

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Commission held at County Hall, Glenfield on Wednesday, 7 June 2017.

PRESENT

Mr. S. J. Galton CC (in the Chair)

Mr. D. C. Bill MBE CC
Mr. S. L. Bray CC
Mr. L. Breckon JP CC
Dr. T. Eynon CC

Mr. D. Jennings CC
Mrs. R. Page CC
Mr. A. E. Pearson CC
Mr. T. J. Richardson CC

1. Appointment of Chairman.

RESOLVED:

That it be noted that Mr. S. J. Galton CC has been appointed Chairman of the Scrutiny Commission for the period ending with the Annual Meeting of the County Council in 2018 in accordance with Article 6.05 of the Constitution.

2. Election of Vice Chairman.

RESOLVED:

That Mrs. R. Page CC be elected Deputy Chairman of the Scrutiny Commission for the period ending with the date of the Annual Meeting of the County Council in 2018.

3. Minutes.

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 March 2017 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

4. Question Time.

The Chief Executive reported that no questions had been received under Standing Order 35.

5. Questions asked by members under Standing Order 7(3) and 7(5).

The Chief Executive reported that no questions had been received under Standing Order 7(3) and 7(5).

6. Urgent Items.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

7. Declarations of interest.

The Chairman invited members who wished to do so to declare any interest in respect of items on the agenda for the meeting.

No declarations were made.

8. Declarations of the Party Whip in accordance with Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 16.

There were no declarations of the party whip.

9. Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order 36.

The Chief Executive reported that no petitions had been received under Standing Order 36.

10. Change to the Order of Business.

The Chairman sought and obtained the consent of the Commission to vary the order of business from that laid out on the agenda.

11. Housing Growth and Water.

The Commission considered a report of the Chief Executive which set out questions that had been submitted to Severn Trent Water prior to the meeting and a statement provided by Severn Trent Water in response to the questions. The Commission also noted that a letter from a local resident had been received raising concerns regarding infrastructure provision for new developments and the condition of the existing sewerage system. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 11' and the letter is filed with these minutes.

The Commission received four presentations, three from Severn Trent Water and one from the Assistant Chief Executive of the County Council. The presentations from Severn Trent Water outlined its approach to supply and demand management, its role in supporting housing growth and development and its role in managing flood risk, particularly with regard to sewer flooding. The presentation from the Assistant Chief Executive provided an update on the development of the Strategic Growth Plan. A copy of the slides forming the presentations is filed with these minutes.

The Chairman welcomed Doug Clarke, Paul Hurcombe and Tim Smith from Severn Trent Water to the meeting for this item.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:-

- (i) A Price Review would be undertaken in 2019 by Ofwat, the economic regulator of the water sector in England and Wales. This would set the price, investment and service package that customers would receive between April 2020 and March 2025. It would determine how much was available to invest, for example in improvements to the existing system and set out penalties and rewards linked to the achievement of customer priorities and associated targets. Severn Trent Water was currently identifying the options and priorities it would issue for public consultation and then submit to Ofwat and was undertaking engagement with customers to inform this.

- (ii) The level of infrastructure charges that Severn Trent Water could levy for new connections to the water supply and sewerage systems were agreed annually with Ofwat. The charge was intended to cover connection to the water supply and provide a contribution towards the costs of developing or enhancing local networks to serve new customers.
- (iii) An infrastructure discount schemes was in place which gave developers a 100 percent discount on infrastructure charges if they built new homes to the Optional Technical Standard in Part G of the Building Regulations of 110 litres of water per person per day, rather than the standard of 125 litres. This had been well received by developers as the standard could be reached by choosing devices with the correct flow rate at no additional cost. The scheme had been launched in April so it was too soon to measure its effect; however, other water companies were now considering trialling similar schemes.
- (iv) Planning Authorities were able to impose the Optional Technical Standard and it was suggested that wording to this effect should be included in the Strategic Growth Plan. Severn Trent Water could also reinforce this point in its response to the consultation on the Strategic Growth Plan. It was felt that there would be value in an informal discussion with infrastructure providers as part of the development of the Strategic Growth Plan.
- (v) On new developments, surface water should ideally be managed sustainably and any connection to the sewerage system should be a last resort. Capacity issues within the existing sewerage network could, in part, be attributed to historic design practices whereby surface water and foul flows were combined into a single system but the connection of additional impermeable areas could have an adverse effect on capacity. To offset this risk greater effort was being made to disconnect existing surface water connections through use of sustainable solutions to alleviate capacity issues. This was done through improvement schemes, which were prioritised based on their expected impact on surface water flooding.
- (vi) In terms of the supply of water, Severn Trent Water was working hard to manage customer demand and reduce leakage in its system. It was not currently looking for new sources of water. Long term supply options would be assessed as part of the 25 year Water Resources Management Plan.
- (vii) One of the reasons for additional surface water runoff contributing to potential for flooding was an increase in impermeable areas, for example from front gardens being paved over. Legislation required homeowners to seek planning permission if they were paving an area of over five square metres and it was felt that more needed to be done to raise awareness of this and the related flooding risks.
- (viii) Severn Trent Water was seeking to work in partnership with other organisations involved in flood risk management, including Local Authorities. There were already some examples of good practice in this area, including jointly funded flood alleviation schemes and the sharing of day-to-day operational information. Efforts were also being made to deal with customers queries at the first point of contact, for example by talking to the relevant partner before providing a response to the customer.
- (ix) A high proportion of sewer flooding incidents were wholly or partly caused by blockages in the sewer system. Across the whole Severn Trent Water region, on

