OUR REF:
DATE: 17 March 2023
YOUR
REF:

Wealden District Council

The Rt. Hon. Michael Gove MP

Secretary of State (Department of Levelling
UP, Housing and Communities)
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

By email: michael.gove.mp@parliament.uk

Dear Mr Gove

We write to you regarding our concerns in respect of Southern Water relating to their performance in the treatment of wastewater within our District. We have significant concerns for the health and wellbeing of our residents. We are particularly alarmed that the company is restricting itself to providing a minimal service to residents, whilst not acting to prevent sewer discharges occurring, which we considered is entirely predictable during periods of high rainfall.

We believe that action to stop this practice by Southern Water is too slow and data is not being shared across the whole of our district to show the scale of the problem. Whilst we recognise that we cannot refuse planning applications for new development which could add additional load into the sewer network, as the legal duty is on Southern Water to deliver the necessary upgrades, we consider there needs to be greater local transparency and scrutiny over the delivery of these upgrades, to protect our environment and our communities.

Wealden District Council condemns the Government's Storm Overflow Reduction Plan which will continue to allow water disposal authorities (such as Southern Water) to continue to discharge sewage into our homes, gardens, rivers and seas for many years to come.

Wealden District Council has for many months been actively engaged with Southern Water to explore how these matters could be better dealt, however we are finding that there is either a lack of detailed answers or a lack of drive to deliver on the changes necessary.

On the 22 February 2023, a cross party motion was agreed at my Council's Full Council meeting, whereby the Council voted to raise our significant concerns regarding the Southern Water's performance with both yourself as the Secretary of State for the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities but also with the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food & Rural Affairs.

disability confident EMPLOYER

Wealden District Council, Vicarage Lane, Hailsham, East Sussex, BN27 2AX
T **01323 443322**
W **www.wealden.gov.uk**

We urge you to consider our proposals as set out in this letter to ensure that Southern Water is not restricting itself to providing a minimal service to residents and other stakeholders. Making water disposal authorities a statutory consultee on all planning applications and setting binding expectations on the quality of their responses, is considered imperative to ensure system upgrades are properly planned and actioned. It is appreciated that all UK water companies are required to produce an Asset Management Plan setting out the business plan objectives and budgets in line with Government and regulatory objectives. However, we feel there is a disconnect as to this priority setting compared to the delivery approach on the ground. Therefore, we also consider that the introduction of annual reporting requirements on the progress of water disposal authorities in relation to the infrastructure upgrades required to serve new growth is a key part of the water infrastructure puzzle which is needed to ensure that infrastructure is appropriately planned for and timely.

As set out above, alongside writing to yourself we are also taking the opportunity to also write to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food & Rural Affairs as we wish to seek overarching reforms to that would require water disposal authorities to publish all (live) details of storm overflows, not those just into bathing waters (as is current practice by Southern Water), but every location into every watercourse. It is not acceptable that Southern Water is not acting to prevent sewage discharges occurring.

We implore you to answer our calls that Government make water disposal authorities a statutory consultee on all planning applications, setting binding standards on the quality of responses and to seek the introduction of annual reporting requirements on the progress of water disposal authorities in relation to the infrastructure upgrades required to serve new growth.

We would be happy to meet with you to discuss the detail of our suggested changes if this would be helpful to you and your department.

Yours sincerely





Cllr Ann Newton
Leader of the Council
Portfolio Holder for Planning & Development

Trevor Scott
Chief Executive

cc Nus Ghani MP, Caroline Ansell MP, Huw Merriman MP, Maria Caulfield MP