

**Rother District Council**

**Report to:** Cabinet

**Date:** 3 October 2022

**Title:** Discharge of Untreated Water at Galley Hill / Bexhill Beach Water Quality

**Report of:** Chief Executive

**Cabinet Member:** Councillor Oliver

**Ward(s):** Not applicable

**Purpose of Report:** To reinforce the Council’s concern, expressed in the motion agreed at the last meeting of full Council, over the recent discharge of untreated water from the outfall at Galley Hill, Bexhill and also to commit to working with the relevant agencies to improve the quality of the bathing water at Bexhill beach.

**Decision Type:** Non-key

**Officer**

**Recommendation(s):** It be **RESOLVED:** That:

- 1) the Chief Executive and other relevant officers continue to engage with Southern Water and other relevant agencies; and
- 2) an update report is presented to a future meeting of Cabinet outlining the steps being taken to:
  - a. prevent a similar discharge into the sea; and
  - b. improve the overall quality of the bathing water at Bexhill beach.

**Introduction**

1. Members will be aware of the discharge of untreated water into the sea at Galley Hill on 17 August 2022 and the subsequent advice issued to the public to not enter the water until advised to do so. Members will also be aware of the motion passed at the meeting of full Council held on 21 September 2022 (Minute C22/49 refers).
2. The motion agreed stated:
 

Rother District Council (RDC) therefore urges Southern Water and all associated companies to:

  - a) make public an investigation into the causes of the equipment failures at the Galley Hill pumping station, and of actions to be taken to prevent a recurrence;

- b) install back-up equipment capable of taking over and managing key functions in the event of a breakdown of the primary machinery;
  - c) set a date, no later than 2027, for all sewage discharges into the sea to cease in the Rother District area, and areas adjacent to it;
  - d) increase investment in the sewage and wastewater systems within Rother to ensure efficient treatment of the same, sufficient to meet present and predicted demand; and
  - e) provide compensation for the losses and costs suffered because of the calamitous failures of Southern Water.
3. It is recognised that our coastline and beaches are major assets for the Council and therefore we must take positive action to ensure they are protected and available for the public to use. The specific incident has caused concern amongst residents and businesses, but we should also be concerned about the ongoing poor quality of the bathing water in Bexhill.
4. In moving forward it is of course imperative that the causes of the discharge are fully investigated and steps taken to ensure such an incident does not recur. That aspect is largely down to Southern Water to resolve. However, if we are to resolve the ongoing issue of water quality, that will require concerted effort by several organisations, including RDC, Southern Water, Environment Agency and East Sussex County Council (ESCC).
5. The only way this will be achieved is if all the relevant agencies work together with the aim of identifying the causes of poor bathing water quality and taking steps to resolve those issues.

## **Discussion**

6. Since the time of the incident, the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive have joined a meeting called by our local MPs, along with Southern Water and the Leader of ESCC and representatives from the Public Health Team.
7. The purpose of that meeting was to establish what happened on 17 August, what the response was and how do we prevent it recurring.
8. The main points arising from the meeting were:
- a. It appears the fault at the Galley Hill Waste Wastewater Pumping Station was caused by the failure of a UK Power Networks asset.
  - b. Southern Water agreed that incident reporting to RDC and other agencies needed to be more timely to enable accurate information to be given to the public.
  - c. Southern Water agreed to work with RDC to find opportunities where Southern Water could potentially support in warning and informing the public when beaches have to be closed.
  - d. Southern Water to review pollution modelling and share details with group.
  - e. Southern Water to engage with the Environment Agency and the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) around responsibilities and ownership of notifying public health teams during pollution incidents. ESCC Public Health team to feed into discussions.
  - f. A public statement to be made confirming commitment that Bexhill bathing waters will receive attention it deserves, including recent pollution incident.

- g. The bathing water sampling plan to be shared along with information on what Southern Water does and what the Environment Agency does.
  - h. Southern Water to arrange discussion with RDC around potential compensation to affected businesses.
  - i. Southern Water to check that suitable expertise/agencies are being engaged for innovation/collaboration purposes in reducing storm overflows.
9. Since the meeting referred to above, Southern Water have contacted the Chief Executive to advise on how businesses impacted by the incident can claim compensation and this will be communicated to businesses through local Ward Members, Chamber of Commerce and our usual communications channels.

## Conclusion

10. There is ongoing liaison between Southern Water, Environment Agency, MPs and RDC and there is still much to be done. Ultimately, the Council will wish to see a plan of action outlining the clear steps, with timings, that will deal with the discharge issue and restore Bexhill's water quality to a level we can be proud of.
11. Cabinet is therefore asked to resolve that:
- the Chief Executive and other relevant officers continue to engage with Southern Water and other relevant agencies, and
  - an update report is presented to a future meeting of Cabinet outlining the steps being taken to:
    - a. prevent a similar discharge into the sea; and
    - b. improve the overall quality of the bathing water at Bexhill beach.

## Environmental Implications

12. There are clear negative environmental impacts of material being discharged into the sea, whether through surges or other more gradual means.

## Risk Management

13. Failure to take steps to deal with the issues will potentially lead to an on-going poor quality rating for Bexhill beach bathing water quality. It will also have a reputational impact which will inevitably impact on tourism and therefore local businesses that rely on the tourist trade.

Other Implications	Applies?	Other Implications	Applies?
Human Rights	No	Equalities and Diversity	No
Crime and Disorder	No	Consultation	No
Environmental	Yes	Access to Information	No
Sustainability	No	Exempt from publication	No
Risk Management	Yes		

Chief Executive:	Malcolm Johnston
Report Contact Officer:	Malcolm Johnston
e-mail address:	<a href="mailto:malcolm.johnston@rother.gov.uk">malcolm.johnston@rother.gov.uk</a>

Appendices:	N/A
Relevant Previous Minutes:	N/A
Background Papers:	N/A
Reference Documents:	N/A