

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the Extraordinary consultative meeting of Scrutiny Committee held Online via the Zoom app on 17 March 2022

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 10.30 am and ended at 12.05 pm

55 Declarations of interest

Minute 57. Presentation by South West Water followed by questions from Members of the Scrutiny Committee, Members and the public.

Councillor Eileen Wragg, Personal, Member was awarded a Pure Service Award by South West Water.

It was noted that all Members had an equal personal interest as customers of South West Water.

56 Chair's opening comments, welcome and introductions

The Chair welcomed Mr Alan Burrows, Director of Environmental Liaison and Culture for South West Water, to the meeting and expressed the hope that the meeting would be the start of an on-going constructive dialogue between the Council and South West Water.

The meeting had come about due to Members' concerns primarily about sewage contamination in East Devon's watercourses and coast. Questions from Members had been sent to South West Water in advance.

57 Presentation by South West Water followed by questions from Members of the Scrutiny Committee, Members and the public

Mr Burrows gave a presentation on the work of South West Water (SWW) with key points as follows:

- Regarding water quality, SWW will: build on the success of the 'Clean Sweep' coastal investment programme in the South West; improve monitoring, real time live data and transparency; deliver a step change by reducing the impact on river water quality by one third by 2025.
- Storm overflows were explained, including the demand on the network, and plans are being developed for further investment in infrastructure to reduce usage of storm overflows.
- In the local area, SWW is committed to sharing data and information about potential impact, real time notification via BeachLive [www.beachwise.org.uk/beachlive] with free alerts for beaches in Devon when storm water overflows may temporarily affect bathing water quality. It was noted that Exmouth Beach has been rated 'excellent' for bathing water quality.
- Regarding the Maer Lane facility in Exmouth, it was noted that there is a temporary increase in operation vehicles pending completion of improvement and upgrade works at other sites
- In Exmouth there is investment in a £1.2million project for surface water separation and a £2.5million project for rising main replacement to improve treatment capacity.
- It was noted that SWW is not a statutory consultee in the development planning process. The company works with developers to ensure that its assets can cope with increased demand. Nature based drainage solutions are promoted.

- Partnership working is crucial to making the changes everyone wants to see. The presentation outlined ways in which collaborative working helps with finding solutions and how simple changes which the public could make would reduce the impact on SWW's systems.

The Chair thanked Mr Burrows for his presentation.

In responding to questions from Members, Mr Burrows advised the following:

- Regarding the reporting of sewage spills on The Rivers Trust website, differences in the figures shown for Honiton may be due to the figures being for different events such as a combined sewer overflow or an emergency overflow. When considering spills, it should be noted that the volume, rather than the length of time, was important. SWW is working with Exeter University and the Centre for Resilience in Environment, Water and Waste (CREWW) to develop technology to measure spill volumes.
- SWW is required to do a root cause analysis for instances of failure for phosphate levels and data is then shared with the Environment Agency (EA).
- Regarding storm water instances, which are likely to increase due to climate change, all new development must have surface water separation as part of planning conditions to prevent surface water from entering the sewerage systems. Where surface water cannot be separated, other options are available, including nature based solutions to slow water flow and temporary storage before release back into the system.
- Although not a statutory consultee, SWW development planning team constantly reviews local plans to ensure that it is aware of planned development and the capacity which would be required. Where there is insufficient capacity, this would be built into the business planning review process.
- Attention was drawn to the information available on the South West Water website.

Questions for Mr Burrows were put by members of the public, Ms Vicky Whitworth and Mr Geoff Crawford, and the responses included the following points:

- Regarding stopping sewage discharge into the River Axe and its tributaries and how long this would take to achieve, it was noted that SWW works with Local Planning Authorities to reduce nutrient enrichment of rivers. A £10million improvement scheme had been announced which included the River Axe special area of conservation in order to help reduce the impact of nutrients. The scheme would also unlock growth and maintain and improve the area designated by Natural England for specific species and habitat.
- Regarding the SWW permit for sewage discharge at Exmouth, the height of the sewage pipe above Ordnance Survey datum is not a requirement of the permit. The distance quoted in the permit is from the storm sewer overflow to the point at which the Environment Agency extracts bathing water samples.
- Regarding the vehicle movements in Exmouth, SWW is preparing a sludge strategy, with a requirement to comply with the Industrial Emissions Directive, and, as a result, issues with vehicle movements should be resolved.

