Southern Water Working Group Meeting

13:00 on Monday 24 July 2023
Via Teams

Attendees:-

	Representing
Chris Bending (Director of Place, Wealden District Council)	East Sussex
Karl Roberts (Joint Chief Executive, Arun District Council)	West Sussex
Simon Kennedy (Strategic Environmental Planning Manager, Partnership for South Hampshire)	Hampshire
Fjola Stevens (Divisional Manager, Development Management, Chichester District Council)	West Sussex

CB started the meeting by welcoming FS to the Group.

1. Actions flowing from priorities

It was acknowledged that the actions from the agreed priorities now need to be put in in place.

a. Invite EA to next main group meeting

In terms of priority No. 5 (invite the EA to the next main Group meeting) CB asked whether Michael Turner might be a good person to approach? The meeting agreed with this – at a meeting a couple of weeks ago Michael Turner certainly took the lead in this area. It was also suggested that OFWAT also be invited to the same meeting. Given the new momentum with this Group and the wider Stakeholder Group, it would be good to capture both organisations together. Members would also certainly appreciate this approach.

b. Set up first meeting direct with SW to explore priorities - what do we need to do to prepare?

Priorities Nos. 1-4 – these are predominantly around work with Southern Water (eg data sharing/consultation response format/CSO data publications, transparency around upgrade works, etc). It was agreed we should meet with Southern Water as a Working Group, to gauge their reaction to the workings of the Groups so far and gain a better understanding of what it is they are trying to achieve and how they think we can work together, in turn helping us shape our asks. CB advised he has spoken to Southern Water already about our Groups so it will not come as a surprise to

them. However it would be good to re-emphasize the fact that Local Authorities are actively coming together collectively, to ask questions.

ACTION: CB to contact SW to invite them to the next smaller Working Group meeting. CB to also track down a good contact from OFWAT to invite, as well as invite the EA to the wider Stakeholder Group. The SW meeting needs to take place before the next wider group Stakeholder Meeting so we have something to report back. Given the impending summer holiday season, it was acknowledged we may need to push the date of the next wider Stakeholder Group back slightly, which in turn will give the EA and OFWAT more time to ensure they can attend. It was also agreed that we circulate an invitation for questions to the Wider Stakeholder Group for putting to the EA, in advance of this meeting.

In terms of preparing for this meeting, it was agreed to ask for as much as we can get. **ACTION:** All to provide thoughts against each of the priorities to share in advance, to come back to CB for him to collate.

c. Anything else?

FS suggested we might need to check in with each of our respective DM teams to see if there have been any changes/improvements to our working relationships with Southern Water in recent months. To date there has been a marginal improvement but nothing significant and certainly worth checking. The key issue here is to gain clarity for the public's benefit – it is quite difficult to understand Southern Water's terminology. CB has briefly had sight of their proposed new consultation document which looked to be heading in the right direction, but it does not seem to have progressed since then. We need to make it clear to Southern Water that we want to know when they are making changes so we can share these with our Members – perhaps inviting them to tell us at the meeting what they think they have changed and what they are doing differently since those changes were implemented. We can then part with our list of questions.

2. Working Group membership

Size of this working group – SK asked whether anyone had any objections to inviting more people from Hampshire to this Group. Everyone was in favour and of the view it would clearly be beneficial to try those who are willing and have the capacity/resource to help. Ultimately it would be good to get a range of experiences/views.

Action: SK to reach out to his contacts in Hampshire. CB agreed to reach out to other authorities in East Sussex to balance off the East/West split. SK to also provide CB with details of his Kent contacts, in a further attempt to entice someone from Kent into this Group.

3. Communication – shared PR?

CB asked whether we need to find a way to do more on the PR side to promote the workings of both Groups. He suggested it would be good to have a prepared piece

of PR before each meeting, so everyone is sighted to the same press story and we can then all put this shared, collective statement to each respective PR team for publishing.

Perhaps this could include a common piece of text for people to use as/when (eg standard notes to editors to explain the membership of the group etc)? FS added that her PR team would be happy to help out in this regard.

ACTION: CB thanked FS for the offer and agreed to liaise with Wealden's comms team, with a view to the 2 PR teams possibly working together going forward.