

### An extract of the minutes of the Scrutiny Board held on 6 September 2011

#### 11(ii) Discharges into Local Harbours

The Board considered a report by the Environment and Neighbourhood Quality Panel setting out the Panel's findings in connection with its scrutiny review of Discharges into Local Harbours.

The Board invited Councillor Collins, together with Jonathon Driver, to join the members of the Panel to take questions in connection with the report.

The Chairman provided a brief introduction to the report, by way of background information. He reported that on the rare occasions where storm-surge conditions had led to discharges into the Harbour from the Budds Farm plant, these discharges had been "screened", whereas discharges into the Solent from the Fort Cumberland plant at Eastney under similar circumstances were "unscreened" due to the failure of the screens at the plant.

Key issues raised during the course of the debate arising from the Panel's report and recommendations included:

- Replacement of the screens at the Fort Cumberland plant:

Councillor Lenaghan advised that, in order to provide a long-lasting and fit-for-purpose solution to the problem, the screens and pumps needed to be completely redesigned so as to be totally effective within the conditions that prevailed at Fort Cumberland and that, whilst the design process was lengthy, Southern Water hoped to have the new screens in place within five years.

- Funding for the new screens:

Jonathon Driver reported that £10M funding for the replacement screens would be made available to Southern Water through OFWAT as part of the regulator's ongoing maintenance programme and it was anticipated that the work would commence before 2015. He suggested that it should be noted, however, that funding was not the only issue in that problems associated with the historic design of the Portsmouth sewerage system also needed to be overcome.

- Educating the public:

Councillor Lenaghan explained the impact of the disposal into the sewerage system by domestic users of fats and oils, which caused significant blockages. This was one of the most significant problems faced by the water company and Councillor Lenaghan

demonstrated the use of a simple “Fat Trap” that had been developed by Southern Water to encourage the safe disposal of fats and oils within domestic refuse.

In terms of illegal surface water connections into the sewerage system, Councillor Lenaghan explained that responsibility for monitoring this fell to Southern Water and not the Council. However, he gave an assurance that, in dealing with planning applications, the Council only very rarely authorised such connections in exceptional circumstances and when this would have minimal impact.

- Quality of bathing water and impact on users:

Jonathon Driver explained that, on the rare occasions where there had been screened discharges into the harbour from Budds Farm, any elevated levels of bacteria had been washed away within between 12 and 24 hours and that the impact on bathing water was therefore limited. Councillor Collins assured the Board that the Environmental Health team regularly took water samples and were able to take immediate action in the case of any contamination. The Board noted that local watersports groups employed a text alert system and that the officers worked together with these groups as far as possible to increase awareness.

Councillor Lenaghan reminded the Board, that whilst the water company was largely perceived to be responsible for water contamination, it should be borne in mind that other sources of pollution, such as waste from domestic pets, wild birds and farm animals, also had a significant impact.

At the conclusion of the debate, the Chairman commended the Panel on their report and thanked all those who had contributed to the discussion.

**(A) RECOMMENDED to the Cabinet that**

- (1) the Portfolio Holder be requested to write to Southern Water expressing the Council’s concern about unscreened discharges from Fort Cumberland and requesting the Company to provide details as to how quickly improvements can be effected;
- (2) the report be endorsed and progress of work to improve facilities at the Fort Cumberland works be monitored over the next four years;
- (3) the public be educated in using the correct disposal methods of all waste; through possible “Serving You” articles and potential joint PR with Southern Water;
- (4) the Building Control team ensure that rainwater is disposed of

correctly, through monitoring of improper connections.

**(B)** RESOLVED that

(1) All participants in the review be thanked for their co-operation.