

Report to:	TOURISM, ECONOMY AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Relevant Officer:	Clare Nolan- Barnes, Head of Coastal and Environmental Partnership Investments
Date of Meeting:	8 February 2023

BATHING WATER QUALITY ANNUAL REPORT 2022/2023

1.0 Purpose of the report:

- 1.1 To provide a basis for the Committee to consider the delivery of the Council’s statutory and other duties in respect of bathing water management. The report will provide a brief outline of the various statutory duties including statistics and highlight areas of challenge and concerns and information on the work of love my beach and turning tides.

2.0 Recommendation(s):

- 2.1 To scrutinise the delivery of the Council’s statutory and other responsibilities in relation to bathing water management, note the performance and highlight any areas for further scrutiny.

3.0 Reasons for recommendation(s):

- 3.1 To ensure constructive and robust scrutiny of the report and provide confirmation that the Council is delivering its statutory duties and other responsible duties and actions in respect of bathing water management.

3.2a Is the recommendation contrary to a plan or strategy adopted or approved by the Council? No

3.2b Is the recommendation in accordance with the Council’s approved budget? Yes

3.3 Other alternative options to be considered:

None

4.0 Council Priority:

4.1 The relevant Council Priority is:

“The economy: Maximising growth and opportunity across Blackpool”

5.0 Background Information

5.1 The Council has statutory duties as set out in the Bathing Water Directive 2006 (BWD) implemented through the Bathing Water Regulations 2013 (BWR) in respect of its four bathing waters which are, Blackpool South, Blackpool Central, Blackpool North and Bispham.

5.2 Following the completion of Bathing Water Management Scrutiny Review in 2013, the Scrutiny Committee is to receive a report on an annual basis, relating to progress on its bathing waters.

5.3 Statutory Duties

The BWR requires Blackpool Council to erect signage at all its bathing waters providing specific details of the bathing water, the quality of the water and any links for the public to enquire at any time during the bathing season about the quality of the water. In addition, the BWD set stricter standards to be adhered to in respect of bathing waters quality compared to previous directives. These stricter standards were imposed following the 2015 bathing season. Blackpool Council responded to the challenges by forming a partnership with Wyre, Fylde and Lancashire County Councils, the Environment Agency United Utilities and Keep Britain Tidy to take collective and collaborative action to ensure our Fylde Peninsula Bathing Waters are the best quality possible and meet the stricter standards directed by the BWD.

In addition to forming a local partnership, Blackpool also embraced a regional approach to improving bathing waters via the Turning Tides Partnership

5.4 Budget Information

There is no official funding for the delivery of our statutory duties under the BWR. However, the Council works proactively with its partner organisations in particular the Environment Agency and United Utilities to ensure that any available funding to deliver projects or campaigns is explored.

The Turning Tides Partnership are working together to establish funding for a three year period to enable the re-establishment of the Love my Beach campaign and for project works to improve bathing waters.

6.0 **Statutory Duty**

Blackpool Council has consistently complied with its duty to erect signage at its four bathing waters, Blackpool South, Blackpool Central Blackpool North and Bispham. The signage provides the relevant information about the sampling point which is used by the Environment Agency when they sample. To date, the Council has not received any adverse comments from the Environment Agency regarding its statutory signage.

In addition, Blackpool Council has responded to pollution risk forecasting in order to advise the public against bathing if there is likely to be increased pollution at a bathing water on a set day. In 2021 the Environment Agency changed its pollution risk forecasting applications to bathing waters which has significantly reduced the number of pollution risk forecasts in the 2021 and 2022 bathing water seasons.

6.2 **What has changed**

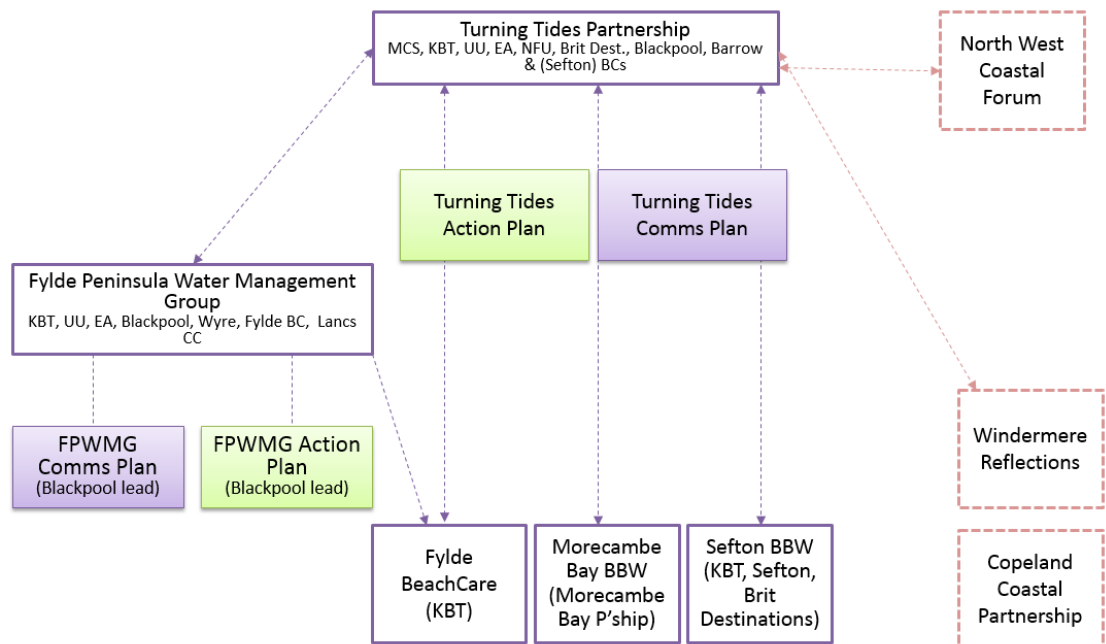
6.3 **Bathing water predictions in 2011**

In 2011, it was predicted that seven of the eight bathing waters along the Fylde Peninsula would be poor at the end of the 2015 bathing water season, which would have meant having to erect signage advising against bathing.

