

Agenda Item 11

Housing Health and Environment Policy Advisory Committee

7th September 2023

Member Agenda Item Request from Cllr Stuart Jeffery – Rivers Task Force

Timetable	
Meeting	Date
Housing Health and Environment Policy Advisory Committee	7th September 2023

Has this Member Agenda Item Request been submitted urgently?	Not Applicable
Final Decision-Maker	Cabinet/Cabinet Member for Environmental Services
Wards affected	All

Executive Summary

An amendment to the motion on the Rights of Rivers was tabled at the Council meeting on 19th July 2023 requesting the setting up of a task force to clean the River Len. This report proposes a revised version of that amendment be discussed and requests that the proposal be taken to the Executive for agreement.

Purpose of Report

To request that an officer report be presented (with the member agenda item request) directly to the Cabinet containing costs and benefits of the scheme with a preferred option to agree the scheme.

Member Agenda Item Request – Rivers Task Force

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The state of the rivers running through the Borough has been the subject of much discussion and work over the past 12 months but so far no actions have been taken to improve the quality of those rivers.
 - 1.2 An amendment to the motion on the Rights of Rivers was tabled at the Council meeting on 19th July 2023 requesting the setting up of a task force to clean the River Len. This amendment was not passed.
 - 1.3 The River Len is one of three main tributaries to the River Medway within the Borough. Each of these, plus the main River Medway, are in need of urgent support. Only 14% of rivers in England have good ecological status.
 - 1.4 The last assessment provided by the Environment Agency gave an overall 'Moderate' rating but with 'Poor' phosphate levels and 'Fail' on hazardous substances including mercury, see <https://environment.data.gov.uk/catchment-planning/WaterBody/GB106040018440>
 - 1.5 Healthy rivers are vital for biodiversity and to human health and well-being. Rivers provide habitats for a range of wildlife, protect against flooding and provide beautiful places for recreation and reflection. Freshwater ecosystems are in crisis globally and in England there are concerns about the multiple stresses being placed on riverine biodiversity and the dangers posed to swimmers and other river users from bacteria from sewage pollution.
 - 1.6 It is noted that the separation of river water from the water table and other vital ecological/biosphere phenomena is an artificial one and that they should be considered as a system rather than as separate parts.
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2. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That an officer report be presented (with the member agenda item request) directly to the Cabinet containing costs and benefits of the creation of a task force with a preferred option to agree the scheme:
 - 2.1.1 That a task force be created to drive the improvements to the River Medway and its tributaries.
 - 2.1.2 The Medway River Basin Task Force will be comprised of local landowners and their representatives, water companies, the Environment Agency, Kent Wildlife Trust, South East Rivers Trust and other influential players (see Appendix) under the chairmanship of the Leader of the Council.
 - 2.1.3 The Medway River Basin Task Force will enable:
 - 2.1.3.1 More naturally functioning river channels and floodplains that are resilient to climate change and can provide: natural flood management; a healthy habitat; a secure, clean water supply; and an attractive, resilient landscape that supports sustainable agriculture and flourishing wildlife.
 - 2.1.3.2 Progressive removal and/or bypassing of manmade barriers to ecological movement i.e. restoring the right to a natural flow, while ensuring that natural barriers are in place to provide a variety of flow and pooling;

- 2.1.3.3 Setting measurable targets and achieving continuous improvement across flow rates;
 - 2.1.3.4 Ensure that water quality is measured and improved year on year (e.g. mitigating current pathways for diffuse pollutants including agricultural and highway run-off);
 - 2.1.3.5 Provide direction on supportive and enforcement measures to those currently polluting the rivers;
 - 2.1.3.6 Enhancing and recreating riparian habitats along the course of the rivers and its tributaries, including wet woodland, marsh and fen, wet heathland, flood meadow, ponds and ditches; and
 - 2.1.3.7 Restoration, expansion and reintroductions of declining or lost riparian flora and fauna associated with the rivers.
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3. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

- 3.1 *The first report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees Water Cycle work was presented to Cabinet on 26th July 2023.*
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Appendix

Potential stakeholders

- Kent County Council
- Borough councils
- Parish councils
- Upper Medway Internal Drainage Board
- Natural England
- Environment Agency
- Historic England
- National Farmers Union
- Water companies
- Network Rail
- Kent Highways
- Private landowners and farmers
- Angling clubs
- Kent Fisheries Consultative Association
- Medway Flood Partnership
- Medway Catchment Partnership
- Country Land and Business Association
- Kent Wildlife Trust
- Medway Valley Countryside Partnership
- Joint Parish Flood Group
- South East Rivers Trust
- Friends of the River Medway
- Local residents.