

Minutes of the meeting of the Connected Communities Scrutiny Committee held in Conference Room 1 - Herefordshire Council, Plough Lane Offices, Hereford, HR4 0LE on Tuesday 8 July 2025 at 2.00 pm

Committee members present in person and voting:

Councillors: Bruce Baker, Frank Cornthwaite (Vice-Chairperson), Elizabeth Foxton, Ed O'Driscoll (Chairperson) and Diana Toynbee

Others in attendance:

Councillor B Durkin	Cabinet Member Roads and Regulatory Services	Herefordshire Council
B Evans	Engineering Manager	Herefordshire Council
S Hodges	Directorate Services Team Leader	Herefordshire Council
H Merricks-Murgatroyd	Democratic Services Officer	Herefordshire Council
Councillor P Price	Cabinet Member Transport and Infrastructure	Herefordshire Council
A Rees-Glinos	Democratic Services Support Officer	Herefordshire Council
D Webb	Statutory Scrutiny Officer	Herefordshire Council

61. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence were received.

62. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

There were no named substitutes.

63. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

64. MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting were received.

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 3 June 2025 be confirmed as a correct record and be signed by the Chairperson.

65. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

No questions had been received from members of the public.

66. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

No questions had been received from councillors.

67. GULLY CLEANSING

The committee considered a report on Gully Cleansing.

The Engineering Manager introduced a presentation and welcomed the opportunity to update the committee on Gully Cleansing.

The principal points of the subsequent discussion are summarised below:

1. In response to a question regarding progress on mapping all drains, gullies, and culverts under the responsibility of Herefordshire Council, the Engineering Manager acknowledged that the process is not yet complete and will remain challenging until inspections have been carried out across the entire county. However, progress has been made in developing a clearer understanding of the network. The report also includes a link to the full map of gullies, as well as a link to this year's programme of works.
2. The Chairperson stressed the importance of knowing when a high percentage of the county's drains will be mapped, along with a clear strategy for achieving this goal to enable progress tracking.
3. The Cabinet Member Roads and Regulatory Services reported that progress is advancing quickly, and a significant amount of information is being gathered. It was also suggested that a progress report may be provided in the future.
4. The Engineering Manager added that an update can be brought back to the committee to highlight what progress has been made.
5. In response to a question about how a parish lengthsman can deal with gullies for their area, the Engineering Manager noted that some lengthsman have their own jetting machine or can bring in the council's.
6. In response to a question about how the repairs from last year's flooding gone, the Directorate Services Team Leader noted that in terms of where assets had been identified for repair, they had been repaired using existing drainage budgets and there was an additional investment made available to last year and this year of £2m in investment. In terms of some of the locations, work had been done closely with Balfour Beatty to ensure that the right locations were prioritised.
7. The Engineering Manager added that a performance update of what's been delivered and the programme for delivery can be brought to committee in the future.
8. In response to a question of whether a comprehensive countywide maintenance schedule has been developed to anticipate heavier future rainfall, the Engineering Manager explained that preparations are underway for the winter season. While not all areas have been addressed, many key hotspots have been covered. Significant resurfacing work has been completed across the county, with careful attention given to avoid resurfacing areas where it is not required.
9. In response to a question about whether parish councils contact Balfour Beatty or the council to let them know of their problem drains, the Directorate Services Team Leader confirmed that funding has been made available to parish and town councils for drainage works to identify and come forward with cleansing work and small level flood schemes.
10. In response to a question about a request for a dedicated gully management system to be introduced, the Engineering Manager confirmed that as part of the

contract, the contractor will be bringing in the system which the council will use as part of its asset management process.

