

Shropshire Council
Legal and Democratic Services
Shirehall
Abbey Foregate
Shrewsbury
SY2 6ND

Date: Wednesday, 1 November 2023

**Committee:
Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

Date: Thursday, 9 November 2023
Time: 2.00 pm
Venue: Shrewsbury/Oswestry Room, Shirehall, Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury, Shropshire, SY2 6ND

You are requested to attend the above meeting.
The Agenda is attached.

There will be some access to the meeting room for members of the press and public, but this will be limited. If you wish to attend the meeting, please email democracy@shropshire.gov.uk to check that a seat will be available for you.

Please click [here](#) to view the livestream of the meeting on the date and time stated above.

The recording of the event will also be made available shortly after the meeting on the Shropshire Council YouTube Channel: [Here](#)

Tim Collard
Assistant Director - Legal and Governance

Members of Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Joyce Barrow (Chairman)	Nick Hignett
Steve Davenport (Vice Chairman)	Pamela Moseley
Garry Burchett	Ed Potter
Rosemary Dartnall	Rob Wilson
Julian Dean	Paul Wynn
Roger Evans	

Your Committee Officer is:

Sarah Townsend Committee Officer
Tel: 01743 257721

Email: sarah.townsend@shropshire.gov.uk

AGENDA

1 Apologies for Absence

2 Disclosable Interests

Members are reminded that they must declare their disclosable pecuniary interests and other registrable or non-registrable interests in any matter being considered at the meeting as set out in Appendix B of the Members' Code of Conduct and consider if they should leave the room prior to the item being considered. Further advice can be sought from the Monitoring Officer in advance of the meeting.

3 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

To consider the minutes of the Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 20th July 2023.

Contact: Sarah Townsend (Tel: 01743 257721)

4 Public Question Time

To receive any questions or petitions from the public of which notice has been given. The deadline for notification for this meeting is 5.00 p.m. on Friday, 3rd November 2023.

5 Member Question Time

To receive any questions of which Members of the Council have given notice. The deadline for notification for this meeting is 5.00 p.m. on Friday, 3rd November 2023.

6 River Water Quality Task and Finish Group

To receive the report of the River Water Quality Task and Finish Group. (Attached).

Contact: Tom Dodds (Tel: 01743 258518)

7 Response to the report and recommendations of the New Housing Developments Work

To receive a report on the response to the Committee's recommendations arising from this work and the action plan for their delivery. (Attached).

Contact: Tracy Darke (tracy.darke@shropshire.gov.uk)

8 Response to the report and recommendations of the Social Housing and the Housing Strategy Work

To receive a response to the Committee's recommendations following consideration of this item at the Cabinet meeting held on 6th September 2023. (Attached).

Contact: Jane Trethewey (Tel: 01743 258913)

9 Banners, Bunting, Christmas Lights and Temporary Signage

To receive a report on the progress and impact of delivering recommendations and an update on timescales. (Attached).

Contact: Gary Parton (Tel: 01743 258786)

10 Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme

To consider the future work programme of the Committee. (Attached).

Contact: Tom Dodds (Tel: 01743 258518)

11 Date/Time of Next Meeting of the Committee

The Committee is scheduled to next meet on Thursday, 25th January 2024 at 2.00 p.m.



Committee and Date

Economy and Environment
Overview and Scrutiny
Committee

9th November 2023

ECONOMY AND ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 20 July 2023

**In the Shrewsbury/Oswestry Room, Shirehall, Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury,
Shropshire, SY2 6ND**

2.00 pm - 3.25 pm

Responsible Officer: Sarah Townsend Committee Officer

Email: sarah.townsend@shropshire.gov.uk Tel: 01743 257721

Present

Councillor Joyce Barrow (Chairman)

Councillors Rosemary Dartnall, Julian Dean, Roger Evans, Nick Hignett, Ed Potter, Rob Wilson, Paul Wynn, Roy Aldcroft (Substitute) (substitute for Steve Davenport), Ted Clarke (Substitute) (substitute for Pamela Moseley) and Peggy Mullock (Substitute) (substitute for Garry Burchett)

4 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Garry Burchett (Councillor Peggy Mullock was in attendance as his substitute), Councillor Steve Davenport (Councillor Roy Aldcroft was in attendance as his substitute) and Councillor Pam Moseley (Councillor Ted Clarke was in attendance as her substitute).

5 Disclosable Interests

Councillor Roger Evans declared a non-pecuniary interest in Agenda Item 6 (Social Housing and Reviewing the Housing Strategy) as he was a Board member of Shropshire Rural Housing Association, which was a provider of houses.

Councillor Julian Dean declared a pecuniary interest in Agenda Item 6 (Social Housing and Reviewing the Housing Strategy) as part of the discussion around housing would be concerning temporary lets and his current property was a temporary let.

6 Minutes of Previous Meetings

RESOLVED:

1. That the minutes of the Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 11th May 2023 be approved as a correct record.
2. That the minutes of the Place Overview Committee meeting held on 23rd March 2023 be approved as a correct record.

3. That the minutes of the Communities Overview Committee meeting held on 22nd March 2023 be approved as a correct record.

7 Public Question Time

There were none.

8 Member Question Time

There were none.

9 Social Housing and Reviewing the Housing Strategy

The committee received the report of the Scrutiny Manager which set out the key findings, conclusions and recommendations of work carried out by the former Communities Overview Committee as they considered housing need and social housing in Shropshire with the objective of informing the future review and update of the Housing Strategy.

The Scrutiny Manager took the committee through a presentation outlining the various meetings and workshop that had taken place to inform this piece of work, including the main learning points from both the meetings and workshop.

Also in attendance were the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Assets, the Assistant Director Homes and Communities, the Head of Housing, Resettlement and Independent Living and the Strategy and Development Manager.

Prior to discussion, both the Chairman and the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Assets thanked all those that had been involved and contributed to the work and commented that both the report and the work that had been undertaken were excellent.

Committee discussion, comments and suggestions covered:

- It was noted that recommendation five of the report specifically covered key workers.
- Information was provided on cross subsidy housing and how this can be effective as well as local lettings policies.
- The revised Housing Allocations Policy and Scheme was due to be implemented on 27th July 2023.
- Shropshire Council sets an affordable housing contribution of between 10% to 20% of dwellings, dependent on the location, and it was questioned whether this percentage could be increased, given that other local authorities adjacent to Shropshire may require a contribution of up to 40%. It was commented that if this percentage were to be higher, it could put builders off building. In responding, the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Assets commented that the

Council had to balance overall delivery against affordable housing delivery and that the historic performance in overall housing numbers delivery is in line with the needs of the next local plan period.

- It would be useful to have comparative data on affordable housing percentages from Shropshire's CIPFA (Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy) family group and that perhaps a small working group could meet to look at the percentage of affordable housing contributions and the comparative data of other local authorities. It was thought that this could be achieved within one meeting and could be held within the next two weeks.
- It was explained that currently, and prior to the implementation of the new policy, registered providers do not use the Council's policy. Therefore, by implementing the recommendations detailed within the report, this would make a significant difference as registered providers have signed up to use the Council's policy. Also, government policy was moving towards a place based approach.
- It was suggested that Community Land Trusts should be explored as a possibility to attract funding.
- It was commented that there was a need for the Council to address limiting the growth of temporary let holiday accommodation as many people felt that this was affecting the rental market.
- The importance of the Social Care Strategy was highlighted and particularly, the need to ensure that housing priorities are delivered in the right place for social care workers and it was questioned whether larger properties / buildings could be converted into multi-occupancy houses for careers to occupy.

In terms of taking the report forward, the various options that were available to the committee were outlined by the Scrutiny Manager.

RESOLVED:

1. That a small working group meet within the next two weeks to look at the Council's percentage level of affordable housing contributions along with comparative data of other local authorities.
2. That the recommendations as detailed within the report be taken forward for consideration by Cabinet at their meeting on 6th September 2023 and that in addition, reference to Community Land Trusts in terms of the innovation be included and an additional recommendation looking at short-term lets and their impact be added.

10 Work Programme

The Scrutiny Manager presented the Economy and Environment's proposed work programme for the coming 12 to 24 months which had been informed by the committee's work programming sessions. He explained that it was a live, flexible document and asked the committee to confirm which topics they wanted to commission first.

Regarding the Housing Development Task and Finish Group Action Plan, it was noted that the committee should expect a report back at their next meeting on the action plan and the progress and impact that has been made to date. The Chairman explained that the Assistant Director had invited her to work with Officers to help ensure that the action plan and progress reporting is what is required.

Regarding Developer Contributions, it was requested that this be widened to incorporate developments and the adoption of roads, associated delays and costs of remedial action.

A question was asked regarding witnesses and whether Zero Carbon Shropshire, Marches Energy Agency and the Passenger Transport Group could be included as part of the Climate Change topic. It was also suggested that consultants such as Phil Jones Associates could be included as a witness on the Transport topic.

It was noted that the next Climate Change Annual Report was due to be published in Spring 2024 and that despite the previous two annual reports not having been scrutinised, it would probably be more appropriate to consider this topic around this time, in order that the most up to date information could be looked at.

Clarification was sought regarding Task and Finish Groups and the Scrutiny Manager confirmed that it was the Task and Finish Groups that would confirm the terms of reference, along with any witnesses that they wished to speak to.

Following discussion, a vote was taken and it was agreed that the Developer Contributions topic be commissioned as the first piece of work and that a Task and Finish Group be established to not only look at this but also to consider developments and the adoption of roads and associated issues. The Scrutiny Manager commented that he would look into the terms of reference and would aim to bring an update on this topic to the committee's next meeting.

11 Date/Time of Next Meeting of the Committee

It was noted that the next meeting of the Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee was scheduled to be held on Thursday, 9th November 2023 commencing at 2.00 p.m.

Signed (Chairman)

Date:



Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee

9 November 2023

Item

Public



Report of the River Water Quality Task and Finish Group

Responsible Overview and Scrutiny Officer:	Tom Dodds		
email:	tom.dodds@shropshire.gov.uk	Tel:	01743 258518
Task and Finish Group Chair:	Kate Halliday		

1. Synopsis

The report and recommendations of the River Water Quality Task and Finish Group following their investigation looking at pollution of waterways, focused on sewage, and options to reduce or stop this from occurring in Shropshire.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1. This is the report of the River Water Quality Task and Finish Group. It sets out key findings, conclusions and recommendations of their work considering river water pollution. Whilst the members understand that there are different causes of pollution that affect river water quality including agricultural and highways run-off, they focused their work on understanding more on the causes of sewage pollution and learning from other areas about what works.
- 2.2. This work arose from a Motion to Council and was taken into their work programme by the Place Overview Committee and continued by the Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 2.3. Concerns about deteriorating river water quality, and reports of increasing sewage pollution raised by communities and those who use rivers and

waterways, including anglers, kayakers and wild swimmers have highlighted issues nationally and locally. Against this context, the Task and Finish group has looked in detail at the available data and information, and sought evidence and learning from other areas of the country.