In order to ensure Blackpool Council and its partners achieved the best possible results, the Fylde Peninsula Water Management Partnership was formed and the Turning Tides Regional Partnership was formed, as it was recognised that more could be achieved to ensure the messages and campaigns to improve bathing waters by working with the wider region.

6.4 **Governance**

The original Governance for the partnerships set up to improve bathing waters and promote the benefits of the beach and bathing waters is detailed below, during 2023 the Fylde Peninsula Partnership will review the communications and action plan to continue to improve bathing waters.



6.5 Challenges

The most significant challenges to bathing waters are described below in respect of source pollution, however Blackpool also needs to provide the resources to work in partnership and expand the knowledge base.

In respect of the latter, during 2022 officers continued to be trained and upskilled to continue the work to maintain bathing water standards.

Investment is required by Partners to continue the work started by Turning Tides and to re-establish the Love my Beach campaigns, work is progressing to establish funding as stated in 5.0 above.



6.6 Source pollution

Typically the source of pollution is described below, however due to the deterioration in results in the North West for the 2022 bathing season the Environment Agency have carried out DNA sampling and Blackpool Council are waiting for further information on the source of pollution for the 2022 bathing season.

Outfall sewers – Members may recall that United Utilities have invested in providing long sea outfalls in the South of Blackpool at Harrowside and at Anchorsholme in the North. United Utilities will be asked to provide an update on the impact of this investment. This is particularly important as the classification at Blackpool North has been classified as poor in the 2022 bathing season.

Animals – animal waste in particularly from areas of salt marsh grazing on the river Ribble are regularly reported and the council erects warning signs to prevent bathing during this type of pollution risk forecast. This will continue to be a challenge in maintaining standards. However, the Environment Agency have not provided pollution risk forecasting in respect of animal waste during the 2022 bathing water season, Blackpool Council have challenged this decision.

Dogs and Birds – Work has continued to monitor the impact of pollution from dogs and birds. Public space protection orders are in place during the bathing season between North Pier and South of South pier in respect of dog control orders.

In respect of birds, the Environment Agency have advised that sea birds continue to present a pollution risk to bathing waters.

Surface water run off continues to be a challenge in terms of monitoring and will be included in the action plan for monitoring source pollution during 2023

Misconnections – Blackpool together with its partners the Environment Agency and United Utilities continue to investigate and enforce on any misconnections or pollution directly to sea from piped sources.

6.7 Results at the end of 2022

The results for 2022 are:-

Blackpool South – Good

Blackpool Central – Satisfactory

Blackpool North – Poor

Bispham – Excellent

We will continue to work with Partners at the Environment Agency and United Utilities to understand the source pollution in samples and improve the quality of water.

6.8 Short Term Pollution and pollution Risk Forecasting

Blackpool Council officers continued to display short term pollution signage at bathing waters when rainfall is expected to be heavy potentially reducing the bathing water quality for short timescales. The advantage is that the public receive additional advice about quality and results can be discounted for providing this advice.

Blackpool Council continued to apply pollution risk forecasting signage at bathing waters when pollution events are expected or known to potentially reduce bathing water quality. Results can be discounted for providing this advice. It was important to ensure we provide this health and safety advice to bathers.

However as stated above the Environment Agency have significantly reduced the number of pollution risk warnings in the 2022 bathing water season.

6.9 Awards

The results from the 2022 bathing water season mean that Blackpool have the opportunity to seek Seaside Awards for Blackpool South and Central, and a Blue Flag award for Bispham.

Motion for the Ocean

Blackpool Council have now declared a motion for the ocean and have had significant interest from external partners including academic institutions who can assist in studying the source pollution and also assess opportunities to make best use of our critical asset and in line with our climate emergency response.

Does the information submitted include any exempt information? No

List of Appendices: - None

7.0 Financial considerations:

7.1 Funding by partners to Blackpool Council and the Turning Tides Partnership is required to ensure standards continue to be met and campaigns to raise awareness.

8.0 Legal considerations:

8.1 None

9.0 Risk management considerations:

9.1 Failure to implement the statutory duties could lead to action from the Environment Agency against Blackpool Council and failure of the bathing water standards resulting in Blackpool having to erect signs advising residents and visitors against bathing in our waters.

9.2 Blackpool Council needs to retain the expertise and resource to deliver the statutory duties in respect of bathing waters and ensure it works with its partners in developing and implementing the action plan to maintain the quality of the bathing water. The expertise in this area needs to be further expanded and include upskilling officers so that the Council remains resilient.

10.0 Equalities considerations:

10.1 None

11.0 Sustainability, Climate change and environmental considerations:

11.1 Sustainability and environmental considerations are contained within the main body of the report.

12.0 Internal/ External Consultation undertaken:

12.1 Blackpool Council chairs both the Turning Tides Partnership and the Fylde Peninsula Water Management Partnership and Councillor Hugo is the lead representatives for the water quality sub-group of the Local Government Association (LGA) Coastal Special Interest Group (SIG). Blackpool also represent the LGA SIG at the National Bathing Waters communications forum which is chaired by the Environment Agency.

13.0 Background papers:

13.1 None