

Ref: RK/RP/MM/PB/CW/13.01.2022

21st January 2022

Councillors Michael Michael, Peter Bradbury & Caro Wild
County Hall,
Atlantic Wharf,
Cardiff CF10 4UW.



Dear Cllrs Michael, Bradbury and Wild,

Environmental Scrutiny Committee – 13 January 2022 – Managing Biodiversity and Natural Environment In Cardiff- Update on Responses to Scrutiny Recommendations and Weed Control Trial

On behalf of the Environmental Scrutiny Committee, I would like to thank you as well as Officers from the Planning, Transport and Environment as well as the Economic Development Directorates, for attending Committee on Thursday 13th January and facilitating the Committee's discussion on Biodiversity and Natural Environment in Cardiff and the Weed Control Trial. Following our consideration, Members of the Committee have requested that I feed back the following observations, requests and recommendations to you.

Managing Biodiversity and Natural Environment Recommendations

Ecologists

During their discussions Members queried recommendation 2 regarding an additional Ecologist being employed. The updated response provided in the report stated that the Planning Service were seeking to recruit a new Ecologist, however Cabinet Members also added that as part of the One Planet Cardiff agenda the aim was to employ Ecologists into other areas of the Authority as the responsibilities under the Section 6 Duty of the Environment Act Wales didn't just apply to Planning. The overall objective, it was explained, was to try and get Directorate portfolios to work together, to grow expertise across the Council, but this would be a challenge. It was also highlighted that whilst special ecologist support was important, there were

already expertise from within the staff already employed such as Community Park Rangers and collaboration was the best way to share these expertise and knowledge.

Planning & Biodiversity Forum

Following a query from the Committee regarding whether there had been attendance by Planning Officers at the Planning & Biodiversity Forum Officers stated that the Forum had been rebranded and incorporated into the On Planet Cardiff Agenda. The Committee **requested** confirmation of this in writing explaining how it had been incorporated.

Parks

In relation to engagement with Communities, the Committee welcomed evidence provided by Officers on the numerous engagement and volunteer schemes that the Parks Team have been working on. These included significant work with volunteers in Bute Park, working with several groups on 'Love where you Live' as well further ones on the 'Tiny Forest' in the Bay, Groups such as Cardiff Rivers Group and Parks Watch Groups who assisted by unlocking and locking parks in various parts of Cardiff. Officers reported that there was a well-established network of groups and volunteers who interact with staff within the Council regularly and that these members of the community made such a large and valuable contribution. It was highlighted that whilst a normal year there could be approximately 20,000 volunteer hours involved, this had obviously reduced during the pandemic due to restrictions. Post-Covid, Officers would be looking to get these numbers back up.

Ward Based Mapping

Members expressed the wish to take up the offer from the Head of Planning and **requested** to receive the new ward-based mapping mentioned in recommendation 16 as well as the results of the i-Tree survey and other digital mapping exercises that have been undertaken.

Litter and Enforcement

The Committee raised concerns about litter, highlighting that whilst litter picking groups were a huge benefit, there was the ongoing issue of behaviour of those who consistently drop litter. Cllr Michael, Cabinet Member, Clean Streets, Recycling and Environment agreed that behaviour change was an issue as was enforcement however whilst there was often criticism of litter and people littering, there was likewise criticism for fining for littering. The Committee agreed with Cllr Michael that more needed to be done regarding enforcement and litter. They therefore **requested** that to support this and gain a greater understanding of the associated issues, they be provided with hard evidence relating to enforcement for littering, including the figures for the number of fines that have been issued over the past few years, for comparison purposes, as well as associated reports and figures detailing the extent of the issue. Should it be the case that the evidence indicates that enforcement figures for littering are relatively low in comparison to the extent of the problem, the Committee **recommend** that this be taken forward with a view to exploring what more can be done to tackle litter in the city and enhance the enforcement services associated with this.

Engagement

In terms of Managing Biodiversity and engaging groups further, the Committee support the notion put forward by Cllr Bradbury, Cabinet Member Culture and Leisure, that volunteers were key to get the messages out to the public as to what the Council is doing, why areas are being left, why grass isn't being cut in some locations etc. He stated that volunteers are local advocates as are Officers within the Parks Team and Allotments service and would be key to informing the public on the Council's Biodiversity initiatives.

Future Scrutiny of Biodiversity and the Natural Environment

It was agreed by the Committee that in light of many of the recommendations of the Inquiry having been taken forward, and the subject of 'Managing Biodiversity' being integrated across the Council, future Scrutiny consider this subject under the larger remits of projects and agendas such as One Planet Cardiff and monitoring of the BRED forward work programme. In the same

way then, Scrutiny can ensure that Biodiversity as a priority is integrated into its own work programme where the success of the Council can be explored and monitored more consistently and in context.

Weed Control Trial

Final Report

The Committee welcomed the presentation and information associated with the weed control trial that had been undertaken and acknowledged the results presented. Members **requested** to receive the full report as soon as it is published in February to consider the detail of the findings including the cost comparisons.

Customer Satisfaction

During discussion around whether there was a deliberation around cost versus the environmental impact Cllr Bradbury commented that it was bigger than this incorporating a focus on satisfaction also – of local Members and the public. He further commented that education was a key factor in ensuring that whatever the outcome of the trial, the public were well informed to fully understand the Council's position on weed control and what measures were being taken in an attempt to reduce queries and complaints. Again, it was explained to the Committee that the fuller picture in relation to customer satisfaction around the trial would be provided as part of the final report. Members subsequently **recommend** that when analysing the data for customer complaints for the final Weed Control Report, Elected Member complaints also be incorporated into this in order to provide a fuller picture.

Planning and Design of New Developments

During the meeting detailed discussion took place surrounding the various methods of weed control and one key aspect raised was the design of new development. The Committee were advised that one of the most sustainable ways to reduce weeds is to develop infrastructure that prevents weeds. Whilst it is recognised that there are cost implications for this in relation to Highways, Members highlighted that a key method to achieving this is for the

Council departments such as Planning, Parks and Transport etc, to work more closely together and ensure that this is factored into the design aspects of any future development from the start. The Committee therefore **recommend** that as part of integrating Biodiversity across the Council, relevant Council services work together to ensure that preventative weed control measures are factored into any future development at the earliest design stage. This is in order to reduce the future issue of weeds and the associated costs for removing them, as well as minimise any environmental impact from having to use herbicides. It was also highlighted that this would necessitate working closely with building developers at the design stage to factor these preventative measures in from the start.

Use of Glyphosate

Whilst the Committee did not dispute the findings of the weed control trial, Members did express disappointment over the suggestion that Glyphosate would now not likely be phased out based on the outcome of the trial. This was based on reservations Members still have about the potential dangers associated with the use of Glyphosate. Members queried how other Local Authorities were managing to use alternative herbicides successfully, to which Officers at the meeting explained that other Local Authorities were only using alternatives in small amounts. The Committee **requested** further evidence of how this has been explored including detail as to how other Local Authorities in Wales and England are managing the use of Glyphosate, reducing its usage and successfully utilising other alternative products.

Requests following this scrutiny

For ease of reference the requests contained in the letter are as follows:

Managing Biodiversity and the Natural Environment

- To receive confirmation in writing explaining how the Planning & Biodiversity Forum has been incorporated into the On Planet Cardiff Agenda.

- To receive the new ward-based mapping mentioned in recommendation 16 as well as the results of the i-Tree survey and other digital mapping exercises that have been undertaken.
- To be provided with hard evidence relating to enforcement for littering, including the figures for the number of fines that have been issued over the past few years, for comparison purposes, as well as associated reports and figures detailing the extent of the issue.

Weed Control Trial

- To receive the full Weed Control Trial report as soon as it is published in February
- Further evidence of how the Weed Control Trial has explored weed control in other Local Authorities in Wales and England, including how they are managing the use of Glyphosate, reducing its usage and successfully utilising other alternative products.

Recommendations to be monitored following this scrutiny

To summarise, the Scrutiny Committees made three formal recommendations which are set out below. As part of the response to this letter we would be grateful if you could, for each recommendation, state whether the recommendation is accepted, partially accepted or not accepted and summarise the Cabinet’s response. If the recommendation is accepted or partially accepted, I would also be grateful if you could identify the responsible officer and provide an action date. This will ensure that progress can be monitored as part of the approach agreed by Cabinet in December 2020.

Recommendation	Accepted, Partially Accepted or Not Accepted	Cabinet Response	Responsible Officer	Implementation Date
Litter & Enforcement 1. Should it be the case that the evidence indicates that enforcement figures for littering are relatively low in comparison to the extent of the problem, the Committee recommend that this be taken forward with a view to exploring what				

more can be done to tackle litter in the city and enhance the enforcement services associated with this.				
<p>Customer Satisfaction</p> <p>2. When analysing the data for customer complaints for the final Weed Control Report, Elected Member complaints also be incorporated into this in order to provide a fuller picture.</p>				
<p>Planning and Design of New Developments</p> <p>3. As part of integrating Biodiversity across the Council, relevant Council services work together to ensure that preventative weed control measures are factored into any future development at the earliest design stage. This is in order to reduce the future issue of weeds and the associated costs for removing them, as well as minimise any environmental impact from having to use herbicides. It was also highlighted that this would necessitate working closely with building developers at the design stage to factor these preventative measures in from the start.</p>				

Regards,



Councillor Ramesh Patel

Chairperson Environmental Scrutiny Committee

Cc:

- Andrew Gregory, Director of Planning, Transport and Environment
- Simon Gilbert, Head of Planning
- Jon Maidment, Operational Manager, Parks, Sports and Harbour Authority
- Mark Tozer, Parks Development & Asset Management Officer
- Dr Dan Jones – Independent Consultant, Managing Director, Advanced Invasives Ltd

- Heather Warren, Cabinet Support Office
- Melanie Jackson, Cabinet Support Office
- Cabinet Support Office
- Joanne Watkins, Cabinet Business Manager
- Imelda Seymour and Jonathan Childs, Director of Planning, Transport & Environment's Office
- Clair James, Director of Economic Development's Office
- Leaders of the Opposition
- Chris Pyke, Audit Manager, Operational Manager
- Internal Audit
- Tim Gordon - Head of Communications & External Relations
- Members of Cardiff's Environmental Scrutiny Committee