From: **Jamie Henderson-Cabinet Member for Coastal Regeneration and Environment**

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To: **Growth, Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee – 10 November 2026**

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

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Electoral Division: County-wide

Summary: Kent is one of the driest regions in England with population and economic growth along with a changing climate 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, agriculture, tourism and water availability for residents. A Kent Water Resources Strategy is in development 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 the update on 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 Parts of Kent are already classified as experiencing moderate to serious water stress, where water demand exceeds the effective rainfall available, these include Shepway, Dover, Thanet, Swale, Gravesham, and Sevenoaks.

1.3 The recent heatwaves experienced within the county and the water supply outages have highlighted the immediate and long-term risks posed for everyday water access for residents and the impacts that will be faced for housing development, economic growth, tourism, and the environment.

1.4 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.

1.5 Using this platform, and working with our strategic partners, KCC is developing the Water Resources Strategy to enable partners to understand how we can manage the long-term risk to water resources collectively and build resilience.

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 Economic growth, including housing, will require significant investment in the water infrastructure and technology to balance future supply and demand in Kent. Depending on the climate prediction, level of population growth and the mitigation action taken, projections suggest an additional 1.5 – 2.6 billion litres per day will be needed for households by 2080 in the South East.

2.3 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, including newly emerging industries such a data centres.

2.4 Water Resources South East, is an alliance of the six water companies that cover the south east region of England, they work to secure water supply for the future and take a regional approach to managing water resources. KCC is working closely with them in the development of a Spatial Development Strategy which will review the water demands across the South East Region. This work is critical to improving our understanding of housing forecasts, infrastructure needs and economic development against available water supply and how additional need will be met.

2.5 Whilst regional strategies, as well as new and emerging policy and development in the water sector, are vital in shaping how water resource and supply is managed, there remains a need for a Kent focused strategy.

2.6 The development of the Kent Water Resource Strategy is ongoing, and the Kent Water Resilience Partnership meeting held on the 8th October 2026 has highlighted that partners from all sectors support this approach and are committed to co-designing the water strategy. The ambition for the strategy is that it will be owned and delivered by all partners across the county, with KCC acting as its facilitator for implementation.

3. Draft Kent Water Strategy overview

3.1 The Kent Water Strategy is being developed during a period of substantial change for the water sector and increasing water demand. Bringing partners together to develop the strategy will enable collaboration and active participation in the creation of shared goals. Adaptation and innovation is needed to improve water resilience but will require forward planning and

continuous improvement from all sectors to achieve a sustainable and environmentally sensitive solutions.

3.2 The ambition of the strategy will be to ensure that Kent has a resilient water environment which can support communities, the natural environment, the economy and enable the delivery of sustainable growth.

3.3 The Kent Water Resilience Partnership meeting highlighted that a wealth of technical expertise, knowledge and data exists across all sectors involved in water resource management. In bringing partners together the strategy will develop goals which can

- Bring together existing expertise and data to share, collaborate and consider the whole water management system in delivering coordinated action
- Address water demand and deliver water resource management projects in a timely way
- Invest in water resilience through innovative nature-based solutions to deliver for the economy, public health and the environment
- Lead by example through best practice adaption of public buildings and assets
- Ensure that growth ambition is fully understood and water resource planning is embedded to reduce uncertainty around future water demand.

3.4 The Kent Water Resource Strategy had previously intended to cover a 25-year period, however in recognising the role that the Water Resources South East Regional Strategy has and the need to align these strategies the timeframe of the strategy will now cover the period 2027 -2075.

3.5 In addition, to support development of the strategy the 18-month EU funded Pathways to Resilience project will be embedded, strengthening the focus on adaptation and resilience into a single framework.

3.6 The new timeframe will allow for the development of short-, medium- and long-term objectives and actions and align with the Water Company Asset Management Periods (AMPs) which will be one of the mechanisms for investment and delivery.

3.7 A phased approach to delivery will enable short term and quick win projects to be delivered at pace, delivery of medium-term objectives which require investment and increased coordination with partners would be delivered post 2030 and long-term objectives from 2035 onwards would realise the delivery of significant investment, adaptation and resilience.

3.8 Work is now underway to bring the partnership together to develop the strategy as a shared approach. It is anticipated that the draft strategy will be taken to public consultation in early 2027.

4. Leading water resilience for Kent

4.1 It's important to note the ongoing work of KCC on improving the water resilience of Kent. The strategy will bring together and coordinate these projects to provide a clear vision and ongoing and new activities will form the action plan for the delivery of the strategy. This includes:

- Holistic Water for Horticulture – a partner in the project, which supports the horticulture sector to reduce water use and create resilience within the sector.
- Work with sports clubs to assess options for rainwater storage and boreholes for irrigation. KCC is working with Active Kent, Kent Cricket, South East Water, Affinity Water.
- Work with schools to deliver sustainable drainage, water harvesting, grounds enhancement, water audits and education sessions.
- Creation of the rain water harvesting tool for growers to help farmers to calculate the most effective rainwater harvesting system for their circumstances. Now working with water companies to deliver a water resilience in agriculture pilot.
- Working with NFU, farm clusters, Environment Agency, Trading Standards and Public Health Further to support growers and agriculture to implement rain water harvesting equipment to reduce reliance on mains supply and increase resilience.
- Design guidance for irrigation reservoirs for the agriculture sector to reduce reliance on mains supply.
- Working with water companies, farm clusters,and the horticulture sector to review, test and modify the Water Trading Platform, which was started in 2020 to enable abstractors to trade licences when needed, to reduce reliance on mains water.

5. How the proposed decision supports the Council's Strategic Statement

5.1 The Kent water strategy will align with the Kent strategic statement by **putting Kent residents first.** The strategy will:

- Identify and implement water resilience measure that can be implemented for farming and growers across the county.
- Support local businesses to become more water resilience through nation and regional opportunities and programmes.

5.2 **Building better communities,** the strategy will:

- The strategy will identify areas where KCC can ensure that the water infrastructure needs of the county to support economic growth and quality of life are fully in place through partnership working and engaging with water companies.
- Protect our Kent environment with practical, affordable and visible improvements including assisting with building water resilience into

businesses and KCC buildings where practicable to do so. This will lead to case studies that can be shared more widely and translated into other areas.

5.3 In the context of water availability and quality and maintaining quality blue spaces for residents and visitor to enjoy.

6. Financial Implications

6.1 This proposed decision/update has not costs involved.

7. Legal implications

7.1 There are considered to be no legal implications for Kent County Council in developing a Kent Water Resources Strategy.

8. Equalities implications

8.1 An EqIA screening has been completed as part of the draft Kent Water Resources Strategy in advance of undertaking a public consultation and reviewed following the consultation process

9. Data Protection Implications

9.1 There are considered to be no data protection implications for Kent County Council in developing a Kent water strategy

10. Other corporate implications

10.1 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.

11. Governance

11.1 The Kent Water Strategy will be adopted by the Flood and Water Management Team, Environment and the Circular Economy division.

12. Conclusions

12.1 KCC is developing a shared 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.

12.2 Whilst work on the strategy continues, other collaborative efforts still continue to address the challenges of water security in the county.

13. Recommendation(s):

13.1 The Cabinet Committee is asked to **NOTE** the paper and to continue to support the development of a Kent Water Resources Strategy

14. Background Documents

EqIA 2006-01-13 Water resources Strategy

15. Appendices

None

16. Contact details

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