Southern Water Local Authority Stakeholder Group

16:00 on Monday 19 October 2026
via MS Teams

Minutes

1. Introduction from the Chair of the Southern Water Stakeholder Group - Cllr Rachel Millward (Wealden District Council)

Cllr Rachel Millward opened the meeting and thanked Lawrence Gosden and his Southern Water team for attending today. She noted that there were several apologies to today's meeting, largely due to the shorter notice associated with the revised date.

2. Actions from last meeting (Southern Water)

Aaron Kidd ("AK") outlined Southern Water's actions from the previous meeting and how they would be addressed during this meeting:

- **Tidal modelling update** – AK introduced Anne Saunders from Southern Water, who will be presenting Southern Water's work on tidal modelling.
- **Communication of more localised information** – County-level information was due to be included in the September stakeholder newsletters, which were expected to be issued imminently, following publication of the customer newsletters. AK acknowledged that earlier publication had been intended. The action to provide clearer, more localised information was expected to be addressed during Stephen Pattenden's presentation today.
- **NAV companies** – Gareth Barker had been asked to make enquiries with a NAV company on behalf of Cllr Sue Wallsgrove. Gareth is on leave and unable to attend today's meeting with an update. AK advised that the action was believed to have been completed, subject to confirmation with Gareth on his return. Cllr Wallsgrove asked whether general information on NAV agreements was available, noting that these appear to feature in every planning application coming forward and that several estates/developments were experiencing problems. AK agreed to check directly with Gareth on his return in a few days and report back to the Group.
- **Discharge information for Folkestone & Hythe** – Archie MacLeod, Head of Public Affairs, who had attended the previous meeting, is unable to attend today. His action was to provide Cllr Jim Martin with a full response on the frequency and duration of discharges from the long sea outfall at Folkestone & Hythe. AK agreed to follow up directly with Cllr Martin after the meeting.
- **Water and wastewater growth schemes within the Havant district** – Stephen Pattenden ("SP") agreed to provide Cllr Grainne Rason with details of water and wastewater growth schemes within her district. AK understood that SP is progressing the action and expected the response to be finalised after the meeting.

Lawrence Gosden ("LG") was then welcomed to present to the Group, with Q&As to follow.

LG began by apologising for missing the previous July meeting due to illness and confirmed his willingness to attend further meetings to help address the Group's questions. He explained that the purpose of his presentation today, is to cover Southern Water's progress, current priorities and future direction.

LG reported that he is entering his fifth year at the helm of Southern Water and emphasised that turning around a major infrastructure company required sustained investment and time.

His initial priority had been to strengthen the company's finances by securing new shareholders and equity investment. He described the company's experience with Macquarie positively. He reported an initial investment of £1bn, with a further subsequent £500m for the turnaround plan and additional monies making the total equity investment standing at £2.8bn. LG described this as the largest equity injection into a water company since privatisation. He confirmed no dividends had been paid since 2017, and none were anticipated before 2030, when improved performance was expected to enable a modest return to shareholders.

His second priority was to improve operational performance, which remains a work in progress. Referring to regulatory assessments for 2025/26, he reported that Southern Water has improved from the bottom of industry rankings for flooding, pollution and supply interruptions and the company now leads the industry in reducing flooding and leakage and is in the upper quartile for performance. Following significant supply interruptions such as in Hastings, Winchester, Southampton and the New Forest, average interruption time has fallen from two hours per customer in 2024 to less than five minutes per customer in the latest year. LG explained that stronger finances have enabled investment in the capital programme and that operational improvements are following. Pollution reduction remains his principal priority. He reported a reduction of approximately 40%, while acknowledging the company's poor starting position and the need for a further reduction of a similar scale over the next 18 months to 2 years. The company's published Pollution Incident Reduction Plan sets out the technical measures, including investment in plants and equipment. Approximately £200m has already been invested in pumping stations and infrastructure to reduce failures and environmental pollution. Southern Water is also using AI technology and sewer sensors to identify blockages, including those caused by wet wipes and domestic cooking fats, before they result in flooding or pollution. LG reported that industry lobbying has contributed to Government legislation being passed the previous year to ban plastic-containing wet wipes, with a further 4 to 5 months anticipated before the retail ban takes effect. He identified wet wipes as the largest cause of pollution on the network.

