SCRUTINY COMMISSION

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY, 11 OCTOBER 2023

Councillors Present: Carolyne Culver (Chairman), Dominic Boeck (Vice-Chairman), Paul Dick, Geoff Mayes, Erik Pattenden, Justin Pemberton, Christopher Read and Stuart Gourley (Substitute) (In place of Antony Amirtharaj)

Also Present: Councillor David Marsh, Councillor Clive Hooker, Councillor Matt Shakespeare, Councillor Howard Woollaston (representing Lambourn Valley Flood Forum) [remote], Richard Aylard (Thames Water), Nikki Hines (Thames Water), Karen Nelson (Thames Water), Dave Willis (Environment Agency), Pete Devery (River Action), Charlotte Hitchmough (Action for River Kennet), Martyn Wright (East Garston Flood and Pollution Forum), Keith Hoddinott (Thatcham Flood Forum), Kay Lacey (Pang Valley Flood Forum), Paula Saunderson (Newbury Flood Forum) [remote], Jon Winstanley (Service Director - Environment), Paul Bacchus (Principal Engineer - Drainage and Flood Risk), Gordon Oliver (Principal Policy Officer - Scrutiny & Dem Services) and Benjamin Ryan (Democratic Services Officer)

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Councillor Antony Amirtharaj, Councillor Ross Mackinnon and James Bentley

PART I

29. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

30. Thames Water and Environment Agency

Councillor Carolyne Culver introduced the item on Thames Water and the Environment Agency (Agenda Item 3).

Richard Aylard CVO (Sustainability Director) and Karen Nelson (Network Operations Manager) gave a presentation on behalf of Thames Water, which was an updated version of the presentation circulated with the agenda. Key points from the presentation are summarised below:

- Thames Water had received many questions and offered pick these up separately if they were not answered in the meeting.
- Leadership changes at Thames Water were summarised.
- Thames Water's financial position was outlined:
    - £14bn of debt set against an asset base of £19bn.
    - 97% of debt was fixed in real terms so exposure to rising debt costs was limited.
    - The company had a strong liquidity position, with £3.6bn of cash and committed funding.
    - To support a turnaround plan, shareholders had provided £500m of new equity and committed a further £750m by 2025.
    - £2.5bn of additional equity support would be provided between 2025 and 2030.

  - This was in addition to significant overspending by Thames Water in both the previous and current periods.
  - Although spend was less than required, it was more than had been allowed for by the regulator when they set the bills for these periods. Around 25% of any overspend was charged to customers, and 75% to shareholders.
- The draft five-year plan for 2025-2030 was explained:
  - A record level of investment of £18bn was proposed (a 40% increase). This was considered to be the maximum that would be both affordable for customers and deliverable by Thames Water.
  - £6.6bn was proposed for environmental improvements, of which £885m was for reducing storm overflows.
  - It was noted that the plan was subject to change following discussions with regulators – it was expected that the plan would be finalised in a year's time.
- Targets for improving environmental performance by 2030 included:
  - 22% reduction in leakage.
  - 30% reduction in pollution incidents.
  - 28% reduction in storm overflows.
  - 15% reduction in sewer blockages.
  - Generating 295GWh from renewable sources.
- Implications for household water bills were summarised:
  - For every £1 of customer's bills, 48p would fund infrastructure improvements and 20p would fund operational costs.
  - A document was available on the Thames Water website which provided further detail.
- In relation to storm discharges:
  - Thames Water had been the first water company to set targets for reducing discharges - 50% reduction in total duration and 80% reduction in sensitive catchments. Reducing total duration was felt to be better than reducing the number of discharges, but central government had since set a target of 10 overflows per year on average by 2050. Thames Water had reworked its targets on this basis. A 24% reduction was proposed for 2030. Figures would be averaged across 10 years. Last year, the 2030 target was achieved because it was a very dry year.
  - In relation to dry discharges, it was noted that there was no standard definition of what constituted a 'dry day'.
  - If a sewage works was discharging, it was because it was receiving more flow than it could treat. This could be due to rainfall or groundwater infiltration. Any discharges due to prolonged groundwater infiltration would be very dilute.
  - There were plans to expand sewage treatment works at Bucklebury and Chapel Row. Foam observed in local streams, may have been due to detergent (white foam) or excess nutrients (brown / off-white foam). Nutrients could be naturally occurring or from treated or untreated sewage discharges. Each case needed to be reviewed to determine the cause.
- The sewage treatment process was described:

  - Unwanted items were screened out at the inlet and taken to landfill, with grit from road run-off also removed.
  - Sewage was passed to a primary settlement tank – resulting sludge was taken away and used for renewable energy.
  - Sewage was then passed to filter beds to remove ammonia and increase oxygen levels.
  - A humus tank was then used to remove remaining fine particles before being passed for tertiary treatment using a mechanical filter.
  - Clean effluent could then be discharged to the watercourse.
  - Effluent was routinely tested for key pollutants, but not for bacteria unless there were designated bathing water sites downstream.
  - Excess sewage arriving at a treatment works would automatically overflow to storm tanks and would be held there until there was spare capacity available.
  - Once storm tanks were full and if flows still exceeded capacity, then there was no option but to discharge to watercourses. Effluent would be screened and solids removed, but it would not have been subject to biological treatment.
  - Thames Water did not consider it acceptable to discharge untreated sewage to watercourses and was working to prevent this entirely.
- Reasons for increased flows in sewers included:
  - Infiltrations – these difficult to find due to the size of the network and the narrow window in which they could be detected.
  - Misconnections – surface water drains were sometimes connected to foul sewers by mistake or to save money.
  - Inundation – surface water entering through manhole covers.
  - Physical damage to sewers
  - Unauthorised connections
- Finding and fixing infiltration:
  - Lessons had been learned from 2012/13 which had been wet years, and the team had been restructured in 2019.
  - There was a small window in which to find infiltration – water levels in sewers were monitored closely and cameras were deployed.
  - Balloon stoppers could be used to hold back flows and facilitate investigations, with tankers used to manage upstream flows.
  - Flows were managed through the winter months to minimise discharges to the environment.
  - Groundwater levels were monitored to help predict when problems would occur.
  - Thames Valley had 243 catchments - each of these behaved differently.
  - In Lambourn, groundwater usually peaked in January, but there had been a second peak in March this year.
  - The window for carrying out repairs was May to October.
  - Repairs at one location could cause additional leaks to form elsewhere.

  - Private pumping to sewers by property owners was a problem and could lead to downstream flooding.
- Four options to reduce discharges of untreated sewage:
  - Direct surface water away from sewers.
  - Stop infiltration by lining sewers and sealing manholes.
  - Increase capacity at sewage works – this would be inefficient for most of the year.
  - Build more storm tanks – suitable for short-term rainfall events not long-term infiltration.
- Interactive map:
  - Showed live information about discharges from treatment works.
  - Good feedback received.
  - Thames Water hoped to add cumulative records for the year to date and records for the previous week.
- Schemes being delivered in West Berkshire:
  - Kintbury - £2m upgrade to treatment works.
  - East Shefford - £10 million scheme to tackle phosphorous reduction and improve flow.
  - Hungerford - £5 million works to improve ability to treat flow and increase storm capacity.
  - Approved schemes at Aldermaston, Beenham, Bucklebury, Chapel Row, Chieveley, Hampstead Norreys, Newbury and Pangbourne, with additional information on the Thames Water website.
- Future plans:
  - Drainage and Wastewater Management Plan developed for 25 year period.
  - Co-created with local authorities and other stakeholders.
  - Broken down into 5 year business plans.
  - Aimed to reduce sewage spills to an average of 24 per year by 2025 and an average of 17 per year by 2030.
- Groundwater:
  - Catchments to the north and west had a chalk bedrock geology where groundwater infiltration was widespread.
  - The Enborne and lower reaches of the Kennet had a clay bedrock geology where infiltration was more localised.
  - Groundwater conditions in Hampstead Norreys over the last three years were discussed. There was a long delay between rainfall and groundwater rising. Works were carried out in the autumn when levels were lowest.
- Schemes being delivered:
  - Hampstead Norreys, Stanford Dingley, Aldermaston, Compton and East Garston – mostly sealing / lining of sewers and sealing of manhole covers.
  - Also, some operational improvements.

