

Motion to Southern Water to explain how it will safeguard the River Ouse, its tributaries and the coastal waters of Lewes District.

To be proposed by: Cllr Bird To be seconded by: Cllr O'Connor

Preamble

Southern Water was fined a record £90 million for deliberately dumping billions of litres of raw sewage into the seas off Sussex, Hampshire and Kent in July 2021. Between 2010 and 2015 the company was responsible for 8,400 illegal discharges of raw sewage into some of our most ecological diverse and precious environments. Investigations are still being carried out for incidences that occurred after 2015.

In sentencing Southern Water, the Judge stated that the company was responsible for '*previous and persistent pollution of the environment*'. The harmful implications of these actions are massive for both the environment and people's health.

Local MPs including Lloyd Russell Moyle, Caroline Lucas and Maria Caulfield have been unanimous in their condemnation of Southern Water's actions and behaviour.

More generally the volume of sewage and run-off entering our waters means that the UK is ranked 25th out of 30 EU countries for coastal water quality and only 16% of waterways meet good ecological status.

Southern Water had previously had a £126m penalty imposed on it by Ofwat for failing to operate a number of wastewater treatments works properly, including by not making the necessary investment which led to equipment failures and spills of wastewater into the environment. This was the highest penalty ever imposed by Ofwat and yet despite this Southern Water still generated an operating profit of £138.8m in 2020/21. The new Chief Executive Ian McAulay has since been awarded a bonus of £550,000.

Raw sewage has been leaked into the Bevern, a major trout stream that runs across Plumpton. The Sussex Express has reported that sewage has been dumped upstream of Barcombe 78 times in 2020 and Southern Water refused to detail the location of its sewage outfalls to a local resident who wanted information on their locations.

Barcombe Mills has become popular for swimmers in recent years who routinely face stomach upsets and other health impacts due to the poor quality of the river water.

The Ouse and Adur Rivers Trust has provided information on recent pollution episodes on the Ouse.

Using data collected from sewage discharge (overflow) reports from 2020 (the latest data) we can show that sewage overspills in Lewes District occurred a combined total of 612 times during 2020 lasting a total of 7,486 hours (311 days). The table below shows where these discharges occurred, how many times and for what length of time.

Site	No. Occasions	Total No. Hours
Ham Lane, Lewes	189	3574
Barcombe	78	962
Court Road, Lewes	45	784
Neves Lane, Ringmer	57	727
Newhaven (Channel)	85	504
Cooksbridge	33	266
Kingston Hollow	37	212
Jackies Lane, Newick	36	207
Hazeldene Lane, Newick	18	74
Glynde North	11	53
Newhaven Main STW (River)	12	51
Newick WTW	8	51
Glynde South	3	21
Total	612	7486

Of the 25 waterbodies on the River Ouse, 13 (52%) fail to reach the Good Ecological Status objectives of the Water Framework Directive as a result of either Poor or Moderate levels of phosphate.

We are in the middle of a climate and ecological emergency and Southern Water's failure to reinvest in its infrastructure and ensure that it is resilient to climate change threatens us all. Just over 20 years ago in the floods of 2000 sewage backed up onto the streets. It is all too likely that similar extreme weather events will repeat this situation and more housing and development will only increase the potential for pollution episodes unless water infrastructure is radically upgraded.

Motion

The Council resolves to:

Request the Leader of the Council write to the Chief Executive of Southern Water and ask him to respond to the following questions:

- 1. What measures are you taking to ensure there are no sewage discharges or other pollution incidents in those parts of the River Ouse, its tributaries and the coastal waters that lie within the area covered by Lewes District Council?**
- 2. What measures are you taking to ensure that sewage discharges do not take place in the area covered by Lewes District Council in extreme weather events such as those in the Lewes Floods of 2000?**
- 3. How much are you investing in infrastructure improvements in the area covered by Lewes District Council and what measures are you taking to ensure this infrastructure is climate resilient?**