

## **Minutes of the Economy and Environment**

### **Overview and Scrutiny Panel**

#### **County Hall, Worcester**

**Tuesday, 9 November 2021, 2.00 pm**

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#### **Present:**

Cllr Alastair Adams (Chairman), Cllr Karen Hanks (Vice Chairman),  
Cllr Bob Brookes, Cllr Allah Ditta, Cllr Beverley Nielsen, Cllr Jack Satterthwaite,  
Cllr Emma Stokes and Cllr Craig Warhurst

#### **Also attended:**

Tim Smith, Severn Trent Water Ltd  
Richard Osborne, North Worcestershire Water Management  
Martyn Cross, South Worcestershire Land Drainage Partnership  
Cllr Tony Miller, Cabinet Member with responsibility for Environment

Paul Smith, Assistant Director for Highways and Transport Operations  
Rachel Hill, Assistant Director for Economy, Major Projects and Waste  
Steph Simcox, Deputy Chief Finance Officer  
Michael Green, Senior Flood Risk Consultant  
Glenn Lucitt, Contract Project Manager  
Mark Morris, Highway Drainage Manager  
Dave Corbett, Management Information Analyst  
Samantha Morris, Scrutiny Co-ordinator  
Alison Spall, Scrutiny Officer

#### **Available Papers**

The members had before them:

- A. The Agenda papers (previously circulated);
- B. The Supplementary papers (previously circulated);
- C. The Minutes of the Meeting held on 20 September (previously circulated).

(Copies of documents A and B will be attached to the signed Minutes).

#### **422 Apologies and Welcome**

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel Tuesday, 9 November 2021  
Date of Issue: 15 December 2021

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Tony Muir.

**423 Declarations of Interest and of any Party Whip**

None.

**424 Public Participation**

None.

**425 Confirmation of the Minutes of the previous meeting**

The Minutes of the meeting on 20 September 2021 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**426 Flood Risk Management Annual Report/Update on Flooding 2020-21**

In attendance for this item:

Worcestershire County Council:

Paul Smith, Assistant Director for Highways and Transport Operations  
Rachel Hill, Assistant Director for Economy, Major Projects, and Waste  
Steph Simcox, Deputy Chief Finance Officer  
Michael Green, Senior Flood Risk Consultant  
Glenn Lucitt, Contract Project Manager  
Mark Morris, Highways Drainage Manager

Severn Trent Water – Tim Smith, Flooding and Partnerships Manager

South Worcestershire Land Drainage Partnership (SWLDP) - Martyn Cross

North Worcestershire Water Management (NWWM) - Richard Osborne

The Panel received the Annual report on Flood Risk Management in Worcestershire. The Senior Flooding Risk Consultant (SFRO) gave a presentation, commencing with a reminder of the background context of the report and highlighting the Council's responsibilities as Lead local Flood Authority. The following provides a summary of the key points highlighted in the presentation and the discussion points and questions raised by the Panel during this time.

Understanding and prioritising flood risk

- The Panel was reminded that all of the partners had worked together on 3 major flood events during the year, with January 2021 being the most significant.

- A new template had been developed for Section 19 flood investigation reports, which would make the process more efficient.
- With regard to the development of the new Local Flood Risk Management Strategy, to follow on from the current 6-year strategy, the SFRO advised that guidance from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and the Environment Agency (EA) was awaited. Once this was received a timeline for the development of a new strategy would be able to be drawn up.
- Local site investigations had been completed in Hagley, Redditch and Wythall following recent flood events and flood risk plans were being produced as a result. The Representative from NWWM highlighted that these areas had been impacted by multiple sources of flooding, and therefore the plans were needed to bring all relevant partners together.
- The Cabinet Member commented that the Council's role was one of facilitator, working in partnerships with other agencies.
- A Member raised an issue concerning Droitwich town centre which had suffered from surface water flooding resulting from a main drain being blocked by developers. The SFRO confirmed that both District Councils and the County Council (as statutory consultees) had a responsibility for sustainable development. The SDLWP representative, commented that he was unaware of this issue, and it was agreed to be followed up after the meeting.

#### Reducing the likelihood and impact of flooding

##### New schemes and developments:

- The full list of completed flood alleviation schemes was included in the appendix to the report, along with others that were planned as well as drainage schemes in the pipeline.
- For the past 3 years a natural flood management programme had been funded by Defra, which had proved to be very successful. A short video was shown to the Panel of examples of the types of interventions which had been installed in river catchment areas. A new bid for continued funding had been submitted and funding was now in the process of being secured for the next 6 years.
- Representations had been made on 2040 planning applications by the Council, the South Worcestershire Land Drainage partnership, and North Worcestershire Water Management.

##### Maintaining the existing arrangements:

- 68 land drainage consents had been processed during the last year which provided a check that the flood risk was not being increased. The Panel was advised that for the main rivers this role was carried out by the Environment Agency, but for all other watercourses this was done by the land drainage Partnerships.
- Severn Trent had carried out visits to a number of schools in Worcestershire and delivered key messages to children.
- Gullies work – Members were pleased to be informed of the work that had been carried out on gullies during the year, including 100 broken

gully connections repaired and 21,000 gullies jetted, which was very positive.

- Flooding hotspots – a Member asked whether hotspots were monitored and whether remedial works were performed? The SFRO advised that the County's surface water plan had over 1,000 known hotspots identified which were prioritised with associated actions. The flood team or highways team were involved, depending on whether properties or roads were affected. The Panel was informed that it was a live document, which was regularly updated when new locations were reported. All hotspots that were reported to the Council through the 'report it' site would automatically be included in the listing. A link to this site would be provided for Members and they were encouraged to use it to ensure that every problem area was captured on the system.
- In response to a Members question about whether building currently took place within the flood plains, the SFRO advised that generally building on flood plains was avoided but if it was necessary, the area would be flood compatible, e.g., with highways or public open space. The Representative of SWLDP advised that there had been no development in the south of the county on flood plains. The NWWM representative, commented that water management issues were complex, and historical flood data was constantly referred to. Information on the number of houses which had been built on a flood plain in the last 12 months was not available at the meeting.
- A Member referred to a situation in Feckenham where the building of a house had directly contributed to a flooding issue for other properties through the unlawful accessing of a drain. He felt strongly that ownership of responsibility had to be a key priority of all landowners. It was agreed that this case would be looked at outside of the meeting.
- The Chairman highlighted a case in his area where residents had paid for a scheme to be completed which had successfully solved the problem. He urged a concentration of effort from partners to find solutions for small-scale flooding problems which needed to be resolved. The NWWM representative advised that whilst previously national pressure had aimed resources at larger schemes, this had changed and funding was now available for smaller schemes via the Regional Flood and Coastal Committee (RFCC).
- The Cabinet Member responded to a question about the 6-year funding programme, advising that it was an Environment Agency programme, with the RFCC being responsible for allocating funding. Some of the major recent allocations included works at Alcester, Severn Stoke and Childswickham.
- In terms of surface water flooding, the Cabinet Member explained that priority was focused on water causing flooding of residential properties and businesses. Other initiatives, for example raising the height of the New Road past the cricket ground in Worcester meant that the road should be able to remain open in times of flood.

#### Flood response and recovery:

- The response to and recovery from the major flood events was a key focus during the year.

- Following new guidance from Defra, the Worcestershire multi-agency flood plan was updated and provided a new framework document for the response to flooding.
- The temporary barriers at Beales Corner, Bewdley had been compromised and a plan was established to enable temporary barriers to be erected until a permanent barrier was provided. The Contract Project Manager explained that the barriers were the same as the previous ones, with the addition of concrete barriers behind to support them. The Cabinet Member advised that major works had taken place at Beales Corner, with the road having been resurfaced with a more resilient material to allow the barrier to have more traction. A training and installation programme had also taken place.

### Governance and Partnerships

- The Panel was informed that working together with partners, for example through the River Severn Partnership allowed strategic level opportunities to be developed. Other local partnerships had led to economies of scale being achieved and allowed access to different sources of funding.

### Communications and Engagement

- Community resilience initiatives were encouraged as was the development of flood groups. Crucial support was provided in partnership with the National Flood forum.
- In response to a question, the SFRO confirmed there was a flood group for the Powick area which was affiliated to the Flood Forum. He advised that work with agencies was ongoing to try to reduce the incidence of flooding in that area.

The Chairman thanked the Senior Flood Risk Officer for his presentation. Members then proceeded to ask some further questions to which the following responses were provided:

- When looking to set up a Flood group, residents could obtain practical help and support from the National Flood Forum to identify priorities, facilitate the setting up of the group and initiate meetings with relevant agencies.
- The adoption of sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) – The Severn Trent representative advised that from October 2020 Water Companies had been able to adopt some SuDS features if they could be defined as sewers. He explained that the definition of a sewer had been broadened to include some SuDS. The option to offer SuDS features (to Severn Trent to maintain) was now available to developers, but the take-up was slow, with plans taking a lengthy time to come through and none as yet going all the way through to adoption. If developers incorporated SuDS, they were not required to pay an ongoing fee to the Water Company, but instead the drainage charge would be included in the surface water fee to homeowners. It was noted that the Government was considering setting up SuDS approval bodies.

- In respect of a land-owners legal obligation to others when they created flooding problems for others, the NWWM representative advised that landowners had a legal duty to pass water on unimpeded, to allow nature to take its course. The SWLDP representative highlighted that in the past 50 years there had been significant problems created as a result of much larger land areas being contained within farms with greater run-off and increased rainfall levels.
- In terms of legal powers that could be used where problems were being created, the Panel was informed that the Land Drainage Act allowed action to be taken where channels were being blocked, although there was little that could be done in respect of run-off. If issues were creating life threatening situations, Worcestershire Regulatory Services would take urgent action. The SRFO highlighted that the law was complicated around land drainage issues and planning enforcement for each case was different.
- The Severn Trent representative advised that developers were required to separate foul and surface water systems. A combined sewer was the last option that they would want water to flow into. Severn Trent took a proactive approach to this issue determining whether extra capacity was required to the network at an early stage. Home purchasers could find out about connection issues for their property as part of the usual information supplied to house buyers. It was also highlighted that public sewer records were available, and that plans would also show sewers on sites which were still under development.

The Chairman thanked the partners for their contribution to the Annual report and to the meeting.

The Panel agreed that they would urge the Cabinet Member to continue to support additional funding for flooding issues and for drainage/gullies work to be continued in the 2022-23 Budget.

## **427 Performance, In-Year Budget Monitoring and 2022/23 Budget Scrutiny**

In attendance for this item:

Steph Simcox – Deputy Chief Finance Officer  
 Paul Smith – Assistant Director for Highways and Transport Operations (HTO)  
 Rachel Hill – Assistant Director for Economy, Major Projects, and Waste (EMPW)  
 Dave Corbett – Management Information Analyst

### Performance – Quarter 2 (July to September 2021)

The Panel raised a number of questions relating to the performance data, as follows:

- Potholes – A Member highlighted that the detailed information regarding performance requested at the previous Panel meeting, had not yet been made available. The Assistant Director (HTO) explained the current

process in some detail. He advised that the Highways Inspector inspected potholes and determined whether they required repair in 1 hour, 1 day, 7 days or 28 days. For potholes falling within the 7 and 28-day categories, the details of the pothole would be recorded, photographed, and forwarded to Ringway for action. If the pothole required repair within the 1 hour or 1-day categories, the emphasis was on safety and ensuring that the required work was reported immediately by telephone. The tracking of the repair was a secondary concern, but the Directorate were looking at this to see how it could be done retrospectively. The Panel was informed that the 7-day repairs were completed in an average of 5 days, whilst the 28-day ones averaged 22 days. The Assistant Director highlighted that to ensure efficiency, potholes were clustered together, but always completed within the set timescales.

- Members felt that there had to be a way of extracting more detailed performance information from the Ringway system or have different internal measures. The Management Information Analyst advised that Ringway had previously sent detailed data for the 7 and 28-day repairs and he had requested that they do so again. The Assistant Director advised he would ensure that this outstanding matter was resolved in time for the Panel's next review of performance data.
- Other queries raised on potholes, included the length of time between a member of the public reporting a pothole, it being inspected and then them receiving a response. Also, regarding the process that takes place when a pothole is reported. The Assistant Director advised that potholes reported by the public were inspected, and that there were two routes for them to be reported through, either, directly to Ringway or via the Public Enquiries Management system (PEM's) depending on the nature of the call.
- Public Enquiries – A query was raised as to why the number of outstanding public enquiries had doubled since September 2020. The Panel was informed that there was a slight increase due to seasonal factors, but the major reason was due to the reduction in road usage during lockdown, and thereby less reporting of issues, which meant that last year's figures were much lower than usual. The Panel was informed that the figure had now risen back to pre-pandemic levels.
- Measuring economic performance – A Member queried how the general measures of economic performance were updated and strategy documents reviewed. The Assistant Director (EMPW) explained that at a strategic level, a refresh took place on areas where the Council could have influence (as part of the review of the Corporate Plan) and at a service level, more work in this area could be beneficial.
- Train Delays – In response to a question, the Assistant Director (EMPW) advised that the Council had no direct control over the specific causes of individual train delays, but could try to use its influence to lobby MP's and by way of its good relations with rail companies, encourage improvements in the system. A Member suggested that faults with new trains appeared to be a key factor in the delays. The

Panel was informed that there was dialogue with the rail sector through an Officer Board. The Assistant Director agreed to take forward the concern about that the new trains adversely impacting the number of delayed trains. Another Member raised the matter of signalisation which she felt was crucial to being able to offer timely, reliable services. The future use of the global positioning system (GPS) was also raised, which would take away the future need for signals. The Assistant Director agreed to seek further information on these plans.

