewed. There are also Business Delivery Plans within each Directorate that include a focus on the delivery of green infrastructure and diversity, including various key performance indicators. Therefore, biodiversity is embedded within the Council's policy framework.
- Members asked for clarification on the response to recommendation 8(a) in relation to Council officers attending the Planning and Biodiversity Forum. The Head of Planning stated that posts are being repurposed within the Planning Department to satisfy the requirements of the One Planet Cardiff Strategy and the replacement LDP. The department is also seeking to review the evidence base used to inform policy and decision making, for example data on trees, tree preservation orders, and species. In terms of the Planning and Biodiversity Forum, Members were advised that officers from Planning, Parks, Highways and Environment meet on a monthly basis as part of the One Planet Cardiff Strategy. The Director agreed to provide confirmation of that in writing.
- Members noted the improvements made in terms of volunteering, particularly litter picking. Members asked what more could be done to further increase participation from volunteer groups. The Cabinet Member for Leisure and Culture stated that efforts are continuing to increase engagement with Friends of Parks groups. It was suggested that the release of further resources could potentially

increase engagement with local sports groups. The Cabinet Member for Clean Streets, Recycling and Environment stated that he had recently met representatives of the Cardiff Rivers Group who undertake extensive voluntary clean-ups of waterways across the city. There are also approximately 20 voluntary groups engaged under the 'Love Where You Live' scheme. The Operational Manager Parks and Harbour Authority advised that there are in excess of 20,000 volunteer hours undertaken in the City each year and the volunteers are involved in a broad range of activities. The Coed Caerdydd programme received funding to recruit a volunteer co-ordinator specifically for the purpose of getting volunteers and community groups to become involved with the planting and aftercare of trees.

- Officers provided a summary of the processes in place to ensure volunteer groups are able to lock parks in a safe manner. The replication of keys is not permitted.
- A Member referred to the response to recommendation 8(c) and in particular 'action towards securing the maintenance and enhancement of biodiversity, the resilience of ecosystems and green infrastructure assets must be demonstrated as part of development proposals'. The Member asked whether there were any examples of this taking place. The Head of Planning advised that this was Welsh Government policy. Further guidance is anticipated in this regard. However, all developments seek to mitigate any adverse impacts on environmental grounds. In Wales there is a separate national framework beyond planning that requires developers to consider biodiversity and nature within SUDS legislation.
- Members noted the partially accepted recommendations 15 and 16. Members asked for further details of the work being undertaken under the review of the LDP. The Head of Planning advised that the replacement LDP has a range of policies in it and there are a range of constraints identified, including a number of constraints that are environmental in terms of national and local designations. As part of the LDP review the Council is obliged to review local designations for nature conservation. That process is ongoing and will form part of the evidence base that will be submitted to Welsh Government through the Deposit Plan. The intention is to consult on the Deposit Plan in late 2023, and this will be followed by a public inquiry in 2024. A lot of the survey work is yet to be undertaken.
- Members asked whether the ward mapping exercise has been completed and when the results will be shared with ward members. The Head of Planning understood that ward maps have been updated and he gave an undertaking that the results would be shared with local Members.
- A Member noted the comments made previously in respect of local litter picking groups. The Member considered that the groups in question care about their communities and are frustrated that those who cause litter problems stubbornly refused to change their behaviour. The Member requested comments on that point and what engagement there has been with those groups in terms of managing biodiversity and the natural environment. The Cabinet Member for Clean Streets, Recycling and Environment accepted that those local groups do a great deal for the City and agreed that it was frustrating when litter appears in areas that have recently been cleared of litter. Behavioural change was difficult and the Council can do more in terms of enforcement action. Prior to the

pandemic an event was planned for local litter picking groups and it was hoped that that could be revisited in the future. The Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure agreed that local groups are able to advocate for why the Council is taking decisions for the benefit of biodiversity in the local environment.

- The Operational Manager Parks and Harbour Authority provided an overview of the National Park City initiative which aims to support groups who want to do more in their communities. National Park City status is awarded by the National Park City Foundation and Cardiff is considering applying. In order to gain National Park City status, cities must pass 10 key milestones. In November a stakeholder workshop was held with a view to forming a committee to work towards National Park City Status. There were currently 80 expressions of interest. Cardiff is also working in partnership with Glasgow on a National Lottery Heritage Fund Bid to establish a co-ordinator post for National Park City application.

RESOLVED – That the Chairperson writes to the Cabinet Member on behalf of the Committee to convey any comments, observations and recommendations made during the way forward.

47 : WEED CONTROL TRIAL

The Committee received a report providing an update on the weed control trial that has been undertaken by Officers within the Economic Development Directorate in response to a Scrutiny recommendation to Cabinet from the Environmental Scrutiny Committee's Inquiry into 'Managing Biodiversity and Natural Environment in Cardiff'.