- 2.4. The work that the Task and Finish group carried out informed a series of more focused questions to Severn Trent Water and to the Environment Agency, as the water company and the regulator. Whilst there have been responses to a number of the questions, there are gaps that the group would like to be followed-up, and the answers used to inform further work.
- 2.5. They have made 9 recommendations which they believe will contribute to reducing or removing sewage pollution in rivers and waterways, including recommendations:
 - to the Council, and
 - promoting a system working approach across all stakeholders.

3. Recommendations

Members are asked:

- 3.1. To review, comment on and adopt the report of the Task and Finish group.
- 3.2. To commission a standing task and finish group that has the environment and climate change as its focus, as per the recommendation 9 in the Task and Finish group's report.

Report

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1. Whilst there are no direct financial implications from this Task and Finish group report, should the committee adopt the report and present it to Cabinet, and Cabinet wish to adopt any of these recommendations then appropriate financial advice on the costs involved should be sought.

5. Climate Change Appraisal

- 5.1. Work completed by the Task and Finish group has identified the following points which will have benefits for climate change and the environment:
 - Reducing run-off, slowing the flow of water in the catchment, and increasing opportunity for absorption

- Tree planting and reed beds to reduce the flow and form nature based pollution traps
- Separating combined sewers e.g. to reduce flow of rainwater into treatment works during heavy rain events
- Promoting rainwater and grey water collection and usage, especially in new developments, to make better use of available water
- Taking highways run-off out of the sewerage system
- Promoting the use of the products of carbon reduction such as biochar from pyrolysis to help reduce pollution entering rivers and waterways.

6. Background

- 6.1. Following a motion to Council on the 30 March 2023 it was confirmed that the Place Overview Committee, replaced by the Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee, would progress a task and finish group looking at River Water Quality.
- 6.2. The Task and Finish group has carried out its work with a strong focus on learning from the available information and from other areas of the country where there has been successes in improving river water quality.
- 6.3. This has included learning about how Local Planning Authorities can require specific requirements such as sufficient sewage infrastructure and treatment to be met before new housing developments can be occupied (Grampian Conditions), and how Bathing Water Status can help improve river water quality, and the best approaches to realise this.
- 6.4. They have heard from the Windrush Against Sewage Pollution (WASP) campaign group and from Ilkley Clean River Campaign, as well as Phillip Dunne MP Chair of the Environmental Audit Committee, Shropshire Bathing Water Status campaigners, Surfers Against Sewage, and officers from Shropshire Council. They have also asked specific questions of Severn Trent Water and the Environment Agency and had a site visit to the Ludlow Water Treatment Works.
- 6.5. Their key findings, conclusions and recommendations are set out in their report, attached at appendix 1.
- 6.6. The group's conclusions and recommendations recognise that, although the significant responsibilities to tackle sewage pollution sit with the water company, Severn Trent Water, and the regulator, the Environment Agency, the Council also has a substantial role to play as a 'Place Leader', and through its own services and responsibilities.
- 6.7. Specific points of focus in the recommendations include:
 - that the Council, as the Local Planning Authority should adopt Grampian Conditions to ensure that all new developments can join wastewater and

rainwater infrastructure that has the design and capacity to handle the additional demand.

- That the Council, as the highways authority, proactively engage with and encourage Severn Trent Water in their progression of works that will increase the separation of rainwater run-off from wastewater, including highways runoff.
- 6.8. Using their learning from other areas, and experiences locally from a range of different situations, the group has also concluded that the greatest impact will be realised by stakeholders taking a system approach; recognising the added value that the sum of all the different parts can deliver.
- 6.9. The Council, as a Place Leader, can enable wider involvement in improving the quality of river water in a number of ways, including helping community groups identify and access small grants that might help fund citizen science work or raising awareness, and supporting applications for bathing water status.
- 6.10. The group also believe that there is scope for the Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee to establish a standing task and finish group that has climate change and the environment as its scope. This group would encompass the committees remit for flooding, maintain a focus on river water quality, and track the progress of climate change actions and initiatives. It would report back to the committee e.g. every 6 months, on its evidence based findings, including highlighting any emerging issues or opportunities that might need further investigation, or recommendations to Cabinet.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

Local Member: All

Appendices

Appendix I: Report of the River Water Quality Task and Finish Group



Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Report of the River Water Quality Task and Finish Group

9 November 2023

Acknowledgments

This cross party Task and Finish group work has been undertaken with passion and clear focus by the members involved. They have considered the issues from different perspectives and sought to come to balanced and evidenced conclusions and recommendations. They would like to express their thanks to the full range of organisations and individuals who have helped them explore the issues, learning and opportunities. The list of those who have helped to inform the work is attached at appendix 1.

Members of the Task and Finish Group

Kate Halliday (Chair)

Simon Harris

Edward Towers

Peter Broomhall

Rosemary Dartnall

Roy Aldcroft

Pam Moseley

Joyce Barrow

Bernie Bentick

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1. Context

Clean, healthy rivers are essential to Shropshire's prosperity and wellbeing. In recent years there have been complaints that water quality in rivers has deteriorated. The chief contributor in urban areas are the frequent and intermittent discharges of raw sewage when it rains. These combined sewage outfalls (CSOs) contribute to the deterioration of water quality and biodiversity and have a negative health impact on those who use the river for sport and leisure activities, such as those who swim in the river.

According to local Angling Clubs fish stocks have reduced by 60% in the last 10 years. Data released by the Environment Agency show that Water Companies discharged raw sewage into English waters 400,000 times in 2021, an increase of 27% on the previous year. In January 2022 a motion on improving river quality was passed unanimously by Shropshire Council.

The Environment Act (2021) requires water companies to ensure progressive reduction of the adverse impact of discharges, and introduces additional monitoring and reporting obligations. However, it does not give water companies a timetable to invest and update the sewage system, and there remains no legal duty on water companies not to release sewage into our waterways. It is therefore important that Shropshire Council plays an active role in holding key partners to account, and looks at opportunities to enable, encourage and enforce actions that will help to reduce sewage being released into waterways.

River water quality is a fast-moving topic area with national and regional developments and announcements being reported on a frequent basis. Some examples of recent announcements from 2022 and 2023 are included in appendix 2.

2. Scope of the work

It is recognised that there are a number of different factors that impact on the quality of river water including agricultural sources and highways. However, this piece of work is focused on the impact of sewage discharges into waterways.

This focus has been taken because of the local and national focus on these matters and the developments taking place by Government and by water companies including Severn Trent Water locally.

It will be important that the Council is well placed to understand the options and opportunities and to identify where the Council can play a role in helping to realise improvements in its area.

3. Objectives

- To understand the nature of the monitoring and infrastructure improvements that have been made and the impacts that this has achieved.
- To understand how weather conditions can impact on river water quality and sewage discharge and how this is reflected in the results for Shropshire.
- To better understand the infrastructure requirements that remain necessary and ask water companies to provide timescales for mitigating the effects of sewage [and other pollutants] being discharged into our rivers, and to discuss the funding of capital schemes and possible access to additional funding.
- To better understand the monitoring of these discharges, identifying the opportunities to ensure that there is comprehensive coverage across Shropshire and that the reporting of any results is easily available, and more open and transparent.
- Through the planning process, identify the options and opportunities to hold developers and the water companies to account including the provision and funding of adequate sewerage provision for the large increase in housing proposed in the draft Local Plan.
- To make recommendations to best place the Council to identify, pursue and lobby for the best outcomes for river water quality (related to the release of sewage) for Shropshire communities.

4. What has the Task and Finish group done?

Members carried out their work to deliver their objectives using a range of approaches. This work is summarised below, and the key findings and conclusions and recommendations that have arisen are set out in their report.

Members researched data and information on river water quality in Shropshire using websites including the Environment Agency and the Rivers Trust. This provided them with a view of the assessed states of the rivers and waterways, the types of pollution that had been identified, as well as maps and visualisations of data that helped to identify the locations where the highest number of incidents occurred. They used their findings to inform the questions and lines of enquiry, which they refined as they carried out their work

To inform their understanding further they spoke to witnesses from other areas of the country as well as putting questions to key individuals and organisations. The full list of witnesses is attached at appendix 1.

Members of the Task and Finish Group also undertook a site visit to Ludlow Sewage Treatment Works to combine meeting with officers from Severn Trent Water to hear responses to the questions they had shared, and to see first-hand how a treatment site works and learn more about the developments planned for the location. They were aware that Ludlow was one of the sites in Shropshire applying for bathing water status.

5. Key Findings

Members observed that when looking at the impact of pollution on rivers and waterways it was important to look at the catchment areas and the different factors that can influence water quality in a geographic place, such as the area that the Council is responsible for. Relationships with the different companies, local authorities, regulators and communities are key to understanding, preventing, managing, and removing the risk of such pollution occurring.

In carrying out this work the Members have heard a lot about how improvements are being made in the Shropshire Council area, but they have not received much additional or new perspectives. In particular, they have highlighted not being any clearer on the timing and location of releases of sewage (especially dry releases) when there should be concern in communities and raised awareness about using waterways, or receiving confirmation of when access to the data and the visualisation will take place.

Preventing pollution is best

The members confirmed, at the earliest stage in their work, that they recognised that there are a number of different sources of pollution to waterways, including agriculture, highways run-off, and sewage.

They have focused on sewage in this work but have taken account of agriculture and highways run-off as it has come up in their investigation. Consideration of the Environment Agency data on the health of rivers and waterways highlighted that in the Shropshire Council area the health of the River Severn was rated as better than the tributaries, and that outside of the more urban areas the impact of agriculture was higher.

Evidence considered by Members highlighted the need to focus on the prevention or removal of the risk of pollution to rivers and waterways. There were many different contributions to this, ranging from:

- education and awareness raising about changes that could be made in the home and what goes down the drain,
- through to interventions in the catchment area that could slow run-off and reduce flooding such as planting trees between agricultural land and waterways,
- to physical changes to infrastructure in more urban areas e.g. separating waste water and rainwater run-off to reduce the impact of rainfall events on treatment capacity and the triggering of storm overflows resulting in sewage entering water courses.

Addressing pollution as close to source as possible was also highlighted, particularly in terms of agriculture and highways.

