NORTH DEVON COUNCIL

Minutes of a Special meeting of Licensing and Community Safety Committee held at Caddsdown Business Support Centre - Bideford on Wednesday, 27th April, 2022 at 6.00 pm

PRESENT: Members:

Councillor York (Chair)

Councillors Biederman, Gubb, Pearson, D. Spear, L. Spear and Tucker

Officers:

Service Lead - Environmental Protection Officer

7. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bulled, Campbell, Cann, Chesters, Henderson, Hunt, Orange and Yabsley.

8. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest announced.

9. JOINT AGENDA ITEM WITH TORRIDGE DISTRICT COUNCIL - PRESENTATIONS FROM SOUTH WEST WATER AND THE ENVIRONMENT AGENCY

The Committee received a presentation from the Environment Agency (EA) in relation to the EA's regulation of sewage.
Dave Trewolla, Team Leader for Integrated Environment Planning at the EA provided the Committee with the following overview:

- The following legislations: the Water Framework Directive, Environment Act 2021, Shellfish Directive and the Bathing Waters Directive underpinned the statutory role of the EA.
- To help enable the legislation the EA had to follow, plans were in place such as the Drainage and Waste Water Management plan, setting out how the EA would achieve its objectives and targets as well as the partners it would be working with.
- Programmes detailing funding mechanisms for the partners were also in place so ensure the work could be carried out.

- Combined Sewer Overflows (CSOs), operate when the system is overloaded and helped avoid wastewater backing up into properties.
- There was an increasing demand on this infrastructure, especially since the Pandemic, where more people were working from home and staying in the country when on holiday.
- Climate change was likely to cause more intense rainfall, which would add to the impact of overloading the CSOs.
- Since 2016, Event Duration Monitoring (EDM) was installed at 80% of the sewerage network, from 862 locations to over 12,000, with South West Water (SWW) monitoring over 1,200 of those locations.
- This increase in monitoring gave an awareness of how the systems were operating.
- The increase in monitoring was an increase in awareness not necessarily an increase in spills.
- On 18 November 2021 the EA and The Water Services Regulation Authority, or Ofwat, launched an investigation into sewerage treatment works. This was still an ongoing investigation and up-to-date information on the progress of the investigation could be found on the GOV.UK website.
- The Asset Management Plans (AMP), had provided £1.4 billion investment by SWW since 1990.
- Developing Drainage and Wastewater Management Plans (DWMP), helped protect the environment and reduced flooding from sewers and surface water.
- A map was displayed detailing the location of the CSO's and spillage frequency. This was no reflection on compliance.
- During 2021 there had been 1290 spills into the river Torridge.
- It was not possible to comment on specific locations so as not to prejudice the ongoing investigation.
- The water quality standards that applied to designated Bathing waters and Shellfish waters continued to be the same as used in the EU and it was not intended to change this at present.
- The increase in 'wild' swimming had created higher demand for bathing designations.
- Anyone could request to designate an area as bathing water and once this designation was in place then monitoring of the water quality would be carried out.
- Shellfish water quality was improving but there was always more that could be done.
- The Department for Fisheries and Rural Affairs (Defra) do not publish annual shellfish water quality statistics.
- More investigation into influences affecting declining fish stock would need to be undertaken to gain an overall picture of what was causing the decline in numbers of fish.
- A graph was displayed showing the occurrences of different diffuse sources. This indicated the predominant diffuse source in Devon was from agricultural activities.
- The most frequent source of pollution came from poor livestock management, followed by poor nutrient management and poor soil management.
- To report an occurrence of pollution ring 0800 80 70 60.

The following questions had been put forward ahead of the meeting:

1. An FOI response mentioned bathing waters and shellfish waters, what was the effect on the general fish population, which has noticeably reduced in the Taw in particular – according to local fishermen?

Hopefully answered in presentation and the maps slide 8

2. What are the latest statistics regarding ND river pollution?

Hopefully answered in presentation and the graphs slide 9

3. Would like a comprehensive picture of river pollution from farming practices.

Hopefully answered in presentation and the graphs slide 9

4. How is the discharge of raw sewage affecting bathing water quality? "We have two of the 'poor' bathing water readings from the seven nationwide."

I'm assuming that this question refers to Wildersmouth and Instow, both previously Poor quality but subsequently de-designated. Certainly in the case of Instow the primary influence on the bathing water quality was from the catchment as a whole, land management and agriculture, not from the sewerage infrastructure.

The following answers were given during the debate after the EA's presentation:

- The Plymouth area, on the graph showing diffuse sources of pollution, was not picking up any diffuse source from agricultural activities as the waterways that fed into the Plymouth area came under South Hams and would be listed under that area.
- Information on the process to designate bathing waters can be found on the GOV.UK website https://www.gov.uk/guidance/bathing-waters-apply-for-designation-or-de-designation
- The EA could not attend every incident that was reported. Priority was given to incidents and monitoring of those undertaken. A decision on whether to escalate an incident could then be made. This was a national response not a local decision and had come about due to resource constraints.
- Representations were made to Defra each year for funding.

