

WATER MANAGEMENT CYCLE WORKING GROUP - NOTES

TUESDAY 7 FEBRUARY 2023

10.30 A.M. – 1.10 P.M.

<p>Present:</p> <p><u>Members</u> Councillor English (Chairman) Councillor Harwood Councillor Cleator Councillor Garten Councillor Jeffery Councillor Springett</p> <p><u>Officers</u> Emergency Planning and Resilience Manager Democratic Services Officer</p> <p><u>External Attendees</u> Head of Central Operations, Southeast Water Wastewater Investment Strategy Manager, Southern Water</p>	
Item	Minute
1. Apologies	Apologies were received from Councillor Brice.
2. Substitute Members	Councillor Springett was in attendance as a Substitute Member for Councillor Brice.
3. Evidence Collection – External Stakeholder Interviews.	<p>The Chairman welcomed the External Stakeholders to the meeting, with all attendees asked to introduce themselves, and outline their expertise and interest to the topic.</p> <p>The aims of the review were outlined, with the working group’s (the group) previous consultation meetings with the Council’s officers highlighted to the external attendees.</p> <p>Each External Stakeholder was asked to introduce themselves and their organisation, followed by questioning from the group.</p> <p><u>Head of Central Operations, Southeast Water</u></p> <p>Steve Andrews introduced themselves as the Head of Central Operations at Southeast Water (SEW) and stated that they were responsible for the water supply call and control centres, amongst other things.</p> <p>The Head of Central Operations provided a short presentation to the group.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• SEW’s history and areas of responsibility were outlined, with the company providing clean drinking water to 2.3 million customers, with a daily average of 530 million litres of water provided. Each customer used on average 150 litres per day; it was hoped that this could be reduced to around 125 litres per day.• SEW operated 87 treatment works, had 9,000 miles of water pipes and managed 33 sites of Special Scientific Interest. The latter,

coupled with the rural locations across SEW's network, led to environmental and maintenance challenges. SEW's focus was to ensure that customers had a continuous supply of high-quality water.

- It was stated that the water management process worked across five-year periods, with SEW's current Asset Management Plan Period being 2020-2025; the plan had been produced prior to the Covid-19 pandemic and the changes to water usage and demand since then had not been built into the current plan period. During the pandemic water usage increased by 20% and homeworking had remained. The challenge this presented to SEW was strongly emphasised.
- SEW's Draft Water Resources Management Plan (WRMP) was currently under consultation and included efforts to reflect the increased demand for water. A brief outline of the plans aims was provided, to include a collaborate approach working with other water companies across the Southeast, looking into new water reservoirs such as at Broad Oak and Arlington, water recycling schemes and a desalination plant; the latter would provide assistance for short-term issues, but SEW would not ideally promote this as a long-term solution given its significant environmental impact.

Up to 85% of Kent's water supply was sourced from ground water, with the importance of sourcing water sustainably strongly emphasised.

- The WRMP focused on reducing general usage and leakage. This included improving the network's resilience, with pipework connecting different regions to transfer water across areas being installed. An example given was between the Maidstone and Ashford areas.

The Head of Central Operations drew particular attention to the effects of extreme weather as seen in 2022, including:

- Wide scale power disruption, with fixed and mobile generators being used where needed. This had impacted water treatment areas, such as those supplying the Paddock Wood Area.
- Extreme heat and droughts, with the dry conditions having caused pipework breakage and an increase in burst water mains. This had impacted the Coxheath, Linton and Loose areas, as a trunk main burst in Maidstone preventing water from being treated and stored in the local reservoir.
- Flooding events across October-November 2022. This extended to the water treatment works located at Tunbridge, causing it to be unavailable for several weeks.
- Extreme cold in December 2022. The changes in weather outlined above across a 45-day period placed significant strain on SEW's infrastructure.

- The challenge in meeting the increased demand for water, whilst conducting winter maintenance works, and responding to the weather extremes. The latter could not all be attributed to climate change, although the impacts to the water network were occurring more frequently.

The resulting actions being were outlined, which included engagement with Local Resilience Forums, and reviewing which of SEW's planned actions could be brought forward to increase the systems resilience. The biggest challenge for the Maidstone area was the amount of water available. The water licence for the Aylesford Paper Mill had been purchased, and the site provided 5million litres of water daily (future production to be 20million litres), with a new water treatment works to be built on site and linked to a new water main between Aylesford and Ashford.