Using Planning to reduce the impact of new developments

Members considered the experience of the Windrush Against Sewage Pollution (WASP) campaigners who had worked in their area to highlight the issues and causes of sewage pollution in the River Windrush, raising these with the water treatment company and their Local Planning Authority, and achieving the adoption of Grampian Conditions.

The purpose of these conditions is to ensure that the infrastructure that is required is in place before the main development is commenced, or before the housing can be sold. In the case of this Task and Finish group work a condition might delay the delivery housing until sufficient infrastructure is in place to handle additional wastewater that is separate to run-off.

Members also learned that Grampian conditions can be applied development by development on an individual basis, or they could form part of Planning Policy. The conditions would be applied to the network area. Members recognised that this would need to be confirmed locally for Shropshire Council.

In all cases it would be important to evidence the issues in the area that demonstrate why the conditions would be required and the actions that would need to be taken to address them.

They understand that these conditions can be applied to smaller and larger developments, and from the experiences shared with them, that the application of the conditions can work best where the water company asks the Local Authority (LA)/Local Planning Authority (LPA) to apply Grampian Conditions outside of the area of the development i.e. outside of the land that the developer has control over. WASP advocated a collaborative approach to find the best solution, with the LA aiming to put the developer and the water company face to face.

An alternative is that the Council can ask the Water Treatment Provider for advice, but it can make its own decision and can apply the Grampian Conditions without the water company making a request.

Use of water and climate change

The group highlighted the value of slowing the flow of water through the environment and enabling greater absorption as part of sustainable drainage, and how this can reduce the risk of wastewater and sewage entering waterways.

Linked to this, and as part of planning requirements, are the ways that the Council can encourage more sustainable use of water. Some examples could be looking at how grey water systems and rainwater capture as part of new housing developments, can be used to reduce the use of drinking water to water gardens and clean cars.

Members suggested that the feasibility of introducing supplementary planning documents (SPD) should be explored and progressed.

Education

Education is a feature of prevention, but it was also raised throughout the work of the Task and Finish group and has therefore been highlighted separately. Members identified that it fulfils a range of important functions including:

- Raising awareness of the risks, issues, and indicators of pollution of rivers and waterways and developing a 'respect' for our collective environment so that improvement is sustained;
- Encouraging and embedding empowerment, engagement with, and ownership of local places and the actions that local people and communities can take;
- Highlighting the roles, responsibilities and opportunities of all of the different organisations, groups and individuals

Members heard of different types of education and awareness programmes. Two examples are:

[Yellow fish](#), which is a scheme to raise awareness about sources of water pollution and the quality of water in streams, rivers, lakes or ponds. Yellow fish are stencilled next to drains to remind people that what is put down a drain impacts aquatic life. Members made a strong link between this awareness and changing behaviours that resulted in sewers becoming blocked and increasing the potential for flooding and overflows and outfalls to occur, including putting fat and wet-wipes down the drain.

And

River Health Checker App, developed by the Environment Agency and Shropshire Wildlife Trust with CREST at the University Centre Shrewsbury. The app provides a route for observations and data on chemical testing, observations of the state of the river/waterway, invertebrates, and wildlife, and a function that prompts the user on what to do in a potential pollution situation. Members heard that the expected costs of launching the app and covering annual costs should be between roughly £3,000 to £4,000, although the costs would need confirming and exploring in greater detail.

Response and mitigations

Through their work members learned about and confirmed the importance of keeping separate, wastewater and run-off. This was easier to factor into new developments and associated infrastructure, but equally important to design this into the replacement of combined sewers.

Equally relevant is the reduction of run-off, particularly in more urban areas, to lower the volume of water entering the sewers. Members learned of initiatives in other areas of the country such as Mansfield, where hard standing was being replaced with more porous surfaces along with greening of the physical environment.

In a significantly rural place, like Shropshire, Members commented on the opportunities to reduce flooding and associated pollution by slowing the flow of water across the land, and to capture pollution and slow run-off from highways. They discussed using natural solutions such as planting trees between farms and agricultural land and waterways, and reed-bed filtration, as well as options such as the use of bio-char arising from the introduction of green technology such as pyrolysis, to trap pollutants.

Bathing Water Status and Standards

Evidence gathered through this work, including from experiences in Ilkley and from Surfers Against Sewage identified that whilst councils can apply for bathing water status, it was often best for the applications to be brought forward and led by the community. This included the identification of the sites. It was explained to the Members that by being community-led the applications would likely be better supported, have greater community ownership, and be more sustainable.

Members were aware of bathing water status applications to Defra being made for Ludlow and Shrewsbury and learned about the value of the roles of Shropshire Council and the town councils as landowners and as key local supporters, and the value of seeking and getting support from MPs.

Working as a system

Realising sustainable improvement to river water quality will be best achieved by all stakeholders from communities to councils, to water companies and regulators working together and delivering their parts of the system. Members identified that achieving improvements cannot be done in isolation.

In this context, there are mutual opportunities and shared outcomes between the stakeholders, whether communities, public sector organisations such as the council, regulators and the private sector. They come with different drivers, but all have their part to play. This 'system' approach should promote working in partnership.

A specific example that the group considered was the separation of wastewater and rainwater run-off, particularly where it would require both the water company and the Council as the highways authority to act together.

Effective engagement by all stakeholders with each other and local people and communities

Within this system way of working it will be essential to understand what is important at all levels, especially where it is acknowledged that individuals and communities play a key role – whether in the way they use water and what they put down the drain, or in the role they might fulfil like citizen scientists, who are increasingly playing a role in monitoring the health of waterways and identifying where pollution is taking place.

In this context engaging effectively with local communities will be significant in helping to get buy in to changes, possible disruption as a result of changes to infrastructure being made, and to encourage different preferences and choices to be made to achieve a lasting positive impact. Equally important will be doing the engagement in the right way, so that the messaging and language is clear and consistent, and it is coordinated across all of the different stakeholders in the system, informing their individual remits as well as the whole.

The regulatory/licencing environment

Members heard from witnesses that the regulatory environment drives behaviours in a certain way, with water companies working within these parameters and delivering what the licence requires, rather than progressing beyond them and pursuing the best for the environment.

Related to this is the monitoring, reporting and visibility of data required of the water companies. Members highlighted whether the frequency and timing of the monitoring and reporting was sufficient and took place at points that would truly show the impact of releases on river water quality. They noted that it remains very difficult to understand what is truly happening in our rivers.

Changing role of agencies and organisations and the role of the community

The work of the Task and Finish group has provided Members with growing insights about the changing roles of agencies, organisations and the community in relation to the scope of this investigation, and beyond.

Recent years have indicated a strengthening focus on the role of the Council as a 'Place Leader' and shaper, increasingly being an enabler. Evidence that the Members heard from other areas that have been progressing work to improve river water quality who highlighted that the support of councils to changes was instrumental to success. Some particular examples, included support from councils through:

- their direct responsibility as the local planning authority, adopting planning requirements such as Grampian Conditions, to ensure that infrastructure and treatment capacity was in place, and

- supporting applications for bathing water status in writing to Defra and by providing access and facilities, and
- providing small amounts of funding e.g. contributing to the costs of testing by Environment Agency recognised laboratories of the results of work by citizen scientists.

The pandemic provided evidence of the resilience and capability of communities. The Members heard about how this is being demonstrated in relation to tackling river water quality and particularly sewage pollution.

Members learned about how communities have been fundamental to achieving the successful changes in Ilkley and Northwest Oxfordshire. The role and leadership of community campaigners who used their energy and focus to raise awareness and push for action was combined with the emergence and growing purpose and impact of citizen scientists who brought their enthusiasm, knowledge, skills and experience to monitor and evidence the health of waterways and highlight pollution.

The growing role of the citizen scientists was commented on by Members, making links to the impact of reduced funding on the ability to respond to all reports of pollution by the Environment Agency (EA). Members were aware that the EA was focusing its resources to respond to the most serious cases of pollution, and that citizen science could help to fill the gap.

There was recognition that the community has a wide reach as well as strong ties to their place, and given the right tools, support, and opportunity, they could play a key role in monitoring pollution and raising awareness, helping to bring issues to the attention of organisations such as the Environment Agency.

When discussing the River Checker App with officers from the EA, Members learned about the many different citizen science groups that are working in their areas across the country who were developing recording of their data, making their data accessible, and the visualisation of the information. The discussions with the EA reinforced the need to not try to have a single tool or approach for all areas, but emphasised the importance of ensuring that there was consistency in the robustness of data collection and data structure that would enable data integration and analysis of greater depth and across wider geographic areas.

Members felt that the shared accessibility of the data could offer opportunities to engage places of further and higher education and the environmental sector in developing analysis and visualisation, as well as scope to inform innovation in prevention and mitigation of the pollution of waterways.

6. Conclusions

From the very start of this piece of overview and scrutiny work the members of the Task and Finish group were very much aware of the role and responsibilities of Local Authorities. They were also mindful of the different key contributors to pollution in waterways. They agreed to focus on sewage but would take account of matters and opportunities relating to agriculture and highways run-off where they came-up.

Through their work the Task and Finish group have concluded that whilst direct issues relating to regulation and holding to account on matters of water pollution, including through sewage, fall outside of the remit and responsibility of the Council, it does have direct impacts on the Council, communities that the Council enables and supports, and can create demand for services that the Council delivers.

There are also aspects of the Council's role, responsibilities and decision making that can help to reduce the risk and occurrence of pollution to waterways and enable and strengthen the voice and position of communities on environmental matters. In this final point, the Task and Finish group have drawn some parallels with the Council's role in relation to tackling climate change.

Influence through Planning

Members have concluded that opportunities exist for the Council to have direct influence on the sufficiency and capacity of wastewater infrastructure and treatment plants to handle additional needs from new housing developments.

Learning from other areas of the country suggests that the adoption of Grampian Conditions can provide the opportunity for the focus on ensuring that housing is not developed in isolation of the capacity of the infrastructure and services that need to be in place, in this instance, to cope with additional demand for wastewater and run-off and minimise the wider environmental impact of the development.

From a climate change position, planning requirements for new developments could also be useful in helping to reduce water usage to help make better use of grey water and rainwater.

Confirming and strengthening the role of Shropshire Council as a 'Place Leader' and enabler

As described evidence indicates that on the matters that the Task and Finish group have considered there is scope for the Council to grow in its role as a Place Leader. This is both strategically e.g. jointly leading the River Severn Partnership, in its role as the Local Planning Authority, and for more specific and community focused issues and initiatives e.g. providing small amounts of funding for specific activity.

Members believe that the Council does not need to deliver all things, but should be active in providing direction, and supporting and enabling initiatives that deliver its priorities and the shared outcomes of the system partners.