Councillor Yvette Gubb gave thanks to the EA and SWW for the work they had undertaken over the years at Combe Martin in relation to the bathing waters.

The Committee then received a presentation from South West Water.

Alan Burrows, Director of Environmental Liaison and Culture, from SWW provided the Committee with the following information:

- Mr Burrows had worked with the EA for 31 years before transferring to SWW.

- SWW had more than 2 million customers peaking at around 10 million customers during holiday season.
- They serviced 19 km of pipelines, 1,200 storm overflows, 635 sewage treatment works as well as 100's of pumping stations.
- SWW were committed to a net zero carbon footprint by 2030. This meant that consideration had to be given to all their activities to reduce carbon emissions. The fleet of vehicles was to be upgraded to greener energy solutions with tree planting to offset where emissions could not be reduced. It was hoped to have planted 250,000 trees by 2025.
- SWW were committed to zero polluting spills into rivers by 2030, currently there were on average 20 overspills a year, it was hoped to reduce this by a third by 2025.
- SWW were working with Exmoor and Dartmoor National parks to restore and create natural habitats.
- SWW were working collaboratively with local partners and Local Authority Planning departments to ensure surface water and foul water drainage was separate on new housing developments.
- It was hoped that non flushable items would be banned and a campaign the 3P's was aiming to educate about what should and shouldn't go down the toilet. 450,000 tonnes of un-flushable items was retrieved from pumping stations last year.
- The location of all storm overflow locations was available on their website.
- The total number of discharges into the river Torridge during 2021 had increased, this was primarily due to the weather.
- All storm overflows were to have monitoring equipment attached to by 2023. 19 of the 24 currently monitored overflows had worked 100% of the time over the last year.
- If you suspected that a polluting event was taking place you could call 0300 346 20 20 to report it.
- Incidents mentioned at Braunton Burrows was not logged on their system so it was suspected that the asset might well belong to Highways.

The following questions had been put forward ahead of the meeting:

Which Quango is responsible for monitoring SWW? How do they connect with the general public?
We have an open dialogue and meet regularly with our regulatory bodies – Ofwat, the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra), the Environment Agency (EA), Drinking Water Inspectorate and the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) to ensure that our business plans address their priorities and concerns. We engage regularly with all our regulators on business plans, strategy, performance, risks and opportunities and delivery for customers. We attend regular meetings, provide reports and reviews, respond to consultations and join workshops to ensure trust and transparency within these relationships.

The cold water swim trend is constantly gathering followers. This means more people are swimming out of the usual swimming/bathing season. Can we do away with the idea of a swim season and attempt improved water quality throughout the year?

We have committed to maintain our excellent bathing water quality standards, all year round work with others on attending the first bathing quality river, using learnings from our current pilots on the rivers Dart and Tavy.
SWW provides disinfection all year round at **62** sites around the coast and specifically **6** sites in north Devon.
Cllr Malcolm Wilkinson (Lead Member for Coastal Communities) would like to know how discharge of raw sewage is affecting bathing water quality. "We have two of the 'poor' bathing water readings from the seven nationwide."

There are no 'poor' classified bathing waters in Torridge or North Devon for 2021 based on Environment Agency monitoring and reporting.

In 2021, DEFRA announced the latest bathing water results. These showed that 100% of the classified bathing waters in the South West have now passed the newer, more stringent standards, with 98% rated as 'Good' or 'Excellent'.

We have been undertaking a number of projects in the Combe Martin area to improve water quality. This has included:

- Developing close working relationships with EA, NDDC, Combe Martin Water Watch Group, Combe Martin PC and catchment landowners to ensure a common understanding of risks to BWQ
- Misconnections surveys – surveying for and removing private misconnections to NDDCs surface water network, which goes direct to the River Umber
- Flow monitoring and infiltration surveys on the public sewerage system to identify and remove ground water and surface water connections to reduce storm overflow operations
- Investing in the optimisation of the storage on the public sewerage network to reduce storm overflow operations
- Funding tree planting and hedgerow creation in the River Umber catchment to help reduce diffuse agricultural pollution (implemented through North Devon Biosphere)
- Investigating and supporting the remediation of private discharges to the River Umber and associated sewerage networks
- Supporting the EAs investigations into the sources of pollution to the bathing water through Microbial Source Tracking
- Supporting North Devon Biosphere's Smart Catchment project – looking at understanding total catchment water quality and flow
- Piloting smart water butts to reduce surface water entering our combined wastewater network and reduce pressure on the network during times of heavy rainfall
- We welcome the acknowledgment of our involvement along with the Environment Agency that was expressed by members of the Committee.

Chair
The meeting ended at 8.06 pm

NOTE: These minutes will be confirmed as a correct record at the next meeting of the Committee.