

Water Quality Select Committee Recommendation Response Report – March 2024



Water Quality Select Committee Summary

The Plymouth City vision is to be ‘*One of Europe’s most vibrant waterfront cities, where an outstanding quality of life is enjoyed by everyone.*’ Plymouth Sound is also the UK’s first National Marine Park, where more people will be getting in, on, under and next to the water. The cleanliness of the water is therefore very important for the City, its citizens and the wildlife within the Sound. The waterfront is one of our greatest assets supporting economic prosperity and the water quality of Plymouth Sound needs to be excellent. This paper sets out the role and responsibilities of Plymouth City Council in supporting an agenda to improve water quality in Plymouth Sound.

In November 2023 the Growth and Infrastructure Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviewed a paper on water quality issues, challenges and opportunities in Plymouth. The Committee agreed to establish a Select Committee by March 2024 focused solely on Water Quality, inviting key stakeholders and user groups to provide evidence for consideration and review.

The Select Committee on Water Quality took place on the 22nd February 2024 and heard evidence on the issues, challenges and opportunities for water quality in Plymouth Sound National Marine Park from:

- Plymouth City Council.
- Environment Agency
- South West Water
- Tamar Catchment Partnership
- University of Plymouth
- Plymouth Sound National Marine Park
- Youth Representative
- Representatives from the swimming community.

The evidence provided was followed by the presentation of a draft Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for a long-term enhanced collaboration between Plymouth City Council, South West Water and the Environment Agency. The full draft MoU is included in Appendix I of this report, but the key principles and deliverables are as follows:

Our collaborative approach seeks to build and expand on existing good practice in Plymouth, such as the Integrated Urban Drainage Modelling Project and take a holistic and place-based approach to water management to create a Plymouth Plan for Water. Our purpose is to meet the future water management challenges jointly and collaboratively. This includes a commitment to;

- further develop a shared understanding of the challenges faced in Plymouth, especially with reference to increasing climate change impacts.***
- identify further synergies and partnership opportunities between our planned investment programmes and wider working.***
- work together to identify more holistic solutions with greater impact and with a focus on developing a ‘Green First’ approach to water quality improvement project development.***
- enabling greater levels of community engagement, understanding and community codesign of solutions to water management.***
- deliver investments and programmes in a more integrated way to maximise the benefits (including wider social, environmental and economic benefits) and mitigate risk.***
- identify and address critical gaps – for example resource gaps through shared bids or developing innovative financial models for investment gaps; and***
- jointly explore wider opportunities and levers that can support our shared ambition e.g. with other key city partners and national stakeholders.***

The MoU sets out a proposed approach to delivering this work. The proposed partnership approach will not resolve all of the issues impacting water quality in Plymouth. Further work with wider partners will be needed to resolve issues relating to microplastics and agricultural run-off, but it will be a positive start to enhancing water quality.

Water Quality Select Committee Recommendations and Responses

The Water Quality Select Committee, after reviewing the evidence presented and the draft MoU made 16 recommendations. For completeness all recommendations have been detailed, including those recommendations to organisations that attended the Select Committee. Each recommendation is listed below with a proposed response.

Number	Water Quality Select Committee Recommendation	Cabinet Response to the Recommendation.
The Committee		
1.	Accept the conclusion in the report that the issues and challenges with water quality are complex, will increase with predicted climate change and needs an enhanced and urgent approach to delivery;	This is welcomed.
2.	Support the collaboration set out in the MoU, for a long-term delivery focused relationship of Plymouth City Council with the Environment Agency and South West Water;	The Cabinet supports the proposed MoU and directs officers to finalise the drafting with partner organisations and delegates the final approval and signing of the MoU to Councillor Briars-Delve (Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change).
Recommended to South West Water		
3.	That they ensure existing investment identified for drainage infrastructure of the city is delivered in line with the ambition of the MoU where there are no legal constraints;	The recommendation has been passed to South West Water to consider.
Recommended to the Environment Agency:		
4.	That they make sampling data from Firestone Bay taken over the winter available to the public at the earliest opportunity;	The recommendation has been passed to the Environment Agency to consider.
5.	That they carry out winter pilots in the 3 bathing areas to improve water quality data, and make this available to the public:	The recommendation has been passed to the Environment Agency to consider.
Recommended to Cabinet that:		
6.	Signage is increased and improved at the sea fronts when storm drains discharge;	RESPONSE - Cabinet will direct officers to investigate options for improving signage in consultation with Environment Agency, seeking best practice from other areas.
7.	SWW and EA work with PCC officers to increase education across the city on what communities can do to improve water quality;	The MoU sets out a key deliverable related to community involvement. 3- Deliver a joint, sustained and collective citizen engagement and involvement programme to give