Increasing the application of 'system working' to all areas of service delivery

Members of the Task and Finish group believe that the issues that have been considered in this work will be better solved by recognising the different 'cogs' in the system that are either contributing to or can help to address the issues.

Each of the different parts of the system, e.g. the Water Company, the Environment Agency as the regulator, the Council as the Local Planning Authority and a 'place leader', developers, and local communities, play different roles and have different organisational and personal powers, responsibilities, and ways to impact and deliver their shared outcomes. Members believe that by working together and each doing their piece of the whole, the system partners will deliver change more quickly, more efficiently and have a more sustainable impact.

Effective Engagement

Engaging effectively with local communities will be a key driver of success, helping to garner support for changes, raise awareness of issues and plans to address them, and to promote ownership, for example in the monitoring of the health of waterways and identifying where pollution is taking place, and personal and community responsibility including what goes down the drain.

Maintaining effective engagement of the community and between the stakeholders will be both the foundation of working in this system way, and getting this right and investing in maintaining it should be a system priority.

As well as using the outputs of engagement to inform plans, to increase the sustainability and the embedding of change, the circle needs to be closed, This will include demonstrating the outcomes, progress and impact, and in doing so recognising how the different contributions have delivered successes.

Changing roles and voice of communities in environmental and other matters

Members have concluded that roles are changing due to a number of different factors and influences including changes to funding e.g. to the Environment Agency, which are forcing prioritisation of activities. They heard about how people in communities have knowledge, skills, experience, interest and energy in communities and how these have been used to great success in different areas of the country. The different

stakeholders need to collectively embrace and work with each other to achieve the sustainable change that is required.

Frequency and timing of monitoring by water companies

The group has highlighted that they believe that the visibility of the health of rivers and waterways in Shropshire is not as good as it should be, and that this would be helped by more frequent monitoring. More monitoring in general and in more tactical and targeted ways will help to generate a clearer and more transparent view of what the health of waterways is, what is having an impact, where, when, how and why, and whether the actions taken and investment made are having the impact expected.

Members believe that more monitoring by the water companies will help with this, both in terms of increasing the frequency to weekly, and to ensure that there is monitoring before and after releases so that the direct impact on the quality of the water is known and shared. This would be particularly relevant for dry releases, which Members understand should not be taking place, and where they did, could have greater impacts on the quality of the river water due to the reduced flow and reduced dilution of the released sewage.

Helping make the health of Shropshire waterways accessible and visible

The group believe that there is real potential offered by the River Health Checker App to raise awareness, enable the collection of data and information on the health of waterways, as well as provide guidance on reporting potential pollution incidents.

Members felt that the app provides the opportunity to raise and embed a love of the environment and ownership across all parts of communities, where school children to retirees, from interested amateurs to people with significant training and professional backgrounds, can all contribute in their own way.

Consistency in data collection and structure

Members endorsed the importance of supporting and promoting a standardised approach to the collection and recording of data arising from the work of citizen scientists. They concluded that this was important in enabling data from different areas of the country to be brought together to develop richer and deeper data sets, and to engage with further and higher education, and the environmental sector.

Bathing Water Status

Members confirmed their support for applications for Bathing Water Status and were pleased to be able to help progress with Shropshire bids during their work. They recognised the role that applying for and achieving the status has as a means to drive

awareness, focus attention and energy, and keep the pressure on the water industry and the other parts of the system to prevent and minimise pollution of waterways. They also concluded that Shropshire Council had an important role to play in supporting bathing water status applications rather than leading them, and that the applications were better made through the community.

Working in partnership with Severn Trent Water to achieve shared outcomes

Operating in a 'system' way will require the Council to continue to, if not increase, working in partnership with Severn Trent Water, as the water company in the area, to identify more opportunities deliver shared priorities and outcomes. Learning from pilot projects and initiatives identify that this could include:

- Looking at Council assets and car parks and the green environment more widely, to make changes that would slow run-off and increase absorption, contributing to reducing flooding and the risk of flooding. This is likely to be more relevant in urban areas, but there may be opportunities in all areas that the Council covers.
- Promoting work to separate combined sewerage so that surface run-off can be diverted and reduce the flow into sewage works, and the need for Combined Sewer Outfalls (CSOs) to be triggered or better still, required.
- Understanding opportunities for different stakeholders to use their spheres of influence to help system partners to share key messages and advice to people and communities which would help to achieve positive shared outcomes. An example shared with members was enabling access for a water company to raise awareness with householders of the misconnection of household appliances such as washing machines or dishwashers resulting in wastewater potentially entering into the wrong drains (where combined sewers are not in use).

Transparency and reporting of progress and impact

All partners in the system should be able to be clear about how what they have been doing contributes to the shared outcomes as a whole, what difference this has made, what they plan to do and what impacts these are expected to have.

The frequency of these updates should be aligned to the delivery plan timescales of the system as a whole and of the individual system partners, with an emphasis on when impacts and progress are planned to be evident to communities. These should also take account of any established or emerging national or organisational reporting timescale requirements.

All of this should be reported in a way that means that communities can understand what is planned, what has been done, and what has happened as a result. Therefore,

this needs to be consistent with the language and priorities of local communities to ensure that:

- the messages are relevant,
- they provide mechanisms for communities to raise issues effectively and be assured that they have both been listened to, and more importantly heard by the system partners,
- they enable the stakeholders to communicate their progress and priorities in ways that meet their own requirements.

Embedding river water quality within Overview and Scrutiny of climate change and the environment

Within achieving the transparency described above, the opportunity should be taken to establish a mechanism, such as a standing task and finish group, for overview and scrutiny to track climate and environmental topics and issues. This would include river water quality and flooding, keeping abreast of plans and developments, the results of monitoring, and impact and progress on these matters across the relevant stakeholders.

This has a strong fit with supporting the Council in its role as a place leader on these matters and would also allow the follow up on questions and lines of enquiry raised by the River Water Quality Task and Finish group that were not able to be answered during the work done. It could encompass the remit of the Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee in terms of flooding and climate change, and in doing so have a view of strategic working taking place, including the River Severn Partnership.

The group would need to maintain a consistent view across the topics and would need to feed its findings and any recommended points of focus back to the committee to be considered for inclusion in the work programme and possible deeper investigation.

7. Recommendations

The Task and Finish group have identified what they have defined as hard recommendations and softer recommendations. They expect that the hard recommendations will, in most cases, have a more direct impact on reducing sewage pollution and be more measurable in terms of delivery and impact. They form the first set of recommendations below.

Hard recommendations

1. That Shropshire Council, as the Local Planning Authority, should
 - Adopt Grampian Conditions in Shropshire to ensure that new developments will be joined to appropriate infrastructure and access to treatment works with the sufficient current and future capacity in place.
 - Promote the requirement for grey water systems and rainwater capture as part of new housing developments, reducing the use of drinking water to water gardens and clean cars. As part of this, Members recommend that the feasibility of introducing supplementary planning documents (SPD) should be explored and progressed.
2. That Shropshire Council, as the highways authority, should proactively engage with and encourage Severn Trent Water in their progression of works that will increase the separation of rainwater run-off from wastewater, including highways runoff, thereby helping to reduce the risk of overwhelming sewage infrastructure and treatment works.
3. That more monitoring of the health of rivers and waterways needs to take place:
 - Severn Trent Water should increase the frequency of monitoring and reporting to once a week and ensure that testing occurs before and after releases. This data needs to be made available and the results made visible and easily accessible and understandable e.g. using trend charts and maps.
 - System partners, including Shropshire Council, should work with citizen scientists to identify and put in place mechanisms that will allow them to continue to deliver and develop testing and monitoring that enhances the picture of what is happening beneath the surface of rivers and waterways.
4. That Shropshire Council is a 'Place Leader'. Within this there are a number of roles and actions that the Council should take to enable communities to help contribute towards improving river water quality:
 - Identify and provide access to small grants or accessible funding such as through initiatives like civic social crowdfunding that can be used to enable communities to take forward work that results in improved river water quality e.g. funding equipment and lab testing of citizen scientists work, and funding the River Health Checker app.
 - Supporting and enabling initiatives and applications for Bathing Water Status.
 - Assessing the feasibility of managing the River Health Checker App and promoting its use locally with stakeholders in the system and communities.

Softer recommendations

5. That system partners confirm shared outcomes and objectives in relation to river water quality and the environment and use these to jointly and consistently lobby Government to realise a regulatory framework and requirements that encourages water companies and other stakeholders who are part of the system, to target and achieve the best environmental outcomes.
6. That local representatives, including Shropshire Council, should work closely with Severn Trent Water to inform how and where the recently announced investment to reduce sewage pollution takes place. This should include enabling and ensuring the engagement between agencies and with local communities and help to realise the greatest benefit for the environment of the resources being brought to bear.
7. That system partners work to support increasing the visibility of the data and enabling greater understanding of what is actually happening in Shropshire rivers and water ways.
 - Support the adoption of the River Health Checker App
 - Enable and promote consistency of recording, data structures and access to the data, using those nationally described and adopted by other areas of the country.
 - Encouraging effective use of the data, and promoting the development of visualisation, including engaging with local further and higher education colleges.
8. That, once a reduction of sewage releases has been put in place, Shropshire Council progresses activity, directly through its own services and responsibilities, and through its partnership working as a Place Leader, to reduce the flow of other pollutants from agricultural and highways run-off.
9. That the Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee form a standing group that tracks climate and environmental topics and issues including river water quality and flooding, keeping abreast of plans and developments, the results of monitoring, and the impact and progress across the relevant stakeholders. To inform its work it may specify key measures of activity and progress that it wants to review. The group should meet every 6 months and report back into the Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee twice a year.

Appendix 1

Witnesses that the Task and Finish Group heard from

Witness	Organisation
Dan Wrench	Shropshire Council
John Bellis	Shropshire Council
Hayley Deighton	Shropshire Council
Professor Mark Barrow	Shropshire Council
Professor Becky Malby	Ilkley Clean River
Vaughan Lewis	Windrush Against Sewage Pollution
Geoff Tombs	Windrush Against Sewage Pollution
Phillip Dunne MP	Member of Parliament for Ludlow/ Chair of the Environmental Audit Committee
Kirsty Davies	Surfers Against Sewage
Alison Biddulph	Shrewsbury and Ludlow Bathing Water Status
Marc Liddeth	Environment Agency
Guy Pluckwell	Environment Agency
Lydia Ashworth	Environment Agency
Tim Smith	Severn Trent Water
Jason Rogers	Severn Trent Water
James Ratcliffe	Severn Trent Water
Gareth Mead	Severn Trent Water
Zack Holbrook	Severn Trent Water

Examples of River Water Quality Announcements

To start to address the issue of cleaner water Severn Trent, in 2022, announced the Green Recovery programme which works towards a goal of 15km (9.3 miles) of bathing quality waters by 2025. This includes the River Teme in South Shropshire. Severn Trent have also pledged to double the amount of bathing rivers in its region in the next 10 years.

