

Questions for South West Water (SWW) for East Devon DC Scrutiny Committee 1/2/24

- 1) In 2023 there were ten non-permitted spills from SWW assets that affected East Devon Bathing Waters. Communication from SWW is highly inconsistent, with an apparent reliance on the Environment Agency (EA) to notify Environmental Health Colleagues due to shellfish beds. The notifications to the EA are often hours after the original incident and do not take into account the Council's beach management function. Why is communication from SWW so inconsistent and how can you ensure you alert our beach safety officer immediately when there is a non-permitted spill affecting one of our bathing waters, rivers, or beaches?
- 2) It was particularly disappointing to read in the media in reference to the spill on the 5th and 6th of January 2024 at Exmouth, that SWW were saying that advising the public of spills was the responsibility of beach managers. SWW had not notified EDDC that a second pipe burst had taken place or to work together to manage this issue. Why were we not informed of this occurrence?
- 3) When there was a manhole 'blow off' and discharge at the Hamm, Sidmouth on 4/12/23, it was reported to the EA as being 'minor with no significant release of effluent'. However the entire river walk some 100m long was full to knee deep with discharge? Please can you clarify SWW definitions of the levels of discharge.
- 4) Have the uprated pumps installed in Exmouth resulted in more breaches/bursts (due to increased flow rates)? Is this an issue you recognise and is it related to aging infrastructure? If so what specifically are you doing about it?
- 5) Is the combined system at its capacity? If not, why are we seeing more spills (consented and unconsented) and what are you doing about this specifically?
- 6) In the Water fit document you say that you are working towards no more than 20 permitted discharges per bathing water per year. In 2022 you claimed that good progress had been made in this regard. Why in 2023 was this progress lost? For example, Exmouth had 40 discharges in 2023 vs 19 in 2022. Was this related to 2023 being a 'wetter' year and if so are you reviewing your conclusion that progress is 'being made' as it seems reliant on the weather?
- 7) Why have all EDDC bathing waters exceeded the 'no more than 20 permitted discharges' target in 2023 (Sandy Bay 21, Exmouth 40, Budleigh 44, Sidmouth 28, Beer 32, Seaton 31). What specifically are you doing to reduce discharges at our beaches going forward? Will SWW be subject to any punitive measures for breaching this target?
- 8) In regard of the updates issued by Beach Live/Water Fit what does it actually mean when an Event Duration Monitoring sensor is put in maintenance status? Given that many of these occur during the hours of darkness and high tide making it clear no actual maintenance is occurring?
- 9) SWW state that the discharges from combined sewer outfalls are not sewage but 'storm water'. Given that the any discharge from a sewer is by definition 'sewage' how do you justify this? Whilst the overflow may be due to storm water, it is mixed with sewage and will pick up contaminants from this.
- 10) Can you explain why there have been spikes in E. Coli and Enterococci bacterial load at Exmouth following these 'discharges of storm water' ? data here [Open WIMS data](#)
- 11) We are concerned that SWW do not raise concerns with planning applications which will clearly add to wastewater flows within a network which clearly cannot cope. In relation to this:
 - a. From previous Scrutiny meetings we understand that there are 12 SWW officers commenting on planning applications that affect SWW assets. What is the process for deciding which applications to comment on?
 - b. How does SWW consider the cumulative effect of separate applications on the sewerage system?

- c. How does SWW take this information and plan for infrastructure improvements and capacity building?
- d. What are your plans to stop spills and ensure there is capacity in the network for future property growth?

Please note: Our Planning Committee have previously asked for information from SWW on connections capacity and network upgrades with no response.

- 12) There were over 4000 tanker movements in Exmouth in 2023. Why are you tankering Sludge from Kilmington STW to Maer Lane STW Exmouth, rather than to the STW at Countess Weir which has significantly better road access?