

From: **David Wimble, Cabinet Member for (the Kent) Environment**
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To: **Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee, 4 November 2025**

Subject: **Development of a Kent Water Resources Strategy**

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Past Pathway of report: N/A

Future Pathway of report: N/A

Electoral Division

All electoral divisions

Summary: Kent is one of the driest regions in England with population and economic growth along with climate change putting increasing pressure on the county's water resources. The results of water stress within the county are expected to cause long term impacts for house building, economic development, tourism and water availability for residents. Water scarcity will also have a negative effect on wildlife and habitats, which form the rich landscape of the county. The development of a 25-year Kent Water Resources Strategy is proposed to address the challenges now and, in the future, and shape how the county can maintain growth whilst protecting water resources for the benefit of the environment and quality of life for the residents of Kent.

Recommendation(s):

The Cabinet Committee is asked to note the paper and support the development of a Kent Water Resources Strategy

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Kent is one of the driest regions in England, and climate change is intensifying the pressure on its water resources. The county is experiencing warmer, wetter, winters and hotter, drier summers, which are impacting both the quality and availability of water.
- 1.2 The Environment Agency projects a national water shortfall of nearly 5 billion litres per day by 2050. Parts of Kent are already classified as experiencing moderate to serious water stress, where water demand exceeds the effective rainfall available. Areas under serious stress include Folkestone & Hythe, Dover, Thanet, Swale, Gravesham, and Sevenoaks.
- 1.3 National population growth is expected to reach 7.3% by mid-2032, with Kent and Medway anticipating significant increases in both population and economic activity. This growth will drive demand for new housing,

employment, and infrastructure, placing further strain on water supply systems.

- 1.4 Water stress in Kent poses long-term risks to housing development, economic growth, tourism, and everyday water access for residents. It also threatens the county's rich natural habitats and biodiversity.
- 1.5 Kent County Council has, over the previous 10 years, worked to develop and deliver water resource projects, build strategic partnerships with key stakeholders and understand the risks and challenges for securing water resources.
- 1.6 Using this platform, it is proposed that KCC works with strategic partners to develop a shared Water Resources Strategy for the county that looks at how we will manage the long-term risk to water resources.

2. Developing a Kent Water Resources Strategy

- 2.1 Kent is a diverse county with a high-quality environment, varied towns and rural landscapes. These resources and assets are valued by residents, business and visitors alike, providing significant benefits to the county's economy and the health and wellbeing of its residents.
- 2.2 However, the county has experienced numerous drought events since the 1970s. Projected climate change and population growth will increase water demand while decreasing water available for supply.
- 2.3 Significant investment will be needed to balance future supply and demand in Kent – depending on the climate path, level of population growth and the mitigation action taken, projections suggest an additional 1.5 – 2.6 billion litres per day will be needed by 2080 in the South East.
- 2.4 These figures do not represent a hard line but will be realised incrementally year-on-year, with the impacts being felt on the public water supply and high-water consumption sectors.
- 2.5 Unless more is done to balance water supply and demand, droughts are likely to pose an increasing threat for soft and top fruit and salad production (Kent's main irrigated crops) in summer months, particularly where they rely on high levels of irrigation from river abstraction, reservoirs and groundwater sources.
- 2.6 Kent County Council funded the National Institute of Agricultural Botany East Malling Research (NIAB EMR) to support advances in horticulture, including irrigation technology and water harvesting on polytunnels. Kent County Council is also a member of the Holistic Water for Horticulture project working with the horticulture industry. However, water scarcity remains a very real and increasing risk for this sector and the associated economy within Kent.
- 2.7 Water is essential for healthy, thriving ecosystems in Kent. By protecting and improving water supply and quality available for natural ecosystems, we will ensure habitats can thrive and continue to be attractive and appealing spaces to relax and enjoy for visitors to the county.

- 2.8 The regional Water Resources South East group (WRSE) is an alliance of the six water companies in South East England. Taking a collaborative approach, it has developed a multi-agency regional resilience plan *Futureproofing our water supplies June 2025* with stakeholders along with developing a long-term strategy for demand minimisation and supply maximisation measures to maintain a sustainable water supply.
- 2.9 However, there remains a need for a Kent focused strategy for water resources that clearly sets out the challenges and opportunities for the county to secure sustainable water resources for residents, business and the environment.
- 2.10 The strategy will align with the 6 Goals of the Environment Plan and support delivery of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy and the Local Flood Risk Management Strategy. The strategy will focus on four key areas –
- **Integrated Water Planning:** Embed water resource considerations into spatial planning and infrastructure development.
 - **Demand Management:** Promote water efficiency measures across sectors, including domestic, public, commercial, and agricultural use.
 - **Investment in Resilience:** Support innovation and investment in water recycling, storage, and supply infrastructure including nationally significant infrastructure projects.
 - **Environmental Protection:** Safeguard ecosystems through catchment-based approaches and nature-based solutions.

3. Financial Implications

- 3.1 The strategy will be developed by a base funded member of staff, so it is not considered to present any additional pressure on the budget.

4. Legal implications

- 4.1 Developing a Kent Water Resources Strategy is not expected to have legal implications for Kent County Council.

5. Equalities implications

- 5.1 An EqIA screening will be completed as part of the draft Kent Water Resources Strategy in advance of undertaking a public consultation and reviewed following the consultation process.

6. Other corporate implications

- 6.1 There are no specific implications on other areas of KCC. However, delivering the Strategy will require support from other areas of KCC. There are no expectations for any additional spending.

7. Conclusions

- 7.1 KCC is proposing to work with strategic partners to develop a shared 25-year Kent Water Resources Strategy, which can bring together existing strategies, plans and projects to support water security for Kent. A coordinated, forward-

looking strategy is essential to strengthen partnerships to ensure Kent's water resilience, support sustainable growth and protect the unique environment and landscape for the future.

8. Recommendation(s):

The Cabinet Committee is asked to note the paper and support the development of a Kent Water Resources Strategy

9. Contact details

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