

CABINET- 26 MARCH 2024

CABINET RESPONSE TO THE REPORT OF THE COMMUNITIES, ENVIRONMENT & HIGHWAY SELECT COMMITTEE

Item under consideration: Surrey Utilities – Water and Wastewater Services

Committee Conclusions and Recommendations:

That the Communities Environment and Highways Select Committee concludes that:

- I. There is a strong appetite for collaboration with the Council on the part of Water companies and the representative body for the south east region (WRSE).
- II. There are opportunities for water companies to work collaboratively with local authorities on the delivery of demand management and demand reduction activity and to share learnings and best practice in customer education and behaviour change.
- III. There is scope for greater collaboration at a strategic level and an opportunity for the Council to collaborate with the regional body (WRSE) on development of the next regional water plan and on other strategic issues such as the Nature Recovery Strategy and how to increase biodiversity and the resilience of water sources. The Council should seek a seat on the WRSE Strategic Advisory Board to influence development of the next regional plan and better integrate the needs of Surrey both in terms of water users and the environment.
- IV. The Council should approach the national regulator to explore options to develop (or revise existing) KPIs on water company performance to take account of community impact and collaboration with Local Authorities, as part of the next round of five-year plans.
- V. There are opportunities to work better together to plan and coordinate operational works to reduce traffic disruption and environmental impact and to explore the use of IT systems to enable this. Surrey Council should look at replicating the best practice that exists in the form of the Infrastructure Mapping Application used in London.

- VI. There is room to improve the quality and availability of information to residents on planned works and on-site signage and an appetite to work closer in partnership to develop and implement best practice.
- VII. The Council should collaborate more closely with Thames Water on the development of the next Drainage and Wastewater Management Plan (DWMP) given shared responsibilities and mutual interest in drainage, flooding and environmental protection. The next DWMP cycle is about to start.
- VIII. As the lead planning authority, the Council has an important role to play working strategically with utility companies to highlight new developments so that network capacity implications can be effectively managed and green infrastructure and sustainable drainage solutions promoted in any new developments. The Council should enhance its role in this regard and work with utility stakeholders to act on the government review of building regulations.
- IX. As the Local Lead Flood Authority there should be closer working between the Council's Flood Risk Management Team and Thames Water to map flood risk hotspots, to address flooding issues and to deliver environmental priorities. Ofwat's anticipated response to draft business plans 2025-30 should provide clarity on levels of investment and is a good starting point for discussions on delivering future priorities in flooding, drainage and wastewater management.
- X. A task force should be established to take these opportunities forward and to deliver the specific actions and outcomes agreed at the session (Annex B). This should involve Council officers and water company representatives and in broad terms should aim to deliver:
- Better coordination and communication around operational works on the road network
 - Better coordination between the local authority and water companies on flooding, drainage, sustainable solutions and environmental objectives.
 - Better coordination on planning, new developments and strategic network issues.
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Cabinet Response:

Cabinet is grateful to the Chair, Vice Chair and Members of the Communities, Environment and Highways Select Committee for facilitating engagement with the water utility providers in Surrey and seeking ways to deliver improvements for Surrey residents and build better Strategic relationships between Surrey County Council and these utilities. Cabinet is particularly grateful for the Committee's involvement in developing robust Key Lines of Enquiry which helped to support the agenda and steer the conversation.

Cabinet accepts the recommendations made by the committee and work has begun by officers to address the recommendations through:

1. **Lobbying:** Including communicating with OfWat, the national regulatory body for water utilities regarding the development of some Local Key Performance Indicators which allow Surrey to monitor disruption to or impact on:
 - the road network including forward planning and coordination of streetworks, and timeliness of the completion of water infrastructure works. This will allow both utilities and Surrey to identify where improvements can be made to enable better coordination and management, maximising opportunities for collaboration and reducing disruption to our network;
 - our natural environment, and in particular impacts from sewage outflows as a result of flooding and implementation of Drainage Waste Management Plans; and
 - supply and response in the event emergency situations. Indicators being proposed include measures as to how long disruption to supply lasts, demonstrating collaboration with local resilience forum and reporting on measures taken to reinstate supply or provide alternative provision, with particular importance given to our vulnerable residents.

Additional contact has been made with the office of Baroness Scott following her recent visit to the River Thames Statutory Consultation event requesting her support for future lobbying on the above issues.

2. **Time Limited Task Forces:** Setting up two time-limited task forces to take forward recommendations. These are a:
 - Street works Task Force, meeting in mid March, which had a focus on Streetworks and looked at how Surrey County Council and the utilities can work together operationally to engender better coordination and communication around works on the road network.
 - Environmental Improvements Task Force with a focus on better coordination between the local authority and water companies on flooding, drainage, sustainable solutions and environmental objectives. Liaison between Surrey and utilities is underway to coordinate this session, ensuring the right representatives are present.

3. **Establishing longer term strategic relationships:** Forming partnerships to work on key joint initiatives, the first being with SES Water who provide 40% of water and waste water to residents in Surrey. Currently a Memorandum of Understanding is being developed.

Marisa Heath
Cabinet Member for Environment
26 March 2024