

Water and Sewerage on the Isles of Scilly: an update from the Working Group on Water and Sewerage Services and Investment on the Isles of Scilly

The purpose of this document is to provide an update now that the consultation on new water legislation has finished and work is progressing to identify what improvements to the islands' water and sewerage infrastructure and services may be required to help ensure future compliance. The purpose of this document is to ensure that the public remain informed of this work going forward.

Background

On 20 November 2014 Defra held a consultation outlining proposals to fill gaps in the way current water legislation applies to the Isles of Scilly. This consultation closed on 15 February 2015. A consultation response to the comments made by stakeholders is due from Defra in October 2015. It had become apparent that some water and sewerage infrastructure on the islands needs to be upgraded regardless of any changes to legislation. A clear legislative framework will allow such improvements to be properly planned. Work is already underway to understand the cost and resources required to meet and, where appropriate, go beyond standards established by any changes to legislation.

The Working Group – who are we?

Defra have established a working group to identify the improvements and measures required to deliver water and sewerage services across all of the islands in order to comply with new legislation. This group includes representatives from Defra, the Council of the Isles of Scilly, The Duchy of Cornwall, Tresco Estates as well as the appropriate regulators: Environment Agency, Drinking Water Inspectorate and OFWAT.

The group has been set up to look at all the different aspects of water and sewerage provision on the Isles of Scilly, including establishing a baseline for any investments and resources that may be required, as well as the most affordable, cost effective and sustainable solutions for delivering services and bringing assets and infrastructure up to at least the required standards.

The working group want to ensure that that there will be enough time to explore options, take decisions and plan for any upcoming costs. We will work with those involved to develop transitional arrangements to manage when the impact of any new regulations will begin to take effect.

Water Forum

Ultimately it will be for the Council and Government to make the decision on the way forward. The Council has established a water forum, which is designed to ensure that a wider audience on the islands has its say on how the future is shaped. The water forum will have a strong voice from businesses and the community within the Isles of Scilly's, who asked for meaningful engagement and representation within this process. The Working Group agrees that all voices need to be heard. We are therefore keen to ensure that all those affected by the changes will have had a chance to engage in this process.

Ongoing and future work

The Working Group is currently pooling all available data and taking action to identify any information gaps to ensure there is evidence on which to base future investment decisions.

Part of this process is exploring the prospect of an alternative supplier of water and sewerage services across the islands. The Council, in their consultation response, have already indicated that it will be difficult for any Council, let alone one of its size, to run water and sewerage services on the islands effectively. It is also very challenging for the islands to raise sufficient income for the investments and resources required to improve infrastructure (both public and private) and services delivery due to the size of the customer base and the additional costs due to the remote location.

The Working Group will be mindful of the concerns of off-island residents, whose wishes to remain inside or outside any new framework need to be taken into account, especially as there may not be a 'one size fits all' solution for all the islands. With this in mind, we are looking at the possibility of engaging the private sector to provide some solutions, and to this end have made OFWAT part of the Working Group.

When the Working Group has completed its work on understanding the state of the infrastructure on the islands and the current resource and environmental pressures, it will be able to establish what improvements would be required as a statutory minimum and what level of service beyond that is required to deliver growth and ensure an affordable and sustainable future.

What the Working Group will do to keep you informed

Residents can be assured that they will be consulted over any potential changes to the provider of their water and sewerage services. In fact this exercise will also look at the level of service customers receive and what they think that level of service is worth in terms of payment, as that will form an important element in understanding the future responsibilities of the water and sewerage service provider to the Islands.

What outputs can be expected from the group?

The group will produce periodic updates such as this to tell you:

- What work has been produced
- What decisions have been taken
- Changes of personnel
- Progress against future milestones
- The legislative process

Please contact islesofscillyconsultation@defra.gsi.gov.uk for further information.

