

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 6 May 2025 in the Town Hall, Royal Leamington Spa at 6.00pm.

Present: Councillor Milton (Chair); Councillors Armstrong, Collins, Falp, Harrison, Kohler, Luckhurst, Payne, and P Wightman.

Also Present: Councillor Roberts – Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood.

114. Apologies and Substitutes

- (a) Apologies were received from Councillor Redford; and
- (b) Councillor Falp substituted for Councillor Barton and Councillor Kohler substituted for Councillor Russell.

115. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest made.

116. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 March 2025 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

117. Work Programme

The Committee considered a report from the Head of Governance and Monitoring Officer which informed Members of the Committee's work programme for 2024-2025, attached at Appendix 1 to the report.

Resolved that

- (1) the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 19 August 2025 be repurposed for the extraordinary O&S Committee meeting to discuss Local Government Reorganisation; and
- (2) Councillor King be requested to attend the Shakespeare England agenda item, as the outside body representative, on 8 July 2025.

118. Outside Bodies and Champions Briefing Note Report

The Committee considered a report from Governance Services. The briefing note provided a list of outside appointments and the appointed representatives, together with the evaluation criteria used by the Monitoring Officer for the appointment in the case of Council appointed representation (as seen at Appendix 1 to the report).

An annual statement from Councillors who were the Council's appointed representatives on outside bodies was attached as Appendix 2 to the report.

An annual statement from the Council's Champions was attached as Appendix 3 to the report.

The Committee was asked to review the annual reports and identify any areas to add to its work programme for more detailed scrutiny at a future meeting.

Councillors were requested to contact the Monitoring Officer if they considered that the Council should not appoint a representative to a specific outside body. The Monitoring Officer would consider this in liaison with the Leadership Co-ordination Group (LCG).

The Council's Champion update was provided for information purposes only. Councillors were advised if they had questions they should be directed to the relevant Champion.

No reports had been received from Councillor King in respect of Shakespeare England, from Councillor Payne in respect of Coventry Airport Consultative, or Councillor Yellapragada in respect of the Children's and Adult's Safeguarding Champions.

It was agreed that each year, Councillors appointed to represent the Council on Outside Bodies should submit an annual statement of the work undertaken by the outside body. For completeness, the work being undertaken by Champions had been included in this update.

The Council's Constitution, section 4 – Scheme of Delegation stipulated that the Monitoring Officer had authority to: MO (2) Subject to consultation with Group Leaders, make appointments to outside bodies in accordance with the political balance already agreed.

This delegated power allowed the Monitoring Officer to determine which outside appointments could be discontinued after consulting with the LCG.

The appointments by Council were made on a politically proportionate basis. The process for nominations was that the largest group on the Council was requested to make its nominations first, followed by, in turn, the second and third largest.

The guidance for outside body representatives needed to be reviewed.

In answer to questions from Members the Head of Governance and Monitoring Officer advised that:

- the list of outside bodies had reduced significantly, by 75%;
- he would encourage Warwick District Council to reflect on the value of providing a representative to each of the outside bodies and whether the outside body continued to benefit from having a representative from WDC attend;
- the reporting methodology was introduced as a result of some outside bodies, on occasion, not meeting for a long period of time. It was now considered good practice to report annually;
- currently Members were asked to report back on their outside body appointments annually;
- officers were unaware of Members' attendance until the end of each municipal year;

- there were no direct sanctions for Members that failed to attend outside body meetings;
- introducing sanctions on non-attendance would be a decision for Council. For example, Council might decide if a Member had failed to attend multiple outside body meetings, they could appoint a different representative;
- it was impossible to know if the Council was missing out on information, if representatives failed to attend a meeting, given that it was not known what was discussed at the meeting;
- in relation to the outside bodies that had been removed from the list previously, these could be re-evaluated against the scoring matrix used;
- in relation to Members suggesting potential future outside bodies, Members could be given the criteria used, and asked to provide information as to how the body met the criteria;
- there was one potential outside body organisation, the Coventry, Warwickshire, and Solihull Local Access Forum which discussed rights of way, that needed to be discussed with Group Leaders;
- Members were able to explore whether there were any outside bodies they wished to suggest a representative from WDC attended;
- Members might wish to be cautious in regard to their capacity and time for adding further outside bodies, given the number of existing Working Parties, Committees, sub-Committees, and working groups in addition to their ward work;
- officers would have a conversation with Coventry Airport Consultative Committee in relation to Councillor Payne's concerns that he had received little contact from them and no invitations to meetings;
- there was potential for the Coventry Airport Consultative Committee to be replaced by a similar organisation that would look at the development of the site and focus on engagement work in future;
- the outside body organisations stipulated their own terms and conditions and rules with regards to who could attend the group and whether a substitute could attend in the representative's absence;
- guidance on where the focus should be would need to come from Councillors whether that be from Cabinet or Group Leaders;
- papers had been published today, 6 May 2025, for annual Council listing the outside body appointments for 2025-2026; and
- consideration should be given to whether the annual outside bodies report ought to come to Overview & Scrutiny Committee much earlier, potentially December, to allow a greater gap between the report and annual Council.

