

Sewer discharges. Engagement with Thames Water Communities and Environment Overview & Scrutiny Panel

Reason for review

On August 16th 2023 the Communities and Environment panel of the Overview & Scrutiny commission discussed the recommendation agreed at Council on 12 July 2023, that Overview and Scrutiny should work with other local authorities across Thames Valley to challenge failures of Thames Water and minimise environmental damage. It was agreed to undertake a scrutiny review on Thames Water with a revised scope compared to the full text of the Council motion.

While evaluating the scope of the review it became clear that the interfaces between stakeholders are manifold. This document outlines the summary work plan, recognising a staged approach to delivery might be required.

Objectives/scope

Key questions:

- Which options are available to Bracknell Forest Council (BFC) to effect changes resulting in reduced frequency and impact of Thames Water operational sewage discharges?
- What collaboration opportunities with other affected local authorities exist?

The first stage of the review will:

- Identify the interfaces between BFC, the parish councils, and residents with Thames Water and other agencies
- Reach out and identify local and regional stakeholders to start/ engage with a cross borough forum for coordination with Thames Water
- Establish an overview over the regulatory framework in which BFC and other stakeholders operate regarding Thames Water

The second stage of the review will gather evidence to support the development of recommendations.

The third stage of the review will

- Develop recommendations for a persistent cross borough framework dealing with Thames Water to minimise sewage discharges
- Develop recommendations linked to sewage management for BFC to ensure information available from TW is considered in management of public spaces as well as planning, including the development of local plans or local neighborhood plans.
- Consider the impact of climate change on the waste water system and identify requirements to ensure resilience

The review will do this by:

- Identify links between Thames Water and BFC through planning, drainage, environmental, maintenance
- Identify external stakeholder interfaces – e.g. community groups, NGO's, Ofwat, EA, Thames Water

- Undertake a high level availability review of potential mitigations such as storage tanks, increased monitoring, alert systems on discharge events to inform the discussion with TW
- Establish contact to neighboring boroughs across the Thames Valley to initiate cross borough collaboration and identify adoptable Best Practice.
- Interviewing key witnesses including representatives from Bracknell Forest Council and Thames Water.
- Understand the planned investments of Thames Water in the area and its impact on pollution.
- Identify a Best Case scenario for the long term outcome of the engagement process.

Out of scope:

- Direct engagement with individual local issues (ie regular sewer failure).

At the conclusion of this work the Panel will produce a report highlighting its findings and propose recommendations to the Executive.

Delivery methods: Best Practice from other boroughs, interviewing key witnesses, focus groups, desktop analysis of research and data.

Council theme: Climate emergency, Council motion 12/07/2023

Council team: PPR
Environmental Service
Highways and transport

Review due: March 2024

Proposed by:

Equalities Impact Assessment

Financial and legal implications

Climate Change implications

The purpose of the recommendations should feed into the Council's overall plan to reduce carbon emissions within the borough and reduce the impact of climate change.