- River Pang:
    - Environment Agency (EA) assessed water quality against a wide range of indicators including fish, invertebrates and ammonia levels. The overall assessment for the river was determined by the worst single indicator.
    - The River Pang had been rated as 'poor' for 2022 because fish stocks were poor when sampled in that year. 2022 had been a hot, dry year and it was suggested that fish had moved about.
    - Significant sewage spills would have affected invertebrates and ammonia levels, but these were rated as 'good'.
    - Major improvements were being carried out at Hampstead Norreys to reduce infiltration and improve the sewage treatment works, which should greatly reduce discharges.
    - A photo had been taken of the River Pang in Pangbourne on 21 September, which showed discoloured water. It was confirmed that there had been no relevant discharges from Hampstead Norreys and it was suggested that the discolouration was due to silt from run-off. Thames Water has since apologised to the Committee for failing to check for discharges from other sewage treatment works. There were untreated discharges from Bucklebury, Chapel Row and Beenham sewage treatment works on that date.
- Planning and development:
    - The Water Industry had lobbied Defra about implementation of Schedule 3 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010, which had still not been enacted. However, Defra was now consulting on this, and a decision was expected in 2024.
    - It was confirmed that the Bockhampton rising main could cope with 150 additional houses. It had previously burst due to corrosion from Hydrogen Sulphide, but the issue had been addressed during the repair.
    - Addressing issues related to developments adjacent to the Vodafone site in Newbury was reliant upon implementation of Section 42 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010, which Defra had said would be considered after Section 3.
- Reporting pollution:
    - Residents were encouraged to report live pollution incidents via the online tool:

      https://www.thameswater.co.uk/help/report-a-problem#/view-and-report-problems
    - A crew could usually attend within 2 hours, day or night.
    - Reports after the incidents had occurred were much less helpful.
- Defects in Pipes:
    - It was explained that sewers had not been designed to be watertight. Leaks were generally not down to a lack of maintenance, but groundwater conditions were different now compared to when the pipes had been built. In groundwater impacted areas sewers were serviceable between April and November. Thames Water had made good progress in tackling issues, but there was still a long way to go.

Dave Willis (Area Environment Manager – Thames Area) gave a presentation on behalf of the Environment Agency. Key points from the presentation were as follows:

- The EA's role in relation to protecting and improving river quality was shaped by the government's Integrated Plan for Clean and Plentiful Water and the Thames River Basin Management Plan. These set out the current status of the water environment and set objectives and priority actions.
- West Berkshire had important chalk streams, including the Kennet and Pang Catchments, which were internationally rare. The National Chalk Stream Restoration Strategy also guided the work of the EA and other organisations. Only 17% of chalk streams in England met 'good' ecological status. The ecological health of our rivers was not where it needed to be, and much work was needed to meet the government's 25 year plan target of 75% of rivers achieving good ecological status.
- Pressures on the water environment were diverse and complex. An integrated approach was needed, and catchment based partnerships were key to tackling the challenge.
- Most rivers in West Berkshire did not achieve 'good' ecological status with key pressures being wastewater and rural diffuse pollution, physical habitat modifications, and changes to natural flows and levels.
- Key activities for the EA included:
    - Responding to serious environmental incidents
    - Environmental monitoring
    - Strategic planning for water quality and resources
    - Environmental permits and associated compliance / enforcement
    - Physical habitat restoration
    - Partnership working, particularly with catchment hosts
- Environmental monitoring programmes included river and groundwater quality / quantity, and river ecology.
- Programmes covered three categories:
    - Proactive national programmes to provide consistent information across England
    - Reactive local monitoring in relation to serious environmental incidents
    - Proactive local monitoring in relation to targeted investigations