Alongside restoring operational performance, Southern Water needs to change how its water and wastewater systems operate. Preventing infrastructure failures and pollution is a core responsibility, while reducing storm overflows requires changes to how rainwater enters the sewer network. Separating surface water from sewers is a major

investment priority over the next 10 years, with the first 5-year programme being focused on reducing storm overflows. He expressed a preference for eliminating spills but said that Government support did not extend to that ambition. LG reported an agreed target of fewer than 10 spills per year on average, which would mean rivers and beaches would be free from spills for more than 99% of the time. A further priority is nutrient reduction through new and improved wastewater treatment equipment to remove phosphates and nitrates, with hundreds of installations planned across the region over the next few years. Southern Water is also developing new water sources, particularly in the west of its region (LG referenced the hosepipe restrictions had applied in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, but not in Sussex or Kent). New sources equivalent to nearly 40% of current water production are being planned over the next 5 to 10 years, with completion in 2034. LG referred to favourable conditions in the Portsmouth area and explained that water recycling technology would be used to supplement reservoir supplies, while acknowledging the sensitivity of the subject. LG described these investments as preparation for the effects of climate change.

LG acknowledged that customer service requires substantial improvement and is becoming a greater focus. A particular priority is supporting customers struggling with increased water bills. LG stated that bills had fallen over the previous 10 to 15 years when continued investment should have been enabled during that period. He said that bill increases were now necessary to fund improvements. He linked this investment to customers' expectations for cleaner seas and rivers and secure water supplies. Southern Water offers a 45% discount for customers on low incomes, with the number supported increasing from 100,000 to approximately 200,000 over the last 4 year period. A hardship fund is also available. A major customer service improvement programme is planned over the next 18 months, covering telephone enquiries, explanations of bills, assistance with leaks on customers' properties and faster, easier access to information. LG identified customer service as the company's next major area for development.

Turning to water resources, LG explained that the summer had demonstrated the effects of climate change and suggested that flooding could follow within the next two months due to changes in season. He described alternating dry and wet conditions as a recurring pattern requiring more resilient infrastructure. LG explained that most water supplies in Kent and Sussex came from aquifers, which can provide resilience during hot summers if replenished by sufficient winter rainfall. Insufficient winter rainfall presents a risk to replenishment. Southern Water is making applications to the Environment Agency and Defra concerning reservoir replenishment and groundwater preservation and are considering drought-related projects over the winter to strengthen preparedness.

Cllr Rachel Millward and Chris Bending interjected the meeting by acknowledging the information, but clarified that this Group's specific focus is on foul water.

Questions from the Group were as follows:-

Cllr Jim Martin, Folkestone & Hythe District Council *thanked LG for speaking to the Group today. He questioned the rationale of investors investing billions in Southern Water when they are not expected to receive a return until at least 2030, expressing concern that customers would ultimately bear the cost. Referring to the target of 10 spills per year on average, he reported that Hythe alone had experienced 23 spills since 1st September 2026, totalling more than 30 hours. He asked whether the average would be calculated across all outlets in the county, noting that most local outlets in his district exceed 10 spills, while a small number do not discharge at all. He welcomed the increased investment of £47 million in his district for 2025–2030 but considered it insufficient to address the scale of the issues. He requested clarification on the calculation of spill averages and how local spills would be managed.*

LG confirmed that each overflow is assessed individually based on a 2-3 year average period (to allow for variations in weather). He acknowledged that the method was imperfect but said it was the only measure currently available.

Cllr Emily O'Brien, Lewes District Council *referred to an approach by River Truth to at least one local parish council in her district, offering a subscription service of £15 per month. The service was described as combining official storm overflow data, water quality and river level records hourly, highlighting discrepancies in the data and providing a local PDF report for parish council meetings. She acknowledged the value of this information but questioned whether parish councils should have to pay for it. She asked whether Southern Water could provide a similar, more detailed local breakdown free of charge?*

LG replied that Southern Water's publicly available database provides up-to-the-minute spill information for individual overflows. **Action**: LG offered to discuss with his IT team, whether automated PDF reports comparing rainfall and overflow activity could be produced for individual parish council areas, potentially using the Lewes parish councils as an initial trial. In the meantime, Cllr O'Brien agreed to forward the original email received by the Parish Council to inform this discussion.