An external consultant had been commissioned to review SEW's procedures, with a focus on providing help and support to its customers in managing the water leaks, particularly in Winter. This included responses to water shortages, given the reliance upon bottled water that could be impacted through supply chain difficulties. Free repairs would be provided when the customer was unable to pay, with methods of further support being considered. A dedicated feedback form had been created to receive customer feedback.

During the interview process, the group raised the following points:

- Methods to reduce water usage and leakage, following questions from the group on how this could be facilitated.

The Head of Central Operations stated SEW encouraged using products that promoted water efficiency, including Water Butts, and 'grey water' for garden use. SEW had been working with farmers to look at rainwater harvesting.

SEW was not a statutory consultee for planning applications, with few developers using grey water and/or water recycling initiatives within new developments. For example, SEW offered a discounted rate for environmental connections, but larger connections were preferred, in part to accommodate additional bathrooms and ensuite facilities; many of those fixtures would eventually experience leakages.

SEW would provide funding to support initiatives to reduce water demand but struggled to engage with developers. The Head of Central Operations stated that support from the Group to encourage developers to consider water usage across their developments would be welcomed. In response, the Council's ongoing development of the Design and Sustainability Development Plan Document was highlighted as a potential mechanism to achieve this.

In response to questions concerning water leakage, the Head of Central Operations stated that around 25% of the water produced by SEW was wasted through leakage; one-third of this was from customer supply lines. The WRMP focused on reducing water leakage and included a target for SEW to reduce leakage on its supply lines by half across the plan period. To assist, SEW were using additional

sensors and satellite and acoustic technology where possible to identify leaks earlier, as currently 80% of the leaks were registered by customers. However, the Head of Central Operations stated that a low amount of leakage where water was returned to the environment was not unreasonable; clean water entering the drainage system and being unable to be used was an issue.

- Smart Meter Usage

Several of the group's members expressed concern that promoting behavioural change would not significantly reduce water usage on its own. The use of smart meters would enable people to see how much water they were using and the cost, to encourage a reduction in usage.

In response, the Head of Operations stated that as the water meters were not located at individual properties, it was difficult to obtain accurate readings from the properties' Wi-Fi. However, a pilot scheme was operating in the Hartley area, with fully smart networks installed, providing better information to customers on their usage and enabling water leaks within the customer's pipework to be identified. In Faversham, monthly readings of the centralised water meters were being trialled, although this needed to be balanced against the environmental impact of travelling to the meters, and the cost of conducting the additional readings. More information on future smart meter usage was included within the WRMP.

The Head of Operations stated that 90% of the properties SEW supplied water to had smart meters, with building sites having one metered standpoint. A suggestion was made to the group to promote further scrutiny into the developer's use of water at development sites.

The group expressed strong support for engaging further with developers, including more robustly, with the potential for the group to lobby central government to provide legislative powers to SEW (and similar organisations) to take action against illegal water usage.

- SEW's incident responses

Several Members of the group expressed that SEW's responses to water incidents had been good. The importance of ensuring that vulnerable individuals were properly supported during incidents was reiterated.

In response, the Head of Central Operations stated that SEW's incident responses were prioritised. For example, the primary action during water outages was to support hospitals; although most large hospitals, such as Maidstone Hospital, had water tanks and continuity plans in place.

The responses could be improved through the creation of a data-sharing mechanism and protocol, similar to that used by Local Resilience Forums. Residents would then be able to sign up to the service. A suggestion from the working group to encourage injection

points within care home water supply tanks, alongside the creation of Business Continuity Plans for those sites, was supported by the Head of Central Operations as this would reduce reliance on bottled water and increased resilience.

- Southeast Water's 'wish-list' of actions for the Group to consider as part of the review, as the group felt that this would support the review being solution driven and outcome focused.

In response, the Head of Operations stated that they would produce a list and send this to the Group following the meeting. In the meantime, increased involvement in the planning process was reiterated.

The Head of Central Operations outlined that whilst the WRMP was designed to manage the development achieved through Local Plans, they would encourage the group to ensure that future developments were as water efficient as possible. An example given was to include reduced water consumption targets and water butts into the development process.

