



**Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

**9 November 2023**

Item

Public



# Report of the River Water Quality Task and Finish Group

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<b>Task and Finish Group Chair:</b>	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