Further questions were put by Members and Mr Burrows responded as follows:

- The EA issues an annual environmental performance assessment which compares pollution incident numbers across providers. Numbers for 2021 will be published in June 2022 [www.gov.uk – search Environmental Performance Assessment].
- A pilot scheme on two river catchments is running to understand whether bathing water standards can be met. The scheme will be promoted by Citizen Science and the West Country Rivers Trust who are assisting SWW.
- Regarding new development, the EA has a hierarchy for sewage treatment in that it must connect to an existing water and sewage network first, before any secondary or private network is brought in.
- In response to a question about the number of spills in the River Otter and its catchment, SWW has a programme in place to monitor high frequency spills and to investigate causes. Data will be published on the SWW website in early April and will provide a summary of actions taken and an explanation of monitoring work across the network.

- Dealing with surface water from downpipes on older properties is a long term issue across the country. As regards system capacity, SWW has flow compliance monitoring in place and the EA has powers to tighten limits on sewage treatment works.
- Regarding issues at Clyst St Mary and the need to protect villages and communities from the impacts of development upstream, SWW is working on drainage and wastewater management plans. It is acknowledged that it will take time to resolve issues in the west end of East Devon. Simon Jupp MP is in contact with the CEO of SWW. The SWW planning team is also in regular contact with local authority planners to address these issues.

The Chair thanked Mr Burrows for attending and for his presentation. Mr Burrows left the meeting.

The meeting continued with Members raising further questions for SWW as follows:

- Regarding the £10million of funding shared between the River Camel and the River Axe to reduce the impact of nutrients, what measures will the money be spent on for the River Axe? As there is likely to be further development in Axminster and the Axe Valley area, what mitigation measures would be required from developers towards improvements to the River Axe and the reduction of nutrients?
- Is the Exe Estuary, with its wildlife, national and international designations, included in the water testing system? What harm, if any, can be done to wildlife if tests carried out are not at acceptable levels?

Members considered ways in which the issues under discussion could be dealt with going forwards. The points made included the following:

- The Scrutiny Committee could formulate recommendations for SWW, one of which could be the formation of a stakeholder group.
- SWW could be invited back for a series of focussed meetings.
- Questions for SWW could be better collated in advance so as to avoid duplication as Members had not seen all of the questions in sufficient time before the meeting.
- There was concern that SWW should be involved in planning for new development at the earliest stage possible.
- Prior to any future meetings with SWW, Members could use the SWW and BeachWise websites to inform themselves.

The Committee was unanimously in support of inviting South West Water back for a series of meetings focussing on single issues as follows:

1. Planning (with a focus on a more joined up approach)
2. Beach water quality
3. Update on rivers

The matter would be added to the agenda for the next Scrutiny Committee meeting for further discussion.

Attendance List

Councillors present:

T Wright (Chair)

V Ranger (Vice-Chair)

J Bonetta

M Chapman

O Davey

J Kemp

T McCollum

H Parr
E Rylance
T Woodward

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

M Armstrong
J Bailey
C Brown
B De Saram
A Dent
P Faithfull
N Hookway
M Howe
V Johns
R Lawrence
D Ledger
A Moulding
G Pook
M Rixson
E Wragg

Officers in attendance:

Andrew Ennis, Service Lead Environmental Health and Car Parks
Allison Ferrero, Principal Environmental Health Officer
Ed Freeman, Service Lead Planning Strategy and Development Management
Andrew Hancock, Service Lead StreetScene
Susan Howl, Democratic Services Manager
Sarah Jenkins, Democratic Services Officer
Anita Williams, Principal Solicitor (and Deputy Monitoring Officer)

Councillor apologies:

S Hawkins

Chair

Date: