

Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday 12 April 2023

Minutes

Attendance

Committee Members

Councillor Jeff Clarke (Chair)
Councillor Jonathan Chilvers (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Jenny Fradgley
Councillor Dave Humphreys
Councillor Bhagwant Singh Pandher
Councillor Andrew Wright
Councillor Marian Humphreys
Councillor Penny-Anne O'Donnell

Portfolio Holders

Councillor Andy Crump, Portfolio Holder for Fire & Rescue and Community Safety
Councillor Kam Kaur, Portfolio Holder for Education
Councillor Wallace Redford, Portfolio Holder for Transport & Planning

Officers

David Ayton-Hill, Assistant Director - Communities
Shail Chohan, Service Manager (County Highways)
Kim Fraser-Bell, Strategy and Commissioning Manager (Economy & Skills)
Caroline Gutteridge, Delivery Lead Commercial & Regulatory
Jagjit Mahal, Delivery Lead Flood Risk Management
Isabelle Moorhouse, Democratic Services Officer
Christina Osbourne, Technical Specialist Development and Performance
Jon Rollinson, Lead Commissioner – Strategy & Policy
Mark Ryder, Strategic Director for Communities
Sarah Tregaskis, Strategy and Commissioning Manager

External Speakers

Matt Lewis, Network and Operations Lead – Severn Trent Water
Rob Lunt, Partnership & Strategic Overview Team Leader – Flood and Coastal Risk Management – Environmental Agency
Tim Smith, Flooding and Partnerships Manager – Severn Trent Water

1. General

(1) Apologies

Councillor Tim Sinclair was substituted by Councillor Penny-Anne O'Donnell
Councillor Mejar Singh was substituted by Councillor Marian Humphreys
Councillor Richard Baxter-Payne
Councillor Martin Watson (Portfolio Holder for Economy)
Councillor Heather Timms (Portfolio Holder for Environment, Climate and Culture)

(2) Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

None.

(3) Chair's Announcements

None.

(4) Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes were approved as a correct record.

2. Public Speaking

None.

3. Questions to Portfolio Holder

In response to Councillor Jenny Fradgley, Councillor Wallace Redford (Portfolio Holder for Transport & Planning) confirmed that progress was going well for clearing the backlog of fixing potholes with delegated budgets. He agreed to chase up any that were being delayed.

Mark Ryder (Strategic Director for Communities) informed the committee that Warwickshire had been allocated an extra £2 million by central government to fix potholes. This had been added to the list of schemes to be prioritised.

Shail Chohan (Service Manager (County Highways)) added that winter had created more potholes which added to the backlog and the bad weather meant more money had to be spent on temporary fixes for other defects on the highways. £1.8 million had been spent on delegated budgets in the last year compared to just over £1 million in 2021. Every scheme planned to be delivered in year will be.

In response to Councillor Dave Humphreys, Shail Chohan said that potholes that needed to be filled in for safety reasons would not use delegated budgets. Delegated budgets could be used to accelerate the road works WCC were doing.

Councillor Redford agreed to chase up the puffin crossing scheme on Coventry Road in Exhall for Councillor Bhagwant Pandher as it had been delayed for three years.

He also agreed to chase up a crossing in Birchwood in Polesworth on behalf of Councillor Marian Humphreys which had been delayed for four years.

(1) Economic Development Update

Kim Fraser-Bell (Strategy and Commissioning Manager (Economy & Skills)) summarised the following points:

- The Warwickshire Support Employment Service was launched in February 2023 and it supports adults with autism and learning difficulties get into sustainable employment

- The launch event was held in Nuneaton with 50 attendees and 98 people have signed up for it in the first few weeks. The target was 400 people this year
- WCC's Digital Creative Grants scheme received 11 applications requesting £280,000 in total. Six applications requesting £350,000 in total were granted £160,000 after an evaluation process
- The Property and Infrastructure Fund (PIF) is the third strand of the WRIF and will be fully launched at UK REEF in May 2023. It will provide £10 million in loans to support and facilitate the development of employment land in the county or to help bring forward the necessary site infrastructure to bring a site to market. CPRE will be leading this
- WCC's Skills Hub celebrated its third birthday. Over 1000 businesses have engaged with it and received 5000 hours of help. There are currently 18 members of staff
- £1.1 million had been provided to small/medium businesses through the Apprenticeship Levy Fund, which covers mainly training costs for young people which has led on to 120 apprenticeships and 66 businesses making inclusive jobs
- WCC's business branding team had been working with Coventry City Council's team to develop new branding ahead of key development

Councillor M Humphreys congratulated the work with people with autism and requested that transport be possible for residents to attend events in Nuneaton from North Warwickshire. Kim Fraser-Bell agreed to look into and added that there was a new job portal that mapped people to different job opportunities.