- Section 38/278 Development Control – A query was raised as to when the Master Schemes Register would be available? The Assistant Director (EMPW) agreed to find out and inform members.
- Annual performance indicators – In response to some confusion regarding the data being presented to the Panel, the Assistant Director (EMPW) agreed to ensure that it was made clear on the data graphs where the figures shown were an annual indicator and therefore were repeated throughout the year.
- Public Enquires/PEM's – The overlap between public enquiries and PEMs was highlighted. The Panel was informed that there were some interim problems whilst the system was being developed and also staff shortages. It was highlighted that once the Member Portal was linked to the PEMs, this would avoid duplication.
- Footways – The Panel were delighted that increased funds had been made available this financial year to provide additional spend on footways. They also observed the performance data from the coarse visual inspection survey which showed that 35.4% of footways were still in need of repair. The Panel urged that the continued additional investment be continued for 2022/23. On the same subject, when footways were repaired, the Chairman highlighted the need to ensure that weeds did not grow through, perhaps by use of a membrane. The Assistant Director explained that a membrane was not the appropriate solution in this situation.
- Public Rights of Way (PROW) – The Chairman drew attention to the large number of outstanding defects on PROWs, (6,296 as at September 2021) despite the positive impact of significant additional funding which had been made available in this financial year. Panel Members were pleased to see the level of work being carried out by the volunteer Countryside Access Groups and wished to see this initiative expanded and promoted going forward. The Panel also supported a request that additional funding for PROWs be continued for the year ahead to enable progress to be continued.
- Definitive Map Modification Orders (DMMO) – The Panel observed the poor performance in terms of reducing the numbers of DMMO's, with only one completed in the year and a backlog of 72 still outstanding. This was an issue that the Panel had raised over the years and the situation was deteriorating further. The Chairman highlighted that



external companies could be employed to help with the backlog. The Assistant Director (HTO) advised that this situation was complex and under review, but that the best way forward for the Council would be sought.

- EnviroSort/EnviRecover – Referring to the visits recently attended by Panel members, a Member highlighted there was a need to spread positive messages about the work carried out at these plants as many residents had little knowledge of what took place. He would like to see the Communications team produce publicity for dissemination to residents throughout the county. It was also highlighted that school visits were encouraged and welcomed. The Assistant Director (EMPW) agreed to take this forward.

### In-year Budget Monitoring – Period 6 and Budget Scrutiny for 2022-23

The Panel received in-year budget monitoring information. The Leader of the Council had also asked that Panels consider emerging pressures and challenges for services relating to the 2022-23 Budget at this round of Panel meetings.

The Deputy Chief Finance Officer provided an update on financial information and reported that at Period 6 the year end forecast position was an overspend of £183k. She advised that this had proved to be a difficult period with transport and purchasing of services both being subject to price inflation since the budget was set. Income generation had been harder than anticipated and some posts were proving difficult to recruit to. These were the main reasons for the variances to the budget and focused attention on what could be worked on to mitigate the forecast. The Panel was also informed of the pressures regarding inflation and pay and that these were being closely monitored and managed.

The Assistant Director (EMPW) reported that material supplies were impacting future capital works as well as some of the existing ones. She commented that the difficulty to recruit was a national problem and that they were having to make use of contractors and consultants when necessary. The Panel was informed that the Directorate had a capitalisation target of £2m this year and service managers would be looking to capitalise staff costs wherever appropriate

On a positive note, the Chairman was delighted to highlight a forecast underspend of £250k in street lighting due to a reduction in energy costs following conversion to LED lighting.

## **428 Work Programme**

The Panel was invited to review its current work programme. There were no alterations to the work programme, but the following points were noted about forthcoming events.

- A visit to the Ringways Depot would be organised as soon as this was allowed. In the meantime, a demonstration of the final version of the online gully mapping system would take place on 29 November, via teams, at a time to be confirmed.
- A visit to the House of Commons, courtesy of Nigel Huddleston MP, would be arranged as soon as public visits were resumed, to enable members to watch a Select Committee.

The meeting ended at 4.50 pm

Chairman .....