

 <p>WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL</p>	<p>WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL</p>
<p>Name and Date of Committee</p>	<p>EXECUTIVE – 13 DECEMBER 2023</p>
<p>Subject</p>	<p>UPDATE ON IMPROVEMENT WORKS WITH THAMES WATER</p>
<p>Wards Affected</p>	<p>All</p>
<p>Accountable Member</p>	<p>Councillor Lidia Arciszewska – Executive Member for the Environment. Email: Lidia.arciszewska@westoxon.gov.uk</p>
<p>Accountable Officer</p>	<p>Phil Martin – Assistant Director, Business Support Services. Email: Phil.martin@publicagroup.uk</p>
<p>Report Author</p>	<p>Phil Martin – Assistant Director, Business Support Services. Email: Phil.martin@publicagroup.uk</p>
<p>Summary/Purpose</p>	<p>To consider the improvements as a result of closely working with Thames Water over the past 12 months.</p>
<p>Annexes</p>	<p>Nil.</p>
<p>Recommendation(s)</p>	<p>That the Executive Resolves to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> I. Note the content of the report.
<p>Corporate priorities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A Good Quality of Life for All ● Working Together for West Oxfordshire
<p>Key Decision</p>	<p>NO</p>
<p>Exempt</p>	<p>NO</p>
<p>Consultees/ Consultation</p>	<p>Executive Member with Responsibility for Environment; Chief Executive; S151 Officer, Head of Legal Services and Director of Governance</p>

I. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The level and volume of raw and untreated sewage being released into our rivers and local water courses is on the increase and the current legislative framework provides the District Council with no powers to directly enforce against this or demand improvements.
- 1.2 In order to improve this situation and build a better understanding of the key issues and facts, the Council adopted a different approach, which involved a small team of Councillors and Officers, lead by the Executive lead responsible for the Environment directly engaging with representatives from Thames Water.
- 1.3 Regular meetings began in July 2022 that focused on building a working relationship based around trust and gaining detailed knowledge of key operations to enable an informed discussion and effective challenge have been established. To assist with this Thames Water bring in experts from across their organisation and share relevant information and data.
- 1.4 Since the meetings started the team have made significant progress in a number of areas, these include;

Sewage Treatment Works

- i. The team developed a working knowledge of the components and data used by Thames Water to calculate the capacity of its Sewage Treatment Works (STWs). This work initially focused on the 9 largest STWs across the district and enabled them to identify, with the technical support of Windrush Against Sewage Pollution (WASP), where there isn't enough treatment capacity to meet the current needs and press for their inclusion in Thames Water's investment programmes as this will significantly reduce the level of discharges. The team have also used this knowledge to analyse Thames Waters investment programme both in terms of growth and compliance to ensure that investment meets current and future demands.
- ii. As part of this work the team discovered that the data set used by Thames Water was not reflective of the Council's Local Plans so that areas where housing was set to grow was not being fed into their plans for upgrading the capacity of their SWTs. The communication gap was quickly addressed and now the relevant officers from both the Council and Thames Water share information on an ongoing basis.
- iii. Another key outcome from this work is that a major component of the calculation, which traditionally has been set by the EA and acts as a multiplier has now been standardised and a higher figure is now being used for all new investment schemes, thus ensuring that adequate 'head room' is included when capacity levels are calculated.

Infiltration and Pipe Network

- iv. The team's work focused on hot spots across the district, which identified that nearly half of flow capacity through STWs was derived from infiltration, which can be because of cracked and damaged pipes as well as water entering the system through manhole covers.

- v. Thames Water provided the team with data as well as brought along their network experts who were able to explain the challenges they were facing and how they were increasingly using technology to identify where blockages and pipe failures had occurred. Whilst it was good to hear that Thames Water were adopting more of a pro-active approach, the team were able to persuade them to install more flow monitors into their network to identify where severe ingress of the network was occurring and then to use this data to plan the appropriate works.
- vi. The Council have successfully been able to get Thames Water to prioritise its attention on a number of sites across the district as a result of the closer working relationship that has been developed. This has led to an acceleration in the delivery of the works planned in Eynsham, Clanfield and Crawley.

Planning Process

- vii. The adoption of the Validation Checklist which now means that all development applications must state at the outset whether there is sufficient capacity at the relevant sewage treatment works and sewer infrastructure.
- viii. Where there is insufficient STW capacity, network capacity or both the team have been working very closely with Thames Water to develop a matrix, which sets out a number of Grampian conditions that will be applied stating that the new homes may not be occupied until additional capacity has been installed and is operational.
- ix. Thames Water has now made a commitment to responding to all planning applications in locations where there is insufficient treatment capacity rather than just the larger ones. This will include undertaking an assessment of the likely impact proposed developments will have on the existing network during normal operations.

Communication and Reporting

- x. Whilst the Council cannot take full credit for the introduction of the interactive map that identifies real time discharges in rivers and water courses that is available on Thames Water's website - <https://www.thameswater.co.uk/edm-map>, it was involved in the early development as it recognises the importance of making people aware of areas affected and giving them the information to lobby for improvements.
- xi. The team also worked closely with Thames Water on the development of a web-based "Fix My Sewer" interface where sewerage problems can be reported online. This will potentially save residents many, many hours of time sitting on the phone to report the same problems as they have previously done. And also provides transparency.
- xii. As the team have built a good working knowledge of Thames Water's SWT operations, a tool kit has been developed which identifies key pieces of data that will help other Councils challenge Thames Water in an informed way. This has been shared with the responsible Cabinet member at Cotswold District Council and it will be used to support their sewage summit event.

2. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

The Council could change its approach to how it works with Thames Water in the future, requesting that they present information on their plans and performance on a regular basis. This is akin to what used to happen and without the knowledge and trust built up during the regular meetings this will be counterproductive going forward as the Council has no powers to demand change.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are currently no direct financial implications for the Council associated with the work the team are undertaking with Thames Water, if this situation changes then a report outlining any costs will be brought back to the Executive for consideration.

4. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct legal implications resulting for the closer working relationship with Thames Water as the Council does not have any specific powers under the Land Drainage Act to enforce improvements.

5. RISK ASSESSMENT

There is a reputational risk to the Council if it does not use its position to influence changes in the way that Thames Water operates across the district in terms of actively being involved in the planning process and how it processes wastewater.

6. EQUALITIES IMPACT

Nil.

7. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS

As Thames Water is responsible for providing both clean drinking water as well as processing foul water and effluent across the district their actions have a massive impact not only on the lives of the residents but also on the ecology and wider environment of the district. We have not only seen an increase in storm surge discharges into the rivers and waterways across the district but also a worrying trend in 'dry season' discharges. The work of the small team on behalf of the Council has focused on identifying the areas most affected and through a better understanding of the way Thames Water calculate the capacity of its sewage treatment works has pushed for investment in these areas so they are able to process the increased volumes coupled with improvements in the overall network to reduce the amount of water ingress and infiltration that is contributing to the problem.

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.

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