

| | |
|--|--|
| Meeting: | Cabinet |
| Date: | 19 April 2007 |
| Subject: | Water management and drought planning |
| Key Decision: (Executive-side only) | No |
| Responsible Officer: | Andrew Trehern, Executive Director of Urban Living |
| Portfolio Holder: | Councillor Susan Hall, Portfolio Holder for Public Realm and Community Safety |
| Exempt: | No |
| Enclosures: | Appendix 1 – Scrutiny Challenge Panel Water management and drought planning Appendix 2 - Reference |

SECTION 1 – SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Members of Cabinet are asked to note and endorse the content of this report. With a copy to be forward to Three Valleys Water

REASON:

In accordance with Overview & Scrutiny rules, Cabinet must consider reports produced by the Committee, or one of its Sub-Committees.

SECTION 2 – REPORT

Overview

Harrow Council's approach to water management and drought planning needs to be developed within the wider context of the Climate Change Agenda. Whilst water shortages are likely to be an on-going issue, so is the likelihood of increased localised flooding due to weather changes. Reconciling changing climatic conditions and water conservation and use will be a challenge for us all.

The Council will continue to develop policies and guidance in the Local Development Framework (LDF) that reflect latest thinking in respect of water conservation and use in new development. Inevitably this involves thinking more holistically, for example not only will grey water recycling and sustainable urban drainage systems need to be developed, but such matters as the use of waste disposal units in new flat developments will need to be justified on sound evidence.

Whilst the Council can clearly have a major impact on new development, the most important changes will have to evolve through acceptance of the need for changing lifestyles - a longer term and on-going challenge that is critical for future water conservation and use.

The Planning Policy team has been in discussion with the Environment Agency (EA) about undertaking an in-house Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) that is proposed by Harrow Planning and Drainage Teams. This consultation is ongoing. This will formalise the Council's holistic approach to flood reduction and prevention in a holistic manner, through the collation of in-house data, data held by the EA and relevant data held by Thames Water. Flooding from leaks and drought prevention need to be looked into carefully. Water needs to be harvested.

The Planning team requires information on foul and surface water sewer flooding in Harrow and the TWUL (Thames Water Utilities Limited) service levels standards for expected flood return on both systems. The Council would like to engage in partnership with both the EA and Thames Water in undertaking this work as some flooding is caused due to lack of capacity and/or repeat blockages in surface and foul water public sewers.

It would be helpful if data/baseline on flooding and drought and water management were shared amongst colleagues to ensure that measures being implemented and suggested approaches/mitigation decisions are consistent at a corporate level. Joint working is essential in this area of work.

Three Valleys Water have presented a sensible sympathetic view to continuing to deliver a water supply to Harrow and are generally keen to work with Harrow Council and any other partners to keep business operating and cause least disruption to customers.

It is important to maintain the links with Three Valleys and be an active partner to assist with any publicity etc and to ensure that our concerns remain addressed in

the event of another drought. Certainly at the moment Harrow is in the fortunate position where the aquifer has been hydrated (Water table volumes increasing) and we should not be in the same condition as we were last year.

The scrutiny report recommendations have addressed the services key concerns and include closer partnership working with Three Valleys, to identify service areas which may be at risk as a result of drought orders and a coordinated PR strategy to push a consistent message to our residents.

Comments on recommendations found in the Scrutiny Report pages:

FINDINGS

ISSUE 1 - COMMUNICATIONS AND CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY

Finding 1: Communication generally

Recommendation A: We recommend that Three Valleys and Thames should consult the Council, and that the Council should consult the water companies, over strategic planning and development for the Borough, and particularly on the development of plans such as the Economic Development Strategy, on an ongoing rather than an ad-hoc basis.

This approach should be supported. Clearly the LDF is a key Strategy - Three Valleys Water and Thames Water are statutory consultees in this process. Consultation is on going.

Finding 2: Direct engagement with local people, the community and voluntary sectors

Recommendation B: We recommend that Three Valleys work with Harrow (and other Councils within its service area) to develop an information base for itself that will permit it to carry out a sustained conversation with local people through residents' and amenity groups.

This approach should be supported. It would be appropriate for Harrow Council to facilitate their conversation and consultation through our communications outlets i.e., website etc., and promote key issues on a joint basis. "Sustained conversation" should be maintained across a wide number of fronts in order to continue getting the message on water conservation and use across.

Finding 3: Corporate responsibility

Recommendation C: We recommend that the Council support water companies' lobbying for regulatory change in the water industry, but that in the meantime all parties should be vigilant of instances where competing priorities (within a particular organisation as well as between two separate ones) might create a conflict which could adversely impact upon water conservation measures.

This approach should be supported providing that Harrow Council is not tied into support of issues where we do not agree.

ISSUE 2 - LEAKAGE AND REPAIRS

Finding 4: Emergency work and risk planning

Recommendation D: We recommend that Three Valleys consult closer with the Council and local people, where possible, when emergency works are to be carried out.

