

ANNA FIRTH MP

Member of Parliament for Southend West

HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Water Quality Meeting

Friday 28th July 2023

9am

Attendees	
Organisation	Name
Anna Firth MP	
Sir James Duddridge MP	
Anglian Water	Dr Robin Price - Director of Quality & Environment
	Lisa Bush - Head of Pollutions Strategy
	Jonathan Glerum - Regional Flood and Coastal Manager
	Natalie Jones - Environmental Permitting Team Leader
	Jamie Szajewski - Treatment Support Manager
	Emily Linsdell - Regional Engagement Team
	Ian Phillips - Network Support Technician
Essex & Suffolk Water	William Robinson - Water Resources & Supply Strategy Manager
	Thomas Andrewartha - Customer Service Manager (Strategy & Campaign Delivery)
Southend City Council	CLlr Meg Davidson - Cabinet Member for Environment
	CLlr Daniel Cowan
	CLlr Matt Dent
	CLlr Lydia Hyde
	CLlr Ann Jones
	CLlr Richard Longstaff
Leigh Town Council	CLlr Paul Gilson
	CLlr Alan Hart
Sealife Adventure	Marc Miller – Managing Director (Stockvale Ltd)
	Philip Miller
Blue Tits Chill Swimmers	Daniella Boon
Southend Against Sewage	Shah Haider
	Alex Haider
Thorpe Bay Residents Assoc	Andy Hall
	Kim Hall
Velocity	Garry Moore
Other	Peter Rae
	Penny Allard

Agenda	
Time	Action
9:00	Opening remarks and welcome from Anna Firth MP
9:10	Introduction from Anglian Water
9:30	Questions from Anna Firth MP & Sir James Duddridge KCMG MP
9:40	Open questions
10:25	Closing remarks and thanks from Anna Firth MP

Agency	Responsibility
Anglian Water	Provides sewerage and sewage treatment
Essex & Suffolk Water	Provides water supplies
Ofwat	Regulates the water and sewerage industry
Environment Agency	Has a duty to maintain and improve the quality of surface waters and ground-waters and, as part of the duty, it monitors the quality of rivers, the sea and groundwater on a regular basis.
ECAS	Environmental compliance experts that help businesses to comply with or enforce legislation to protect the environment
Blue Tits Chill Swimmers	Southend-based cold-water swimming group
Southend Against Sewage	Water quality action group
Velocity	Eco-lavatory company

Minutes

Anna Firth MP introduced the meeting.

Dr Robin Price - Director of Quality & Environment

- Any overflow is unacceptable. The mission is to eradicate them all.
- The hope is for Southend to become an international exemplar of good practice.
- An open offer was made to all to visit AW's sites and network and see the improvements being made
- Southend's combined sewer system was designed when the thinking was that dilution would sort out the problems with storm overflows, but the thinking on this has changed, and systems like this are not designed or built anymore.
- In this five year investment period, £800 million has been spent improving management of waterways.
- £200 million is being spent directly on storm overflows, and this is in delivery mode.
- Much of this money is being spent on increasing capacity and monitoring of systems to understand the issues better.
- There are 15 spills on average per storm overflow a year, but the situation is improving.

There are 17 overflows in Southend, including five on the coast. Since April 2023 they have all been monitored.

- Prittlebrook – 7 spills
 - Belton Gardens – 24 hours of spills
 - Manila Road- 15 spills.
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- Last six months most of the overflows have been caused by blockages from unflushable materials.
 - **7000 meters of sewer have been CCTV inspected. 1500 meters have been washed.**
 - **41 blockages have been removed that could have caused further overflows.**

- **New monitors have been installed in the system itself.**
 - 15 Beach Aware Alerts have been issued since March 31st.
 - On average 30% of EDMs report false alerts.
 - The data exists as to what happened at these, but is being 'quality assured'. **This will be shared with us at the beginning of September**
 - By January 2024 there will be near real time monitoring, and the company is looking to improve the technology around this, including eliminating false alerts
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- The partnership with Southend City Council has been improving, including a recent 'best practice' fact-finding mission to Netherlands recently.
 - £5,000 has been contributed to the City Beach Programme and £5,000 has been given to enhance Southchurch Lake in partnership with SCC and a new wetland is being developed at Benfleet.
 - In Silverdale Avenue a trial is ongoing using 'Smart Water Butts' to remove water from the system at times of high rainfall.
 - A Business Plan is being developed which will see £162 million investment in areas such as storm tanks to reduce the pressure on the existing sewer system.

