



Date: Thursday, 23 January 2025

Time: 2.00 pm

Venue: Shrewsbury/Oswestry Room, Shirehall, Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury, Shropshire, SY2 6ND

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ECONOMY AND ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

TO FOLLOW REPORT

4 Minutes of the Previous Meeting (Pages 1 - 8)

To consider the minutes of the Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 14th November 2024. (To Follow).

Contact: Sarah Townsend (Tel: 01743 257721)

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Committee and Date

Economy and Environment Overview
and Scrutiny Committee

23rd January 2025

ECONOMY AND ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2024

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

2.00 - 4.25 pm

Responsible Officer: Sarah Townsend Committee Officer

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

Present

Councillors Joyce Barrow (Chairman), Steve Davenport, Rachel Connolly, Julian Dean, Roger Evans, Nick Hignett, Alan Mosley, Ed Potter, Rob Wilson, Paul Wynn and Roy Aldcroft (Substitute) (substitute for Garry Burchett)

21 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Garry Burchett. Councillor Roy Aldcroft was in attendance as his substitute.

Apologies for absence were also received from Councillor Dean Carroll (Portfolio Holder for Housing and Assets) and Councillor Ian Nellins (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Climate Change, Environment and Transport).

22 Disclosable Interests

There were no interests declared.

23 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 6th September 2024 be approved as a correct record.

24 Public Question Time

A question had been received from Ms Siobhan Connor on behalf of Shrewsbury Quarry Flood Action Group regarding Shropshire's Flood Risk Management Strategy and funding/additional resources in managing flood risk. Ms Connor was not in attendance to ask her question and it was therefore read out on her behalf by the Overview and Scrutiny Officer. The response to the question was read out by the Executive Director of Place. A full copy of the question and response provided is attached to the web page for the meeting.

Regarding the last part of the question (*'Please would the Committee agree to reinforce the need for the Lead Local Flood Authority to receive the appropriate funding/additional resources to meet its legal obligations in managing flood risk'*), the Committee requested that the update to the Council's Local Flood Risk Management Strategy be brought forward as quickly as possible and that in addition to engaging with the Shropshire Flood Action Group Forum, the draft version also be sent to all Members and Town and Parish Councils.

25 Member Question Time

None were received.

26 Strategic Developments relating to water management and water quality

The committee received a presentation from the Strategic Partnerships Manager and Programme Manager – River Severn Partnership Advanced Wireless Innovation Region regarding the various projects that the Council was involved in and strategies that influence water management and water quality. The presentation covered areas such as the River Severn Partnership, the 2100+ Climate Resilience Strategy, the Severn Valley Water Management Scheme, the Clun Valley Water Quality Management Project, innovation and investment in projects which demonstrate the applications of wireless technology.

In responding to questions, committee discussion and comments covered:

- Changes of behaviour were required by landowners in order to lead to a different way of managing land and it was questioned whether landowners and farmers would be willing to engage in giving up their land for the storage of water for social good, as the incentives for doing so would need to be fairly substantial. In responding, the Executive Director of Place explained that they were working with the National Farmers Union, the Country Land and Business Association and Defra to make sure that farms would be no worse off and possibly, better off. The importance of building a relationship with landowners and farmers was also emphasised.
- It was clarified that some of the work within the Demonstrator Programme involved working with private landowners.
- It was commented that the presentation did not address the immediate impact on residents given that in the last two months, Shropshire had experienced two of the worst days of rainfall on record, with leaves not being cleared and surface water being of particular concern. In responding, the Drainage and Flood Risk Manager explained that leaves over gullies was a yearly problem and that due to the Council's financial situation, more reactive maintenance was being undertaken as opposed to preventative work. The Executive Director of Place also commented that the Street Scene Service had suffered from a range of budget pressures and the model that was currently in operation was what was considered to be 'the absolute minimum'.

