

Surrey Heath Borough Council

Executive

19 March 2024

Report of the External Partnerships Select Committee

Strategic Director/Head of Service Gavin Ramtohal
Report Author: Eddie Scott
Wards Affected: N/A

Summary and purpose

To detail the recommendations of the External Partnerships Select Committee following its consideration an item in relation to odour pollution at Camberley Sewage Works at its meeting on 28 November 2023.

Recommendation

The Executive is advised to RESOLVE that a letter be written to OFWAT, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and Surrey Heath MP, highlighting the need for better regulation of water companies in relation to Air and Land Pollution, including the potential for additional enforcement powers for local authorities.

1. Background and Supporting Information

- 1.1 The above recommendation follows thorough consideration of an item in respect of severe odour pollution at Camberley Sewage Treatment Works by the External Partnerships Select Committee at its meeting 28 November 2023.
- 1.2 The Committee first considered a report, by the Strategic Director – Environment and Community, which gave background and outlined the series of events, following complaints of severe nuisance odours emanating from Camberley Sewage Treatment Plant during the summer of 2023.
- 1.3 Throughout the consideration of the item, the Committee scrutinised the response of Thames Water to the severe sludge event, how the situation had been allowed to develop, and the learnings which would hopefully result in such an event not taking place again.

2. Reasons for Recommendation

- 2.1 Following the Committee's questions and comments James Bentley, Operations Director for Thames Valley and the Home Counties, Thames

Water, acknowledged that mistakes had been made during the series of events, and apologised for not communicating with residents in the affected area, and Councillors and Officers sooner and for not implementing odour control measures quicker.

- 2.2 However, despite this, it was felt by Members that there was an overall lack of sympathy and ambivalence to the distress caused to Camberley residents by Thames Water, typified by the reluctance to commit to any form of financial compensation. However, it was acknowledged by the Committee that this was symptomatic of wider problems in respect of the regulation of water companies; and that the regulatory framework and associated sanctions failed to protect residents. As a result of this, the Committee agreed to recommend to the Executive for a letter to be written, to highlight the need for water companies to be tightly regulated in respect of air pollution and land pollution (in addition to existing regulatory provision in relation to pollution of the waterways and provision of consumer water supply). Moreover, the Committee recommends that Camberley be used as an example of where Thames Water had diverted the risk of fines for watercourse pollution, by mitigation activities which had in turn caused air pollution.

3. Proposal and Alternative Options

- 3.1 The Executive has the option to accept the recommendation from the Select Committee or to reject the Committee's recommendation to lobby for better regulation.

4. Section 151 Officer Comments:

There are no additional budgetary implications of this report.

5. Legal and Governance Issues

- 5.1 In accordance with section 9FE of the Local Government Act 2000, the Executive is required to consider this report and its recommendations and, within two months of the Executive Meeting at which they are received.

6. Monitoring Officer Comments:

- 6.1 No matters arising.

Annexes

None

Background Papers

None