



Lewes District Council

Meeting: Cabinet

Date: 20 March 2025

Subject: Recommendations from Full Council - Southern Water Panel Report

The Cabinet is asked to consider the minute and resolution of the Full Council on the Southern Water Panel Report held on 4 March 2025 as set out below

Recommendation to Cabinet:

1. For Cabinet and Officers:
 - a) To continue to play a full part in any formal discussions between Southern Water and local Councils, including on the Southern Water Local Authority Stakeholder Group.
 - b) To continue to be proactive in seeking partnership and funding opportunities with Southern Water to implement innovative surface and rainwater management projects.
 - c) To publicly support campaigns as they arise for maintaining existing wetlands and the creation of new wetlands and natural flood solutions in the District.
 - d) To continue to explore new locations in the District which would be eligible for, and benefit from, the enhanced monitoring and testing regime concomitant upon designation as 'bathing waters,' including exploring the potential of Newhaven's West Beach as part of the regeneration activities taking place there, and any other coastal or inland waters, and when assessed to write to the EA and Defra to support such designation.
 - e) To seek to raise awareness of the public and businesses of the need to check on private septic tanks to ensure that they are not leaking or overflowing and contributing to pollution within the Ouse River Basin, via the council's existing social media activities.
 - f) To seek to raise awareness of organisations which can assist and advise residents, businesses, and Town and Parish Councils on options for those affected negatively by sewage discharges.
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MINUTE EXTRACT

Lewes Full Council – 4 March 2024

37d. Report of the Southern Water Panel

Councillor Keene (Chair of the Panel) moved and Councillor Cohen (Deputy Chair of the Panel) seconded the recommendations to Council from the Southern Water Scrutiny Panel and the Policy and Performance Advisory Committee. Councillor Keene thanked Councillor Cohen for the time and effort he had put into the report, all members of the Panel for their contributions, and officers for their support and expertise.

Councillor Keene and Councillor Cohen highlighted key portions of the report and the factors that led to poor quality of water in local rivers and seas, and a continued history of dumping of sewage and leaking of other pollutants. Although it was recognised that the new Government had made a start with an independent commission, it was felt that this work would take time, and the report set out immediate actions and included recommendations to the Government, to Southern Water and to the Council's Cabinet and Officers.

The recommendations were debated by the Council and welcomed. Councillor Robinson offered to pass to Councillors Keene and Cohen details on how they could take part like in the Independent Water Commission Call for Evidence. As the water champion and Cabinet Lead for Climate and Nature, Councillor O'Brien responded to the recommendations on actions the Council itself could take, and work that had already started with the Southern Water Local Authority Stakeholder Group, building water quality considerations into the new local plan and projects towards nature restoration and rewilding.

The recommendations were put to a vote and carried unanimously.

RESOLVED

A. To ask the Leader of the Council:

1. To write to the secretary of state for environment, food and rural affairs (Defra) calling for the Government:

- a) To welcome the Government's new sector review into the water industry, but express disappointment that this does not currently include nationalisation. To urge the Government to reconsider bringing water companies, including Southern Water, into public ownership and to ensure adequate funding (estimated at least £260bn) to upgrade sewerage infrastructure over 10 years.
- b) To support the Government's expressed intention to reform or replace Ofwat with a fit for purpose regulator capable of prioritising the public interest and health and wellbeing over company profits or financial viability, and of ensuring the environmental sustainability of water companies' whole operations.
- c) To restore funding and resources to the Environment Agency to at least 2009-10 levels in real terms, and to a level enabling it to be adequately funded and

staffed to undertake active and regular monitoring and investigation of regulation breaches and take effective enforcement action.