In April 2023 there were a range of announcements that both informed and impacted this Task and Finish group work:

- Government plans to lift the cap of £250,000 for penalties for firms that release sewage into rivers of the sea. [Part of 'plans to make polluters pay' – including from plastics, and chemicals used in farming].
- Severn Trent Water have been given the green light by Defra, Ofwat and the Environment Agency to bring forward £95m worth of improvements to get started before the next 5 year cycle starting in 2025. (250,000 smart meters to help customers reduce demand and tackle leakage, increase reservoir capacity and improving monitoring at 80 sewage treatment works].
- Severn Trent Water made progress on work to protect rivers 1 year on from Get River Positive with 100% monitor coverage of storm overflows, and announced that 84% of reasons rivers are not achieving Environment Agency status is down to other sectors:

Severn Trent Water press release 31 March 2023

Severn Trent has today shared progress one year on from announcing its commitment to protect and improve in the health of the region's rivers. Results show impact from its operations has reduced by one third in one year and the water company has completed the installation of 100% of monitor coverage across the region.

Central to Severn Trent's commitments is the pledge that its operations will not be the reason for any stretch of river in its region to be classified as unhealthy by 2030. Environment Agency (EA) data released today (31 March 2023) shows this figure is now 16% down from 24%, with the remaining 84% attributable to other sectors.

The 2022 Event Duration Monitoring data shows that on average storm overflows were used for 1.15% of the total year - a 47% decrease in the operational time of 2021. In addition, whilst rainfall across the region was lower (13% less than in 2021) through improvements and investments, activations have reduced by 26% compared to the previous year and duration reduced by 46% on average.

Severn Trent is moving faster, in some cases 20 years ahead of targets set out by regulators and the Get River Positive pledges have made a difference across its region over the last 12 months including:

- *Investing £100 million a year on improving infrastructure*

- *Making significant progress on the £78 million Bathing Rivers programme to improve 50km of rivers in Warwickshire and Shropshire and the £25 million project to help prevent sewer flooding and river pollution across the Gloucestershire town of Stroud*
- *Installing 100% of monitors on storm overflows by the end of 2022, recording data every 2 or 15 minutes, providing more 300 million data records over the course of a year*

On Monday 2 October 2023 Severn Trent Water made further statements on the investment they will be making:

Severn Trent has today announced it is investing £12.9 billion in its water and sewage network, as part of ambitious plans submitted to water regulator Ofwat, whilst keeping bills affordable and good value for customers.

The multibillion-pound programme is set to create 7,000 new jobs between 2025 and 2030, which will have a positive lasting impact for decades to come. It also means that for every household, Severn Trent will invest £2,400 back into the region, transforming the way more than four million customers are served across the Midlands.

The major announcement comes after 68,000 customers helped to shape the plan so that it delivers the outcomes its customers care about most - it will guarantee a secure water supply for generations to come; storm overflows will cause no harm to rivers and customers will receive sector leading service, with a promise that customers won't pay for anything twice.

Investment in the water system is essential to ensure the security of water supply in the future and will deliver significant improvements in the region's water and sewerage system. The plan is underpinned by a £550m financial support package, which means financial support for around 700,000 people to help pay their bill - more customers than ever before - and around one in seven customers in the region. We understand this support is the most extensive in the water industry, from the information we had at the time we submitted our plan, and the numbers supported exceeds those we forecast to be in water poverty by 2030.

Liv Garfield, CEO at Severn Trent, unveiled the £12.9bn investment plans and said: "By 2030 we will have transformed our network to continue to provide our customers with the best service that can be relied on. At the heart of this ambition is a commitment to ensure a sustainable future – from healthy rivers, to providing jobs of thousands, less leaks and a water supply to deal with the impacts of climate change and population growth whilst making sure that no customer ever worries about affording their water bill.

"We've listened hard to our customers; not only will we make sure we keep building on our strong sector leading track record, but we'll be more than a water company. This

investment will make sure we have a positive economic, environmental and social impact for decades to come for the communities we serve.”

Highlights of the 2,000-page plan include:

- *To help with climate change and population growth – which is set to grow by 12% to nine million in the Midlands by 2050 - Severn Trent will lay new water mains almost the length of Lands End to John O’Groats twice over and provide an extra 100 million litres a day from new water sources.*
- *Severn Trent has already reduced its impact on waterways by a third in the last year alone and today’s announcement confirms a further almost £7 billion investment in its wastewater treatment, including plans to go faster to improve storm overflows – three a week, every week and means spills will be stopped five years ahead of Government targets. More River Rangers will also be recruited to continue to improve the health of waterways and to boost biodiversity*

Severn Trent has the second lowest bill in England and Wales - £29 below national average, and this plan will make sure that bills continue to be affordable and offer the best value. From an average of £1.15 a day today, to £1.42 a day by 2030, people will receive a high quality and reliable clean water and wastewater service that customers can count on, and new record levels of investment where it is wanted – doing the right thing for the environment and society. For context, water bills are today the equivalent 1.2% of disposable income, increasing to 1.3% by 2030.

The plan builds on Severn Trent’s strong track record of delivering large scale investment projects, as well as being recognised for the fourth year running, with highest four-star rating for environmental performance by the Environment Agency and recognised by Ofwat as being sector leading for financial resilience in a region where there hasn’t been a hosepipe ban for 30 years.

The £12.9 billion investment will create up to 7,000 jobs in the water company’s extensive supply chain and directly in the business and will also enable thousands of new work experience placements, apprenticeships and internships.

The plans submitted today to Ofwat will now be reviewed, and final business plans for 2025-2030 will be confirmed in April 2024.

Full details of the plan can be found at: www.stwater.co.uk/about-us/our-plans-2025-2030

River Water Quality Task and Finish Group – Additional questions to the EA, STW and Shropshire Council

Question	Recipient		
	EA	STW	SC
<p>How have treatment works in Shropshire been expanded over the past 10 to 20 years?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which sites and locations has this happened at and what was done in the expansion/upgrade? • How future proofed were these activities – how long were/are for these changes expected to meet demand (how much additional capacity gets built into developments)? • Were any of these expansions/upgrades identified through links made to the Local Plans and large housing developments? • If so, please confirm which ones and how the Local Plan/details of the housing development informed the scope and scale of the work undertaken. 		✓	
<p>What horizon scanning do you do to understand expected/forecast demand, to forward plan infrastructure and treatment works capacity and testing locations and requirements?</p>		✓	
<p>What triggers a response and inclusion in your Asset Management Plan e.g. Local Plan or developer confirmation of work starting?</p>		✓	
<p>What level of investment is going to be required to ensure that there is sufficient storm storage in place in Shropshire communities, particularly where it's a Victorian system?</p>		✓	
<p>To what degree do you forecast asset requirements based on existing CSOs etc? What consideration takes place of probable and potential new/increased demand on infrastructure and treatment works?</p>		✓	
<p>What are the current and future programmes of improvement and development of infrastructure and treatment works in Shropshire that affect or impact on Shropshire rivers and waterways,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the locations that work is taking place or is planned to take place and when? • What work is being or going to be done at each site? • What the net benefit of each improvement/development will be to the river/waterway system overall as well as locally, and • whether it's about being ready for the future to meet standards or growing demand, or putting a finger in the dyke to address current issues? 		✓	
<p>For the development of new treatment facilities or upgrades/redevelopment of existing sites, please identify which of the following best reflects practice and planning and why:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addressing gaps in current capacity? • Meeting forecast future demand based on known or expected demand? • : achieving current minimum standards? 		✓	

Question	Recipient		
	EA	STW	SC
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeting future expected standards? • Implementing the technological developments and innovation to achieve the best possible standards? 			
Please provide information that sets out annually for the last 5 years any significant events in Shropshire and the locations e.g. spillages and prosecutions	✓		
What would the EA need to be informed of to trigger an event?	✓		
What proportion of the total events nationally, and in Shropshire, do the EA think they are informed about? Please provide this as different data sets.	✓		
What would help the EA to deliver the levels of activity/standards that they would like to achieve? Both in terms of their own activity, and the outcomes for waterways and communities.	✓		
How do the EA engage with Citizen scientists? What do they do with the data? Are there any pinch points that impact on using the data provided and what could be done to alleviate them?	✓		
What impact would reducing flooding closer to the source and slowing the flow in the catchment have on pollution in rivers/waterway in Shropshire – particularly sewage, but also from agriculture and highways run-off?	✓		
What number of investigations are currently underway in Shropshire? What are the trends over the past 5 years? What were the causes for each investigation?	✓		
Is the testing and related data provided by Water Companies adequate in terms of timing of the testing taking place in relation to events, locations e.g. upstream/downstream of outfalls and CSOs, and what is covered by the testing? What would better testing data look like and what benefits would it provide?	✓		
What evidence would the EA require to change policies re: standards for timing, location and content of testing?	✓		
What data and testing are you asked for? When are you asked for it? If it is unplanned what triggers collection of the data/testing? Is this the right data to show the true issues?		✓	
How independent of management is the testing and reporting that takes place?		✓	
When was the last time that your organisation felt that water quality in rivers and waterways in Shropshire was good? What has changed since then?	✓	✓	
Does the EA triaging of incidents and the fact that category 2 incidents are usually identified through an EA officer visit, mean that only category 1 incidents are truly responded to?	✓		