  Results from the national programmes were published via River Basin Management Plans and the Catchment Data Explorer website.
- EA actions related to water quality pressures included:
    - Serious environmental incident response
    - Regulation of Thames Water (planning, permitting and compliance)
    - Diffuse pollution action plans and farm regulation inspections
- Action related to water resource pressures included:
    - Serious incident response (e.g., 2022 drought response)
    - Regulation of Thames Water's resource activities

  - Investigations into potential over-abstraction
- Examples of actions in relation to physical habitat restoration included:
  - Collaborative projects to restore river habitats on the Rivers Kennet, Lambourn and Pang
  - River and wetland habitat restoration projects
  - Natural flood management projects
- The EA's role in regulating Thames Water was focused on ensuring that the water companies delivered their environmental responsibilities through:
  - Assessment and reporting of the companies' environmental performance
  - Providing guidance on / assessment of plans to protect and improve the environment
  - Determination of environmental permits and associated compliance assessment / enforcement
- In relation to assessment and reporting of environmental performance, the EA undertook annual performance assessments, which were published each summer and resulted in a one to four star rating. Thames Water received a two star rating in the 2022 assessment, showing that significant improvements in environmental performance were required. Performance on some aspects had declined and the EA had particular concerns about the total number of pollution incidents, the high number of serious pollution incidents and the delay to some key environmental improvement schemes.
- In relation to guidance and assessment of plans, the EA's role included provision of advice to government on a range of water company plans, as well as leading on the Water Industry National Environment Programme (WINEP). This was a key part of the five-yearly price reviews by Ofwat. WINEP set out a five-year investment programme of schemes to deliver environmental obligations. Water company plans also included Drainage and Wastewater Management Plans and Water Resources Management Plans. These were vital to set out the companies' plans to protect and improve the environment over the next 25 years.
- Thames Water had recently submitted their draft Business Plan for 2025-2030 to Ofwat, which included the WINEP. These were critical to delivering environmental improvements by 2030 and included implementation of the Storm Overflows Discharge Reduction Plan, in which chalk streams were designated as high priority sites. The EA would review Thames Water's plans to assess if environmental obligations had been included and would advise government and Ofwat on final plans due to be determined by December 2024.
- The EA's role included determining environmental permits as well as compliance assessment and enforcement. In relation to Thames Water, a wide range of compliance activities were undertaken, including data return assessments, site inspections and site audits. Enforcement action against Thames Water, included successful prosecutions at 17 sites since 2015, resulting in fines of £37 million.
- There were also a number of live EA investigations at national and local levels, including the largest ever criminal investigation into potential breaches of environmental permit conditions at over 2,000 sewage treatment works by all water companies. Initial investigations suggested widespread and serious non-compliance

with environmental permit conditions. The EA was undertaking further investigations on specific sites.

- There were investigations into the nature and extent of storm overflow discharges via assessment of water companies' monitoring data. All storm overflows must be monitored by December 2023.
- A Local investigation into the major pollution incident in Thatcham in 2020 was nearing completion.
- The EA was creating a larger and more specialised workforce using additional funding allocated in the recent spending review to focus further on water company regulation.
- In summary:
    - The ecological quality of rivers in West Berkshire was not where all parties wanted it to be.
    - Issues facing our catchments were varied and complex with no simple solution and considerable investigation, planning and investment was needed to resolve them.
    - Tackling issues in an integrated way was vital – all partners needed to step up to the challenge. The EA would continue to work actively with catchment partners to support this.
    - The EA would continue to hold water companies to account to drive improved environmental performance and investment in operations and assets.
    - The EA planned to increase water company compliance activities and would take appropriate enforcement action.
    - EA staff were committed and cared passionately about protecting and improving the water environment.
    - The EA would need to prioritise their actions and would not be able to fully meet all customer expectations on some issues (e.g., response to lower risk incidents and local environmental monitoring). These activities had been reduced due to reductions in government funding. The EA would continue to make the case for increased funding.

