

<b>Report to:</b>	<b>CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</b>
<b>Relevant Officer:</b>	Clare Nolan- Barnes, Head of Coastal and Environmental Partnership Investments
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	15 November 2023

## **BATHING WATER MANAGEMENT ANNUAL REPORT**

### **1.0 Purpose of the report:**

- 1.1 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 and highlight areas of challenge and concerns and information on the work of Partnership Working through Turning Tides.

### **2.0 Recommendation(s):**

- 2.1 To scrutinise the delivery of the Councils statutory and other responsibilities in relation to bathing water management, note the challenges, actions 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**

5.3.1 The BWD 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**

5.4.1 There is no official funding for the delivery of our statutory duties under the BWD. 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 a Turning tides officer that was previously hosted by Keep Britain Tidy and for project works to improve bathing waters. It is anticipated that funding from partners will allow Blackpool Council to

establish a Turning tides Partnership Officer, Communications Officer and provide the secretariat duties for the Partnership.

## **6.0 Statutory Duty**

6.1.1 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.

6.1.2 Blackpool Council have responded in respect of its statutory duty to advise the public against bathing if there is likely to be increased pollution at a bathing water on a set day, this occurs when the Environment Agency have issued a pollution risk forecast warning.

6.1.3 In 2021 the Environment Agency changed its pollution risk forecasting applications to bathing waters which significantly reduced the number of pollution risk forecasts in Blackpool during the 2021 and 2022 bathing water seasons. The Environment Agency has reviewed it's applications for calculating the risk of pollution for 2023 the pollution risk forecast which resulted in more advisory notices in the 2023 season.

6.1.4 If a pollution risk forecast is given and the signage is erected the results for that day can be discounted from the final results to reflect the fact that advice has been given on that day.

6.1.5 The Environment Agency have also changed their approach to pollution risk forecasting for Blackpool. Previously, the Authority's pollution risk forecast were individually predicted by the Environment Agency (which meant we could be advising against bathing at Blackpool North but not Blackpool Central) in 2023 the Environment Agency combined the predictions for three of Blackpool's four bathing waters, Blackpool South Central and North received the same warnings.

## **6.2 What has changed**

### **6.2.1 Bathing water predictions in 2011**

6.2.2 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.

6.2.3 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.

6.2.4 As described above, Blackpool Council will take on the role of the Turning Tides Partnership secretariat, communications and Partnership officer to drive improvement to bathing waters and engage with other external Partners to ensure we work across all the sectors and organisations that can help us improve bathing waters.

### **6.3 Governance**

6.3.1 The original Governance for the partnerships set up to improve bathing waters and promote the benefits of the beach and bathing waters has changed and a revisions to the Partnership are developing as some organisations are no longer able to support the Partnerships.

6.3.2 During 2024 Blackpool Council will be working with its partner organisations to actively develop a new communications strategy and action plan for the Turning tides Partnership to continue to improve bathing waters through the Partnership Officer.

### **6.4 Challenges**

6.4.1 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.

6.4.2 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.

6.4.3 In respect of the latter, officers from all Directorates have been involved in a workshop to ensure we work across the Council to improve bathing waters using skills from all areas.

6.4.4 Investment from the Environment Agency and United Utilities identified for 2024 to continue the work started by Turning Tides and to re-establish the Love my Beach campaigns.

6.4.5 A Turning Tides conference/workshop is planned for 2024 to re-establish the

priorities for the next 10 years.

- 6.4.6 During the 2023 bathing season an abnormal situation was declared due to a damaged pipe at the United Utilities Fleetwood waste water plant. The Environment Agency have been investigating the impact of this event but there are no available reports from the investigations at the time of drafting this report.



## 6.5 Source pollution

- 6.5.1 Typically the source of pollution is described below, however due to the deterioration in some results in the North West for the 2023 bathing season the Environment Agency have carried out DNA sampling and Blackpool Council are waiting for further information on the source of pollution.

- 6.5.2 1. 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.

- 6.5.3 2. 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.
- 6.5.4 3. 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. The PSPO will be reviewed in 2024.
- 6.5.5 In respect of birds, the Environment Agency have advised that sea birds continue to present a pollution risk to bathing waters. Blackpool Council has made links to Coast Sense and the University of Liverpool to utilise radar data and analyse bird impact during the bathing season.
- 6.5.6 4. 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
- 6.5.7 5. Combined Sewer outfalls (CSO's) continue to be a challenge for United Utilities (UU) due to the capacity in the sewer and its ability to manage during heavy rainfall. Work is continuing with UU to assist with campaigns to reduce pollution through disposal of wet wipes, plastics etc. into the sewers.

## **6.6 Results at the end of 2023**

- 6.6.1 At the time of drafting this report the results have not been published for 2023 but will be circulated as soon as they are published
- 6.6.2 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.

## **6.7 Awards**

Depending on the results from the 2023 bathing water season Blackpool Council could have the opportunity to seek Seaside Awards.

## **6.8 Motion for the Ocean**

- 6.8.1 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 which is in line with our climate emergency response.

6.8.2 A workshop was held in October 2023 and an action plan with 8 themes has been drafted to deliver the pledges of the Motion for the Ocean the themes include

- Health and wellbeing through utilisation of blue spaces
- Sustainable blue economy, tourism & coastal regeneration
- Education and engagement: residents, commercial and tourists
- Coastal protection and climate change
- Biodiversity protection and restoration
- Waste and pollution reduction
- Collaboration with partners locally and across the Northwest

The work of the motion for the ocean partnership will strengthen the work of the Turning Tides Partnership and benefit the improvement of bathing waters and use of our Blackpool Beaches.

Does the information submitted include any exempt information? No

**List of Appendices:**

None

**7.0 Financial considerations:**

7.1 Blackpool Council will receive external Partnership funding from United Utilities of £75,000 to provide the Partnership Officer, Secretariat and Communications roles.

**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.

**10.0 Equalities considerations and the impact of this decision for our children and young people:**

10.1 There are no equalities or impacts on children and young people arising from this

report.

**11.0 Sustainability, climate change and environmental considerations:**

11.1 Addressed in 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 representative 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