average only around ten percent of flooding incidents were entirely caused by the capacity of the sewer being exceeded by flow during times of rainfall (hydraulic flooding). Collapses of sewer pipes were a small issue; as part of the Sewage Management Plan CCTV cameras were used to assess risks related to the condition of the sewer.

- (x) Severn Trent Water was undertaking modelling to inform the Water Resources Management Plan. This included a range of climate change scenarios and the impact that they would have on the water supply. It was also an important consideration for the response to waste water and extreme weather conditions.
- (xi) Severn Trent Water provided free devices which customers could fit to improve water efficiency. It also undertook Home Water Efficiency Checks. 12,000 homes had been visited the previous year and up to 20,000 would be visited this year. A ten percent reduction in water use had been seen in these homes. Severn Trent Water was looking to expand this programme and it was suggested that it could be publicised through Leicestershire Matters, which was sent to all households in the County. This proposal was welcomed by Severn Trent Water. In terms of harvesting rain water and grey water reuse, it was confirmed that sustainable and cost effective technology for households was not yet available. Rainwater systems had been demonstrated to be viable for new build commercial properties.
- (xii) Severn Trent Water pointed out that developers had a statutory right to be connected to a public sewer and so when responding to planning applications it will often state that it has 'no objection'. This response reflects the fact that Severn Trent Water cannot object to a connection due to the statutory right to connect. However, it was accepted that it would be useful to explain why this was the case in their responses. Severn Trent Water sought to have early conversations with developers so any concerns could be resolved by the time a planning application was submitted. Issues could also be addressed through the Local Plan process.
- (xiii) Housing growth forecasts used by Severn Trent Water were initially provided by local authorities and projected forward to enable long term planning to take place. Severn Trent Water also took account of developments which had not yet been built but where planning permission had been granted.
- (xiv) Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS) were not currently adopted by Severn Trent Water as legislation only covered the adoption of sewers. However, work was being undertaken with Water UK to identify ways of allowing water companies to adopt SUDS in the future.

That Chairman thanked Severn Trent Water for attending the meeting and for the detailed presentation and responses to questions that had been provided.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the officers from Severn Trent Water be thanked for their attendance at the meeting and for the detailed presentation that they provided;
- (b) That officers be requested to include a statement in the Strategic Growth Plan to the effect that Local Planning Authorities should enforce the Optional Technical Standard in respect of water for new developments;

- (c) That officers be requested to include an article on the Home Water Efficiency Checks and/or free water efficiency products offered by Severn Trent Water in a future edition of Leicestershire Matters;
- (d) That Severn Trent Water be requested to provide a written response to the letter from Mr Brian Conway.

12. Draft Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2016/17.

The Commission considered the Draft Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2016/17 which the Council was required to publish. A copy of the report marked "Agenda Item 10" is filed with these minutes.

RESOLVED:

That the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2016/17 be approved for submission to the full County Council at its meeting on 28 June.

13. Date of next meeting.

It was NOTED that the next meeting of the Commission would be held on 19 July at 2.00pm.

10.00 am - 12.40 pm
07 June 2017

CHAIRMAN