Committee Members were concerned with the attendance of some of the outside body representatives and the disparity in the feedback received in the annual statements.

Resolved that a further discussion be had at the Chair's briefing meeting scheduled for 2 June 2025.

119. **Biodiversity Action Plan and Climate Change Adaption Plan**

The Committee considered a report from the Climate Change Adaptation Officer.

On 30 July 2024, a report entitled "Climate Change and Biodiversity Reporting" was presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. It was proposed that further reports be provided in April 2025 focusing on two key

areas: Climate Change Adaptation and the Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP).

Regarding climate change adaptation, the report included:

- Updated international, national, and local data relevant to the review of Warwick District Council's (WDC) Adaptation Action Plan.
- A concise overview of progress made on the Adaptation Action Plan.
- A detailed review of Theme 1 of the Action Plan (Mainstreaming climate resilience into Council operations and services).
- Insights and lessons learned from recent extreme weather events, including:
 - Heatwave of Summer 2022
 - Flooding in January 2024
 - Any subsequent events

In relation to the BAP, the report outlined measures to assess progress, along with a highlights and exceptions report on actions taken. It was agreed that this review would be repeated annually for ongoing scrutiny.

Officers had requested a delay of one month for the reports to allow for analysis of data covering the full 2024/25 period.

In response to a recent request for feedback on the report's focus, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee specified that the report should focus on:

- How improvements in biodiversity would be measured, including early results.
- The connection between No Mow May and the BAP, specifically in terms of quantifiable impacts.
- General highlights, results, and any areas of significant progress or challenges.

Over the past 12 months much of the climate change adaptation work had focused on areas that overlapped with the BAP. While this had meant more attention on nature-based actions, work had also been undertaken on other adaptation actions. To streamline reporting, officers proposed combining the climate change adaptation and BAP reports into a single report due to the overlap.

The report mainly focused on the BAP, with updates provided on climate change adaptation (paragraphs 3.4 and 3.5 to the report), including both actions directly linked to the BAP and others that had been carried out separately.

The vision of WDC's BAP was "to make Warwick District a place that was rich in nature, delivering multiple benefits for wildlife and people".

The BAP set out the strategic direction to 2050 for how WDC would protect, conserve and enhance biodiversity in the district, with a particular focus on the Council's own land and operations.

Approved by Cabinet on 10 April 2024, the BAP included a clear monitoring and reporting process to track progress. The Action Plan to 2030 served as a tool to track progress on each action, with activities set to begin at different times. Some actions were time-bound due to external factors, while others were short-term or long-term initiatives. In addition, the BAP included a series of measures to provide quantifiable reports on the work being undertaken.

These measures would become relevant at various points throughout the action plan, depending on when the associated actions were scheduled to start.

Ambition 3 of WDC's Climate Change Action Programme was: "To enable our environment and communities to have adapted to the potential of at least 3 degrees rise in global temperatures by 2100."

A revised Climate Change Adaptation Plan was agreed by Cabinet in December 2023. This plan set out the actions that should be considered to ensure that the natural environment, people, buildings, and businesses were prepared for the impacts of climate change. It used the findings from the West Midlands and Warwickshire County Council Adaptation Plans, along with the outcomes of the Government's Climate Change Risk Assessment 3 (CCRA3) and National Adaptation Programme 3 (NAP3), to create a localised plan for Warwick District. While the plan primarily focused on actions within WDC's areas of influence, it also emphasized the importance of partnership working to explore wider adaptation opportunities.