Cllr Rachel Millward, Wealden District Council *highlighted local Citizen Science projects where they are testing water and sharing their findings of high pollution levels with Southern Water. She asked about their value to Southern Water?*

LG welcomed this work, particularly where community findings were combined with Southern Water's data to identify pollution sources more quickly, most notably in bathing waters. Financial support is available on a targeted basis to these projects, subject to the provision of actionable data. Short-term collaboration could also be offered where water quality is excellent but communities have concerns. However he emphasised the need to target funding carefully alongside infrastructure investment.

Cllr Sue Wallsgrove, Arun District Council *asked whether water recycling removed pathogens, such as Cryptosporidium, Campylobacter and E. coli?*

LG stated that it did, explaining that the process also removes minerals, which are subsequently restored to achieve the taste of tap water.

Cllr Wallsgrove also asked whether it removed forever chemicals.

Action: LG was unable to confirm this and agreed to consult his technical teams and report back.

Cllr James Murray, Eastbourne Council *welcomed improvements in Eastbourne and Southern Water's support in establishing a Citizen Science group, with 12 volunteers awaiting training. He raised concerns about sewage discharges during dry weather, including a 51-day period without rainfall, and asked whether the anticipated payment of dividends in 2030 depended on achieving wastewater performance targets?*

LG confirmed that dividends were entirely performance-dependent and would not be paid, even beyond 2030, unless the required standards were met. He added that shareholders' expectations focused on the service improvements sought by customers and the Group.

Cllr Natasha Davie – Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change at West Sussex County Council and also representing Worthing Borough Council *– are the performance metrics governing shareholder dividends, publicly available?*

Action: LG believed they were on Southern Water's website, but agreed to share them with the Group, confirming that they are aligned with the business plan submitted to Ofwat.

Cllr Davie also raised a delay of over a year in funding promised to a local Citizen Science swimming group. Is this a normal waiting time for funding?

LG advised this was not a normal timescale and suggested a possible communication breakdown. **Action**: Cllr Davie to send LG the group's details so he could investigate and help resolve the delay.

Cllr Davie also asked whether Southern Water would publish its year-round bathing water testing data, to enable residents make informed decisions about entering the water, noting that routine testing covered May to September despite year-round swimming locally. She also expressed a willingness to work jointly to reduce surface water ingress and storm overflows.

LG confirmed he supported year-round testing and was willing to publish the data, subject to discussion about its presentation and use. Given public trust concerns, he suggested presenting Southern Water's data alongside Citizen Science findings, with local authority involvement and joint branding.

Getachew Mamo, Hastings Borough Council *– asked about funding and delivery timescales for removing surface water from combined sewers through SuDS and separate surface water sewers to reduce spills, pollution and flood risk.*

LG outlined surface water separation work planned through to 2030 in areas linked to shellfish, environmental designations and bathing water quality, including work underway in Portsmouth and forthcoming in Brighton. Regional project details and schedules are available on Southern Water's website.

Action: LG invited members to review the published plans and suggested requesting individual meetings with Southern Water to discuss work in their respective areas if required.

Cllr Grainne Rason, Havant Borough Council *asked whether Southern Water was lobbying for year-round monitoring of both bathing and non-bathing waters, given the year-round recreational use.*

Action: LG agreed to share the information he had with the Group and confirmed they are lobbying through Water UK. He identified the Environment Agency funding as the main barrier and reiterated Southern Water's intention to publish its own equivalent monitoring data, potentially in partnership with local authorities.

Cllr Rason asked whether water companies should lead on surface water reduction, emphasising the need for coordinated action.

LG confirmed that Southern Water was taking a coordinating role, surveying drainage and bringing together householders, businesses and local authorities to implement measures. He stressed that joint working was essential to avoid relocating problems and described disconnecting surface water from sewers as a more sustainable long-term approach than expanding concrete storage tanks, whilst acknowledging there is some risk in this approach.

