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Title of meeting:	Cabinet Meeting
Subject:	Bathing Water Quality - Update
Date of meeting:	9 th January 2024
Report by:	Richard Lee, Assistant Director of Culture, Leisure & Regulatory Services
Wards affected:	All

1. Requested by

1.1 The Leader of the Council, Councillor Steve Pitt.

2. Purpose

2.1 To provide an update to Members on Portsmouth City Council's Regulatory Services' (RS) work to assist the Environment Agency with regard to the bathing water quality classification for the Southsea East beach area. Additionally, the multi-agency work carried out to date in respect to assessing and mitigating the decline in water quality experienced in the last few years, as reported in the previous Cabinet Report dated 25 July 2023.

2.2 Whilst this is initially for information, this paper contains suggestions within Section 8. As appropriate, these can be formally collated into a decision paper for the relevant portfolio, cabinet, or full council meeting.

3. Information Requested

3.1 Information requested on the following:

- An update on the results of analysis and sampling activity undertaken by Portsmouth City Council (*the council*) Regulatory Services (RS) and the Environment Agency (EA).
- The progression of the partnership working with associated agencies in relation to water quality.
- The expected formal assessment of bathing water quality undertaken by the EA for the 2024 Bathing Season.
- The measures the aforementioned assessment will require.

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4. Update since the cabinet report in July 2023

4.1 The cabinet report in July 2023 highlighted the concerns regarding the decline of the bathing water quality at the Southsea East beach location. The report also detailed how RS has been assisting the EA through a supplementary weekly sampling of water quality to provide additional data across the Southsea coastline.

4.2 The EA have continued with their sampling programme throughout the bathing season (May-October). The full results for the EA classification sampling of 20 samples weekly from May to October are now published. On the 1st December 2023 the EA confirmed that for the 2024 bathing season the following changes are necessary:

- Southsea East downgraded from "Sufficient" to "Poor".
- Eastney downgraded from "Excellent" to "Good".

4.3 **Appendix 1** contains a map showing the designated bathing water areas on the Southsea beach and further information on the surrounding coastline.

4.4 At Southsea East, in addition to the classification (poor), this location will require additional signage in relation to "**Advice against bathing**". The required signage information is within **Appendix 2**. This information will need to include the causes of pollution and the actions taken to improve water quality.

5 Sampling activity and results of analysis

5.1 In addition to the EA sampling, which is undertaken over 20 weeks of the bathing season, further sampling has been put in place and obtained weekly by RS since February 2023.

5.2 This work has now been extended further to incorporate 5 sampling locations on a weekly basis and will continue outside of the bathing season. Our sampling will continue to support the classification work and assessment of water quality by the EA which is based on long term results (4 years data) to formally identify water quality trends. The sampling location details, and summary of all sampling results obtained by the council can be found within **Appendix 3**.

5.3 The sampling at the Southsea East location (Sample point A) has continued to reflect the results from the EA samples in that they are not meeting the minimum standard criteria of a "Sufficient" classification. The sampling locations heading East towards Eastney (Sample points B, C & D) are showing that the quality improves going East. There have, however, been sporadic results where this has not been the case.

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5.4 A further sampling location (Sample point 1) has been added since the end of September. This is some distance away from the classification area adjacent to the Beach Club bar. The council's sampling is providing data to assess whether this area is considered a further point of contamination that could be contributing to the overall decline in water quality.

6. Partnership working with associated agencies.

6.1 There have been regular meetings of the Bathing Quality Working Group involving the partner agencies which include the EA, Southern Water (SW) and the Coastal Defence Team. This engagement has been proactive and immensely useful. We formally wish to thank all agencies for their work in discussing, investigating, instigating actions to improve the situation and their considerable efforts to understand the cause.

6.2 Examples of exploratory and investigative work which has been carried out at multiple locations in an attempt to find contamination sources are as follows:

- The main foul connection from south to the Southern Low, have been examined and were found to be partially blocked. The problems have been located and cleared, and fractures on the line have been repaired.
- Some private drains have been found to be blocked. These have been cleared, and work undertaken to rectify.
- As necessary, those responsible for private pipework and connections which require attention have been advised and work has been undertaken to rectify these issues.
- Sewer connections to local business around the Southsea East monitoring point have been checked.
- Dyes have been introduced to the sewer in Alhambra Road which had been identified as a potential concern. At the same time holes were dug in the beach area to the south to check for signs of dye coming through. There was no indication of dye found, which suggests the area of the sewer is not the cause.
- The EA have continued with groundwater (leachate) surveys. These are used to assess the potential release of contaminants from groundwater sources. The area around the proximity of South Parade Pier initially had high results but the most recent survey had levels that were not of concern.
- The EA are having further laboratory work carried out on the samples they obtain with DNA testing to identify the source of contamination - previously this has suggested the main source of contamination was human.
- Plans are underway to investigate the locations further west of Southsea East in in order to eliminate possible sources of contamination.

