

This Report will be made public on 24 March 2026



Report Number **A/25/31**

To: Council
Date: 1 April 2026
Status: Non – executive decision
Responsible Officer: Ewan Green, Monitoring Officer and Director of Strategy and Resources

SUBJECT: MOTION ON NOTICE

SUMMARY: Councillor Hills has submitted a Motion on Notice for Full Council, which requests various actions in respect of Water testing in Romney Marsh and the East Stour. This report provides background to assist Members in their consideration of the motion.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. To receive and note report A/25/31.
2. To consider the motion on notice put forward by Councillor Hills.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 On 17 March, Councillor Hills submitted a Motion which asked members to resolve the following:

1. *“Request that Cabinet bring forward, as a matter of urgency, a report setting out costed options for a targeted water-testing programme covering major open sewers and connected watercourses on Romney Marsh and within the East Stour catchment.*
2. *Ask that this report include options for testing for E. coli and other indicators of faecal contamination and, where practicable and lawful, options for antimicrobial-resistance screening through partnership working with appropriate public bodies, regulators, water companies, laboratories and academic institutions.*
3. *Request that the Leader and Chief Executive write to the Environment Agency, Southern Water, Kent County Council, UKHSA and any relevant academic or public-health partners seeking cooperation, data-sharing and, where possible, joint working.*
4. *Request that the findings of any agreed testing programme be reported publicly to councillors and residents, and referred to Overview and Scrutiny for consideration of any next steps.*

We, the Conservative Group, urge all Councillors to back this motion and be part of the solution, not the problem, by supporting proper testing in our sewers and the East Stour. No one wants Southern Water discharging untreated sewage into our watercourses, with pollution eventually reaching the sea”.

1.2 In order to inform member decision making, this paper sets out the implications for consideration.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Water quality across the district has been a subject raised consistently during the last 2-3 years through Member questions at meetings of the Council. The Leader has also frequently updated Council on his engagement with government, national agencies, local bodies to raise concerns from residents over water quality, particularly in the Romney Marsh, and press for positive action.

2.2 Members and officers regularly engage with key organisations such as Southern Water, the Environment Agency and Internal Drainage Board on the matter of water quality.

On 24 September 2024, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered water quality as part of a wider item on flooding, poor water quality and the role of the Internal Drainage Board. At the meeting Members received a

joint presentation facilitated by Folkestone & Hythe District Council Officers, with external organisations, Southern Water, The Environmental Agency, Romney Marsh Area Internal Drainage Board, and Kent County Council.

Members may find the presentations and Minutes from the meeting to be helpful background ahead of their consideration of the motion detailed in this report. Please refer to:

<https://folkestone-hythe.moderngov.co.uk/mgAi.aspx?ID=19155>

3. IMPLICATIONS

3.1 The motion recommends three actions:

- A Cabinet report setting out costed options for a water testing programme.
- A letter to the Environment Agency, Southern Water, Kent County Council, UKHSA and any relevant academic or public-health partners.
- Findings to be reported and considered at Overview and Scrutiny for consideration of any next steps.

3.2 It should be noted that there is currently no approved budget for the actions detailed in the motion.

Other implications include: -

- Targeted testing of all *'major open sewers and connected watercourses on Romney Marsh and within the East Stour catchment'* will be testing on an extensive scale. The Council would need to appoint specialist external consultants with the technical skills and expertise to develop the scope and specification for a water testing programme.
- From the experience of bathing water testing, further DNA testing to identify species marker is often needed to help identify possible sources.
- Enforcement by council will be difficult if the activity has been regulated by the Environmental Permitting Regulations or other legislation.

These matters would be considered in detail in the report to Cabinet.

4. LEGAL/FINANCIAL AND OTHER CONTROLS/POLICY MATTERS

4.1 Legal Officer's Comments (OS)

The legal authority for Councillors to bring motions to Full Council derives from:

Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12 (meeting Procedures)

Local Government Act 2000 – governance framework and

The Council's Constitution and Council Procedure Rules.

4.2 Finance Officer's Comments (JGS)

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report at this stage. However, should the recommendations be approved, subsequent reports will present costed options for a water testing programme, and these may result in financial implications for consideration.

4.3 Diversities and Equalities Implications (GE)

There are no equality and diversity implications directly arising from this report.

4.4 Climate Change Implications (JWi):

The proposed water quality testing has positive climate and ecology implications and aligns with the Council's Climate Action Plan and District Wide Carbon Strategy, as climate impacts, such as hotter, drier summers and heavier rainfall will affect pollution risks in Romney Marsh/East Stour. Also, pollution detection can support protecting wetland habitats and biodiversity locally.

5. CONTACT OFFICERS AND BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Councillors with any questions arising out of this report should contact the following officer prior to the meeting

Ewan Green, Director of Strategy and Resources
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The following background documents have been relied upon in the preparation of this report:

None.