Cllr Rason asked about investment in education to encourage behavioural change?

LG identified smart meters as the largest planned investment over the next 2 and a half years, with a meter intended for every household across the region to provide up-to-date usage information. This would be accompanied by a major water efficiency campaign, with activity increasing over the next 2 years.

Cllr Emily O'Brien, Lewes District Council *highlighted a Brighton-based Citizen Science group whose Southern Water-funded equipment was shared with volunteers in Seaford and Newhaven. She reported difficulties extending the initiative to East Worthing and noted that the Council had contributed £1,000 each to equipment sharing and river testing. She asked Southern Water to consider an open grant application scheme for Citizen Science groups, describing the existing process as ad hoc and complex, with councillor and MP intervention required to secure support. She suggested that small grants could offer mutual benefits. She also expressed confidence*

in Southern Water's data and praised the Rivers and Seas website for its reliability and public engagement.

Action: LG agreed to take this on board look into this idea further with his team.

Cllr Paul Clarke, Horsham District Council and Chair of Overview & Scrutiny *– raised concerns about surface water entering sewers and combined sewer overflow (CSO) incidents at Pulborough's wastewater treatment works, particularly in winter. He questioned the coastal focus of bathing water measures, highlighting recreational use within his District of the River Arun around its confluence with the Western Rother and the impact of upstream discharges. With major developments under consideration across Horsham, he requested clear information for councillors on measures to reduce existing CSO incidents and prevent additional discharges and deterioration in water quality arising from new development.*

Councillor Philip Sparrow, Gosport Borough Council *– reported that, by late September 2026, the Gosport constituency had recorded 1,260 hours of sewage overflows from 35 active CSO devices. He highlighted residents' anger over continuing discharges, most recently around the Hill Head area, and asked whether major investment was planned to reduce them. He noted that bills had approximately doubled, while residents perceived no improvement in sewage spillages.*

Action: Given the meeting's time constraints, it was suggested that Southern Water respond individually and offline, to the issues raised by Cllrs Paul Clarke and Philip Sparrow. Stephen Pattenden shared a link to their Clean Rivers and Seas Plan - Rivers and Seas Watch. LG advised that the company was soon to be launching a Sustainable Housing Policy and would seek the Group's support on that.

3. Bio-beads – Eastbourne incident: live update and lessons learned (Nurdle & Southern Water)

Joshua Beech, founder of Nurdle, outlined the Camber Sands remediation programme. Excavation resumed after the busy summer period, due to operating heavy machinery alongside up to 30,000 daily visitors presenting significant health and safety risks. The works, described as one of the most comprehensive microplastic remediation projects undertaken globally, use specialist equipment and recovery techniques developed by Nurdle. The programme will run until Spring 2027, targeting buried biobead deposits at depths of approximately 200–400mm. Excavation and screening are supported by quad bike-towed vacuum machines deployed during Spring tides and storms, when larger quantities of biobeads are exposed. Around 85kg of biobeads were recovered during the most recent Spring tide, with the screening operation targeting an average of 10kg per day. Following completion of the main excavation works, activity will move to a longer-term reactive recovery programme. To date, approximately 1,740kg of biobeads and more than one tonne of other plastics have been removed from Camber Sands.

Anne Saunders then presented Southern Water's modelling for preparing the works for Camber Sands, which was based on the Eastbourne biobead release. She explained

that this calibrated, validated and externally audited hydrodynamic water-quality model, had used field data, estimated release timings and volumes, tidal conditions and wind data from nearby Lydd Airport. The modelling confirmed that most beads would strand at Camber Sands, arriving when first observed, with smaller quantities temporarily stranding elsewhere before being remobilised by subsequent tides. She highlighted key differences between beads and wastewater bacteria: beads remain near the surface, are strongly influenced by wind, do not decay in the short term and may take days or weeks to resuspend, particularly if buried; whereas bacteria disperse through the water column and generally decay within hours, depending on season, light and type. This explained why the bead release affected a wider area and persisted longer than a wastewater discharge.