On the national level, the UK's climate change adaptation efforts were guided by the Climate Change Risk Assessment (CCRA) which assessed climate risks and opportunities to inform future adaptation plans. The CCRA was updated every five years with the fourth edition (CCRA4) due for publication in 2026. The National Adaptation Programme (NAP) used the findings from the CCRA to outline actions to address these risks. NAP3 was published in 2023, with NAP4 due for publication in 2028, following the release of CCRA4. These efforts aimed to improve the UK's resilience to climate change, although progress had been considered slower than necessary to fully address the urgency of climate impacts. Local authorities were invited to report on their climate risks and adaptation actions in 2024 as part of the Adaptation Reporting Power (ARP), established under the Climate Change Act. A small number of councils took part in this trial and the government would now consider whether to make reporting mandatory for all councils in the future.

In the past 12 months, much of the climate change adaptation work had focused on areas that overlapped with the BAP, such as restoring habitats, enhancing green spaces and promoting biodiversity to improve nature's resilience to climate change. Other actions, guided by the climate change adaptation plan had also been carried out to further strengthen climate resilience.

Significant achievements had been made during the first year of the BAP.

Key activities had contributed to the success of the BAP in 2024/25, including:

- Launch of Nature Patchwork: Nature Patchwork was an initiative designed to inspire and connect people to help nature by creating wildlife habitats in their gardens and community spaces. The initiative was a collaboration between WDC, Warwickshire Wildlife Trust and other local community partners. The first area of focus was Royal Leamington Spa with a launch event held at the Sydni Centre on 8 March 2025. The Council hoped to expand to other parts of the District in the future.
- Supporting the National Hedgehog Monitoring Programme (NHMP) in Warwick District: NHMP was a three-year pilot project aimed at tracking the number and distribution of hedgehogs across the UK. Wildlife monitoring cameras were set up across gardens, cemeteries and parks in

the Brunswick area including Eagle Recreation Ground and Leamington Cemetery. Initial results indicated a promising number of hedgehog sightings, suggesting a healthy local population.

- Biodiversity Photography Competition: The second photography competition saw another fantastic range of entries, this time with the theme "Bright, Beautiful, Great and Small."
- Introduction of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) into the planning system and early investigation of opportunities for biodiversity enhancement on WDC land through the BNG system. Initial work had focused on Newbold Comyn, working closely with Trust Nature Services (side arm of Warwickshire Wildlife Trust), to understand potential opportunities. The next step was cost management modelling to assess long-term management costs and look at the financial viability and delivery model for implementing BNG at Newbold Comyn. The Council hoped to have this piece of work completed during Summer 2025. Subject to findings, a report would be presented to Cabinet to request approval to proceed with implementing BNG at Newbold Comyn, if deemed viable and appropriate.

Much of the climate change adaptation work over the past 12 months had linked closely with the BAP. Key actions included:

- increasing natural flood mitigation in WDC parks and open spaces by expanding or creating new scrapes to support water storage and slow the flow during heavy rain;
- supporting local food production through the planting of community orchards on WDC land;
- planting trees in residential areas to help with urban cooling, improve air quality, reduce flood risk, and increase carbon storage; and
- incorporating adaptation into grounds maintenance practices to improve resilience to flooding and drought, improve soil health, conserve water, and increase carbon storage in green spaces. This included sustainable planting schemes, expanding meadow areas, adjusting mowing practices (for example, cutting grass higher, No Mow May), mulching, and more.

Additional actions included:

- reducing wildfire risk in WDC parks and open spaces through signage and public guidance at key sites to encourage safer behaviour;
- raising public awareness and preparedness around extreme weather, including heatwaves and cold snaps, and activating emergency protocols when needed;
- supporting the development of Warwickshire's Local Nature Recovery Strategy, ensuring climate adaptation was a key consideration;
- supporting the integration of climate adaptation into the emerging South Warwickshire Local Plan, including:
 - promoting water efficiency measures that went beyond national Building Regulations;
 - embedding adaptation within green infrastructure policies;
 - advocating for an Environmental Net Gain (ENG) approach that delivers adaptation benefits through nature-based solutions;
 - exploring policies to protect areas with high carbon storage and sequestration value; and
 - developing a Climate and Sustainability Impact Tool to inform and improve decision making across WDC, with climate adaptation

embedded as a core consideration.

The Action Plan to 2030 was a key tool for monitoring and tracking progress on each action. Actions were set to begin at different points throughout the plan, with some being time-bound due to external factors, and others being short-term or long-term initiatives. Appendix 1 to the report contained the Action Plan to 2030 Tracker for 2024/25, which provided an overview of the actions for this period, along with a progress update and an explanation for any delays.