Question	Recipient		
	EA	STW	SC
How are wider pollution sources identified and responded to e.g. those that that may be located on a site that only pollutes a watercourse when the site is flooded?	✓		
Are there standards in place for unplanned/irregular discharges of sewage e.g. of timeliness of testing and location of testing? What could help to improve the monitoring of the impact of unplanned discharges?	✓	✓	
What are your/your organisations thoughts on Bathing Water Standards and Bathing Water Status?	✓	✓	
What is the probability and associated risk of (sewage) pollution entering groundwater? Does pumping river water to replenish aquifers have an impact on this? How is/should/could this be monitored, managed, mitigated against?	✓	✓	
How bad is pollution of waterways at CSOs in Shropshire? How does it differ across water courses and across Shropshire and why?	✓	✓	
Would your organisation be interested in being part of a Shropshire focused multi-agency task group to look at identifying solutions to “frequent flyer” CSOs and their proximity to environmentally sensitive areas?	✓	✓	✓
Is the pharmaceutical pollution from treated water and sewage monitored and impact measured? If not how could this be done and what actions need to be taken?	✓	✓	
<p>What alternative methods of treating sewage/wastewater, including nature-based techniques, can or should be used as part of new or expanded/redeveloped treatment works?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which of these approaches reduce or remove levels of pharmaceutical pollution? • Are any of these approaches suitable to be implemented/introduced to Shropshire? • What needs to be in place for them to be suitable (e.g. infrastructure/topography/location in relation to waterways or floodplains/support from other agencies/support from communities etc)? • How, where and when is this or could this happen in Shropshire? 	✓	✓	✓
Looking at other areas of the country – Thames Water asked the Local Planning Authority (North West Oxfordshire District Council) to implement Grampian conditions to ensure that infrastructure and treatment works capacity can respond to and match demand arising from new development. Is this something that your organisation would want to ask of Shropshire Council/would want the Council to do?	✓	✓	

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Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee

9th November 2023

Item

Public



New Housing Developments Task and Finish Group Action Plan

Responsible Officer:	Tracy Darke		
email:	Tracy.darke@shropshire.gov.uk	Tel:	07458 074829
Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder):	Cllr Chris Schofield		

1. Synopsis

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide the Economy and Place Overview and Scrutiny committee an opportunity to review and agree the proposed Housing Development Action Plan following the Task and Finish group's findings.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1. The Task and Finish group evolved from a Place Scrutiny committee discussion regarding the quality of housing development in Shropshire. Concern was raised primarily regarding poor internal finishings, lack of good quality open space provision and the lack of timely adoption of access roads to properties. Members wanted to explore with officers where responsibility for these issues sat and what influence they may have over improving the quality of housing developments, consequently improving the lives for occupiers of new homes in Shropshire.
- 2.2. The review concluded with a decision for officers to report back to the committee with an action plan. The action plan is attached to this report at Appendix A.
- 2.3. This report and the attached action plan meets the priorities in the Shropshire Plan relating to a healthy economy and healthy environment, by virtue of striving to provide better quality homes and surroundings for residents in Shropshire.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1. That the committee review and agree the contents of the proposed action plan.
- 3.2. That the committee request that the action plan is reported back to the committee in 12 months to review and monitor progress.

Report

4. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

- 4.1. There are no human rights or equalities implications as a result of this report.
- 4.2. The work of the task and finish group and the subsequent action plan continues to provide the opportunity to increase members and the public's understanding of the role and influence the Council has in areas such as building control, for example, Shropshire Council's Building Control service is in direct competition with the private sector.
- 4.3. It provides an opportunity to strengthen the role of planning services in ensuring new residential developments feature well-designed open spaces which improves the appearance of the developments, but also enhances the health and well-being of residents living in these areas.
- 4.4. The work of the task and finish group has provided focus on the recruitment of a Green Infrastructure Officer to help provide better designed open spaces.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

6. Climate Change Appraisal

- 6.1. There are no specific climate change implications arising from the recommendation. However, when implementing the action plan, officers should also set out whether there are any impacts on climate change because of their suggested course of action. In particular, there is the opportunity through the improved communications for Building Control to share the requirements for developments to produce significantly less CO2 emissions to meet the governments targets on net zero, which is an important step for the industry ahead of the Future Homes and Buildings Standard in 2025. It is better to build in the efficiencies within the initial design rather than retrofit later.

7. Background

- 7.1. The task and Finish group considered a number of concerns and complaints about poorly designed developments and the impact they were having on creating attractive places for our residents to live. A list of issues were gathered and the review which involved members, officers and developers gave an opportunity to gain a better understanding of roles and influence and how collectively we can tackle some of the difficult issues to improve the environment. This also included the construction of homes and explored how building control works so that this was better communicated to residents.
- 7.2. The findings of the task and finish group resulted in a list of recommendations that were approved by Cabinet on 19th April 2023. This also required an action plan to be developed, which is attached at Appendix A.
- 7.3. Cabinet also required the progress on the action plan to be reported back to Scrutiny committee 12 months from the date of approval.

8. Conclusions

- 8.1. The report therefore recommends that the action plan at Appendix A is approved.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

Report of the Housing Development Completion Task and Finish Group Feb 2023 to Scrutiny Committee

Report of the Housing Development Completion Task and Finish Group 19th April 2023 to Cabinet

Local Member: Cllr Chris Schofield – Portfolio Holder for Planning

Appendices

Appendix A – Action Plan

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Recommendation	Planned works	Responsible officer/s	Completed by
Always encourage the local authority to use its own building control service for its own developments or those of its ALMO.	Ensure that all departments of the Council consider using our in-house Building Control service by giving the opportunity to bid for all work. It is essential to retain the service to give customers choice. Our service competes directly with the market. This will include working with procurement and legal as well as Council services that procure building works.	Tracy Darke – AD Economy and Place Tabitha Lythe – Planning and Development Services Manager	On-going
Request its building control and communications services to collaborate to develop a plan to increase awareness of building control, the New Homes Quality Board and the Housing Ombudsman, to would-be homeowners in Shropshire.	Campaign to help residents be more aware of the importance of building safely and ensuring that they ensure that any developer they have to carry out works to their property meets the required standards. Work with the Communications team to develop a strategy to work with the press in promoting better awareness for customers.	Tabitha Lythe – Planning and Development Services Manager Alice James – Communications and account Executive	October 2023
To include building control in the programme of induction training provided to elected members following all-council elections in 2025.	Supporting Councillors in understanding how building control works and the implications when building regulations are not met. Updating them on the national changes to competency requirements following Grenfell	Tabitha Lythe – Planning and Development Services Manager Miranda Garrard – Head of Legal Services Amanda Holyoak – Democratic Services Team Leader	After 2025 elections to be part of wider induction programme for members

	<p>which has had a significant effect on the industry.</p> <p>This training will be part of the wider induction for members and will enable them to have a good understanding of the importance of building control in building safely.</p>		
<p>Support Cornovii and Star Housing's work in creating their own open space management company.</p>	<p>Explore the opportunity with the Housing Company and ALMO to understand whether it is feasible to set up the management company. This will give developers a further option to transfer the management of open space and enable our housing company and ALMO the opportunity to develop this as a business opportunity as well as ensuring open spaces are well managed.</p>	<p>Harpreet Rayet – CEO Cornovii and Star Housing Tracy Darke – AD Economy and Place</p>	<p>December 2023</p>
<p>Proceed to recruit a dedicated officer with a specific remit of ensuring well-designed, high-quality, coherent, biodiverse open space on new developments.</p>	<p>Job description and person specification prepared to cover breadth of role. Decision on management of role.</p> <p>This will provide a resource that can influence well designed open spaces and ensure that they are integral to the development. The role will also provide a more strategic approach to green infrastructure.</p>	<p>Andy Wigley – Policy and Environment Manager Clare Featherstone – Head of Leisure, Tourism and Culture</p>	<p>Completed. Recruitment underway.</p>
<p>Review its Section 38/278 process to create a greater focus on securing legal agreements early in the planning process.</p>	<p>Resourcing of S38/278 work needs attention as it has been under-resourced for more than 10 years, resulting in a lot of legacy cases. Processes and procedures to be</p>	<p>Tabitha Lythe – Planning and Development Services Manager Miranda Garrard – Head of Legal Services</p>	<p>March 2024</p>

	<p>improved to enable works to proceed more quickly, to avoid many of our estates being occupied before the road works are completed/adopted. This will drive in more income and significantly reduce concerns and complaints about roads not being completed.</p>		
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Committee and Date

Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee

9 November 2023

Item

Public



Social Housing and the Housing Strategy

Responsible Overview and Scrutiny Officer:	Jane Trethewey		
email:	jane.trethewey@shropshire.gov.uk	Tel:	01743 258913
Overview and Scrutiny Chair:	Joyce Barrow		

1. Synopsis

Social housing is a key element of the housing market and housing delivery in Shropshire, ensuring that people who cannot afford to meet their housing need through the open market are able to access suitable accommodation. Shropshire Council's action plan to support this tenure through its Housing Strategy is reported here.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1. This report follows on from key recommendations of the Economy and Environment Oversight Committee on the subject of housing need and social housing in Shropshire, as a key contributor to the objectives of The Shropshire Plan, where Housing is noted as essential to a healthy economy.
- 2.2. The recommendations made through this work aim to shape and inform Shropshire's Housing Strategy and help to bring the Strategic Housing function more centrally into the thinking, planning and delivery of other key strategies such as the economic growth strategy and transport plans. This includes greater alignment between the Housing Strategy and Planning Policy teams.
- 2.3. This report notes where progress has already been made towards delivery of the recommendations and sets out an action plan for further work still required.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1. That committee notes the progress made towards delivering the recommendations agreed at Cabinet in September 2023.
- 3.2. That committee notes and provides feedback upon the action plan showing work undertaken and planned, and agrees to receive future updates on progress.

Report

4. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

- 4.1. The risk for Shropshire Council should it not progress the recommendations previously agreed by Cabinet is that it will fail to maximise the benefits of social housing for those in greatest need and will lose opportunities to support the rural economy.
- 4.2. Failure to maximise opportunities for social housing will also result in higher costs both to the poorest households who may be displaced out of county, and to the Council itself, through a need for more expensive temporary accommodation in place of permanent housing solutions.
- 4.3. Through effective action in pursuing better housing options, the Council has the opportunity to mitigate these risks, and improve outcomes for households and their communities.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1. There are no financial implications directly related to this report.

6. Climate Change Appraisal

- 6.1. Having suitable housing in communities that is located in closer proximity to places of work, education, health services, and retail and food shops can help to reduce the amount of travel by motor vehicle that is required. This can reduce energy and fuel consumption.
- 6.2. Ensuring that homes are energy efficient either as new build or existing properties that are retrofitted with insulation and newer heating solutions will also help to reduce fuel consumption.

7. Background

- 7.1. Earlier in 2023 Members of the former Communities Overview Committee, and subsequently the Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee,

undertook an enquiry into social housing in Shropshire, to contribute to the planned review of the Housing Strategy.

7.2. The objective of this work was

- To review and understand housing need in Shropshire;
- To understand the different types of social housing, and the wider description of affordable housing and its forms, for example, key worker housing;
- To identify and consider specific challenges related to the housing market in Shropshire; and
- To identify key messages and make evidence-based recommendations to inform the review and update of the Housing Strategy.

7.3. A range of learning and findings were identified from this work, which were summarised in the report to the 20 July 2023 meeting of the committee. These findings were further summarised in the committee's report to the Cabinet meeting of 6 September 2023.