11. In response to a question about whether regular meetings are held with Welsh Water, the Directorate Services Team Leader confirmed that for specific locations, detailed conversations have been had with Welsh Water. On a number of sites that Balfour Beatty have been looking at, in and around Herefordshire, where there are also Welsh Water assets, they have been involved so that both the council and Welsh Water are observing.
12. In response to a question about whether there is any way to improve the relationship with Welsh Water and help integrate the relationship into decision-making and scrutiny in the council, the Directorate Services Team Leader noted that there is a look to reestablish roundtable meetings that will include senior people within the council and senior officers in the different risk-management authorities.
13. In response to a question about the need for additional gully cleansing equipment, the Cabinet Member for Roads and Regulatory Services explained that, as the council prepares for the new contract in June 2026, equipment requirements are under review. Particular emphasis is being placed on the role of IT systems in improving the efficiency and effectiveness of gully cleansing operations.
14. In response to a question about the publication of the maintenance schedule so that ward members, city, town and parish councils and local people can have confidence in the plans, the Engineering Manager confirmed that a high-level maintenance schedule has been published and is online with a link in the report.
15. In response to a question about prioritising maintenance in areas most at risk of flooding, the Directorate Services Team Leader explained that Balfour Beatty has been making use of the existing drainage budgets to address issues where possible. However, where more substantial problems have been identified, initial remedial works alone may not provide a lasting solution. In such cases, the intention is to progress these larger-scale works into a development stage, where the detailed requirements can be fully assessed and planned.
16. In response to a question about how priorities are determined, the Directorate Services Team Leader explained that, so far, the vast majority of locations addressed have been those affected by internal property flooding, and these sites have therefore been given priority.
17. The Engineering Manager added that Balfour Beatty applies a prioritisation scoring system, which takes into account factors such as high-speed roads, high-volume traffic areas, and sites with safety concerns or accident histories, ensuring a broad range of demands are considered.
18. In response to a question about whether the matrix for flooding could be refreshed, the Engineering Manager noted that a report could be done on when this was last done and take that forward as an action.

There was a short adjournment to enable committee members to consider potential recommendations. The meeting recommenced and the following resolutions were agreed by the committee.

Resolved:

That

- a. To provide the committee with an update on the current mapping operation and to provide a date by which the mapping will be completed.
- b. To consider early adoption of the upgraded mapping software before the new contract comes into force in June 2026.
- c. To provide an update on the new maintenance schedule that anticipates heavier rainfall across the county with an expected publication date.
- d. To provide an update on the £2 million flood resilience grant.

68. UPDATE ON RECOMMENDATIONS MADE BY THE CONNECTED COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Statutory Scrutiny Officer presented the update on recommendations made by the Connected Communities Scrutiny Committee report.

The principal points of the subsequent discussion are summarised below:

1. In response to a question about whether there is a middle ground between accepting and rejecting recommendations, the Statutory Scrutiny Officer confirmed that respondents can choose to partially accept or reject a recommendation. It was further suggested that more precise and targeted recommendations are likely to elicit clearer, more definitive responses.
2. The Chairperson suggested that a discussion for a meeting could include a period of reflection on the responses to recommendations received.
3. The Statutory Scrutiny Officer noted that in relation to the Local Transport Plan, after meeting with the Transport Planning Services Manager, the consultation period was extended following the committee's recommendation and following the end of the consultation period, it was noted that the response rate was one of the highest in the country.

69. WORK PROGRAMME 2025-26

The Statutory Scrutiny Officer presented the draft work programme for the Connected Communities Scrutiny Committee for the municipal year 2024/25.

The principal points of the subsequent discussion are summarised below:

1. The Statutory Scrutiny Officer added that after meeting with the Transport Planning Services Manager, there has been some changes around funding arrangements for active travel. Officers have asked whether they can consider as a priority to bring the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) to the committee's work programme for September.
2. Members agreed that the LCWIP should be prioritised for the September meeting, reflecting both the urgency created by new funding opportunities and the need for robust scrutiny. Concerns were expressed that the plan must not be rushed and should properly reflect the needs of Herefordshire.
3. Tourism and Destination Management was also identified as a key topic for September, complementing previous discussions on culture.

4. Other items originally listed for September, including the Hereford City Masterplan, UK Shared Prosperity Fund, and broadband, were considered less well developed. Members agreed that these may be better shaped in a separate work programme meeting before being scheduled.
5. It was suggested that if items such as the Hereford City Masterplan are delayed, accountability should still be maintained by officers explaining the reasons for delay in public, rather than issues being indefinitely postponed.
6. The committee also considered the establishment of a task and finish group to examine the impacts of significant housing growth in Herefordshire. The proposal focused on ensuring that community infrastructure and essential services are delivered in step with housing development, and on engaging residents proactively in the process.
7. Suggested lines of enquiry included community infrastructure readiness, planning with people, growth equity and resilience, and monitoring and accountability. The group could gather evidence from officers, developers, parish councils, NHS and education providers, as well as through citizen panels and community workshops.
8. The committee recognised the scale of the work and acknowledged the need to manage timing carefully, given officer resources and other scrutiny committees also planning task and finish groups. Members agreed to consider the proposal further and revisit it at the September meeting.

The committee unanimously agreed the draft work programme for Connected Communities Scrutiny Committee.

Resolved that:

- a. **The committee agree the work programme for Connected Communities Scrutiny Committee contained in the work programme report attached as appendix 1.**

70. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting is Tuesday 9 September 2025, 14:00 pm.

The meeting ended at 3.39 pm

Chairperson