Wastewater Investment Strategy Manager, Southern Water

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David Murphy introduced himself as the Wastewater Investment Strategy Manager at Southern Water (SW), stating that his primary role is to identify future investment needs for wastewater systems through the production of drainage and wastewater management plans and the water industry national environment programme. The amount of funding available to reduce pollution incidents, enhance biodiversity and to reduce risks to people and the environment was briefly outlined.

SW's area of responsibility for wastewater services reaches across Kent, Sussex, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, with six water supply areas within the region. A total of 556million litres of water is supplied to approximately 2.6 million customers daily. SW supplies water to two areas within Kent (Chatham area and Thanet) and works closely with SEW to share precious water resources.

SW processes the wastewater of 4.7 million customers, with 381 separate wastewater systems used to recycle the water; 77 were within the River Medway catchment, of which 12 are within Maidstone BC area. SW maintained 40,000 kilometres of sewerage networks and 330 pumping stations across the River Medway catchment area.

As SW moves and treats a high volume of water, increased energy costs had become a significant issue for the company. Other challenges included population growth, extreme weathers, climate change, asset reliability and environmental protection, in the context of providing the service without increasing risks to the environment or customers through sewage flooding.

The importance of planning future investment was strongly reiterated and had been included within SW's draft Drainage and Wastewater Management Plan (DWMP). The plan would be published by the end of May 2023, following an industry wide request to undertake further works on the

plan. The DWMP was a 25-year plan, allowing for the trajectory of the challenges outlined to be factored into SW's work.

The Wastewater Investment Strategy Manager stated that general funding was controlled by Ofwat as the Water Services Regulation Authority, with additional funding obtained through the Environment Agency's 'National Environment Programme' for investment into its assets where required, or through development contributions. SW was not a statutory consultee on planning applications process, but they were consulted through the Local Plan Review process and monitored the adoption of Local Plans to ascertain where development was likely to occur. SW often did not know which wastewater network a development would be linked to until a planning application was received for the site; developers contribute towards the necessary upgrades to the wastewater systems through the connection charges, with SW's Board and Shareholders often supporting the upgrades in extending SW's network.

During the interview process, the group raised the following points:

- Co-operation between SEW and SW, in the context of working with the Council as Local Planning Authority to achieve greater improvements to the Water Management Cycle. The example given was the proposed Heathlands Garden Community.

In response, support was expressed from both external attendees to use the site as a showcase, for example through installing Smart Meters in the first instance, promoting rainwater recycling and the use of brown water, to demonstrate the improvements that could be made to water usage and efficiency through ambitious measures, and promote these types of methods being used in other areas.

- The mechanisms available to reduce rainwater within sewerage systems

The Wastewater Investment Strategy Manager stated that in some of SW's networks, rainwater accounted for up to 97% of the water flow in a storm; removing rainwater from sewers would reduce the likelihood of sewerage flooding and discharges from storm overflows. Increasing rainwater capture will relieve pressure on sewers and make more water available for home usage (e.g. watering gardens). Attention needed to be given to designing sustainable communities, for example through using sustainable drainage schemes, green roofs and tree pits, to prevent rainwater from joining the sewerage system.

The group expressed support for the example measures outlined above, following consideration of such measures across its previous meetings.

- Incidents of sewer flooding

Several of the group's Members highlighted that detrimental impacts caused to local residents from sewer flooding from combined systems, in part due to high rainwater levels, and the need to implement more natural flood management solutions to reduce this.

The Wastewater Investment Strategy Manager noted their agreement with the views expressed, stating that the Kent area suffered from water stress which could be reduced through greater rainwater capture and reuse. Pilot schemes were taking place in Portsmouth whereby a water resources reservoir is being planned to be filled with spring water and recycled wastewater, which would then be suitably treated and re-used as a water supply; a water recycling scheme is also being considered for the Aylesford area, however it was a complex task.

The need for greater acceptance of grey water use and wastewater recycling, as part of a wider relationship change on how water was used, was strongly emphasised.