The BAP also included measurable indicators to help quantify the work being undertaken. These metrics primarily focused on habitat improvements, as they were easier to monitor and update using the comprehensive grounds maintenance database. Appendix 2 to the report contained the reporting table for these measures, including data from 2024/25. In some cases, the data served as a baseline for future reporting and comparisons.

Whilst these measures showed WDC's efforts to improve conditions for wildlife, it's important to note that the direct benefits – especially in terms of species health – could take time to show. For example, improving grassland quality in the first year might not affect species health and diversity for many years as ecosystems take time to respond to habitat changes.

Research had shown that habitat restoration could support biodiversity, but species populations would often take several years to reflect the changes in habitat. Also, species trends were influenced by many factors outside the Council's control, such as land use changes and broader environmental changes. This made focusing on habitat improvements a practical way to measure progress and see more immediate results.

For species data, the Council relied on external sources like the Warwickshire Biological Records Centre (WBRC), but this data was primarily collected by volunteers and might not have been specific to the areas they were working in. Species surveys could be expensive and resource-heavy, so the Council focused on habitat-based measures, which were more cost-effective and provided valuable insights into ecosystem health.

No Mow May was part of a wider effort to restore habitats and support pollinators. By letting grass and wildflowers grow without mowing, the Council provided important food and nesting sites for bees, butterflies, and other pollinators.

In 2025, the Council would build on this by starting a Wildflower Verge Trial, which would reduce mowing throughout the growing season (spring to autumn). This would give wildflowers and plants more time to grow, improving their chance to thrive. The Council would survey the sites before and after the trial to track changes in plant diversity. Whilst the Council anticipated habitat improvements, it would take time for pollinators to benefit, and it could be hard to directly link changes from this initiative. For species data, the Council would rely on broader trends from sources like the WBRC, as it was difficult to directly measure the impacts on species from the trial alone.

Some of the key challenges in delivering the BAP were:

- **Measuring impacts:** It was difficult to measure the exact impact of the

BAP and link specific actions to changes in species and broader biodiversity. While habitat improvements like reduced mowing, meadow creation, and woodland management were important, it could take years for species populations to reflect these changes.

- **Public support:** Many of the biodiversity initiatives, such as traditional hedge laying and bulb planting, were well received by the public. However, some initiatives like No Mow May, faced resistance because they challenged traditional ideas of tidiness. Public opinion on these initiatives was divided, but the Council planned to continue educate people about the benefits and work to shift perceptions over time.
- **Data limitations:** Accurate progress tracking in the BAP relied on regularly updated data, particularly from the grounds maintenance database. However, there was a challenge when it came to assessing the percentage of WDC land being actively managed for biodiversity. The most recent land registry data available was from 2019, creating a mismatch with the up-to-date ground's maintenance data from 2025. This discrepancy complicated efforts to measure biodiversity improvements on WDC land accurately. The issue with outdated land registry data was being investigated, however, updating it could be costly and time-consuming.

In answer to questions from Members the Climate Change Adaptation Officer and the Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood advised that:

- the infographic within the report would be included in the summer's biodiversity newsletter which was due to be published in June 2025;
- the biodiversity newsletter was seasonal;
- there would be further communication regarding the infographic, including adding it to the Council's website;
- there were various webpages in relation to the biodiversity action plan on the Council's website;
- officers were reliant on the species data from the Warwickshire Biological Records Centre, which sat with Warwickshire County Council's remit;
- the initial species data in the report was used to target specific species for action;
- officers had not received an update from Warwickshire County Council for 2024/25, as they had been busy developing the Local Nature Recovery Strategy;
- this data was reliant on volunteers completing surveys;
- officers had good relationships with community groups across the District, including the Bee Friendly groups, who had been supportive of the work underway and were happy to complete surveys;
- officers had worked with educational groups to encourage students to support the survey work;
- officers had been heavily involved with the environmental side of the Local Plan to influence how it was developed;
- officers had commissioned a study in relation to green and blue infrastructure to look at the requirements in terms of new developments and how to protect wildlife and habitat;
- officers were considering the viability of going beyond the 10% biodiversity net gain target;
- officers from Green Spaces and the Climate Change Team were working hard to achieve the targets;