6.3 In view of the above, it remains possible therefore that a multitude of factors, known and unknown, are impacting upon the quality of water at Southsea East and therefore ongoing work in multiple areas may be required to resolve this issue.

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6.4 We are and will continue to engage with SW in respect to their plans to focus on our bathing waters and seek solution in respect to its decline in quality in the shortest possible timeframe. Any improvement will, however necessarily, be slow in view of the classification framework.

7. Bathing water classifications

7.1 The EA has the formal responsibility for monitoring water quality and regulating water companies in respect to releases. The EA determine the designated bathing water classification each year based solely upon their own data obtained from their own sampling. The council has a formal responsibility to provide the water quality information to the public.

7.2 The determination of classification is calculated based on a statistical percentile calculation from the previous four years sample results. Generally, 80 separate samples - although in 2019 due to Covid restrictions less data is available.

7.3 The classification standards for coastal waters within the Bathing Water Regulations 2013 are:

Parameter	Excellent Based upon a 95- percentile valuation	Good Based upon a 95- percentile valuation	Sufficient Based upon a 90- percentile valuation
Intestinal enterococci	100	200	185
<i>Escherichia coli</i>	250	500	500

7.4 In view of the new classifications for 2024, communication with the public will be required including the signage as detailed in **Appendix 2**. Bathing in an area considered to be poor would be advised against but would not be illegal or restricted if somebody chose to do so.

7.5 The coastal defence works adjacent to the Southsea East designated area and sampling point are now underway, with the beach towards the Pyramids being fenced off. This work will continue throughout 2024 with completion expected in December 2024. This work limits the area for public access to the beach west of the pier and limits the area of the beach where the poor classification will be in place.

8. The importance of excellent water quality

8.1 The council recognises the considerable benefits of having excellent water quality particularly in respect to the environmental, economic, health and well-being social and the cultural benefits that such provides.

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8.2 Our bathing water sites are important assets for local economy, and we recognise the immense physical and psychological benefits derived by having excellent water quality around our coastline.

8.3 The social and cultural benefits which high quality bathing waters contribute to are recognised as vitally important to all our residents, businesses, and visitors. The council is accurately aware that the downgrading of our waters is likely to negatively impact the city.

9. Public information and partner engagement

9.1 It is of significant importance that the public understands what the classifications of bathing water quality are and the impact that such may have on their health, should they enter the water in a location of poor quality. It is also important that information on what the council are doing to assist partners in finding a solution to the current situation is provided.

9.2 Following the introduction of the poor classification during the 2024 bathing water season, and more immediately following the notification of such from the EA, it is suggested that the council carefully consider what additional information should be provided to the public (in addition to the statutory signage) so that they can make an informed decision as to whether they wish to enter the water or take part in water related activities in the area of Southsea East. The council will engage with partners in respect to a communications plans to ensure such narratives are consistent and unambiguous.

9.3 It is recognised that the council is already contributing to the water quality sampling data, to further inform the investigations being undertaken by the EA and SW. These activities, whilst vital, fall outside the formal responsibilities of the local authority and will continue to use significant resources from the RS functions. The costs of this sampling and future engagement will need to be met from the relevant portfolio against which there is currently no funding assigned. The council is committed to do all it reasonably can to provide assistance and data in respect to water quality and continue to find the necessary resources to support this important work.

9.4 It is additionally suggested that the council consider what further assistance it can provide and how such can be resourced moving forward. A poor water quality classification and any recommendation against entering our waters for health reasons is detrimental to our designation as the "Great Waterfront City" and therefore it is recommended that we implement all that is possible to assist our partners and the formal regulator in locating the source of this problem and finding a remedy to this damaging situation.

9.5 A further update is recommended following the start of the 2024 bathing season.

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Signed by Richard Lee, Assistant Director of Culture, Leisure, and Regulatory Services

Appendices:

Appendix 1 - The 2023 bathing water classification.

Appendix 2 - Bathing water signage requirements

Appendix 3 - The council's water sampling results.

Background list of documents: Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972

The following documents disclose facts or matters, which have been relied upon to a material extent by the author in preparing this report:

Title of document	Location
European bathing water quality in 2021	European bathing water quality in 2021 — European Environment Agency (europa.eu)
Bathing water information and signage rules for local councils	Bathing water information and signage rules for local councils - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)
DEFRA - Bathing water classifications	Bathing water classifications 2021 - Defra in the media (blog.gov.uk)
Environment Agency 2023 Bathing Water Profile for Southsea East	Bathing water profile (data.gov.uk)
Environment Agency 2023 Bathing Water Profile for Eastney	Bathing water profile (data.gov.uk)