- d) To ensure sufficient funding for farmers and landowners to reduce water wastage, improve natural water management, and reduce harmful runoff into waterways through sustainable land management practices.
- e) To introduce a new environmental impact rating for water companies which includes permitted and non-permitted sewage discharges.
- f) To instruct Defra, the EA, and Ofwat to cooperate fully with the Office for Environmental Protection's investigation into their possible failure to comply with environmental law in relation to the regulation of Combined Sewer Outflows.
- g) To revise the EA permitting regime and review water companies' sewerage asset permits, to take into account changing weather patterns as a result of climate change and ensure sufficient storage and treatment of sewage to prevent sewage discharge.
- h) To commission a Defra review of new and micro pollutants which are not currently treated or filtered during sewage treatment, including pharmaceuticals, POPs (Persistent Organic Pollutants), PFAs (Perfluoroalkyl and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances), and microplastics, and; consider the potential to follow Switzerland's example in upgrading sewage treatment infrastructure and technology to remove such micro pollutants, and consider realigning UK regulations with updates to the EU Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive. To ensure that findings from such a review are incorporated into relevant environmental improvement plans.
- i) To ensure the roll-out of volumetric sewage monitoring, rather than just event duration monitoring, to enable conformance with the Environment Act 2021.
- j) To require water companies to forecast surface water run-off events, increase volumetric data measurement, and report on the impact of surface water run-off on water quality.
- k) To instruct Defra and the Environment Agency to revise the monitoring regime for both coastal and inland bathing areas by:
 - Increasing the monitoring from May to September to all year round.
 - Improving the water testing regime for bathing waters to include all relevant pollutants.
 - Reporting on this data publicly.
- l) Until and unless the water industry is brought into public ownership, to put in place measures to ensure transparent and ethical management of water companies, including for example:
 - Requiring the publication of directors' remuneration and dividends.
 - Empowering the Government's new sector review into the water industry to consider requiring companies to have customers vote on executive bonuses.
 - That water industry employment contracts stop former regulator employees from working within water companies within 3 years, in order to ensure integrity of regulation.
 - To discourage the professional advisors (such as accountants or lawyers) from working for both water companies and regulators.

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- To introduce progressive water billing, linking the price of water to usage adjusted for household occupancy, so that the price increases with higher consumption.
2. To write to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG):
 - a) Calling for the Government to introduce stronger requirements into the planning system to reduce water consumption; and
 - b) As set out in the Council's consultation response to the proposed NPPF, to ensure the implementation of Schedule 3 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010, to reiterate the need to end the duty to connect, and to ensure that the cumulative impact of development on the capacity of local sewerage and drainage infrastructure may be treated as a material consideration in planning decisions.

B. To ask the Leader of the Council to write to the Chief Executive of Southern Water:

1. To ensure that it engages fully with requests from Lewes District Council for information on the potential cumulative impact on sewage discharges of proposed major developments.
2. To continue encouraging Southern Water to take advantage of partnership opportunities, in particular with Lewes District Council and other partners within Lewes District, to implement efficient and cost-effective surface and rainwater management and to prioritise nature-based solutions to manage surface and groundwater infiltration of networks.
3. To request that it continues to engage with local authorities on the scrutiny of its performance including by engaging with local authorities' scrutiny committees via the Local Authority Stakeholder Group.
4. To review its engagement practices with farmers and landowners, aiming to develop proactive and constructive communication and partnerships, taking into account best practice elsewhere in the industry.
5. To continue to work on embedding a culture of environmental and social responsibility, in which illegal sewage discharges are never tolerated and routine permitted sewage discharges are never viewed as acceptable.

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D. To ask the Cabinet and Officers:

1. To continue to play a full part in any formal discussions between Southern Water and local Councils, including on the Southern Water Local Authority Stakeholder Group.
2. To continue to be proactive in seeking partnership and funding opportunities with Southern Water to implement innovative surface and rainwater management projects.
3. To publicly support campaigns as they arise for maintaining existing wetlands and the creation of new wetlands and natural flood solutions in the District.
4. To continue to explore new locations in the District which would be eligible for, and benefit from, the enhanced monitoring and testing regime concomitant upon designation as 'bathing waters,' including exploring the potential of Newhaven's West Beach as part of the regeneration activities taking place there, and any other coastal or inland waters, and when assessed to write to the EA and Defra to support such designation.
5. To seek to raise awareness of the public and businesses of the need to check on private septic tanks to ensure that they are not leaking or overflowing and

contributing to pollution within the Ouse River Basin, via the council's existing social media activities.

6. To seek to raise awareness of organisations which can assist and advise residents, businesses, and Town and Parish Councils on options for those affected negatively by sewage discharges.

For a copy of the report please contact Democratic Services:

Tel. (01323) 410000.

E-mail: committees@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk

Background Papers:

- [Agenda and Minutes of the Lewes District Council Policy and Performance Advisory Committee on Tuesday, 26th November, 2024, 5.00 pm](#)
- [Reference Document – Full Southern Water Panel Report](#)