This approach should be supported.

Finding 5: Planned work

Recommendation E: We recommend that Three Valleys should take account of the potential additional implications when developing their policy on leakage repairs, and that Three Valleys develop plans to reduce this level of loss. Additionally, we recommend that Government be lobbied to alter OFWATS rigid definition of “economic” levels of leakage.

This approach should be supported.

ISSUE 3 - USE AND WATER MANAGEMENT

Finding 6: Water meters

Recommendation F: We recommend that the Council robustly lobby the Government to allow Three Valleys to introduce compulsory water meters across the Borough, given the clear benefits they afford in terms of costs to consumers and water conservation.

This approach should be supported. Care will be needed on this issue as, although many people would benefit through accurate metering to reduce their bills, large and potentially economically deprived families could be detrimentally affected by larger bills. There is also a risk that people start to reduce water use with associated public health risks. The problem is to balance this problem with the effect it will have on reducing water use and making people repair leaks etc., in their systems.

Recommendation G: We recommend that such a scheme consider as paramount the interests of vulnerable users, and ensure that transactional and other costs (in particular those relating to non-payment of bills) do not under any circumstances fall to local authorities to absorb, but be dealt with on a National basis.

This approach should be supported. Care is required in relation to protecting vulnerable users.

Finding 7: Demand (consumer end)

Recommendation H: We recommend that the Council take a lead in taking measures to reuse water on its property. The use of rainwater harvesting in Parks is an example; the Council should look at how it uses water more generally and effect a cultural change in this use, to encourage local people and businesses to do the same, thus spreading the best practice.

This approach should be supported. Reuse of water will be a component of LDF planning policy guidance. However, resourcing of this investment will need to be given consideration over the longer term.

Finding 8: Demand (sewage)

Recommendation I: We recommend that the Council take steps to ensure Thames Water's public accountability by continued liaison over strategic plans for enhancing the sewer system, and that plans for improvement take account of concerns over storm water and groundwater contamination.

This approach should be supported.

Finding 9: Supply

Recommendation J: We recommend that supply solutions be sought as a secondary measure, as trying to increase supply in the face of increasing demand will ultimately prove unsustainable.

This approach should be supported. It is intended that a Corporate wide water conservation project will be initiated in the future.

Finding 10: Wildlife and the Environment

Recommendation K: We recommend that the Council's Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) officer work with Three Valleys, Thames, regional authorities and the Environment Agency, along with area teams, to identify any areas of services, which may be at risk as a result of the drought order, on an ongoing basis.

As some work is already in place with the partners mentioned in improving water and pond life, it would be prudent if they could consider mitigation/drought prevention in their works.

Risks:

1 - Operational examples include large road gully sweepers require water to damp down when sweeping, without water they cannot function, vehicle washing can be reduced but it is important that some vehicles such as dust carts are washed for sanitary reasons and fine turf areas need irrigation to maintain the grass playing surface, failure to water will lead to major disruption of sports and more seriously may lead to destruction of the sward with associated loss of income and cost of repair.

2 - Environmental impact of restrictions and coupled with reduced ground water conditions

3) Crude drought restrictions brought about by other Water Authorities last summer, which did not take account of real need of communities.

Potential costs:

At this time, financial commitment and cost risks are not available. The majority of recommendations will require Officer time and commitment without necessarily any other monetary investment. However the recommendations listed below may result in costs being incurred to realize maximum potential of the schemes:

Recommendation F – Compulsory water metering is supported, however it is unknown, at this time, if the water companies would continue with the current policy of free installation of water meters. If water companies bring in charges to install meters, it is unclear who would be responsible for that in relation to the councils housing stock and also the financial impact on large and potentially economically deprived families.

Recommendation G – As above. It is not know if compulsory metering would generate costs to Harrow Council and how non-payment of transactional costs would be governed.

Recommendations H – Rainwater harvesting is supported. However the costs involved are unknown at this time. The cost implications vary considerable from relatively simple water butts to complex subterranean storage facilities. Further investigation into the various different options would be required including cost benefit analysis.

SECTION 3 - STATUTORY OFFICER CLEARANCE

| | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|
| Chief Finance Officer | <input type="checkbox"/> | Name: Myfanwy Barrett |
| | | Date: Friday, 23 March, 2007 |
| Monitoring Officer | <input type="checkbox"/> | Name: Hugh Peart |
| | | Date: Friday, 23 March, 2007 |

SECTION 4 - CONTACT DETAILS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS

Contact: Ed Hammond, Scrutiny Officer 0208 420 92 05.
Ed.Hammond@harrow.gov.uk

Background Papers: Scrutiny Challenge Panel – Water Management and drought planning

IF APPROPRIATE, does the report include the following considerations?

| | | |
|----|-----------------------------------|-----|
| 1. | Consultation | YES |
| 2. | Corporate Priorities | YES |
| 3. | Manifesto Pledge Reference Number | C2 |