

EXETER CITY COUNCIL
SOUTH WEST WATER LIAISON GROUP

Wednesday 25 September 2019

Present:-

Stephanie Jones, Waste Water Services Operations Manager, SWW
Matt Perry, Countess Wear Assistant Manager, SWW
John Orr, Residents Representative
Toby Armes, Customer Support, SWW
Peter Ball, Environment Agency
Robert Waddle, Customer Support Team Manager, SWW
Simon Ruddy, Environmental Health, Exeter City Council
Jo Quinnell, Democratic Services, Exeter City Council

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APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR

Owing to the absence of Councillors due to unforeseen circumstances, the appointment of Chair would be postponed until the next meeting.

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APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Newby, Wardle and Ghusain.

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MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 27 MARCH 2019

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 March 2019 were agreed.

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MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising.

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TERMS OF REFERENCE - FOR INFORMATION

The Terms of Reference were noted, subject to one amendment – The Portfolio Holder for Place would be replaced by Portfolio Holder for Equalities, Diversity & Communities who would be invited to future meetings.

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OPERATIONAL UPDATE

The plant was currently fully operational with no issues on site.

As reported at the last meeting, the primary tank ropes had started to fray which resulted in numerous breakdowns. Following discussions with the specialist maintenance manager and in relation to the service contract, a new type of specification rope had been proposed and orders placed for all four primary tanks plus the storm tank. Work to replace these will take place between now and March 2020 before the warmer season starts. The tanks will need to be drained and taken off line. Members of the Group will be kept informed of planned works when a definite date had been set. Proactive measures were being taken in line with the Odour Management Plan which had been completed.

A residents representative referred to the period between Christmas and New Year 2018 where they were unable to make contact due to staff shortages. However, it was reported that although response times may be slightly reduced, staff are on call 24/7 including Christmas Day and Boxing Day, and the operational helpline remains open. Checks would be undertaken to ensure this is in place.

Recently, a number of visits to the site had taken place due to the level of complaints received, including appointments by Environmental Health and the Environment Agency.

Agreed that Members of the Group be informed when dates had been set for replacement of ropes on scraper tanks.

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COMPLAINTS

In the period from January 2019 to today's date, there had been 25 complaints compared 10 complaints over the same period in 2018. It was also noted that there had been five different complainants in 2018, but 13 different complainants this year, some having not made contact for several years. It was confirmed that there had been 22 complaints direct to SWW this year and this mirrored the hot weather conditions.

The issue of communications is regularly remarked upon by complainants and an example was given where it took five days after the initial call to get a call back on the issue. This may be due to a lack of understanding by the call handler and the incorrect action being taken.

Once a complaint is received via the call centre, the complaint would be logged and passed to the dispatch team who will then issue the job. It was acknowledged that although there are regular complainants, the call handler has no history of the case. In such cases where the complainant was disappointed with action or communication, Toby Armes could contact the complainant as part of the escalation process.

If SWW were aware of a breakdown on site, a polygon is placed on the system to enable the call handler to provide appropriate information to the caller. This would continue and assurances were given that information is as clear as possible in terms of timescales.

It was suggested that the residents representatives of this group could be contacted via a group email to enable them to communicate outwards to other residents at any time where there were planned works and a potential risk of odour.

Further examination was required on whether residents could enter their postcode online to get information about the problem being experienced. This is similar to the system used for burst mains, so the systems were in place, but further checks were required on whether resources were available to achieve this, and also taking into account factors such as wind direction etc.

A complaints log was circulated that detailed which complaints related to each operational issue, eg a breakdown. There were occasions where they were unable to link any activity to a complaint. Following instalment of the new ropes to the scrapers, no further issues were anticipated.

Cake is the semi-solid material produced as a by-product of treating sewage and is removed on a daily basis. The new agreed communication method should also

advise of any backlog of cake that needs to be removed as it has potential for odour.

Another issue highlighted on the log related to a problem with the inlet pumps. Flow meters had been installed to the inlet to show how much was being pumped into the works, and this had failed one evening. This was an example of where residents/ECC/Environment Agency should have been contacted as it had the potential to generate odour.

Any problems that arise overnight will be the responsibility of the duty manager who may have to prioritise resources out of hours.

A representative from the pipes and pumps network team had been invited to attend future meetings, which will cover issues such as manhole covers and pump stations. The Group welcomed this.

Robert Waddle would circulate a diagram of the escalation process which could be fed back to complainants. There was no trigger in terms of the number of calls received; they were all dealt with in the same way.

As part of this process, it was felt it would be useful for the Customer Support Team to have a copy of an action plan detailing all outstanding jobs so they can factor in communication around potential odour risks. However, it was noted that there were no outstanding jobs as part of future investment, although a review of the barn where the cake is stored would be undertaken with costings. The review would examine whether the barn could be enclosed, but this would then require the installation of an extraction system.

Covers on two inlet skips had been installed. This was currently working well, and there were another three skips to do. In addition, there are another two skips where the grit is expelled where this could be utilised as well. Members of the group would be informed when these works had been completed, and it was suggested that a site walk-around could take place at the next meeting.

There is a link with the weather in terms of odours as the effluent is stronger, especially over sustained dry weather with no dilution. Wind also plays a factor – if there is no wind, odours stagnate. Particular reference was made to Sundays when the odours seemed to be stronger, and this could be due to more people being at home.

The group discussed the development of 100 new homes being built very close to the works. It would be advantageous to build good PR between SWW and the residents of this development. Once properties are occupied, it would be prudent to open up the works for heritage days to give residents an opportunity to visit the works.

It was noted that the other factory in the city which could give rise to odours was based in Marsh Barton and was a very different odour so was unlikely to be confused. A tidal odour had also been noticed in the past which relates to algae breaking down in the river which can give off a similar smell and can also show as a slick on the river, but this was naturally occurring.

Agreed that:

- (1) An email group be set up to include Environmental Health, Environment Agency, Waste Water Services Operations Manager, Countess Wear

Assistant Manager and residents representatives to advise of any planned maintenance or where there are issues identified on site;

- (2) Customer Support Team Manager to investigate if the online system used for burst mains could be utilised for odours
- (3) Customer Support (Toby Armes) to be the contact in escalation of cases
- (4) Customer Support Team Manager to circulate a diagram of the escalation process
- (5) Group members to be informed when the remaining skips had been covered.

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ANY OTHER BUSINESS

A site visit would be arranged for Toby Armes to give a better understanding of the site.

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DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting would be arranged for January 2020, date to be confirmed.

(The meeting commenced at 2.30 pm and closed at 3.50 pm)

Chair