		<p><i>Plymothians visibility of the water challenges and enable community level action to respond to the challenges.</i></p> <p>RESPONSE - The Cabinet supports the delivery of this recommendation by approving the final drafting and signing of the MoU.</p>
8.	The National Marine Park school engagement programme includes education on improving water quality;	<p>This recommendation aligns with the proposed National Marine Park schools programme and will be integrated.</p> <p>RESPONSE - The Cabinet supports the delivery of this recommendation and directs officers to raise with the PSNMP Horizons Board and the schools programme working group.</p>
9.	A water ambassador programme is developed with the National Marine Park;	<p>A water ambassador programme does not currently form part of the National Marine Park programme and discussions will need to be held with Partners.</p> <p>RESPONSE – The Cabinet will direct officers to present the proposal to the NMP partners for discussion and development of a way forward.</p>
10.	The MoU is more specific on how other stakeholders will be engaged with when improving water quality;	<p>The need to engage other stakeholders with the deliverables set out in the MoU is supported.</p> <p>RESPONSE – Cabinet will ensure the final drafting of the MoU under the direction of Councillor Briars-Delve, Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change, will include an amendment to make it clear how other stakeholders, beyond the three signatories to the MoU, will be engaged.</p>
11.	They lobby government for Plymouth be a pilot for an area of water quality improvement;	<p>Plymouth, home to the UK’s first National Marine Park is a perfect place to pilot an innovative and accelerated programme of water quality enhancement.</p> <p>RESPONSE – Councillor Briars-Delve will write to the DEFRA Minister responsible</p>

		for water quality to set out the opportunity in Plymouth. Officers will also be directed to engage with DEFRA officials to determine how this pilot could be established.
12.	They improve and increase facilities/infrastructure for sea swimmers, such as life rings, defibrillators, hot showers and bins, in consultation with local sea swimming groups;	<p>There are already programmes of work planned to deliver this recommendation, through Plymouth City Council capital works programmes and through the National Lottery Heritage Fund NMP Horizons project.</p> <p>RESPONSE – This recommendation is already underway through existing programmes of work approved by the Cabinet.</p>
13.	Green jobs and growth opportunities in Plymouth for future generations are promoted;	<p>The MoU sets out a key deliverable in relations to green jobs:</p> <p><i>6 - Utilise the enhanced collaboration to seek new opportunities for skills development and development of green jobs in the City.</i></p> <p>RESPONSE - The Cabinet supports the delivery of this recommendation by approving the final drafting and signing of the MoU.</p>
14.	The Cabinet writes to the relevant minister to ask when schedule 3 to The Flood and Water Management Act 2010 is going to be enacted;	RESPONSE - The Cabinet supports the delivery of this recommendation and will write the relevant minister asking when Schedule 3 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 will be enacted. This matter will form part of the letter detailed in recommendation 11.
15.	The Cabinet writes to the relevant minister to ask them to update bathing legislation	RESPONSE - The Cabinet supports the delivery of this recommendation and will write to the relevant minister asking them to update bathing legislation. This matter will form part of the letter detailed in recommendations 11 and 14.
16.	Made a request to trading standards to provide Committee Members with information on environmental enforcement in Plymouth.	RESPONSE - The Cabinet will direct officers within trading standards to provide Committee Members with a briefing note

		on any environmental enforcement in Plymouth relating to water quality.
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RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation – Thank the Select Committee that reviewed the issues, challenges and opportunities for their work hearing and reviewing information presented and proposing the 16 recommendations.

Reason: *To recognise the important role Scrutiny and the Select Committee has played in reviewing the complex issues with improving water quality and seeking ways to positively address the challenges through the recommendations made.*

Recommendation – Support the proposed responses to the recommendations made by the Select Committee set out in the Water Quality Select Committee Recommendation Response Report.

Reason: *To support the actions proposed in response to the recommendations presented by the Select Committee.*

Recommendation – Support the proposal to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to enable an enhanced relationship with South West Water and Environment Agency and delegate the final review and signing of the MoU to Cllr Briars-Delve Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change.

Reason: *To support the proposed enhanced partnership.*