- the study that was being commissioned would be a key piece of evidence in the development of the Local Plan, which would inform specific policies in the Local Plan in relation to:
 - biodiversity net gain;
 - the protection of species;
 - the protection of habitats; and
 - the protection of trees.
- in relation to temperature rises, there was a Climate Change Adaptation Action Plan, which was on the website, that included climate change projections in Warwick District based on Met Office projections;
- the median estimated projections, for temperature rises, in relation to median omissions, would peak in 2080, then start to decline;
- the projected figure in Warwick District estimated a mean annual increase of three degrees by the end of the century;
- there is a lot of data available from the Met Office, however, the information was high level;
- in addition to No Mow May, officers were trialling a wildflower verge project;
- the wildflower verge trial consisted of a small number of areas across the District where verges would be left to grow for longer periods of time, not just for the No Mow May period, and would focus on plant diversity and improvements to species;
- the local community had been involved in the wildflower verge trial by completing surveys;
- officers would add photographs of invasive species to the Council's website and app to enable residents to clearly identify what these looked like;
- officers had linked up with Warwick Natural History Society to write an article for the biodiversity newsletter on the effect of Asian hornets;
- there were no firm plans in the Council's action plan to 2030 to reintroduce species. Instead, they would support organisations, such as the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust in relation to rebuilding the eco-system;
- officers were aware Warwickshire Wildlife Trust were considering reintroducing beavers to Warwick District, however, this was a very lengthy process;
- there had not been a huge amount of focus on adaptation work with regards to flooding, however, in terms of the draft policies put forward for the most recent consultation for the local plan there was some more detailed work around flood risk, mitigation, sustainable urban drainage, and waste water management which had been developed with colleagues at Warwickshire County Council;
- policies needed to be firmly in place by Christmas 2025, to consult again on what would be the final policies;
- officers would continue to work with Warwickshire County Council flood risk staff and the Environment Agency;
- officers were working though the responses from the most recent round of consultations, there might be a resource requirement for this;
- officers needed to understand what the responses were from the Environment Agency, Severn Trent Water, and Warwickshire County Council to understand how to refine the policies;
- officers were pleasantly surprised to see the Council had already reached 2030 targets. As a result, officers would review some of the targets that had been achieved;
- as part of the biodiversity action programme, officers had committed to complete a midway review in 2027, however, officers might consider bringing the date forward;

- the new planning software would be in place in 12 months. The conversation in relation to what the new system could offer (recording and monitoring biodiversity net gain) were only just beginning;
- the Council had a duty to report on biodiversity every five years;
- the first biodiversity report was due in January 2026;
- the Council had a duty to consider biodiversity in everything that it did and report to government how it was delivering this;
- officers were working with the Planning Team in relation to the requirements of the new software;
- biodiversity net gain, in regard to stakeholder developments, came into force in 2024. Officers were unsure whether there had been any planning applications whereby the Council had a financial stake had been submitted since the biodiversity net gain measures had been introduced;
- it was important to get the right policies in place for the next 20 years;
- as part of the wider Climate Change Team, there was a project called Local Engagement Work, which had recently been responsible for sending a survey to all Town and Parish Council's, as well as community groups, to ask what they had been doing in relation to climate action work and if they needed support from WDC;
- this information would be collated, and staff would assess where they could provide assistance;
- the Local Engagement Work would be arranging an event later in 2025 to bring everyone together, to invite speakers, for example some Parish Council's that were doing some great work to share their experiences and best practice;
- as part of the local plan engagement work, staff were working with Warwickshire Association of Local Councils (WALC) to provide Local Nature Action Plans;
- WALC had been working with the Local Nature Action Partnership to provide Local Nature Action Plan templates to Parish Council's to establish what their aims and aspirations were;
- Paragraph 3.3 in Appendix 2 to the report related to the new planning software;
- as part of the planning application approval process, applicants needed to commit to delivering biodiversity net gains over a 30-year period, of which there were legally binding monitoring requirements in place;
- the monitoring costs could be passed to the developer through section 106 agreements;
- there were actions within the plan that supported Severn Trent Water and the Environment Agency with the work they were doing in relation to water quality;
- Warwick District Council were leading the way with their Biodiversity Action Plan. Other local authorities had been watching what Warwick District Council were doing and wanting to replicate it; and
- there was a lot of good biodiversity work happening within Burton Green Parish Council.

The Committee thanked staff for the report and praised the report author for how clear and well written it was.

Resolved that

- (1) Committee would be supportive of additional resources if it were deemed necessary; and
- (2) asked staff to review the 2030 targets that the

Council had already met.

120. Commercial Strategy Scoping Paper

This item had been withdrawn from the agenda and would feature on the Overview & Scrutiny Committee meeting agenda on 3 June 2025.

(The meeting ended at 7.11pm.)

CHAIR
3 June 2025