4. Southern Water infrastructure upgrades – detailed timelines for our areas

Stephen Pattenden ("SP"), Head of Wastewater Asset Strategy and Planning at Southern Water, presented the recently published Isle of Wight Infrastructure Investment Plan, as an example of the localised information that could be prepared for other areas. Members were invited to comment, either during the meeting or via Southern Water's engagement email address (stakeholderteam@Southernwater.co.uk), on whether this format would meet their needs.

The plan provides a simplified overview of the wastewater network, current performance and risks, and planned operational and enhancement investment. It uses maps and timelines to show current activity and anticipated investment to 2030 and 2035, including asset resilience and responses to identified risks, subject to regulatory approval. Southern Water intends to develop similar plans across its operating area, informed by the Group's feedback.

Chris Bending, Wealden District Council *welcomed SP's presentation but, referring back to repeated discussions in previous meetings, requested greater detail on the specific locations and delivery timescales for planned investment, including works scheduled for the current and following year. He noted that this Group required more detailed technical information than a public-facing summary to support scrutiny and accountability. CB also requested clearer information on infrastructure upgrades arising from planned development and housing growth, to reassure this Group (and ultimately the general public) how Southern Water would address future pressures without worsening existing network performance.*

SP summarised CB's request as site-by-site, year-by-year information on network capacity, planned investment and the impact of growth, rather than five-year summaries? He advised that Southern Water was working with the Environment Agency and Water UK to improve how growth pressures and environmental impacts were communicated.

LG agreed that Southern Water should explore a clear area-based plan showing where capacity was available or constrained, planned improvements, known development

locations and any resulting need to bring schemes forward. **Action**: LG and SP agreed to discuss how this could be developed and will report back to this Group.

Cllr Emily O'Brien, Lewes District Council *welcomed the county-level plan and its timelines, noting that it clearly identified where further engagement with local authorities was required. She asked whether longer-term investment plans would address short coastal outfalls, citing the Seaford outfall adjacent to the bathing beach, or whether schemes were prioritised solely by spill frequency.*

SP advised that the Seaford outfall was not currently included in the investment programme, which prioritised poorer-performing outfalls against the target of fewer than ten spills per year. He confirmed that other grounds for investment and more ambitious targets could be considered through the next price review, informed by stakeholder feedback.

Cllr Natasha Davie, West Sussex County Council *expressed an interest in developing a county-level plan for West Sussex and asked how and when the Council could contribute.*

SP advised that engagement was beginning through the optioneering stage of Southern Water's statutory Drainage and Wastewater Management Plan ("DWMP"). Relevant local authority officers, including those working in planning, strategic drainage and highways, would be invited to provide evidence on performance concerns and potential solutions.

Action: *Cllr Davie requested advance notice of West Sussex's engagement to enable interested parties to contribute. She also asked about Macquarie's investment rationale given that no dividends were expected before 2030.*

LG explained that the return was based on capital growth in the value of the company, rather than dividend yield.

Cllr Sue Wallsgrove, Arun District Council *thanked Southern Water for its work to reduce flooding and surface water ingress at Barnham and asked whether real-time control, as used with Wealden District Council, could support major developments in Arun?*

SP confirmed that this could be explored as a mitigation measure for development pressures and hydraulic overload, while cautioning that it was one of several available tools, but it carries risks and was not widely deployed at the scale required. Southern Water is currently testing applications of the technology. CB added that he would be happy to talk to Karl Taylor at Arun District Council to share Wealden's learning from a local authority point of view, if that would help. ***Action:*** *LG and SP to explore what they could do for Arun District Council and discuss with Cllr Wallsgrove offline.*

On behalf of Cllr Millward, who needed to leave the meeting slightly early due to another existing appointment, Chris Bending thanked Southern Water for attending

today and responding to members' questions. He confirmed that the recording had been made solely to support preparation of the minutes and would be deleted once these have been finalised and circulated. The minutes will also be published on the Group's dedicated website - Southern Water Stakeholder Group - Wealden District Council.