The Thames Water and Environment Agency representatives were questioned by the Scrutiny Commission Members. The responses are summarised below:

- Thames Water confirmed that foul water connections to surface water sewers were acknowledged as a concern, since untreated waste would be discharged to the environment. A specialist team looked for issues based on reports. Once the source had been traced, the property owner was asked to fix the issue. If enforcement was necessary, then that had to be through the local authority. This was more of an issue in London than in West Berkshire.
- Thames Water confirmed that interventions to prevent storm water overflows depended on the particular circumstances of the site. At Hampstead Norreys, works were focused on preventing infiltration, while at some sites, additional capacity may be required to keep up with demand from new housing, but for other sites increased storm tank capacity was needed. The EA was consulted on proposed interventions. Thames Water had inherited the sewage works in its area from local authorities – each one was different with no standard model.
- Thames Water confirmed that despite extensive investigations the source of problems at Brimpton remained unclear. There was no option but to use tankers to take away

excess flow. Thames Water would continue to investigate the issue this winter. It was confirmed that there was sufficient capacity at the site, so the issue was either due to infiltration or unauthorised pumping into the sewers - often pumps were hidden. Thames Water wanted to work with local communities to identify and address issues.

- Thames Water committed to meet with Councillor Adrian Abbs Executive Portfolio Holder, who had been trying to set up a meeting since May.

  Action: Gordon Oliver to send Thames Water contact details for Councillor Abbs.

- It was confirmed that Thames Water did not pay much Corporation Tax, because the government's capital allowances scheme automatically deducted tax for capital expenditure. Further details was provided in the Our Finances Explained document.
- The emphasis was on profits being reinvested and no dividends had been paid to external shareholders for the last six years – shareholders recognised the need to improve performance for both the environment and customers.
- In response to a question on the EA view of Thames Water's proposed business plan, the EA confirmed that it had been saying for some time that Thames Water needed to increase the scale and pace of its investment to improve its environmental performance. While the EA welcomed the proposed increased scale of Thames Water's latest plans, there would be a lot of scrutiny of the plans by the EA and Ofwat to ensure they were robust and delivered the required obligations, with final determination due by December 2024.
- Thames Water indicated that they would like to achieve a four star rating in the Environment Agency's environmental performance assessment (EPA) as quickly as possible. There was a large backlog of schemes, because investment levels had not been as high as they should have been for the last 10 years. This was partly due to the focus of the financial regulator on keeping bills low – bills had not gone up in real terms in that time. It was going to take time to improve performance, but Thames Water was seeking to achieve the best outcome from the current and subsequent price reviews.
- Thames Water shareholders were putting up capital for improvements and needed to see a return on their investments. Thames Water sought to deliver as much as possible with the money available. While bills would need to increase, social tariffs would be used to ensure that those least able to pay would get a significant reduction on their water bill.
- Thames Water indicated that they were leading the industry in terms of Catchment Partnerships. Three areas had been designated as smarter water catchments as part of a trial, with £3m invested in each one to build capacity and develop a collectively agreed plan. Following the success of this trial, investment was planned for a further 11 partnerships. These gave communities a voice in what happened to their rivers. It was noted that sewage was not the only form of pollution, and other sources needed to be tackled to improve water quality.
- Thames Water explained that each catchment and stretch of river was unique and they were being improved in different ways. For example, in Kintbury, water quality was being improved through tertiary treatment, while in Stanford Dingley efforts were focused on reducing phosphorus, and infiltration were being addressed at Hampstead Norreys. Improvements would be delivered in different timescales at different sites. Funding and resources were limited, and priorities had to be determined to deliver improvements as efficiently as possible.

