Canterbury City Council

South East Water Stakeholder Group

Wednesday 7 October 2026 at 1.00 pm – 3.00 pm

Draft Minutes

Attendees:

Council	Attendee(s)	Role
Canterbury CC	Alan Baldock	Council Leader
	Bill Hicks	Director of Place
	Matthew Archer	Head of Corporate Governance
	Stephanie Williamson	Democratic Services Officer
Ashford BC	Cllr Noel Ovenden	Council leader
Dartford BC	Caroline Hicks	Deputy Chief Executive – Growth & Community
Kent County Council	Louise Smith	Flood and Water Manager
	Mary Tate	Water Manager
Maidstone BC	Cllr Tony Harwood	Cabinet Member for Planning Policy and Management
Sevenoaks DC	Emma Henshall	Strategic infrastructure Lead
Swale BC	Cllr Tim Gibson	Council leader
Tonbridge & Malling BC	Cllr Adem Mehmet	Cabinet member for infrastructure.
Tunbridge Wells BC	Carlos Hone	Head of Planning
East Sussex County Council	Andy Arnold	Team manager Environment

Eastbourne Borough Council	Linda Farley	Assistant Director of Customer Service and Delivery
Lewes District Council	Joint with Eastbourne	Joint with Eastbourne
Rother District Council	Lorna Ford	Chief Executive
Wealden District Council	Cllr Rachel Millward	Leader of Wealden district council
	Chris Bending	Director of place
West Sussex County Council	Cllr Erika Woodhurst-Trueman	Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport
	Matt Davey	Service Director (Highways Transport and Planning)
Winchester City Council	Councillor Jackie Porter	Cabinet Member for Place and Local Plan
Rushmoor Borough Council	Tom Simpson	Principal planning officer
	Jamie Adcock	Senior Planning Policy Officer
East Hampshire District Council	Heather Stevens	Planning Policy Manager
Hart District Council	Tom Bell	Principal Planning Policy Officer
Bracknell Forest Council	Cllr Guy Gillbe	Cabinet Member Planning Transport and Countryside
Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead	Daniel Rice	Flood Risk Officer, Sustainability and Climate Change
South East Water	Douglas Whitfield	Water Supply Director
	Oliver Martin	Strategy and Regulation Director
	James Kirby	Stakeholder Officer
MHCLG	Russ Aziz	Place Engagement Team, Strategic Engagement Lead for Kent and Sussex
	Harry Leeder	Deputy Director of Water

2. APOLOGIES: -

Thanet DC responded declining attendance, saying that SEW did not really operate in their district (mainly Southern Water).

Apologies from Cllr Peter Griffiths from East Sussex council, Cllr Doug Oliver from Rother District Council, Paul Collard from Mid Sussex District Council, Cllr Keith Dibble from Rushmoor Borough Council, Amanda Dunn from East Hampshire District Council. Nick Stevens, Surrey Heath Council.

Also, John Halsall, CEO of South East Water, gave apologies for not being able to attend.

3. WELCOME & INTRODUCTION (CLLR ALAN BALDOCK - CANTERBURY CITY COUNCIL LEADER)

The Chair welcomed attendees to the inaugural meeting of the South East Water Stakeholder Group.

It was noted that the group had been established following concerns raised by several local authorities regarding water resilience, supply interruptions, communication during incidents, infrastructure investment and the long-term ability of water infrastructure to support planned growth.

The meeting was intended to provide a forum for councils to share experiences, identify common concerns and explore opportunities for collective engagement with South East Water and relevant regulators.

4. BACKGROUND & PURPOSE OF THE GROUP (BILL HICKS - CANTERBURY CITY COUNCIL)

Members heard that the group had been modelled on the Southern Water Stakeholder Group established by Wealden District Council and was intended to provide a practical and collaborative forum for local authorities.

The proposed objectives of the group were discussed, including:

- Sharing intelligence and experience across local authorities.
- Identifying common concerns and priorities.
- Developing a coordinated local authority voice on water resilience, communications and infrastructure investment.
- Improving engagement with South East Water and, where appropriate, regulatory bodies.