Lisa Bush - Head of Pollutions Strategy

- There has been a lot of work on a 'Dynamic Sewer Visualisation Programme'
- This is designed to monitor and understand what is happening underground to find where the vulnerabilities are, to remove any issues before they become a problem
- There is an ongoing programme of teaching and assisting businesses and households to stop non-flushables going into sewers, and they are working with ECAS on this.

Jonathan Glerum - Regional Flood and Coastal Manager

The Beach Aware System

- The alerts are issued all year round if there is a spill
- The alerts take data from overflows and input these into a model (based on tides etc) to determine whether there is like to be an impact on the environment from a spill
- The alerts are not the same as spills. Not every spill activates an alert, and sometimes there may be alerts on other beaches where spills haven't happened locally
- The alert adds 24 hours after a spill has ended before saying it is safe. Surfers Against Sewage's alert adds an additional 24 hours onto this.
- By the end of the year there will be live alerts within one hour of a spill on the Beach Alert System
- The Environment Agency's Pollution Risk Forecast is a holistic model, not just based on spills but things like tides, weather etc. this is only put out during the bathing water season.

Questions

Sir James Duddridge KCMG MP

1. Asked for an update on the work to reduce catastrophic failures
 - AW - 17,381 meters of sewers have been CCTVed to work out where the problems are so that they can be fixed to avoid catastrophic failures in future. 1,500 meters have also been pressure washed and cleaned. This piece of work has involved £21 million of spending and will be finished in January. The aim is to go beyond the previous condition to improve and future-proof the system
2. What are the benefits and impacts of what has been happening in other neighbouring areas, including by Thames Water, PLA and Kent
 - AW has committed with the PLA to create a new work system to perform in depth work to understand what has been happening here, and the impact of water from one area to another. AW will keep stakeholders informed of what is happening

Anna Firth MP

1. What is the target date for reducing the use of storm overflows?
 - AW - The Government is calling for a 75% reduction by 2035, but Anglian is aiming to deliver this by the end of **2030**.
 - AW – cannot commit to a concrete final date, but this is the current target

Daniella Boon – Blue Tits Chill Swimmers

1. How do we know when it is safe to swim after an alert?
 - AW - Broadly, when the Beach Alert system says it is safe to swim, it is safe to swim
 - AW - Modelling data assumes the worst case scenario if a monitor is triggered. An alert stays in place for 24 hours after the data predicts the impact will be over.
 - AW - Beach Aware analyses spill data to determine the impact on the environment of any spill
 - AW - From January 2024, within an hour of a spill, data will be made available of the impact of a spill which will be found on AW's website

Garry Moore – Velocity

1. What is Anglian Water doing to ensure that less sewage is put into the system in the first place
2. What is being done to reduce business use of water
 - Essex and Suffolk Water – has a target to reduce water use by 9% which will have a knock on impact on reducing sewage. Encouraging the retrofitting of water saving devices at home
 - Anglian Water – will look into Velocity lavatories

Cllr Richard Longstaff

1. Why is work only beginning now on improving sewers, and why has it taken so long to start?

- AW - Work has been going on throughout Southend to improve storm overflows since at least 2004, and there has been a steady improvement since then, especially in the quality of bathing water. In 2004, there were only three Excellent rated beaches. Now there are 5 Excellent and 3 Good/Excellent
- AW - Government policy has changed recently requiring improved monitoring, but work on this has been ongoing since 2018

Andy Hall – Thorpe Bay Residents association

1. Why is there no data from this year yet available?
 - AW - The data does exist, but it has not yet been quality assured. It will come this year in September, but work is going on to improve the systems so that in January the data can be available in near real time
2. Where are the new storm tanks going to be built?
 - AW - Proposals exist to build these, but firm proposals have not yet been made because Ofwat is still signing off the 2025-30 business proposal. More information will be shared when it is available. As part of this, there is an £800,000 Beach SuDS (Sustainable Drainage Systems) improvement scheme, which is informing the business plan.

