

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Communities and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Board (4)
held at 10.00 am on Thursday, 18 July 2024

Present:

Members: Councillor M Ali (Chair)
Councillor B Christopher
Councillor J Gardiner (Substitute for Councillor T Sawdon)
Councillor L Kelly
Councillor J McNicholas
Councillor R Thay

Other Members: Councillor S Agboola (Deputy Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities)
Councillor P Hetherton (Cabinet Member for City Services)
Councillor D Welsh (Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities)

Employees (by Service Area):

Highways, Traffic and Road Safety: M Adams

Law and Governance G Holmes, U Patel

In Attendance: G Mead, J Rogers and R Smith (Severn Trent)

Apologies: Councillor R Bailey, G Hayre, E Ruane and T Sawdon and Councillor G Lloyd (Deputy Cabinet Member for City Services)

Public Business

1. Declarations of Interest

Councillor L Kelly declared an 'Other interest' in the matter the subject of Minute 3 below headed "Water Quality" as her son works for an environmental company who undertake water sampling.

2. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 7 March 2024 were signed as a true record.

There were no matters arising.

3. Water Quality

The Scrutiny Board considered a briefing note and received a comprehensive and informative presentation by representatives of Severn Trent Water. The presentation provided an update on the progress of the 5-year plan to reduce surface water entering the sewage system, mitigate flood risk, and improve water

quality, including a pilot programme for use of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SUDS).

This would also provide an opportunity for the Board to question Severn Trent about the 5 year plan which covered:

- A 5-year plan to 2030 and a pilot program for the use of sustainable drainage (SUDs) over a wider area.
- A £65m investment which aims to reduce surface water entering the sewage system, mitigate flood risk, and improve water quality
- A Green Futures project based on a pilot in Mansfield that has been included in the 5-year business plan

The Plan has yet to be finalised as Ofwat would not provide comment due to the pre-election period for the General Election. This therefore provided an opportunity for the Board to consider and raise comments which would be considered as part of the public consultation on the draft plan.

Councillor P Hetherington, Cabinet Member for City Services introduced the item by explaining that given the change in weather, every effort must be made to mitigate against flooding, and this would mean having to change the city's urban environment for added protection in the long run. Local flooding has been exasperated by the fact that front gardens were being replaced with hard standing driveways, making it difficult for the water to drain naturally. A pilot project was being undertaken whereby a sustainable drainage system was being created in Hartington Crescent, Coventry by developing a garden for some of the flood water to drain into and the rest would go into the drainage system. The Board were informed that a visit was going to be undertaken to see a completed project in Mansfield with a view to introducing them in other areas of the city.

The presentation by Severn Trent provided an overview of the Midlands based company, their workforce, their projects, monitoring and the company's future targets.

Some of the points covered included:

- Clean, safe drinking water is supplied to over 500,000 customers in Coventry and Warwickshire and over 8 million overall. Two billion litres of clean water is delivered every day and the wastewater taken away to be treated at the sewage treatment works.
- The headquarters based in Coventry with around 1000 staff would continue to grow over the next few years due to their biggest ever investment programme.
- The company was on track to maintain the highest four-star Environmental Performance Assessment for the fifth consecutive year.
- Great Big Nature Boost plans to revive 12,000 acres of land, plant 1.3m trees and restore 2,000km of rivers by 2030.
- Company have signed up to the Carbon Triple Pledge to be carbon neutral by 2030.
- £566million being invested into the company's green recovery programme

- Since 2020, the company's Community Fund has supported over 1.2million people in Coventry and Warwickshire with over £950,000 donated to 89 community organisation
- The company's Get River Positive and the Storm Overflow Action Plan were working to improve the health of the region's rivers.
- £4.4billion invested in the region to reduce spills and further improve river health, with £300million being spent in Warwickshire on 141 storm overflow improvements alone.

The presentation outlined the company's Get River Positive programme which is underpinned by five key river pledges that paved the way for the restoration and revitalisation of our region's rivers.

The core pledges are:

- Ensure storm overflows and sewage treatment works do not harm rivers
- Create more opportunities for everyone to enjoy our region's rivers
- Support others to improve and care for rivers
- Enhance our rivers and create new habitats so wildlife can thrive
- Be open and transparent about our performance and our plans

Since January 2022, a team of River Rangers have worked with customers, citizen scientist, community groups and environment organisations to protect and enhance our local rivers. Further detailed information on the pledges and real-time information about the region's storm overflows could be found on the company's website.

Across the Severn Trent region, the company planned to deliver storm overflow solutions across 900 locations, with a total investment for 2024/25 of £450m aiming to reduce total storm overflow spills by 20% per year.

This included:

- New storage solutions to capture and store more flows
- A large-scale community trial of over 8,000 free water butts
- New 'nature based' solutions including the creation of 70 new reed beds to treat sewage from storm overflows
- Enhancements to increase the flow of sewage to treatment works
- Flap valves to prevent river ingress into the network
- A 'Zero Spills' hub dedicated to storm overflow improvements

The Board questioned the representatives and received responses on a number of matters including:

- Whether there had been any major pollution areas in Coventry.
- Whether the company worked with the canal and river trust and their working relationship with them
- Replacement of front gardens with hard standing for parking - the emphasis should be on permeable solutions
- Development of a national grid for the water industry
- Local flood forums and community education and involvement

- Level of support from the City Council in relation to comms, raising awareness and traffic management
- What other options were available for areas where drainage and flood mitigation does not work
- Responsibility for gullies on the road
- Level of investment and improvements with Rivers Leam, Sowe and Sherbourne
- Engagement with local river groups and community groups
- Monitoring of water efficiency and water stressed areas, where it was compulsory to have smart meters installed
- What work was being done to engage with hard-to-reach communities and residents who were averse to technology
- Whether consideration had been given to incentives to encourage residents to do more and change behaviours
- How water usage was measured between a combination of different households
- How was sewer pollution measured

The Board noted that Ofwat were currently undertaking a consultation “Your Water, Your Say” which provided an opportunity for everyone to ask questions such as why they do not believe that urban drainage systems should be started now.

With regard to the hard standing and the use of permeable options, Councillor D Welsh, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities offered to provide current information on hard standing conversions. This would be circulated to the Board.

The Board thanked the Severn Trent representatives for an informative presentation.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Board:

- 1. Notes the presentation.**
- 2. Requests that a link to the consultation “Your Water, Your Say” be circulated to the Board.**
- 3. Requests that a visit to the Finham Sewage Treatment Works be arranged for members of the Board**
- 4. Requests that a copy of the second presentation slides be circulated to the Board for information.**
- 5. Requests that the outcome of the gully clean survey be added to the work programme for the next Municipal Year.**

4. Work Programme 2024/2025

The Board considered and noted priorities outlined by Councillor D Welsh, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities. These included amongst other matters

delivering housing need, rough sleeping and support, winter planning, temporary accommodation, the Local Plan and regulation 19 consultation, cultural gateway, community advice service and planning reform and other associated matters that may emerge from the new government. It was noted that the homeless and rough sleeping strategy, temporary accommodation and exempt supported accommodation were already scheduled in the work programme.

RESOLVED that the following items be added to the Work Programme:

- 1) Delivering housing needs**
- 2) Local Plan – Regulation 19 consultation**

5. Any other items of public business which the Chair decides to take as matters of urgency because of the special circumstances involved

There were no other items of business.

(Meeting closed at 12.15 pm)