7.4. Six recommendations were made through this work, with the aim that they help to shape and inform the Housing Strategy and to bring the Strategic Housing function more centrally into the thinking, planning and delivery of other key strategies such as the economic growth strategy and transport plans. This includes greater alignment between the Housing Strategy and Planning Policy teams.

7.5. A further recommendation was that feedback be provided to the Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting of 9 November 2023 to confirm which recommendations have been accepted and which have not. Also that an action plan should set out what will be done and by when to deliver the accepted recommendations, and where recommendations have not been accepted an explanation should be provided.

8. Additional Information

8.1. The six recommendations from the Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed by Cabinet were as follows:

- Following the implementation of the revised allocations policy and scheme, the Council should ensure that this is adhered to by all registered providers through regular monitoring to guarantee those in the highest need are allocated housing.
- The Council should recognise the importance of the strategic housing function and how housing is integral to planning policy, social care and economic development, and therefore the need to strengthen the relationship between these functions.
- The Council should promote a place-based approach to housing and economic development, which includes commissioning affordable and supported housing based on evidenced need so as to ensure that housing priorities are delivered in the right place. Thus, responding to the fact that Shropshire is made up of any different communities across a large geographic area with different needs.

- Investment in social housing must acknowledge the specific needs of rural settlements, therefore products need to be tailored accordingly. For example, intergenerational supported housing, which could include staff accommodation, would help to promote a preventative agenda in villages and small towns (e.g., preventing admissions to hospital and care homes, and supporting people with learning disabilities and mental health problems to live independently).
- The Council should explore and pursue opportunities to attract funding, such as Community Land Trusts, and lobby for new products specifically to support the rural economy which will not only deliver the preventative agenda, but also balance the housing market and help to ensure that people can continue to afford to live in communities in Shropshire. For example, innovative funding products to fund intergenerational living and for sub-market private rented accommodation for key workers who are not necessarily able to access social housing, as they are not in a high priority reasonable preference category.
- The Council should review and implement any new legislation on short-term lets, helping to ensure that the balance is struck between the economic gain to communities and places through increased visitor spend, against the availability of homes to buy and rent where there is local concern.

8.2. A range of actions have already been delivered or are underway to address these recommendations. Further actions are now being scoped or planned to address them more fully. The Action Plan set out in Appendix 1 lists these for review.

9. Conclusions

9.1. The findings and recommendations of the Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee are now being used to inform the development of housing related strategy and policy, with progress reflected in the Action Plan appended.

List of Background Papers

- **Cabinet 6 September 2023 - Social Housing and Reviewing the Housing Strategy**
- **Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee 20 July 2023 - Social Housing and Reviewing the Housing Strategy**

Local Member: Not applicable.

Appendices: APPENDIX 1 Action Plan

APPENDIX 1 ACTION PLAN

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	Recommendation	Action
1	<p>Following the implementation of the revised allocations policy and scheme, the Council should ensure that this is adhered to by all registered providers through regular monitoring to guarantee those in the highest need are allocated housing.</p>	<p>Action to date</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The revised allocations policy and scheme is now being applied. • Shropshire’s main RPs have been contacted individually and have agreed and signed Nominations Agreements to ensure lettings are made in line with policy. • The HomePoint team now regularly challenge landlords rejecting the highest banded bidders for a property, to ensure that this is legitimate. This has resulted in a higher number of lets being made to priority bidders. <p>Further action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Closer working between the HomePoint team in Housing Services and the Housing Enabling team in Planning should see earlier exchanges with landlords around the first lettings of newbuild homes, to ensure that they are identified for cases in highest need. • A planned upgrade of the Abritas system that sits behind HomePoint will improve reporting so that concerns can be identified and addressed earlier.
2	<p>The Council should recognise the importance of the strategic housing function and how housing is integral to planning policy, social care and economic development, and therefore the need to strengthen the relationship between these functions.</p>	<p>Action to date</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A new Housing Strategy Officer post was created and appointed into in summer 2023, creating additional capacity in the strategic housing function. • Planning policy and social care colleagues attend the Housing Executive Board meetings, to share information and action on strategic housing matters. • Housing strategy has been identified as a key element of the Marches Strategic Partnership and the Strategic Infrastructure Partnership, where Shropshire Council working with neighbouring counties and with other partners to ensure that appropriate plans are put in place to meet need into the future.

		<p>Further action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A restructure of the Housing Strategy function is planned, with new recruitment into the vacant Housing Strategy and Development Manager post, and a planned move of housing enabling colleagues from planning policy to Housing Strategy. This will create stronger links between the functions. • Planning Policy officers will be initiating a draft Supplementary Planning Document on Housing in 2024, to provide more detailed advice for house builders on the Council’s requirements and priorities, linked to the Housing Strategy. • Economic Development colleagues will be invited to join the Housing Executive Board meetings in future.
3	<p>The Council should promote a place-based approach to housing and economic development, which includes commissioning affordable and supported housing based on evidenced need so as to ensure that housing priorities are delivered in the right place. Thus, responding to the fact that Shropshire is made up of many different communities across a large geographic area with different needs.</p>	<p>Action to date</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Housing Commissioning Priorities document was drafted and issued to all Registered Providers and to Cornovii Developments Limited in summer 2023, planned to guide development programmes. This is based upon evidenced need derived from the Housing Needs Survey 2022 and includes reference to general needs and supported housing. • Planning consent was achieved for a new housing scheme at Coton Hill House, Shrewsbury, which will provide supported accommodation for homeless people to enable them to move on into settled homes. <p>Further action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A report will be created based upon the findings of the Housing Needs Survey, so that this information is more accessible to partners needing to reference the data, allowing better evidenced decisions to be made. • A focused piece of work is planned to create a Housing Strategy for Shrewsbury, linking to the Big Town Plan, the economic goals for Shrewsbury, and the evidenced housing needs shown in the Housing Needs Survey. • Opportunities are actively being sought to meet specific housing needs across Shropshire, in support of a range of different resident groups.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A review of the Tenancy Strategy is intended to move it to be better aligned to local incomes.
4	<p>Investment in social housing must acknowledge the specific needs of rural settlements, therefore products need to be tailored accordingly. For example, intergenerational supported housing, which could include staff accommodation, would help to promote a preventative agenda in villages and small towns (e.g., preventing admissions to hospital and care homes, and supporting people with learning disabilities and mental health problems to live independently).</p>	<p>Action to date</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Housing Commissioning Priorities document referenced above includes reference to supported housing requirements and identifies a range of locations where newbuild development will be appropriate. • Cabinet has approved the Sustainable Affordable Warmth Strategy addressing the investment needs of rural and urban homes. <p>Further action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An Independent Living and Specialist Housing Strategy for Shropshire is in draft and will be issued for public consultation prior to amendment and submission to Cabinet for approval. This will set out in greater detail the needs and opportunities for specific property types and services and will be used to encourage developers and landlords to provide these. • A service review is underway which will result in the drafting of a new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Prevention Strategy, to capture the range of situations that result in families and individuals becoming homeless, and which will create an improved approach to addressing the triggers which locally create these issues.
5	<p>The Council should explore and pursue opportunities to attract funding, such as Community Land Trusts, and lobby for new products specifically to support the rural economy which will not only deliver the preventative agenda, but also balance the housing market and help to ensure that people can continue to afford to live in communities in Shropshire. For example, innovative funding products to fund intergenerational living and for sub-market private rented accommodation for key workers who are not necessarily able</p>	<p>Action to date</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council officers meet regularly with Homes England as the main funder of social housing in England, as well as with WMCA which has recently been granted devolved funding for housing investment, to lobby for funding to support Shropshire’s housing priorities. • The establishment of the Marches Strategic Infrastructure Partnership has initiated discussions on funding for rural housing, alongside our neighbouring Councils with similar demographic and geographic challenges. <p>Further action</p>

	<p>to access social housing, as they are not in a high priority reasonable preference category.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An affordable and intermediate housing options strategy will be initiated which considers the challenges faced by rural settlements and market towns, and provides options to address these. • The Housing sub-group of the Marches Strategic Infrastructure Partnership will identify opportunities to lobby and bid for funding to address the housing needs of the rural economy, with the intention of having more weight as a group than Shropshire on its own.
6	<p>The Council should review and implement any new legislation on short-term lets, helping to ensure that the balance is struck between the economic gain to communities and places through increased visitor spend, against the availability of homes to buy and rent where there is local concern.</p>	<p>Action to date</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National policy discussions on short term residential lets are being monitored. However, no new legislation has yet been issued for implementation locally. <p>Further action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with the Housing sub-group of the Marches Strategic Infrastructure Partnership, opportunities will be identified to lobby for legislation relating to short-term lets, to address the impact this has on availability of homes for local residents. • New legislation will be implemented appropriately to ensure that the visitor economy and local housing needs are well balanced.

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<u>Committee and Date</u>	<u>Item</u>
Economy and Environment OSC meeting 09/11/2023	

Banners, Bunting, Christmas lighting & temporary signage policy review in Shropshire – Progress Update October 2023

Responsible Officer

Gary Parton. Network Co-ordination and Compliance Manager
Gary.parton@shropshire.gov.uk
01743 258786

Banners, Bunting and Christmas lighting

1.0 Background and Summary

- 1.1 The current application and approval process to display community event banners, bunting or festive lights falls within the remit of Shropshire Councils Street Works team. The team were restructured in 2013 to better align to the objectives of the “Traffic Management Act 2004” and the Shropshire Council Permit Scheme (West and Shires Permit Scheme).
On review of existing tasks within the team the application and approval process for Banners, bunting and Christmas illuminations was highlighted as a task with minimal value in meeting the primary team objectives of “minimising disruption caused by roadworks” and was generally an administrative process with set conditions only.
- 1.2 It's recognised that many people feel that banners (sporting, recreational, charity & cultural only), bunting and Christmas lighting all add to the community experience within an area and can enhance event and general visitor attendance numbers significantly proving a valuable tool for the local economy, however they require approval under the Highways Act 1980 section 178 to confirm they fall within guidelines and policies of safety and do not hinder the aesthetics of the surrounding environment.
- 1.3 Current Process (<https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/roads-and-highways/road-network-management/application-forms-and-charges/banners-bunting-or-christmas-lights-on-the-highway/>)
- 1.4 The current application and approval process is handled by the Street works team who look to ensure banner content is community based and not for general business advertising and that the positions of said items cause no potential hazard or hindrance to highway users. An application is made containing details of the required banner, bunting or lighting type, location and confirmation of sufficient public liability insurance (£5m) to protect the council in the event of any possible incidences resulting from the placement of said items on the highway.