Cllr Alan Hart

1. A lot of investment is promised over the coming years, but where is this money coming from?
 - AW - As part of the 2025-30 business plan, there is a proposal to increase water bills by **17%**. This needs to be signed off and moderated, but a finalised figure will be available by the end of 2024.

Kim Hall – Thorpe Bay Resident's Association

1. What is being done to look at performance related pay and remuneration as opposed to increasing bills?

- AW – all Anglian Water pay is linked to performance. Last year, all bonuses were reduced by 40% as environmental targets were not met
2. Why are water companies not involved in planning?
 - Cllr Meg Davidson – currently the planning system provides an automatic yes to connecting to the sewage system, without looking at capacity. This should be looked at.
 - AW – currently they are not allowed to refuse a connection.
 - AW – Anglian Water are not statutory consultees at the moment. They engage with the system, but do not have to have their opinions taken into account.
 - AW – the current sewage system has a capacity for 280,000 people using it. This is well within the predicted population of 220,000 in the area by 2025.

Shah Haider – Southend Against Sewage

1. Asked for clarity on the two points from the previous meeting (households and who paid for a cleanup when there was a catastrophic failure)
 - AF – confirmed this had been chased up, and AW would provide an answer as soon as possible.
2. Why has Jubilee Beach been closed, and by whom?
 - AW – the Environment Agency issued these alerts. AW sent an engineer to look at these and it seems that there is no evidence that there was any sewage spill there when the alert went off.

Gary Shaw – volunteer at local sailing club

1. Why have sailing clubs and other interested parties not been proactively contacted about any sewage spills?
 - AW – the Beach Aware System exists, and anyone can sign up for the alerts. Recognised that they could contact all local sailing clubs to make them aware of the system.
 - AF – Anglian Water should proactively tell all how to access the Beach Aware system

Penny Allard – swimmer

1. In the past there were only alerts in periods of heavy rainfall, but recently there have been occasions where there have been alerts in dry weather. Why is this happening?
 - Last year there were 9 'dry day spills' in Southend. all these were investigated, and found to be caused by blockages in the pipes.

Cllr Lydia Hyde – Southend City Council Shadow Environment Portfolio

1. Are the problems we are seeing unique to Southend, and is the local sewer system what we would design today?
 - AW – the reason behind the 'Dynamic Sewerage Visualisation Programme' is to understand the quirks of the system, and where the problems lie.
 - AW – monitoring is intrinsic to improving the sewerage system

Cllr Matt Dent

1. Has Anglian Water considered paying out lower dividends to shareholders, rather than increasing household bills? Last year £92 million was paid in dividends
 - AW – AW is a public interest company, and every decision has to be passed by its company board based on public interest, not private profit
 - AW - £110 million has been invested on infrastructure improvements. This money has been borrowed from shareholders, and paying them interest in dividends is the cheapest way to fund these improvements

Cllr Paul Gilson

1. Is a single alert system being considered?
 - AW – agrees that a single alert system would be extremely useful

Marc Miller

1. Would Sealife Adventure be able to put monitors on its water intake system to test water quality?
2. How can SA join in with initiatives such as the smart water butt scheme?
 - AW agreed to work with SA on both of these suggestions

Closing Remarks

- Anglian Water have agreed to continue to do these meetings every quarter, with the next meeting in the early autumn.
- The Environment Agency and Ofwat would be encouraged to attend
- It was suggested that the next meeting could be held at the Southend Sewage Plant, with a tour afterwards. Cllr Daniel Cowan asked that the next meeting venue be wheelchair accessible, which was agreed to.