LG agreed that Southern Water's presentation slides could be published alongside the minutes. **Action**: Southern Water to forward to Kellie Eldridge their presentations for onward circulation/publication to the webpage.

Attendees (in organisation alphabetical order)

Name	Organisation
Cllr Sue Wallsgrove	Arun District Council
Anne Shattock	Basingstoke & Deane
Cllr Kate Tuck	Basingstoke & Deane
Andrew Frost	Chichester District Council
Cllr James Murray	Eastbourne Borough Council
Cllr Jim Martin	Folkestone & Hythe District Council
Cllr Philip Sparrow	Gosport Borough Council
Owen Devine	Gosport Borough Council
Getachew Mamo	Hastings Borough Council
Cllr Grainne Rason	Havant Borough Council
Cllr Paul Clarke	Horsham District Council
Adrian Smith	Horsham District Council
Neil Collins	Lewes & Eastbourne Councils
Cllr Emily O'Brien	Lewes District Council
Tom Gilbert	Maidstone Borough Council
Gabrielle Bussley	Medway District Council
James Smith	New Forest District Council
David Illsley	New Forest National Park Authority
Joshua Beech	Nurdle
Cllr Teresa Killeen	Rother District Council
Katharine Stuart	South Downs National Park
Lawrence Gosden	Southern Water
Aaron Kidd	Southern Water
Stehen Pattenden	Southern Water
Anne Saunders	Southern Water
Anne-Marie McDonald	Southern Water
Amanda Jacobs	Tandridge District Council
Cllr Dennis King	Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council
Chris Bending	Wealden District Council
Hayley Lloyd House	Wealden District Council
Nichola Watters	Wealden District Council
Cllr Rachel Millward (Chair)	Wealden District Council
Stacey Robins	Wealden District Council
Kellie Eldridge (Note taker)	Wealden District Council
Cllr Natasha Davie	West Sussex County Council

Apologies

Catherine Hutchins	Adur & Worthing District Council
Karl Roberts	Arun District Council
Cllr Theresa Fowler	Brighton & Hove City Council
Andy Hill	Brighton & Hove City Council
Cllr Tim Rowkins	Brighton & Hove City Council

Name	Organisation
Cllr Trevor Muten	Brighton & Hove City Council
Cllr Bill Brisbane	Chichester District Council
Cllr Jonathan Brown	Chichester District Council
Fiola Stevens	Chichester District Council
Andy Grandfield	Eastleigh Borough Council
Cllr Stephen Scoffham	Folkestone & Hythe District Council
Cllr Mark Etherington	Hastings Borough Council
Cameron Morley	Hastings Borough Council
Eleanor Evans	Hastings Borough Council
Cllr Elizabeth Lloyd	Havant Borough Council
David Fitzgerald	Havant Borough Council
David Hayward	Havant Borough Council
Cllr Jonathan Hulls	Havant Borough Council
Emma Parkes	Horsham District Council
Marc Dorfman	Lewes & Eastbourne Councils
Matthew Hitchen	Lewes & Eastbourne Councils
Nadeem Din	Lewes & Eastbourne Councils
Cllr Paul Keene	Lewes District Council
Cllr Michael Summersgill	Maidstone Borough Council
Cllr Clive English	Maidstone Borough Council
Cllr Simon Curry	Medway District Council
Dave Harris	Medway District Council
Dean Brunton	New Forest District Council
Holly Harrison	Rother District Council
Sam Stone	Rother District Council
Carlyn Kan	Sevenoaks District Council
Emma Henshall	Sevenoaks District Council
Sion McGeever	South Downs National Park
James Winkworth	South Downs National Park
Tim Slaney	South Downs National Park
George Eykyn	Southern Water
Claire Lipop	Southern Water
Gareth Barker	Southern Water
Adam Bennett	Tandridge District Council
Cllr Catherine Sayer	Tandridge District Council
Cllr Chris Farr	Tandridge District Council
N Perrins	Tandridge District Council
Tom Jones	Tandridge District Council
Allison Parris	Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council
Ria Hotchin	Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council
Cllr Ian Tysh	Wealden District Council
Cllr Katie Thornton	West Sussex County Council
Cllr Vicki Wells	Worthing District Council