- Thames Water confirmed that discounts of up to £1,800 on water connection charges for new homes were being offered to developers in return for developing water efficient homes. Although there had been some interest, take-up had been slow. Thames Water and local authorities would have to work together to progress this through the Local Plan.

  Action: Councillor Carolyne Culver to set up a meeting with planners to review how best to facilitate water efficient homes.

- Thames Water indicated that the sewage works were due to be upgraded at both Burghfield and Mortimer, with additional capacity to reduce sewage discharges in wet weather. The Mortimer upgrade would be completed in late 2024 / early 2025, while Burghfield would be completed in 2026. Infiltration reduction works were also planned for Burghfield.

  Action: Thames Water to arrange a site visit for Councillor Geoff Mayes to the Burghfield and Mortimer sewage works.

- Thames Water confirmed that red flags shown on the real-time map were for discharges of untreated effluent - these discharged from a separate outlet to treated effluent.

- Thames Water acknowledged that storm discharges had only been monitored since 2018 and discharges would have been happening for a long time before that, but they were in many cases very dilute, which was why acute impacts had often not been noticed. Causation factors were varied and included infiltration. Infiltration often took a long time to detect and pinpoint, and it could also take time to identify a cost-effective solution. This meant that other measures, such as increasing treatment capacity and building larger storm tanks were sometimes implemented ahead of infiltration reduction.

- Thames Water's Business Plan included smart objectives around the number of kilometres of sewers to be fixed and manholes to be sealed within particular time periods and the regulator was able to impose penalties if these were not achieved.

- In terms of speeding up the pace of delivery, new methods were being trialled to reduce infiltration at two catchments, neither of which were in West Berks. These had yielded good results and would be used at other locations, including Hampstead Norreys. Proving to the regulator that infiltration could be reduced efficiently would help to justify the investment case to do more.

- Thames Water explained that the London Road pumping station pumped sewage to the treatment works that served the whole of Newbury. There had been issues with the rising main (pressurised sewer) in the past, but there had been considerable investment in lining the rising mains and replacing the pipe where it had become corroded. There had been no issues following the repairs. A project team was looking at how to accommodate the major new development at Sandleford. There was a plan to upgrade the London Road pumping station and a route was being worked out, taking account of cost and potential disruption during construction and when future access was needed. It was thought that the upgrade would address flooding issues in the area. Other smaller scale upgrades may also be required at key pinch points.

  Action: Thames Water to set up a meeting with Councillor Stuart Gourley and council officers to discuss the London Road pumping station.

- Thames Water confirmed that lining works in Stanford Dingley were necessary and there would be no detriment as a result. Also, care was taken when sealing manholes to ensure that effluent did not discharge via customers' toilets. Manhole sealing could

involve sealing the chamber walls rather than covers. Thames Water committed to investigate whether additional works would also be needed in Frilsham.

Action: Thames Water to confirm the details of proposed manhole sealing in Stanford Dingley to Councillor Christopher Read.

- There was discussion around Drainage and Wastewater Management Plans, which brought water companies, local authorities and landowners together to manage surface water, including stopping it getting into foul sewers. This might include natural flood management schemes. There had been changes to payments to farmers through Environmental Land Management schemes (ELMs), where they could be incentivised to temporarily hold water.

  Action: Thames Water to send a link to the Drainage and Wastewater Management Plan to Councillor Christopher Read.

- In response to a question on whether the EA could use the record water company fines to bolster its enforcement activities, the EA confirmed that there had been fines of £37 million imposed against Thames Water since 2015. However, the fines went to the Treasury rather than the Environment Agency. Looking forwards, there was a government proposal to redirect environmental fines to a national catchment restoration fund in order to improve the water environment. This presented an opportunity for Catchment Partnerships to benefit. The EA was awarded costs in relation to successful prosecutions, and this was used to support operational activities. There were areas where the EA was funded through government grant in aid (GIA) where they were under pressure in terms of what they could deliver (e.g., low-risk pollution incident response, and environmental monitoring). Cases had been put to the Government for increased investment.