- The state of the footpaths across Shropshire was highlighted as being of particular concern, as they were currently extremely dangerous.
- Gully cleansing was now undertaken inhouse rather than by contractors and this gave the Council more control when big flood events were experienced.
- Specific reference was made to the public question which stated that *'flooding from both rivers and streams and from surface water affects residents and businesses....'* and a question was asked regarding what the Council were specifically doing about the effects of surface water on roads and streets. The Drainage and Flood Risk Manager explained that the highways drainage network was only designed to drain the public highway and was not designed for adverse flooding events with substantial water runoff from land. If Shropshire did have a situation like what had recently happened in Malaga where there was intense rainfall that lasted over several days and a year's worth of rain, there were processes in place to escalate events as and when they happened such as Tactical Coordination Group meetings involving the Police, Fire and potentially the Military, at which point a response would be coordinated.
- The Planning Policy and Strategy Manager explained that the draft Local Plan contained policies around water management, which including flood risk and the efficient use of water. A comment was made that whilst there were policies in place, they were not strong enough.
- In responding to a question regarding supplementary planning documents to support development in Shropshire and whether one could be included for flood risk, it was confirmed that this was actively being looked at.
- The Department for Transport was currently reviewing guidance concerning highways and highway drainage in the context of climate change.
- It was commented that there were areas of farmland that was rented off rather than farmed by the owners themselves and in some of these situations, ditches were not being maintained.
- Flooding was also reported to be an issue if residents had large gardens with overgrown ditches, as if these ditches were not maintained, the highway could become flooded. It was explained that even if ditches were on private land, this could still be reported via Fix My Street and the Council would investigate the issue and try and work with private landowners to make sure ditches were being maintained.
- Regarding the Smart Abstraction water management project whereby gauges and sensors had been installed along some water courses across Shropshire, it was confirmed that CIL money could potentially be used to install further gauges.
- A proactive 'hotspots' list was used to undertake work in those areas of the county that regularly flooded.
- The importance of working with Town and Parish Councils was emphasised and whether there were opportunities for them to be involved in helping to reduce flood risk in their area.

RESOLVED:

1. Use Developer Contributions, in line with the related specific requirements, to enable investment in/funding of initiatives that can help to mitigate and reduce flooding and water quality risks, resulting from or increased by the development.

2. That the Council raise awareness amongst Members and the public of the best routes to report concerns about issues that are contributing to flooding in specific locations, including the use of Fix My Street for issues that are adjacent to the highway e.g. blocked or poorly maintained ditches, and contact arrangements for the Council's Flood Risk Manager and their team. This should include confirming the responsibility of landowners for drainage, hedges, and structures on their property.
3. That the Council should ensure that Flood Risk Management and Water Quality is incorporated in 'High Quality design' requirements to ensure that these feature strongly in the design and planning of developments.
4. With the increasing frequency and likelihood of significant weather events the Council should be providing robust, consistent and frequent reminders and advice to drivers and communities that highways drainage is not designed to handle the quantities of rainwater run-off that can be experienced in such situations, and about safe driving decisions and actions when there is floodwater in the highway.
5. That the Council should review how street scene activities are delivered and identify whether the council's own team needs to be invested in and/or whether there are opportunities for town and parish councils and community groups to be involved in helping to reduce flood risk in their area e.g. by keeping drains and gulleys clear of leaves and other seasonal debris.
6. That the Council (and its partners) needs to provide clear communication and awareness of the importance of slowing the flow of water in the river catchment, whether in rural areas using farmland with the involvement of the farmer, or in urban areas requiring more 'greening' and less hardstanding and more permeable surfaces through de-paving.

27 Update against progress made against the recommendations from the River Water Quality Task and Finish Group

Further to the Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee report of the River Water Quality Task and Finish Group on the 9th November 2023, the Task and Finish Group identified what they had defined as hard recommendations and softer recommendations. The committee received an update against progress and developments related to the implementation of the agreed recommendations.

The Scrutiny Manager introduced the agenda item and explained that some of the responses to the recommendations had started to be addressed, such as Grampian conditions. Councillor Kate Halliday (Chair of the Task and Finish Group) was also in attendance and explained that one of the highlights had been getting the bathing water status agreed as this would lead to long term benefits.

The committee received a presentation from The Drainage and Flood Risk Manager regarding different types of sewerage systems and Combined Sewer Overflows (CSO's), future Severn Trent Water investment, how the Council can support Severn

Trent Water, the “Pig Trough” CSO and the Morda De-Pave Demonstrator project. It was noted that Severn Trent Water would be investing £4.4 billion on CSO’s over the next 25 years with £214 million to be spent in Shropshire in the next 5 years.

