



Committee and Date

Place Overview Committee

29 September 2022

Item

Public

Proposed Terms of reference for a River Water Quality Task and Finish Group

Responsible Officer

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1.0 Summary

1.1 This report includes a draft terms of reference and outline work programme for a proposed River Water Quality Task and Finish Group.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 Committee to:

- decide whether it wishes to carry out this task and finish group and
- agree the draft terms of reference, subject to any amendments that the committee agree.

3.0 Opportunities and risks

3.1 The proposed group would provide the means by which to hold to account those authorities responsible for ensuring minimal river water pollution. It would also provide an opportunity to support tourism and leisure opportunities in the local authority area.

4.0 Financial assessment

4.1 There are no financial considerations to this report. Any recommendations that are made to Cabinet will need to carry a full financial assessment.

5.0 Report

5.1 In January 2022 Council agreed a motion to:

- Call on Place Scrutiny and Overview Committee to set up a Task and Finish Group to look into the issue and meet the Environment Agency and Severn Trent Water. Their report should seek to better understand the reporting and reasons for both sewage discharges and farm-related discharges and their impact on the bio-diversity of rivers and the health of those who swim in the river.
- Urge Severn Trent to increase funding and provide timescales for mitigating the effects of sewerage and other pollutants being discharged into our rivers

- Investigate how the main rivers in Shropshire may achieve and maintain Blue Flag status
- Map and analyse the additional impact on sewerage into the rivers from the proposed additional house building in the draft Shropshire Plan to 2038, and consider investing CIL monies into schemes to end the discharge of sewerage and other pollutants into our rivers.

5.2 Appendix 1 of this report provides a draft terms of reference for a proposed task and finish group.

<p>List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)</p> <p>None</p>
<p>Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)</p> <p>The Portfolio Holder for Climate Change, Natural Assets & Green Economy</p>
<p>Local Member</p> <p>All</p>
<p>Appendices</p> <p>Appendix 1: Draft terms of reference and work programme for the River Water Quality Task and Finish Group</p>

Appendix 1

Place Overview Committee River Water Quality Task and Finish Group Proposed terms of reference

Introduction

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 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 last year, an increase of 27% on the previous year. In January 22 a motion on improving river quality was passed unanimously by Shropshire Council. This briefing paper will outline some possible steps to progress this issue.

Background

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.

To start to address the issue of cleaner water Severn Trent have recently 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 which fall within the Constituency of Philip Dunne the Chair of the Parliamentary Environmental Audit Committee. Severn Trent have also pledged to double the amount of bathing rivers in its region in the next 10 years.

Objectives

Shropshire Council's Place Committee could play a vital role in overseeing this process by calling together a range of agencies (see below) including Severn Trent Water and Welsh Water to follow key lines of enquiry:

- To better understand the reasons for sewage discharges and farm-related discharges
- To understand the nature of the infrastructure improvements that would be necessary, to 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, ensuring that there is comprehensive coverage across Shropshire and that the reporting of any results is easily available, open and transparent.
- To identify and prioritise those rivers in Shropshire that would benefit from Bathing Water status and then produce a plan on how to achieve and maintain that status.
- Through the planning process, hold developers and the water companies to account so as to provide and fund adequate sewerage provision for the large increase in housing proposed in the draft Shropshire Plan.

Information required

- Green Recover Programme information
- Opportunities for funding to improve river water quality
- Map of rivers in Shropshire
- River water quality data

Possible invitees

- Severn Trent Water
- Welsh Water
- Environment Agency
- Ofwat
- NFU
- Shropshire Council Environmental Health Team
- Planning
- DEFRA
- Fisheries representatives
- Shropshire Wildlife Trust
- Local MPs
- Natural England