- The EA and Thames Water both provided funding to catchment partnerships. The EA was keen to develop citizen science initiatives and various pilot projects were underway. The EA's national monitoring strategy was in development and citizen science would be a key part, but there were still issues to be worked through. Also, there was the potential for the recently announced Defra funding for natural flood management, which could go to catchment partnerships.

- Thames Water's representatives did not have figures available about internal dividends paid, but offered to provide this information. It was confirmed that this was necessary to pay back loans. Shareholders were not taking income from the company.

  Action: Thames Water to send details about payment of internal dividends to Councillor Justin Pemberton.

- Thames Water acknowledged that it had a complex ownership structure - around two thirds of its investors were pension funds, while the rest were sovereign wealth funds. However, this meant that they were able to take a long-term view and forego dividend payments in the short-term.

- In response to a question about debt interest rates, Thames Water confirmed that they had a range of bonds with different maturity dates. The company planned ahead and insured itself against interest rate rises. They acknowledged that debt was rising because they needed to invest large amounts in upgrading their networks. However, equity was also increasing in order to keep gearing at reasonable levels.

- Clarification was provided by Thames Water regarding government targets to reduce pollution. The target for reducing pollution incidents related to failures such as a burst rising main, blocked sewer, or failure of a sewage works, where there would be an

impact on the environment. Thames Water had a Pollution Incident Reduction Plan to address these. The other target was for reducing storm discharges to an average of 10 per year, which related to a properly functioning sewage treatment system.

The Thames Water and Environment Agency representatives were questioned by those other Members present. The responses are summarised below:

- In relation to a question about storm water storage, Thames Water explained that this was used to accommodate additional flows as a result of heavy rainfall. However, it could not cope with increased flows from groundwater infiltration over long periods. Overflow tanks could only be emptied when there was spare capacity. Solutions were often a balance of preventing infiltration, increasing capacity, and increasing storage. Each design was carefully modelled.
- Thames Water confirmed that investigations in Eastbury and East Garston had identified sewers that needed sealing, but high flows from private sewers had also been detected. Owners would be advised that there was a problem and would be asked to take remedial action.
- Thames Water advised that private pumping usually related to water around properties. Sometimes this was pumped to the sewer rather than the surface water sewer.
- It was suggested that the Thames Water CEO should be fined in relation to pollution incidents. Thames Water confirmed that the previous CEO had worked incredibly hard, and the interim CEOs were doing the same. This was not considered an effective way to improve performance.
- It was confirmed that works in Hampstead Norreys would start imminently. Works could not have been started earlier, since the groundwater had receded later than usual. With 62 areas that had to be closely monitored due to concerns, resources had to be prioritised carefully.
- It was noted that the River Pang had previously been rated as 'good' in 2016. Thames Water stated that the only thing that had changed had been the indicator related to fish, which had dropped to 'poor'. Indicators most closely related to discharges were invertebrates and ammonia, which were both rated as 'good'. The 17 pollution incidents that had occurred since 2013 were not considered to have had a significant impact on water quality. However, improvements were needed to stop further discharges.
- When challenged about rising bills for customers, Thames Water indicated that bills were at the same level in real terms as they were 10 years ago.

Councillor Stuart Gourley proposed a no-notice procedural motion to suspend standing orders to allow members of the public to speak at the meeting. This was seconded by Councillor Dominic Boeck. At the vote, the motion was passed.

The Chairman invited members of local stakeholder organisations who had previously submitted questions to Thames Water and the Environment Agency to ask one supplementary question each. Questions were received from River Action, Action for the River Kennet, East Garston Flood Forum, Thatcham Flood Forum, Pang Valley Flood Forum and the Newbury Clay Hill Flood Warden:

- Before asking their question, River Action challenged points made by Thames Water:
    - In relation to the photo of the River Pang in Pangbourne on 21 September, it was highlighted that although there had not been any discharges from the Hampstead Norreys sewage works, there had been discharges from

Bucklebury, Chapel Row and Beenham. Thames Water confirmed this was correct and apologised to the Committee for inadvertently providing an incomplete account of discharges on that date.