Councillor Penny-Anne O'Donnell concurred with Councillor M Humphreys. In response to Councillor O'Donnell, Kim Fraser-Bell stated that people who were awaiting a diagnosis could self-refer themselves to the service or in the past people had been referred by DWP or Adult Social Care. Education providers were worked with too regarding apprenticeships for young people with autism but this could be improved.

Councillor Kam Kaur (Portfolio Holder for Education) added that a lot of work was done between the education teams and Skills Hub to get this scheme going. There was a lot of ground to cover with employment support and she congratulated the team on their work.

4. Q & A with Severn Trent Water and the Environment Agency

Environmental Agency

Rob Lunt (Partnership & Strategic Overview Team Leader – Flood and Coastal Risk Management) presented a PowerPoint and summarised the following points:

- The Environment Agency (EA) was started in 1996 to protect and improve the environment and have 10,500 staff members
- EA covers regulating major industry and wastes treatment of contaminated land, water quality, water resources and across to fisheries, inland navigation, conservation and ecology and flood risk management (managing flood risk from main rivers, reservoirs, estuaries, and the sea)
- The current six-year programme will protect 336,000 properties compared to 300,000 properties in the previous six-year programme. There will also be 2000 new flood risk of flood defence schemes funded in this programme

- The £5.2 billion of funding is split nationally and Warwickshire get £12 million to protect up to 10,500 properties. 4618 residential properties in Warwickshire are at flood risk
- With the new six-year programme they looked more at the benefits than what could be achieved
- All issues are geographically linked so the relevant departments from across the EA were brought together to deal with issues. Warwickshire would involve fisheries, biodiversity, geomorphology, and water quality
- There were five separate catchment issues across Warwickshire and Coventry (four in Warwickshire)
- In Leamington 227 properties were at flood risk and climate change could cause these number to rise by 10%
- The data model they use was being improved for the River Leam project
- Flood storage and flood defences were planned for Leamington's vulnerable locations
- Natural flood risk management is also possible for flood defences e.g. tree planting, scrapes etc. to stop water backing up and reaching water peak levels
- A whole-scale review was being undertaken of the River Avon with the new model

In response to Councillor Fradgley, Rob Lunt said that the River Avon review should start in 2023 but it was unknown what scale it could be so no end date was available.

Councillor Redford said that his area needed to know what the flood peak was in his area so they could be prepared for flooding. Rob Lunt stated that there had been discussions around the weir in Eathorpe.

In response to Councillor Jonathon Chilvers, Rob Lunt noted that they were still looking at the best way for funding opportunities for schemes as well as benefits and risks. All schemes should improve the environment and include natural flood prevention methods. A lot of variables need to be considered like soil texture, but WCC can try its own methods of natural flood prevention as it would always benefit the environment.

Councillor Dave Humphreys noted that houses were being built in Birch Coppice which was often flooded so those houses then get flooded. Warehouses have also been built on flood plains which makes the flooding worse. He added that the EA rarely seem to have objections to planning applications. Rob Lunt confirmed that EA were a statutory consultee on all planning applications. Sustainable development was encouraged, and they would flag up flooding risks when seen; they could not disagree with applications if they did not affect water courses. Their comments could be ignored by the planning authorities though. He agreed to investigate the Birch Coppice development.

Councillor Andy Wright added that Peddimore Brook that ran through Birch Coppice was 'ripped out' annually by the EA despite the biodiversity. Other officers from the EA said this should be happening and the Brook itself never floods. Rob Lunt agreed to investigate this and it was likely linked to asset performance.

Councillor O'Donnell requested that elected members be kept up to date with works going on in their area.

