
OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL RECOMMENDATIONS TO CABINET – THANET BEACHES CONTAMINATION REVIEW

To: **Cabinet – 22 January 2013**

Main Portfolio Area: Operational Services

By: **Harvey Patterson, Corporate & Regulatory Service Manager**

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Ward: **Thanet Coastal Areas**

Summary: **The report sets out the recommendations from the Overview & Scrutiny Panel regarding the recent review of sewage spillage incidents that occurred on Thanet Beaches in early 2012.**

For Decision

1.0 Introduction and Background

- 1.1 At an extraordinary meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Panel on 17 July 2012, Members agreed to set up a Thanet Beaches Contamination Review Task & Finish Group to investigate the sewage spillage incidents that occurred in May 2012, which led to the closure of Thanet Beaches during the Jubilee Weekend.
- 1.2 The Task & Finish Group carried out its investigations as mandated by the Panel and reported back to the Panel at an Extraordinary meeting on 20 December 2012.

2.0 Overview & Scrutiny Panel Recommendations to Cabinet

- 2.1 A number of recommendations were agreed by the Members of the Panel. There were some recommendations directed only at Thanet District Council, the Environment Agency and Southern Water as individual agencies and some directed at all of these bodies collectively.
- 2.2 These recommendations are highlighted in the recommendations section of the Task & Finish Group report to the Panel, which is hereby attached as Annex 1 of this Cabinet report. Cabinet would therefore need to take a decision on which of these recommendations to endorse and communicate to the Environment Agency and Southern Water.
- 2.3 Cabinet may need to note that at the Panel meeting, Members considered but did not finalise the Environment Agency suggestion for rewording Recommendation 6.15 to read as follows:
- i) That Thanet District Council work with the Environment Agency, other coastal Local Authorities, and partner organisations, to produce, agree and exercise a plan for marine & beach incident management response. This plan will provide a consistent framework for warning and informing people, businesses and others, with each organisation having a clearly defined set of remits and responsibilities.

3.0 Options

3.1 Cabinet could adopt the all the recommendations from the Overview & Scrutiny Panel as reflected in Section 6.0 of the report.

Or

3.2 Cabinet could adopt the Overview & Scrutiny Panel recommendations with some amendments with reasons for such amendments back to the Panel.

4.0 Next Steps

4.1 If Cabinet agrees the recommendations, there will be a need for the Executive to communicate the Council position on the matter to the Environment Agency and Southern Water and engage these two agencies further if there is a need to do so.

5.0 Corporate Implications

5.1 Financial and VAT

5.1.1 If Cabinet approves the OSP recommendation relating to stocking and deployment of appropriate signage for future emergencies, then there may be financial implications for the adoption of such a recommendation.

5.1.2 An indicative figure of £2,500 would be required to be set aside for such expenditure. It should be noted that this allocation could be accessed from the contingency fund.

5.2 Legal

5.2.1 There are no legal implications arising directly from this report.

5.3 Corporate

5.3.1 This investigation was undertaken by a Sub-Group of the Panel in order to improve future approaches to emergency responses by Thanet District Council and its partner agencies to contamination of Thanet beaches.

5.4 Equity and Equalities

5.4.1 There are no equity and equality issues arising directly from this report.

6.0 Recommendation(s)

6.1 Cabinet is asked to agree the findings and subsequent recommendations of the Overview & Scrutiny Panel as detailed below:

A. RECOMMENDATIONS TO THANET DISTRICT COUNCIL, SOUTHERN WATER AND ENVIRONMENT AGENCY

6.1 Communication: - Thanet District Council, Southern Water and Environment Agency should meet quarterly to look at the emergency response arrangements and ensure that these arrangements are appropriate and up to date;

6.2 In the event of an emergency, with regards to the initial contact between Thanet District Council and Southern Water; there should be confirmation of any communication between the agencies; so that if a telephone message is left, the call should be returned and if an email is sent, it should be replied to;

- 6.3 There was a need to produce and adopt a Contingency Plan for the closure of Thanet Beaches which should be based on the best practice framework model for the South East Region to be developed by the Environment Agency;

B. RECOMMENDATIONS TO THANET DISTRICT COUNCIL

- 6.4 Compensation: - Cabinet be asked to lobby local MPs to amend the legislation that governs the water industry (particularly the sewer management sub-sector) so that in cases whereby flooding caused by the overwhelming of sewer systems it becomes the responsibility of water companies;
- 6.5 Thanet District Council should be responsible for signage and dissemination of information during emergencies;
- 6.6 Generic large signage boards (AO size) should be in store; ready to be deployed at strategic points of public access only to the beaches affected by the emergency event. The response to emergencies should be measured and appropriate and ensure that beaches not affected are not closed;
- 6.7 Social media (to include face book, twitter and local radio stations) should be used to alert the public about the contamination on the beaches;
- 6.8 After the beaches have been cleaned, signage should be put up to let visitors and the public know that the beaches are now clean and open. Appropriate signage, including social media should be used to advertise that the beaches have been cleaned and are safe;
- 6.9 Cabinet be asked to lobby local MPs to amend the legislation that governs the funding of the Environment Agency to enable them to carry out random sampling of bathing water on beaches during the off season (in winter);
- 6.10 Cabinet be asked to lobby Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) to provide extra funding for off-season sampling of bathing water on beaches.

C. RECOMMENDATIONS TO SOUTHERN WATER

- 6.11 The response time between alarm action and the physical presence of staff to an emergency site should be 20 minutes and Monitoring CCTV facility should be installed at strategic points at Foreness Point Pumping Station in order to enable early response to emergencies;
- 6.12 After a prolonged period of drought, there should be more frequent jet washing of the sewer system particularly along known pinch points;
- 6.13 Southern Water communication/compensation procedures should be more responsive and more sympathetic discretion should be used to compensate residents whose properties are affected by sewage flooding;
- 6.14 In the event of future emergencies, an ad hoc 'Incident Dedicated Contact Point' for customers should be set up;

D. RECOMMENDATIONS TO ENVIRONMENT AGENCY

- 6.15 Request the Environment Agency to consider carrying out random water sampling on beaches in winter due to the increase in winter sports during the off-season.
- 6.16 Request the Environment Agency to draft a best practice framework model for Contingency Plan for closure of beaches in emergencies.

7.0 Decision Making Process

- 7.1 The Overview & Scrutiny Panel can investigate matters that affect the well being of the residents in Thanet District and where appropriate, recommend to Executive for further action.

Contact Officer:	Charles Hungwe, Senior Democratic Services Officer, Ext 7186
Reporting to:	Glenn Back, Democratic Services & Scrutiny Manager, Ext 7187

Annex List

Annex 1	Thanet Beaches Contamination Review TFG Report to OSP – 20 December 2012
Annex 2	Thanet Beaches Contamination Review TFG – Terms of Reference

Background Papers

Title	Details of where to access copy
None	N/A

Corporate Consultation Undertaken

Finance	Sarah Martin, Financial Services Manager
Legal	N/A