- Thames Water had indicated that there had been no sewage leaks from Hampstead Norreys that could be linked to designation of the River Pang as 'poor', but there had been 42 discharges of untreated sewage from other sites in that year.

- In relation to the question on water security, Thames Water confirmed that this was addressed in the company's Water Resources Management Plan, which had been published and submitted to government. This sought to reduce demand significantly by reducing leakage, fitting more meters, and water efficiency. However, additional water resource was also needed to cope with climate change and population growth and a new reservoir was planned near Abingdon. A water re-use scheme was also proposed for West London. In the longer term, water transfers may be needed from other parts of the UK. Abstractions would be reduced from sensitive rivers and groundwater sources.

(Councillor Geoff Mayes left the meeting.)

- The EA confirmed that storm overflows due primarily to groundwater infiltration were not permitted. The EA had driven the requirement for event duration monitoring at all storm overflow sites to be in place by the end of 2023. The EA had active investigations in assessing information from a large number of sites and its compliance with environmental permits. Appropriate action would be taken in response to any non-compliance in line with the EA's enforcement and sanctions policy.

- Thames Water indicated that tankers would be used in East Garston to manage overflows this winter. Other options had been considered, but there was not sufficient room to be able to use mitigations that had been used successfully elsewhere. Tankers were acknowledged to be the last resort. Meanwhile, investigations were ongoing to find the source of infiltration. Filters had been installed to prevent solids from being discharged to watercourses, and any discharges to watercourses had been very dilute, so there had been no impact on water quality. Mitigation works would continue until water levels became too high to continue.

- In relation to new developments, Thames Water stated that they were statutory consultees on Local Plans, but not on individual planning applications, so they relied upon liaison with Council officers to get information. This allowed Thames Water to work out if there was sufficient sewer capacity to accommodate the planned development. If there was insufficient capacity, then developer charges were used to expand the network. If capacity could not be delivered quickly enough to meet the developer's aspirations, then the Council would be asked to impose a Grampian condition to prevent the development from being occupied until the necessary improvements had been made. Building regulation inspections were needed to ensure that the connections had been made properly. If additional flows would create concern over compliance with site permits at sewage works, then Thames Water would ask for a Grampian Condition to be imposed until the necessary works could be completed. These works would be funded from their business planning process. Thames Water sought to avoid seeking Grampian Conditions wherever possible.

- Thames Water acknowledged that there had been issues with receiving data from sewer depth monitors and confirmed that the data logger programme was under review. They committed to finding a solution for loggers in Hampstead Norreys.

- Thames Water confirmed that letters were about to go out to Hampstead Norreys residents informing them of the planned works. This would start with survey work on Section 104a - private sewers adopted in 2011, which had not yet been mapped. Lining works would follow as issues were detected. Completion was anticipated in May 2024, subject to groundwater levels.
- Thames Water indicated that there appeared to be a complex set of issues affecting the Northbrook in Newbury. They offered to set up a series of meetings with the EA and the Council to identify the issues, potential solutions, and sources of funding. The source of a previous milky discharge had been located and stopped, but it was reported that this had since reappeared. Thames Water stressed the importance of pollution incidents being reported as they were spotted. In terms of the oil deposits, a location of interest had been identified and a site visit would be made to ensure that the premises had fat management processes in place.

  Action: Thames Water to meet with the EA and West Berkshire Council to discuss the Northbrook in Newbury.

It was agreed that relevant contact details would be circulated with the minutes:

- Environment Agency:
  - Enquiries: enquiries_thm@environment-agency.gov.uk
  - 24 hr incident hotline: 0800 80 70 60
- Thames Water:
  - Online pollution Incident reporting tool: https://www.thameswater.co.uk/help/report-a-problem#/view-and-report-problems

(The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm and closed at 9.20 pm)

CHAIRMAN …….

Date of Signature …….