Severn Trent Water

Matt Lewis (Network and Operations Lead) Tim Smith (Flooding and Partnerships Manager) presented a PowerPoint and summarised the following points:

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12.04.23

- Severn Trent Water (STW) have 4.6 million customers nationally and are the only major water company with no coastline. Therefore, none of their water waste is discharged to coastal waters
- Water is taken from the environment, processed and supplied to customers. Then wastewater is taken away, treated and discharged back into the environment
- STW responsible for managing flood risk from sewers when water comes out of it. 80% of this flooding is caused by modern products being flushed e.g. wet wipes, nappies and cooking oils. The UK's sewage system is too old to manage these
- Foul (wastewater) water flooding happens with excess rainwater
- Sewer contents at any time was always at least 5% raw sewage. Climate change rain will increase flooding
- There were approximately 700 incidents of sewage getting into houses annually
- Look after some natural flood risk areas
- Extensions/conservatories that will cover manholes should be moved when these additions happen but not a lot of people do this as it costs money
- STW have approximately 2400 storm overflows. These overflows on the sewer network help protect properties from sewer flooding in wet weather. They are consented by the EA and checked regularly
- Over £20m was invested in improving Leamington's sewerage sewer in 2011 / 2012
- Millions of pounds were spent on individual houses to protect them from flooding
- STW planned to implement 40,000 civil monitors to monitor water levels in sewers and whether there were any blockages causing the flooding
- The monitors were put in data led areas but there is a team that looks at river catchments where flooding can happen. Some will also be put into places where developers had misused the sewer system before
- STW are not a statutory consultee in the planning process on drainage, but builders have a right to connect to their system. STW have requested developers to involve them earlier on in building developments
- Sustainable urban drainage scheme (SUDs) guidance was given to new developers
- STW was leading a £76 million water separation scheme in Mansfield that will become the UK's blueprint for SUDS and STW will look at getting funding for the next asset management planning period and several of these schemes could benefit from it and reduce the flooding impact
- 27% of reasons for rivers in England not achieving good ecological status is caused by the water industry according to EA data so STW were working to improve this and have reduced this to 16% in their operating area. They were working with the other 85% to improve river quality
- They had five river pledges (ensure storm overflows and sewage treatment does not harm rivers, create more opportunities for everyone to enjoy rivers, improve river care, enhance rivers to improve wildlife and be transparent with performance plans)
- STW were working to achieve bathing quality river quality on a stretch of the River Leam
- Central government was pushing for water companies to have storm overflow plans which STW had already invested in, and they were ahead of government targets
- There is a 25-year plan in place until 2050 setting out STW's plans
- Other initiatives that STW were doing included decarbonising the water supply, helping customers save water and faster environmental improvements to rivers. These initiatives are part of an additional £566m investment which were approved by OFWAT as part of post-COVID 'Green Recovery

Councillor Fradgley informed the committee that they collected surface water and separated it from becoming foul water. After STW tested it, they got a reduction in their water bills. Matt Lewis stated that they did work with some developers to put water swales in so they would save costs on their usage, but nothing was mandatory for new builds.

In response to Councillor Wright, Matt Lewis said they do not use the pitch fibre pipe anymore. They had 95,000 kilometres of pipe to replace so they would replace and prioritise repair work on a risk basis. He agreed to see where it was on the list.

In response to Councillor Chilvers, Matt Lewis stated that in a full sewage pipe, 95% of it is formed of rainwater. In heavy rainfall, wastewater is diverted into rivers instead of homes/businesses, but this water waste is very diluted. Ammonia samples taken from the river can show little impact to the environment; STW were trying to prevent any impact. STW are regulated by the EA so when there is an overspill in dry weather, they talk to each other. To stop this the infrastructure would need to be increased which would cost billions of pounds. Overspills in dry weather are caused by blockages and STW would receive an alarm when this happens and seek to respond to prevent issues before they cause flooding or pollution.

Following a supplementary from Councillor Chilvers, Matt Lewis stated that they would be responsible for clearing up any impact they make in a river. Rob Lunt added that any other clean up in a river would be the responsibility of the landowner where the river flows through. The Chair noted that rivers were often land boundaries so landowners would dispute whose responsibility it would be to clean. Tim Smith said that EA stated that agricultural waste was the biggest cause of rivers not getting good river status. Matt Lewis noted that everyone had a responsibility to not dump in rivers otherwise the water quality will not improve.

In response to Councillor M Humphreys, Matt Lewis said that all works have permanent reference numbers that can be used to see when work was being done. He agreed to investigate any specific issues.

Tim Smith informed the committee that more information was available on their website.