- 1.5 Items which are placed on or over the highway that are fixed to a non-council owned property, fence or railing require permission from the owner. The application is then assessed and given approval or refusal. A consideration of the applicant is of the load-bearing tolerances of the fixing points, council owned locations should be tested annually, and this information will be made available upon request, private properties are responsible for the maintenance and suitability of their fixing points. In this respect there exists some inconsistency in county-wide process. For example, Shrewsbury has specific, historic, and approved fixing locations that are regularly tested by the Town Council - whilst other Towns and villages do not.
- 1.6 Recommendations from the Place Overview Committee resulted in an engagement note being issued to all Town and Parish Councils requesting consideration and feedback on a proposal to devolve process and enforcement to applicable Town and Parish Councils.
- 1.7 Following further consideration and discussion of received responses by the group, the final "Task and Finish Group" report of 26th March 2020 gave recommendations on pursuing a revised policy, approach, and process.
- 1.8 The recommendations included that:
- i) Shropshire Council retain the powers for permitting banners, bunting and Christmas decorations (under Highways Act 1980 Section 178 and Section 115E) but also look to consult further with all Town and Parish Councils to include, where appropriate, provision for specific retail centres, individual towns and parishes.
 - ii) To consult further with Town and Parish Councils in order to identify any 'best practice' that could be adopted, and to gain local input from Town and Parish Councils on defining acceptable design and content criteria based on local area aesthetics and community sentiment.
 - iii) That separate policies were created both for banners, bunting and Christmas decorations "over" and "alongside" the highway.

Progress Update:

- 1.9 Most Banner applications received are for one or more of the approved fixing points in Shrewsbury. Historically the former Borough Council devised a process for regular testing of fixing points, supply of accredited labour, the equipment needed to fix and dismantle, and a diary booking system for applications. Whilst the powers to licence were transferred under Unitary the logistics to test fixing points and advise on suitable catenary wires and their lifespan etc. remained largely with the Town Council.
- 1.10 Due to both the number of applications for Shrewsbury, and the historical and current logistical issues presented, further discussions and liaison has taken place with STC regarding how to resolve these contemporary issues whilst also

ensuring that Shropshire Council, as designated Highway Authority, retain the powers permitting banners to be installed over and along the highway.

- 1.11 Discussions so far have revolved around a potential dual process which would allow STC to manage applications and diary bookings via their own agreed process (hence retaining “local” control and input) whilst permission to erect under licence is retained by Shropshire Council.
- 1.12 Discussions are ongoing with a view, if feasible and meeting previous recommendations, that any resultant proposed “model” is highlighted for further consultation with other Town & Parish Councils on a revised policy and process which also considers local criteria and aligns with service priorities, Shropshire Councils strategic objectives, and diminishing resources.
- 1.13 A further recommendation from the report advised that separate policies were created for banners “Over the highway” and “alongside the highway”. While discussions with STC are currently involving banners over the highway, the opportunity is also being taken to engage further with Town and Parish Councils regarding the logistical and practical problems of ownership of railings, fences and walls bordering the highway, ensuring safety and compliance, and controlling proliferation and content.
- 1.14 Following the recommendations from the group further discussions and liaison has taken place with Shrewsbury Town Council (STC) regarding how to resolve the logistics of ensuring compliance to licence conditions and the management / maintenance of approved “fixing points” for overhead banners in STC’s ownership, whilst also ensuring that Shropshire Council, as designated Highway Authority, retain the powers permitting banners, bunting and decorations to be installed over/along the highway.
- 1.15 As part of any further consultation with Town and Parish Councils the opportunity is also being taken for a review of the location, ownership and regular load bearing testing schedule for catenary wire fixing points and to ascertain any criteria or proposed restrictions for any specified local area – including specific locations where banners would / would not be acceptable.
- 1.16 The opportunity is also being taken to gain feedback on proposals for local councils to be more involved in the administrative/enforcement process and explore whether issuing annual licences for specified applicants/locations would be beneficial.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 That officers carry out a further engagement /consultation exercise, prior to Christmas 2023, with Town and Parish Councils to further identify “best practice”, provision for specific retail centres, and any local conditions that could be included. This with a view for any subsequent revised policy/process to be implemented by April 2024.

2.2 That, taking account of consultation responses, a revised policy and process report for “Banners, Bunting and Christmas Illuminations” is drafted for consideration and further comment/feedback by the Committee.

2.3 Whilst Shropshire Council retain the legislative licencing function, that views are sought on possible devolvement of the administrative process to Town and Parish Councils outlining the model set by Shrewsbury Town Council as an example.

2.4 That officers gain feedback, via engagement/consultation, on a proposal for an annual licence that could be issued, on application and for specific applicants/locations.

3.0 Opportunities and risks

3.1 The opportunity to utilise a broader and more detailed local knowledge retained by local parish and town councils in the decision-making process of suitable positioning and safety prerequisites necessary for load bearing fixing points and associated displays.

3.2 The opportunity to draft a policy for Shropshire that contains criteria for specific local areas.
For example, the policy could ban banners entirely alongside certain roads in a given town centre.

3.3 The opportunity to encourage local input on defining acceptable design and content criteria based on local area aesthetics and the community sentiment of each individual service application.

3.4 The opportunity to identify an efficient and appropriate use of Council resources regarding which service area could better deal with the administration of applications and any subsequent enforcement process.

3.5 Risk could include significant differences in proposed local approach creating difficulties in drafting a singular policy.

3.6 Could prove to be an opportunity to build further relations between Shropshire Council and parish/town councils.

3.7 A revised policy and procedure for Banners, Bunting and Christmas illuminations would need to align with the approved “Highway Assets Advertising” scheme allowing Highway assets such as roundabouts, boundary signs, lamp columns and verges to be utilised for commercial sponsorship and advertising purposes.

- 3.8 A proposed administration fee could impact on event organisers.
- 3.9 To allow all localised authorities to develop their individual process and best practice guidance based on their communities as it is felt that a 'blanket' approach across Shropshire does not facilitate individual requirements, for example a market town will have different criteria and challenges compared to a rural village.

4.0 Financial assessment

- 4.1 There are currently no attached administration or enforcement fees as the process of promoting local events relating to sporting, cultural, charity and recreational activities is considered vital to maximising attendance and awareness and is to be encouraged where possible.

There is a recommendation that an appropriate fee/charge, considering administration costs and an agreed level of enforcement, be agreed.

Temporary signage

1.0 Background and Summary

- 1.1 The recommendation from the "Place Overview Committee" meeting of July 2019 recommended a Task and Finish group include the current policy and process for temporary directional signing (usually for events or housing developments) in a review of all related "street scene / street clutter" issues.

The current process requires an application and consent under Section 122 of the "Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984" (link)

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1984/27/section/122> and applications and consent are currently facilitated by the Street Works team (<https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/roads-and-highways/road-network-management/application-forms-and-charges/temporary-signage-consent/>)

- 1.2 The application form outlines the conditions and regulations for the erection and removal of signs and indemnifies Shropshire Council against any claims arising. Conditions of consent currently are that signs promoting an event are taken down within one week of the completion of the event and that signs signposting developments can only be permitted for a period not exceeding 6 months following the sale of 80% of the development. This date needs to be agreed prior to the signs being erected.
- 1.3 There is a concern regarding the proliferation of such signage and with regard to the enforcement of set conditions.
- 1.4 The Task and Finish Group report of 26th March 2020 recommended that Shropshire Council revise its charges for its housing development sign permit scheme, to better reflect the work required to administer the scheme effectively.

- 1.5

The group also recommended that any permit scheme limits the duration of a permit to 12 months before requiring renewal.

Progress update:

1.6

The previous recommendations from the Committee were that Shropshire Council revise its charges for Housing Development signage to better reflect the work required to administer and enforce an effective permit scheme – a revision of the current fee structure, based on recovery of officers time and costs, has taken place and a draft revised and increased administration fee of £250.00 per application is proposed for a maximum 12 month licence (£110.00 for a further six month extension if required).

1.7

The revised charge better and accurately reflects the work required to administer the scheme effectively and allows for the additional recovery of officer time in carrying out 3 scheduled compliance inspections through the life of the licence (on installation, on due end date of licence and 14 days after end date to ensure compliance). For any extension this equates to two further inspections.

1.8

There is also an opportunity to simplify/clarify the current guidelines and conditions in relation to duration of a licence, the number of signs allowed, and the location of signs on the network.

1.9

The draft revised process includes recovery of costs for 3 site inspections (start, end & 14 days following end of licence period) and also proposes to simplify the duration of a licence (to maximum of 12 months – plus up to a further 6 months only on re-application if less than 80% of houses have been sold). It also proposes to remove the current condition that signs can only be situated within a half mile/two junctions from the development.

1.10

The maximum 18-month total period, and the concession to allow directional signage further than half mile/two junctions, is to give developers a reasonable period to be able direct potential buyers and also give some flexibility to where signs can be best situated.

1.11

If signs remain following the expiry of a licence the proposal is to draft a standard letter/email to the applicant essentially giving a further 14 days to remove pending removal by SC / Term Contractor at recoverable cost (or the option of extension if needed).

1.12

A previous “benchmarking” exercise on fees charged and conditions applied by other Authorities showed a significant variance with up to £1,585 being applied down to £100 for a 12-month licence for up to six signs.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1

That Committee members provide comment and recommendations on Officers proposal to amend the current administration fee of £102.00 per application to £250.00 per application (further amended ‘extension’ fee increase proposal from

current £97.00 to £110.00) to allow for a recovery of Officers time involved in carrying out 3 scheduled compliance inspections.

2.2 That Committee members provide comment and recommendations on Officers proposal to remove the current condition stating that signs can only be situated within half a mile/two junctions from the Development.

2.3 Officers' proposal is to ensure a revised process and fee is implemented as soon as feasible and by April 1st, 2024, at the latest. Officers would welcome the Committee members comment and recommendations.

3.0 Opportunities and risk

3.1 The opportunity to significantly increase and improve the current monitoring and enforcement process to ensure compliance, control proliferation and timely removal of temporary signs.

3.2 The opportunity to ensure application fees ably recoup officers time in administering and monitoring applications.

3.3 Risk of the service/current available resource being able to accommodate further Street Works inspection schedules.

4.0 1.0 Financial assessment

4.1 There is a current set administration fee of £102.00 payable by applicants.

4.2 The proposal is for this to be increased to £250.00 per application.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

Place Overview Committee report 4 th August 2021

Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)
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Councillor Dan Morris

Local Member

All

Appendices

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