

Motion - South East Water - Submitted by Councillor Bristow

Preamble:

As our climate changes and we face more weather extremes our water industry is clearly failing. As Councillors we have debated long and hard the issues we face from Southern Water (who are responsible for wastewater management) and its continued pollution into our waterways; however, we have not adequately addressed the performance of South East Water who are responsible for our water supply.

Most of the Lewes District currently sits under a hosepipe ban after continued issues with South East Water not being able to supply enough houses due to demand outreaching supply. On two occasions this has happened in Newhaven and for periods in excess of 8 hours at a time: the area had no water on what were some of the hottest days of the year.

Harbour Primary School in Newhaven was forced to close without notice due to lack of water, one of 4 schools in East Sussex similarly affected in June.

It is understood that South East Water lose 88.7 million litres of water a day through leaks in its network - a staggering amount of water. Residents face increased bills with South East Water increasing its charges by almost 10% in February. In the last 2 years the company- which was debt-free when privatised - has chosen to pay dividends of £156m to its shareholders and financed these dividends by loading its balance sheet with debt on which it paid £76m in interest.

South East Water blames the climate for many of its leaks with the ground drying out and shrinking and moving pipes. It further argues that consumption has increased as many more people now work from home. Neither argument relieves them of its statutory duty to supply clean water and maintain the network on behalf of its customers. There is much frustration with South East Water's poor response to leaks with one in South Highton lasting 2 years and a large leak in Newhaven now lasting a month despite numerous reports.

Our water system is not climate ready and continues to deteriorate; I, therefore, request this Council takes the following actions:

Motion:

That the Council:

1. Asks the Policy and Performance Advisory Committee to request the attendance of David Hinton or a member of the Senior Management Team of South East Water before the Committee to explain how it is going to become climate resilient and to seek answers on what future steps it is taking to improve resources and how much of its current old cast iron network has been replaced;
2. Declares a vote of no-confidence in South East Water; and
3. Declares a Water emergency and appoints a water champion to monitor the performance of both companies (Southern Water and South East Water) and to report back to the Full Council through an outside bodies report when appropriate.