

## **Motion for Time Limited Debate**

### **KCC Action Plan for Strengthening Water Infrastructure and Resilience**

**Proposer:** Mr Stuart Heaver

**Seconder:** Mr Mark Hood

**Motion:**

This Council resolves to:

1. Welcome the Water Supply Short Focused Inquiry (SFI) report, thank the Members and Officers involved for their work examining the water outages in Winter 2025/2026 and note the requirement for the Executive to provide a response to the report and its recommendations to the Scrutiny Committee in due course but also recognise that there are a range of other water related issues that merit immediate consideration by the Council.
2. Recommend that the Executive to write to Southern Water and request that its published CSO spill data is condensed into a concise Kent-wide Combined Sewer Outfall (CSO) spill report and submitted on a quarterly basis to enable more effective scrutiny of water borne pollution and the progress of spill reduction efforts,- across the county.
3. Recommend that the Executive to write to Southern Water to request a concise quarterly report on the county-wide progress of the Clean Rivers and Seas Task Force and to offer Southern Water any appropriate support from KCC for their efforts to reduce CSO spills across the county and with particular regard to encouraging SUDS on KCC owned buildings and infrastructure such as schools and libraries.
4. Recommend that the Cabinet Member for Environment, Coastal Regeneration and Public Health to write to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government to recommend that any future fines imposed by the regulator on water companies (or other private or public bodies) for water related failure incidents in Kent, are ring-fenced for water infrastructure and pollution/sewage release prevention improvements.
5. Recommend that the Flood Risk and Water Management Committee consider; asking the Environment Agency to provide a report on the number of pollution incidents for each category report by the Water Companies, many of these resulted in inspections in Kent over the last 5 years; and consider recommending that the Quarterly Environment Agency updates on this matter form part of routine performance monitoring by the Committee.
6. Request that the Executive investigate the feasibility of setting up, facilitating and promoting via Plan Sea or any other appropriate means, the development and support of citizen science testing teams on key bathing water areas and rivers seek greater partnership working between all responsible authorities, including water companies, Districts and the Environment Agency alongside supporting existing projects and research to improve monitoring of bathing water quality.

7. Recommend that the Scrutiny Committee consider requesting a Public Health report on the impact, risks of and KCC responsibilities in relation to water outages and in particular, waterborne pollution in Kent.
8. Recommend that the Executive engages with relevant stakeholders to ensure the first Kent and Medway Spatial Development Strategy has due regard to issues relating to water supply, wastewater management and water demand throughout the preparation, adoption and delivery of the strategy.

### **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. 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.<sup>1</sup>

The recent Water Supply Short Focused Inquiry (SFI) report makes an important contribution to address this issue by highlighting key concerns and making important recommendations. Recognising that the SFI was designed to be short and focused on water outages in the winter of 2025.<sup>26</sup> it did not seek to cover all aspects of Kent's water infrastructure, this motion seeks to address some of those other aspects.

The Royal Academy of Engineering reports failing wastewater systems can expose communities to harmful pathogens in rivers and coastal waters, reinforcing the risks to public health.<sup>2</sup> These failures can limit access to safe drinking water and reduce hygiene standards in homes, schools, and care settings, placing vulnerable groups at higher risk. National reviews have also warned that ageing water infrastructure and underinvestment are increasing risks of leaks, service failures, and sewage discharges, emphasising the need for more proactive and coordinated planning across the sector.<sup>3</sup>

Ensuring the resilience of Kent's water infrastructure requires effective implementation of national policy, careful regulation, transparent reporting, strong partnership working, long-term investment. It also requires robust local governance.

Local authorities can support clear scrutiny arrangements, the timely sharing of operational and regulatory information, and proactive communication during incidents, all of which are essential to maintaining public confidence, supporting emergency preparedness, and enabling informed decision-making. Greater visibility of regulatory activity, alongside monitoring approaches such as community-based and citizen science initiatives, can strengthen understanding of local conditions and enhance accountability.

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<sup>1</sup> **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>

<sup>2</sup> **Royal Academy of Engineering**. Wastewater Risks. Available at: <https://nepc.raeng.org.uk/wastewater>

<sup>3</sup> **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>

As the SFI highlights, water companies should be integral to the planning processes, Strengthening the integration of water infrastructure within planning and policy-making would support more sustainable growth by enabling earlier identification of constraints and more effective investment planning. Existing planning arrangements can constrain the ability of water and wastewater providers to deliver upgrades in line with development, increasing pressure on already constrained networks as growth continues.

While KCC is not responsible for the UK's water industry there are sensible and pragmatic measures it can take now to protect residents from the vulnerability of local water infrastructure.