In response to comments on combined sewerage systems, the Wastewater Investment Strategy Manager stated that whilst separate systems were useful in managing rainwater, there was a risk of misconnection. Misconnections significantly impacted water quality; only one or two lavatories being incorrectly connected to the system could prevent the achievement of an excellent bathing water quality standard. SW had carried out significant investment into wastewater treatment works and had formed a Misconnections Team to tackle the issue, with a higher success rate achieved than originally expected.

An enquiry with a local council was given as an example, as the high number of surface water discharges having caused concern due to the impact of environmental pollution in the local river.

- Actions taken by SW on spillage incidents and natural flood measures

In response to questions, the Wastewater Investment Strategy Manager stated that they understood the need for urgency in tackling spills but noted that storm overflows in the wastewater system have existed since sewers were first built 150 years ago. Storm overflows are designed to achieve a level of dilution before discharging to prevent harm to the environment. All discharges are permitted by the Environment Agency (EA), with any unpermitted discharges resulting in a potential pollution incident and financial penalty on the water company.

Infiltration from groundwater into sewers can cause consistent discharges, with SW having highlighted this through its response to the public consultation on Defra's Storm Overflows Discharge Reduction Plan. The Environment Act 2021 places additional requirements on companies to address the issue, with SW wishing to address 149 storm overflows within the next five-year plan period, in order to improve the local environment. To maximise improvements, a Storm Overflow Task Force (SOTF) had been created to review the different ways of reducing storm overflows, with two 'pathfinder' projects having commenced within the Kent area. In response to questions, the Wastewater Investment Strategy Manager stated that they could circulate the figures demonstrating the reduction in storm overflows to date through the SOTF's work.

The group expressed that preventing spillage across Maidstone and across SW's operational area was a priority and that this should include natural flood mitigation measures. In response, the Wastewater Investment Strategy Manager stated that they were looking to introduce further wetlands as part of the wastewater treatment process and hoped to install up to two across the current investment period. SW had another 15 other potential areas for wetlands. The funding provided for the next investment period through the National Environment Programme was highlighted as an opportunity for nature based solutions, and significant investment to reduce the nitrate and phosphate levels within water.

- Greater involvement from water companies in the planning process, as several members of the group questioned how this could be achieved.

In response to questions, the Wastewater Investment Strategy Manager stated that WaterUK had been lobbying central government for water companies to have increased powers as part of the planning process. It would be helpful if the Government enacted the approval body function for sustainable drainage, which would be applicable to County Councils and Upper Tier Authorities (as contained within Schedule 3 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010). This would require drainage systems to be approved before construction work commenced. A public consultation on this was expected later in 2023.

The group felt that there should be greater avenues for water companies to be involved in the planning process, and that this should be explored as part of the review. The ability for the Council, as a Local Planning Authority, to request comments from non-statutory consultees was highlighted although any comments received would carry less material weight than those received from statutory consultees. The importance of natural solutions was also emphasised.

- Southern Water's 'wish-list' of actions for the Group to consider as part of the review, as the group felt that this would support the review being solution driven and outcome focused.

In response, the Wastewater Investment Strategy Manager stated that they would submit the list at a later date but emphasised the opportunity for enhancements to the building regulations for water, in a similar way to the recent updates to building regulations on the conservation of fuel and power. For example, potentially requiring new development to reduce water consumption below the current 110 litres per person per day. SW is aiming to reduce overall consumption to 110 litres per person per day by 2040 and this was likely to need to be reduced further in the future.

Ahead of the meeting's conclusion, the external attendees were thanked for their attendance and contribution to the review.

Councillor Harwood left the meeting after this item.

5. Any other points to raise	<p>It was noted that the external stakeholders would be submitting further information on the 'wish lists' for review.</p> <p>The group reiterated their support for a working group between the external stakeholders and the Council. In response, the Democratic Services Officer was requested to review similar Overview and Scrutiny Reviews where this had occurred.</p>
6. Review of Meeting Timetable	<p>It was agreed that the Democratic Services Officer would circulate alternative review timetables to the group outside of the meeting.</p>
7. Summary of Agreed Actions	<p>Actions: That the Democratic Services Officer</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Circulate alternative review timetables for the group to consider; and2. Research similar reviews where a working group was created, to advise the group on how this could occur.
8. Duration of Meeting	<p>10.30 a.m. to 1.30 p.m.</p>

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