In responding to questions, committee discussion and comments covered:

- Whether there were any plans for the checking and testing of drainage in new developments once they had been approved. The Drainage and Flood Risk Manager explained that it was the responsibility of Severn Trent Water to look at the sewers on new developments and that sometimes, sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) were missed and the Council was therefore reliant on members of the public reporting issues with a site. However, there were plans on the horizon regarding the establishment of a SuDS approval body under the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 (Schedule 3).
- The Interim Planning and Development Services Manager explained that Grampian conditions were not the favoured condition of planners when looking at development more holistically.
- It was suggested that the committee should consider monitoring the recommendations from the River Water Quality Task and Finish Group on an ongoing basis and consider including an indication of action timescales.
- The enforcement of planning conditions, unadopted developments and whether bonds were something that could be used in the future was discussed.
- How Town and Parish Councils and the wider local community could get involved in influencing the significant investment being made by Severn Trent Water in Shropshire over the coming years. The Drainage and Flood Risk Manager confirmed that he would speak to Severn Trent Water about this.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Council, as a place leader and in its role in the River Severn Partnership, Severn Valley Water Management Scheme and the Marches Forward Partnership and Infrastructure Group, should work with Severn Trent Water to promote and ensure that local councils (Town and Parish Councils) and communities are engaged with proactively and meaningfully to enable them to identify need and opportunity to influence the investment being made over the coming years.
2. That the Council should ensure that Flood Risk Management and Water Quality is incorporated in ‘High Quality design’ requirements to ensure that these feature strongly in the design and planning of developments.
3. That the delivery of the River Water Quality recommendations should be reviewed every 6 months as part of the wider Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee’s review of progress and impact in of the work on Strategic Developments Related to Water Management and Water Quality.

28 Follow-up on Social Housing, the Housing Strategy Recommendations Implementation

The committee received the report of the Assistant Director Homes and Communities which provided them with an interim update on the progress of the Housing Strategy Action Plan, which was last reviewed at their 23rd April 2024 meeting.

The Assistant Director Homes and Communities took members through each of the six recommendations detailed in the action plan updating them of action taken to date and further action that was being planned.

A question was asked regarding recommendation six of the action plan and whether it could be given a more prominent / urgent status, as it was felt that legislation on short-term lets was needed to address the impact this has on availability of homes for local residents.

It was confirmed that no further job losses were anticipated in the housing team and specifically, housing strategy and housing development. The Strategic Housing and Commissioning Manager post was currently vacant but was in the process of being advertised.

Regarding recommendation two and the amended action '*a planned restructure to move housing enabling colleagues from planning policy to Housing Strategy has been suspended indefinitely, pending wider Council restructuring*', the Assistant Director Homes and Communities clarified that if the restructure were to happen, there would be no impact on the number of staff members, or their work. However, it was currently deferred until there was further clarity regarding the wider restructure plans for the Council.

In responding to a question about lobbying and how much Shropshire was involved in discussions and pushing for solutions to enable the building of council homes, the Assistant Director Homes and Communities explained that Shropshire had been building new council housing for several years and also had the benefit of an expert housing development team from Cornovii which was working alongside STAR housing. Regarding future plans, it was noted that announcements were currently awaited from Government.

RESOLVED:

1. That the committee notes the progress being made towards delivering the recommendations agreed upon at Cabinet in September 2023 and the progress against the actions from the Social Housing and Housing Strategy reports presented to committee on 9 November 2023 and 23 April 2024.
2. That the committee reviews and provides feedback on the action plan delivery and planned work and agrees to receive future updates on progress.
3. That a clear focus on the implications and impact of increases in rental properties to moving short-term lets needs to be maintained and have a renewed higher profile as the committee reviews progress in the delivery of the recommendations, and in the wider work of the Council.

29 Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme

The Scrutiny Manager explained that the Crime and Disorder Partnership was not currently included within the work programme. The committee confirmed that they were happy for it to be added and it was agreed to consider this topic at their next meeting, along with a progress report update on Building Control.

Assuming that the committee's meeting scheduled for Thursday, 6th March 2025 went ahead, temporary accommodation would be considered as an agenda item.

The Executive Director of Place shared information regarding the budget and various other communications from Government. It was noted that on 28th November 2024, the Government were likely to release a Devolution White Paper and if this were the case, a member briefing or additional committee meeting might be necessary.

In response to a question regarding a briefing on grounds maintenance and possible devolution from Shropshire Council to Town and Parish Councils, it was explained that this was no longer required.

It was reported that a winter maintenance briefing was scheduled to take place on Monday, 2nd December 2024.

30 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, 23rd January 2025 commencing at 2.00 p.m.

Signed: (Chairman)

Date:

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