- Supporting strategic planning and future growth through better understanding of water resource constraints.

It was recognised that many of the challenges facing local authorities extend beyond individual council boundaries and would benefit from a coordinated regional approach.

5 COUNCIL CONCERNS AND EMERGING ISSUES DISCUSSION

Representatives from local authorities shared concerns and experiences from their respective areas.

The discussion highlighted a wide range of issues affecting councils across the South East Water region. While the specific circumstances varied, many authorities reported common concerns regarding water resilience, infrastructure capacity and future planning.

Authorities highlighted the impact that water resource constraints were having on local plan preparation, housing delivery and decision making. Members emphasised the need for greater certainty regarding future water availability and infrastructure investment programmes.

Concerns were also raised regarding recurring supply interruptions experienced in several areas and the effect these incidents had on residents, businesses and public confidence.

Several authorities stressed the importance of improved communication, both during emergency incidents and in relation to longer-term planning and investment. Members noted that residents often lacked confidence in reassurances provided regarding future water supply.

Discussion also covered:

- The impact of housing growth and population increases on water demand.
- Climate change and drought resilience.
- Leakage reduction and network maintenance.
- Reservoir development and future water resource schemes.
- Water efficiency measures and opportunities to reduce demand.
- The need for stronger engagement between water companies, local authorities and regulators.
- The importance of recognising the unique challenges faced by the South East compared to other regions.

County council representatives outlined ongoing work to strengthen regional

collaboration on water resilience and planning and highlighted opportunities for alignment between existing partnerships and the stakeholder group.

6. SOUTH EAST WATER RIGHT TO REPLY

Representatives from South East Water thanked councils for establishing the forum and welcomed the opportunity for ongoing engagement.

South East Water acknowledged the concerns raised and recognised the need to improve communication, transparency and resilience across its network.

The company outlined several ongoing and planned initiatives, including:

- Development of long-term water resource and resilience schemes.
- Planned investment in infrastructure and network improvements.
- Programmes aimed at reducing leakage and managing demand.
- Continued work on reservoir proposals and additional water resource options.
- Enhanced incident response arrangements and stakeholder communications.
- Increased engagement with local authorities regarding housing growth forecasts and future demand requirements.

South East Water advised that it wished to work collaboratively with councils and regulators to better understand local concerns and identify practical solutions.

Discussion also covered the relationship between South East Water, regulators and emerging national initiatives, including work being undertaken through regional and national water planning forums.

Members welcomed the commitment to continued engagement and requested that future discussions focus on measurable progress and delivery.

South East Water representatives then left the meeting.

7. NEXT STEPS FOR GROUP (MATTHEW ARCHER - CANTERBURY CITY COUNCIL)

The group considered future governance arrangements.

Members expressed support for adopting a model similar to the Southern Water Stakeholder Group established by Wealden District Council, including the creation of:

- A wider stakeholder group.
- A smaller working group to support agenda setting and the development of

work programmes.

The working group would be responsible for preparing draft terms of reference, identifying priorities and helping to coordinate future activity, including agenda setting.

Chris Bending (Wealden District Council) offered to assist with the development of the working group and the next stages of the group's work, drawing on experience from the Southern Water Stakeholder Group. Members noted that further nominations to the working group may be received from authorities present and authorities not represented at the meeting.

There was general support for maintaining broad representation while ensuring the group remained focused and manageable.

Members also discussed the importance of:

- Maintaining a collaborative and constructive approach.
- Setting realistic objectives.
- Focusing on achieving long-term improvements rather than short-term outcomes.
- Avoiding duplication with existing regional initiatives where possible.

It was agreed that future meetings would continue to provide a forum for local authorities to share concerns and engage collectively on matters relating to water resilience and infrastructure.

The next phase of work would be progressed through a smaller working group, with an initial meeting to be arranged in advance of the next stakeholder group meeting. A further full stakeholder meeting could convene in early 2027, subject to the working group's consideration of priorities, timescales and availability.

Cllr Alan Baldock thanked members for their attendance and the meeting ended at 2:52 PM.