The Committee agreed to undertake the inquiry at its meeting held on 19 March 2019. The report was presented to Cabinet on 23 January 2020 and the Cabinet response was considered by the Committee at its meeting on 2 March 2021. The report made a series of recommendations including one on the use of herbicides and pesticides. Cabinet partially accepted the recommendation and subsequently committed to undertake a review of the weed control products available as an alternative to the glyphosate-based herbicide that is currently used.

A trial was undertaken during 2021 to investigate the viability of the alternative weed control applications that are currently licenced for use to control weeds on hard surfaces, in partnership with the Council's Specialist Weed Control Contractor. A number of data sets were collected through the year which have been made available to an independent consultant to allow an assessment of each type of application against key factors. That assessment will be used to produce a detailed report expected in February 2022 which will inform decision making moving forward.

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Michael Michael, Cabinet Member for Clean Streets, Recycling and Environment; Councillor Peter Bradbury, Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure; Councillor Caro Wild, Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning and Transport; Jon Maidment, Operational Manager, Parks, Sports and Harbour Authority; Mark Tozer, Parks Development & Asset Management Officer and Dr Dan Jones of Advanced Invasives.

Members also received a brief presentation on the weed control trial. Members were invited to comment, seek clarification or raise questions on the information received. Those discussions are summarised as follows:

- Members asked for further details on the cost of each weed control method.
- Members noted that Vale of Glamorgan Council have become herbicide free in a number of their parks. Members asked why Cardiff was unable to do this. The Operational Manager Parks and Harbour Authority stated that Vale of Glamorgan had trialled the foam stream method but it was not widely used in their area. Dr Dan Jones advised that some local authorities have begun to use the foam stream method in some very localised areas, such as children's play areas. It was not widely used due to the prohibitive costs associated with that method.
- Dr Dan Jones stated that in his opinion glyphosate was the safest of the herbicides licenced for use. The European Union has recently confirmed that glyphosate is non-carcinogenic. In Cardiff it would be limited to control of weeds on pavements and infrastructure. Glyphosate has been proven to be safe and highly effective. Glyphosate also has a very low environmental impact when compared to the high carbon emissions associated with the foam stream method. Officers stated that the full report and data will be available in February. Any decision on a preferred method will take account not only of cost, but also of environmental impact, customer satisfaction and effectiveness. There was also external interest in the report's findings from other local authorities and the Association of Public Service Excellence. The Cabinet Member Culture and Leisure stated that customer satisfaction was an important consideration. The Cabinet would weigh up all the information available on the various methods and the Cabinet would welcome the Committee's comments.
- Members asked whether there was any distinction made between weeds that were unsightly but on the periphery against those weeds that are encroaching onto the highway and are becoming a hazard and whether these would be prioritised differently. The Operational Manager Parks and Harbour Authority stated that herbicide is not applied in grassed areas, other than sports pitches and bowling greens, where selective weed control measures are used. In shrub beds and bedding areas hoeing, weeding and mulches are used. Officers advised that all highway areas receive the same weed control treatments.
- A Member welcomed the finding that glyphosate has a lower environmental impact than the other methods as this was the only herbicide that will remove invasive species. The Member requested confirmation that glyphosate would still be used where it is needed. Officers confirmed that glyphosate would still be used to manage invasive species.
- Members asked whether precipitation before and after application of herbicides was monitored. Officers stated that the application of 'new-way weed spray' requires an extended period of dry weather post-application, which is one of the limitations of that particular product. Timing of applications was carefully planned to ensure that precipitation would not impact on the trial.

- Members asked whether the small sample of complaints that have been received were sufficient to inform customer satisfaction. The Cabinet Member accepted that point. Complaints received were not the only consideration – customer expectation, repeat visits, Members enquiries and Member satisfaction would also be considered.
- Members asked whether other types of weed control had been considered other than the three methods evaluated during the trial. Officers confirmed that there are other methods but the purpose of the trial was to look at alternative chemical treatments. The cost and environmental impact of other methods is high. Dr Dan Jones stated that studies have been conducted in Holland on the environmental impact of more manual methods. The wire brush method, for example, had a high environmental impact due to the manufacture of the brushes, and also caused damage to infrastructure. Therefore, some form of cost/benefit analysis is necessary. Dr Jones considered that the best method to reduce problem weeds in a sustainable way is through good design and to build infrastructure that has weed control built-in from the start of the development.

RESOLVED – That the Chairperson writes to the Cabinet Member on behalf of the Committee to convey any comments, observations and recommendations made during the way forward.

48 : COMMITTEE BUSINESS

RESOLVED – That

- (1) Councillors Patel, Lancaster, Sandrey and Wong be approved as Members of the Task and Finish Group 'When and how to use Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG);
- (2) The Terms of Reference attached at Appendix 1 of the report be agreed.

49 : URGENT ITEMS (IF ANY)

No urgent items were received.

50 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Members were advised that the next Environment Scrutiny Committee is scheduled for 22 February 2022.

The meeting terminated at 6.30 pm