

WATER RESOURCES – RESILIENCE AND FUTURE PLANNING

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Wards Affected: All
Key Decision: No
Report to: Scrutiny Committee for Planning, Economic Growth and Net Zero
15th March 2023

Purpose of Report

1. This report sets out the background to current and future water supply and water infrastructure in the district which will set the context for a presentation from the water companies operating in Mid Sussex on their draft Regional Strategy and Water Resource Management Plans which this Committee requested at its meeting on the 5 October 2022. South East Water will also be updating Members on the water outages experienced in Mid Sussex in December.

Summary

2. This report:
 - Summarises the responsibilities of the water companies to meet future water demands.
 - Summarises the operational incidents in December which resulted in water outages.

Recommendations

3. **That the Scrutiny Committee for Planning, Economic Growth and Net Zero:**
 - (i) **Notes the content of this report and the presentations to be made by the water companies at this Scrutiny meeting.**

Background

4. When new development is being planned, it is vitally important to ensure there are sufficient water resources to meet increased demands. This must also ensure there are no negative environmental impacts on the waterbodies from which water is abstracted.
5. Water Resources South East (WRSE) is an alliance of 6 water companies in South East England:
 - Affinity Water
 - Portsmouth Water
 - South East Water
 - Southern Water
 - Sutton and East Surrey Water
 - Thames Water

6. WRSE has prepared a draft Regional Plan which sets out the principles for how resilient and sustainable water supplies could be provided in the future. These principles are cascaded to individual Water Resource Management Plans (WRMP) which are prepared by the individual water companies to plan for growth. These are subject to consultation and review by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) before final publication when agreed by DEFRA.
7. The WRMPs set out a range of measures to cater for future demand, based on population projections and growth identified in Local Plans. These plans are set out on a Water Resource Zone (WRZ) basis.
8. The vast majority of Mid Sussex is within the Haywards Heath Water Resource Zone, which is the responsibility of South East Water. Small areas around Twineham (Sussex North WRZ) and Pyecombe (Sussex Brighton WRZ) fall within the responsibility of Southern Water.

Operational Incidents

9. It is recognised that the south east is experiencing more frequent extreme weather, and these incidents have an impact on the water network with rapidly contracting/expanding ground affecting the pipe network. In December 2022, leaks caused by a freeze/thaw increased demand by nearly 100 million litres more than expected at that time of year, the equivalent consumption of three towns the size of Eastbourne. South East Water was therefore required to provide temporary water sources, finding and fixing leaks and repairing customer supply pipes.
10. South East Water will provide additional detail on the incident, their response, and their learnings in their presentation to this Committee this evening.

Water Neutrality

11. As Members will be aware, in September 2021 Crawley and Horsham were notified by Natural England that developments within the Sussex North water supply area (which both authorities are almost wholly within) must not add to impacts on protected nature conservation sites in the Arun Valley Special Protection Area (SPA), Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Ramsar site and must ensure that they are 'water neutral'. This requirement is driven by the Habitats Directive and is specific to protecting the sensitive Arun Valley Special Protection Area (SPA). Sussex North is Southern Water's responsibility and is planned for within their Water Resources Management Plan which was subject to consultation at the same time as South East Water's WRMP.
12. At present, only a small part of Mid Sussex (in the Twineham area) is within the Sussex North Water Resources Zone supplied by water abstraction from the Arun Valley and is therefore the only part of the district impacted by water neutrality.
13. A joint response by the authorities affected by water neutrality has been submitted to the Southern Water WRMP and is at **Appendix 1**.

Planning for Future Growth

14. As noted in paragraph 6 above, water companies must prepare WRMPs which set out how the water companies intend to achieve a secure supply of water for customers, and, measures to protect and enhance the environment. The WRMP must forecast supply and demand using population projections and household projections (including Local Plan allocations) to estimate future demand. It must then set out supply-side (i.e. increasing the amount of water) or demand-side (reducing the amount of water required) options to address any forecast deficits.
15. Of particular relevance to Mid Sussex is the WRMP prepared by South East Water, as this covers the Haywards Heath Water Resource Zone which supplies almost all the district. The WRMP sets out options and proposals to reduce leakage, reduce customer demand, invest in supply infrastructure to reduce reliance on abstraction (therefore benefitting the environment) and improve resilience to drought.
16. The South East draft WRMP for 2025-2075 was published in late 2022 for consultation, which closed on 20th February 2023. The Council's response is at **Appendix 2**. The Council's response to the Water Resources South East Regional Plan is at **Appendix 3**. Representatives from WRSE and South East Water will present their Plans to the Committee during the meeting and will be available to respond to Councillors questions.

Mid Sussex District Plan: Water Resources

17. The draft District Plan, published for consultation in November 2022, sets out a range of policies related to water resources. The aim of these policies is to reduce demand by seeking tighter efficiency standards compared to building regulations to ensure new developments contribute towards the sustainable use of resources and mitigate the impacts of climate change.
18. The draft District Plan sets out the following relevant policies:
 - **DPS1: Climate Change** seeks development to be designed to minimise vulnerability from the effects of climate change re: water supply
 - **DPS2: Sustainable Design and Construction** requires new development to meet Home Quality Mark standards (which incorporate water consumption standards) and to demonstrate opportunities have been taken to incorporate measures such as water efficient appliances, rainwater harvesting, greywater harvesting and Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS)
 - **DPS4: Flood Risk and Drainage** sets out the requirement for flood risk management and supports the use of SuDS for developments of 10 dwellings or more, to protect surface and groundwater quality
 - **DPS5: Water Infrastructure and Water Environment** sets out the requirements for ensuring sufficient water resource and water quality to serve new development
 - **DPH4: General principles for Housing Allocations** requires significant site allocations (1,000+ dwellings) to meet a maximum water consumption of 85 litres/person/day (Building Regulations is currently 110/l/p/d)
19. Water companies play an important role in plan-making process. They are statutory consultees and are therefore specifically invited to provide comments at each stage of the process. The water companies are also consulted on the Council's draft Infrastructure Delivery Plan where input is sought on the types of infrastructure required to support growth proposals.

20. Southern Water and South East Water provided comments during production of the adopted District Plan and the recent consultation on the draft District Plan. They confirm that they support the policies above and the ambition to seek reduced water demand through new development. The comments are summarised in the other item on this Agenda regarding the outcome of the consultation over the draft District Plan.

Policy Context

21. The review of the District Plan is a corporate priority identified in the Corporate Plan and Budget 2023/2024. It aligns with the Council's priorities for Sustainable Economic Growth and Strong Resilient Communities.

Other Options Considered

22. None

Financial Implications

23. There are no direct financial implications for the District Council in relation to the content of this report.

Risk Management Implications

24. No risks have been identified in relation to the recommendations contained within this report.

Equality and Customer Service Implications

25. Water companies have an obligation to connect new developments to their networks and to ensure customers have an adequate supply of water. The District Council will continue to engage with the relevant water companies to ensure WRMPs ensure planned growth is supported by adequate infrastructure to support all members of the community.

Other Material Implications

26. There are no other material implications.

Sustainability Implications

27. Paragraph 18 of this report sets out the Council's approach to seeking tighter water efficiency standards within its draft District Plan in order to promote sustainable development and mitigate the impacts of climate change.

Appendices

- **Appendix 1:** Joint response on behalf of Water Neutrality authorities to the Southern Water: draft Water Resources Management Plan
- **Appendix 2:** Mid Sussex District Council response to South East Water: draft Water Resources Management Plan (February 2023)
- **Appendix 3:** Mid Sussex District Council response to Water Resources South East: draft Regional Plan (February 2023)