

Motion for Time Limited Debate
Strengthening Water Infrastructure and Resilience

Submitted by the Green Political Group

Proposer: Mr Stuart Heaver

Seconder: Mr Mark Hood

Motion:

This Council resolves to:

1. Call on the Cabinet Member for Environment, Coastal Regeneration and Special Projects to write Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to request a change to planning legislation requiring the assessment of water resource availability as part of the determination process for planning applications.
2. Call on the Deputy Leader, as the portfolio holder for emergency planning, to provide an update to the relevant Committee on water-resource resilience in the context of KCC's role within the wider Kent Resilience Forum.
3. Call on the Executive to write to South East Water and Southern Water to request a report on their future prediction of Combined Sewer Overflow spills per year from all Kent wastewater Sewage Treatment Works based on current population growth, climate forecasts and Disinfection Level Period information.
4. Call on the Executive to write to the Environment Agency to ask that they report which wastewater facilities they have inspected in Kent on a quarterly basis and that the Executive provide this information as part of performance reporting to the Growth, Environment & Transport Cabinet Committee.
5. Request that the Executive investigate the feasibility of setting up, facilitating and promoting citizen science testing teams on key bathing water areas and rivers.
6. Recommend that the Scrutiny Committee consider asking for a report on the how the impact, from a public health and economic perspective, of water outages and waterborne pollution is managed or considered where relevant to the effectiveness of and requirement for KCC Services.
7. Call on the Executive to incorporate waterborne pollution in the Kent Environment Plan and in the Biodiversity Recovery Programme.

Background Information provided by the Green Group:

Kent has experienced a growing number of incidents that highlight the vulnerability of the county's water infrastructure and the real world consequences for residents when systems fail. ¹ Water outages, contamination events, and wastewater spills have caused significant disruption to daily life, placed added pressure on local services, and raised legitimate concerns about public health. ² These failures can limit access to safe drinking water, increase risks of waterborne illness, and reduce hygiene standards in homes, schools, and care settings, placing vulnerable groups at higher risk. ³

National reviews have warned that ageing water infrastructure and under-investment create increasing risks of leaks, service failures and sewage discharges, emphasising the need for more proactive, coordinated planning across the sector. ⁴

The Royal Academy of Engineering has also highlighted that failing wastewater systems can expose communities to harmful pathogens in rivers and coastal waters, reinforcing the need for improved infrastructure planning to protect public health.⁵ Exposure to contaminated water can lead to gastrointestinal illness, skin infections, and other preventable health impacts, making the resilience of wastewater systems a core public health concern. ⁶

Whilst planning applications consider the impact on existing utility services, water companies are currently not classified as statutory consultees. Under Section 106 of the Water Industry Act 1991, developers have a right to connect to the water network on 21 days' notice. This does not allow water and sewerage companies sufficient time to plan, design, and deliver any required reinforcement works.⁶ As the number of developments increases, the pressure on existing water supply and demand also increases.⁷

If planning applications required developers to identify the proposed source of their water supply, this would allow water companies to plan any necessary reinforcement

¹ **Kent Online**. Streams in Hawkhurst polluted by Southern Water. Available at: <https://www.kentonline.co.uk/kent/news/the-kent-village-polluted-by-247-spills-in-one-year-306921/>

² **The Guardian**. South East Water could lose operating licence after outages in Kent. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2026/jan/14/south-east-water-operating-licence-ofwat-review-outages-kent-sussex>

³ **Royal Academy of Engineering / National Engineering Policy Centre**. Testing the Waters Priorities for mitigating health risks from wastewater pollution. Available at: <https://nepc.raeng.org.uk/testing-the-waters>

⁴ **Gov UK**. Water and sewerage companies in England: pollution incident report 2016 to 2024. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/water-and-sewerage-companies-in-england-pollution-incident-report-for-2016-to-2024>

⁵ **Royal Academy of Engineering**. Wastewater Risks. Available at: <https://nepc.raeng.org.uk/wastewater>

⁶ **Southern Water**. Briefing Note for Local Planning Authorities: Infrastructure Provision. Available at: <https://www.southernwater.co.uk/media/pb5nd4ux/briefing-note-for-lpa-on-infrastructure-provision-1.pdf>

⁷ **Kent County Council**. Development of a Kent Water Resources Strategy. Available at: <https://democracy.kent.gov.uk:9071/documents/s132938/Water%20Resource%20Strategy%20Report.pdf>

⁸ **Kent County Council**. Kent Minerals and Waste Local Plan 2024-2039. Available at: <https://www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/strategies-and-policies/service-specific-policies/economic-regeneration-and-planning-policies/planning-policies/minerals-and-waste-planning-policy/kent-minerals-and-waste-local-plan-kmwlp>

works in advance, helping to ensure that water infrastructure capacity is considered and supporting the mitigation of potential supply issues. Similar to how the Kent Minerals and Waste Local Plan is essential for evaluating planning applications relating to mineral supply and waste management,⁸ water infrastructure considerations in the planning process would strengthen decision making and ensure that impacts on water infrastructure are formally assessed.

Incorporating changes to the current measures would help safeguard residents by trying to mitigate risks of supply shortages, contamination incidents, or insufficient wastewater treatment capacity.

Regular reporting from local authority public health officers and water companies can further strengthen preparedness. Public health teams can highlight trends in water-related complaints, identify emerging risks to vulnerable populations, and advise on the likely impact of outages or contamination events. At the same time, water companies can provide operational data on network pressures, asset failures, and areas of concern. Adopting a revised approach to Kent's water infrastructure will mean these reports are routinely shared and incorporated so that the council will be better equipped to anticipate problems, collaborate with other agencies and protect community health, the local economy and the environment.

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⁵ **Royal Academy of Engineering**. Wastewater Risks. Available at: <https://nepc.raeng.org.uk/wastewater>

⁶ **Southern Water**. Briefing Note for Local Planning Authorities: Infrastructure Provision. Available at: <https://www.southernwater.co.uk/media/pb5nd4ux/briefing-note-for-lpa-on-infrastructure-provision-1.pdf>

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