[Leamington-Sewerage-Strategy-2011.pdf \(waterprojectsonline.com\)](#)

[65-23-Get-River-Positive-Annual-Report-March-2023.pdf \(stwater.co.uk\)](#)

[Drainage and wastewater management plan | Our plans | About us | Severn Trent Plc](#)

[green-recovery-report-2022.pdf \(severntrent.com\)](#)

5. Local Transport Plan Consultation Review and Recommendation for Adoption

Jon Rollinson (Lead Commissioner – Strategy & Policy) summarised the following points:

- The LTP consultation ran from September to November 2022
- A citizens panel was set up to provide feedback through the LTP process too
- The feedback from the panel and consultation were good and constructive
- The LTP will go to Cabinet in June and hopefully approved by Full Council in July 2023
- There were 300 responses which was good compared to some neighbouring authority's when they did their LTP consultation

In response to the Chair, Jon Rollinson confirmed the strategy was 67 pages long. The LTP should run for 10 years but it will be refreshed when needed. Its purpose is to be a living document.

In response to Councillor M Humphreys, Jon Rollinson said that the purpose of the LTP was to address different areas separately. WCC worked closely with bus companies but as they were private companies they could not be forced to improve or add new bus routes. In the past bus routes were subsidised by WCC but public transport funds were limited nationally.

Following a point from the Chair, Jon Rollinson stated that WCC was working on improving buses through the BSIP (bus service improvement plan) and maximum funding opportunities like S106 funding. Mark Ryder added that WCC were looking more at demand response services to fill in for bus routes.

6. Adult and Community Learning (ACL) Progress and Performance Report 2021/22

Sarah Tregaskis (Service Manager, Education Services) summarised the following points:

- This is an annual report that the committee receives on the performance of the council's adult education service (Adult and Community Learning service). This report relates to academic year 2021-2022
- The service operates out of over 30 venues across the county including community venues, children centres and Council buildings
- The number of residents aged 19 and over accessing the service and taking courses had increased from the previous academic year but learner numbers were still not back to pre-Covid levels
- The service maintained its 'Good' Ofsted judgement when it was inspected in October 2022
- 80% of learners were female and 20.3% were male. Nationally 25% of adult learners were male
After a more targeted recruitment drive, 4 out of 7 curriculum areas gained more male learners. This was mainly in ICT and maths and there was an increase in male students on courses with learning difficulties and disabilities
- The highest proportion of learners were aged 30-39
- Attendance had increased to 84% compared to the previous year at 82%, the service has a target to increase attendance to 90%
- The service retained the Matrix Standard accreditation, which demonstrates how well the service provides impartial advice and guidance
- This service is funded by a grant from the Education and Skills Funding Agency. The service only achieved 92.6% of its funding allocation last year which led to a clawback
- Grant funding was provided by the Department for Education to WCC for a maths programme called Multiply to support numeracy and financial literacy cross-county. The service was successful in obtaining a portion of this funding and delivery has started

In response to the Chair, Sarah Tregaskis stated that despite the clawback in funding, the service has still been allocated the same amount of grant funding this academic year.

Councillor Kaur said that the clawback was caused by not having enough adult learners joining the programmes available. Targeting marketing is taking place to encourage residents to use the services provided.

In response to Councillor M Humphreys, Sarah Tregaskis said that they operated in 30 venues across the county and some courses were available online e.g. GCSE Maths.

Following a question from Councillor O'Donnell, Sarah Tregaskis noted that the Covid pandemic created more competition from providers offering free courses online. WCC's courses are reviewed to ensure they are still relevant and meet resident's needs.

7. Q3 Integrated Performance Report

Mark Ryder highlighted that:

- More people with educational needs were engaging with the employment support team
- More secondary schools were engaging with the violence prevention programme
- More incidents of domestic abuse were being reported last year

In response to the Chair, Mark Ryder said that the schemes listed in the report were complex infrastructure ones. Programme boards covered all the transport infrastructure projects and monitored their progress.

David Ayton-Hill (Assistant Director – Communities) added that there is a risk of schemes going off course because of inflation. This has led to schemes being reprioritised.

Following a question from Councillor Fradgley, David Ayton-Hill said that Birmingham Road in Stratford was labelled at risk because it had not started yet, instead of financial constraints. WCC could fund the first two stages but needed to check whether they could still fund the final stage.

The Chair concurred with this and requested that a report be added onto the work programme to investigate these project delays and how they will be addressed. Councillor Fradgley noted it would be good if members knew what was causing the delays.

8. Communities OSC Work Programme

The following item was added to the work programme:

Transport infrastructure delays and action to be taken

9. Urgent Items

None.

The meeting rose at 15:59

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Chair