

Chair of the Environment Committee



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Léonie Cooper AM
London Assembly Member

Richard Aylard CVO

Director of External Affairs and Sustainability,
Thames Water
(Via email)

26 March 2018

Dear Mr Aylard,

Water Resources Management Plan

On behalf of the London Assembly's Environment Committee, thank you again for attending our meeting in February. Following the meeting, the committee has considered the issues covered by your draft Water Resources Management Plan and, more broadly, issues of water management for London, and offers you the following points in response.

Planning on a long-term perspective

We welcome the overall approach to long-term planning in the WRMP, including the extension of the time horizon to 80 years, and the alignment of population projections with those used by the GLA (which therefore align with the strategy for housing and workplace growth in London). We highlighted two years ago the significant long-term pressure on water resources generated by London's planned growth and the need for up-to-date population forecasting.¹

We have also joined you in highlighting the magnitude of the economic and other impacts of emergency water use restrictions in the case of severe drought. We therefore welcome that you are seeking to increase resilience to this threat and have set a goal in terms of the expected return period of a drought severe enough to trigger emergency measures (from 125 to 200 years). We have in the past received evidence that three-dry-winter (or worse) droughts have occurred in London six times in the 140 years of scientific rainfall records, and urge you to closely monitor the projected future likelihood of clusters of dry winters.²

¹ *Growing Growing Gone*, London Assembly Environment Committee report 2016: <https://www.london.gov.uk/about-us/london-assembly/london-assembly-publications/growing-growing-gone-long-term-sustainable>

² Evidence from Met Office, at the London Assembly Environment Committee meeting, 3 June 2014: www.london.gov.uk/moderngov/documents/b10840/Minutes%20-%20Appendix%201%20-%20Transcript%20Tuesday%2003-Jun-2014%2010.00%20Environment%20Committee.pdf?T=9

See also *Come Rain or Shine*, London Assembly Environment Committee report 2015: <https://www.london.gov.uk/about-us/about-us/london-assembly/london-assembly-publications/come-rain-or-shine>

Demand management

We very much welcome your focus on efficiency demand management and leakage reduction, which we have supported for some years.³ This approach will hopefully minimise both the financial and environmental costs of providing water. The roll-out of metering is an important part of both leakage reduction and consumer efficiency, but safeguarding vulnerable users against bill increases is important and we welcome your attention to this issue.

As we did at our meeting, we must stress the importance of leakage reduction and of reducing mains bursts in building Londoners' willingness to change behaviour to reduce their own usage. This goodwill is undermined if media reports seem to show water suppliers themselves allowing much greater quantities to escape.

Water supply

Where the draft WRMP shows the 'four best programmes' for meeting future water needs, we note that your preferred 'most sustainable' programme bears a close resemblance to the 'lowest cost' programme, and less to the 'least environmental effect' or 'most able to cope with future challenges' programmes. While recognising the importance of cost in keeping consumer bills down, we also consider that environmental effect and the ability to cope with future challenges are crucial aspects of sustainability, and urge you to ensure that you give sufficient weight to these criteria in reviewing your 'most sustainable' programme.

Sustainable drainage and integrated water management

The need for managing rainwater runoff in London is now well-recognised, and we welcome the work you are doing, with the Mayor and others, to promote sustainable drainage.

In the long term, we see the most sustainable future of London's water management involving the integration of water supply, waste water collection and treatment, and rainwater drainage.⁴ Water in any form is a resource, and so it will ultimately be more effective to build these into a functional, integrated system, rather than attempting to deal with each of the three as isolated problems (or by compounding one problem with another as with combined sewers). We therefore welcome the work you are doing, again with the Mayor and others, on Integrated Water Management Strategies, and recommend that you continue to embed this approach in all of your work.

Sustainable energy

Sewage is not just a water resource: it is also a carbon resource. Its carbon will be released to the atmosphere after conventional treatment and so extracting energy from it is of considerable environmental, as well as potentially commercial, benefit. We were very pleased to hear at our meeting of your innovative work to increase the extraction of energy from sewage waste, and look forward to positive results from the pyrolysis pilot.

Trunk mains

We have discussed with you several times now your response to burst trunk mains, and the flooding and other effects that this causes. We welcome your implementation of the recommendations of the Cuttill report, and commend to you the further recommendations of our counterparts in local authority scrutiny, including Lambeth, Lewisham, Hackney and Islington.

However, we are concerned that the strategic review of the trunk mains asset class has not done what we had been led to expect it would. You told us in January 2017 that it would be "a much more

³ *Water Matters*, London Assembly Environment Committee report 2012: <https://www.london.gov.uk/about-us/london-assembly/london-assembly-press-releases/water-matters-efficient-water-management>

⁴ *Growing Growing Gone*, London Assembly Environment Committee report 2016: <https://www.london.gov.uk/about-us/london-assembly/london-assembly-publications/growing-growing-gone-long-term-sustainable>

detailed review, which is going to take a year, which is going to look at our whole trunk mains network. ...to look back over a number of years at what we know about the condition of the pipes, what we do in terms of maintenance and the period over which we replace them. There is going to be a great deal of very detailed learning from that, which will be ready within a year, in time to inform the business plan for the next five years." However, the Strategic Review document published in October is largely an implementation update on the Cuttill report.

The work of establishing where and how to accelerate the replacement of trunk mains, improving the condition of the network, and reducing the likelihood of future bursts, remains to be done. In AMP7 (2020-25), you are planning to increase your renewal programme to 57km, but since you have 3200km of pipe this means you are going at a rate that will take 280 years to replace the network. Since this is well in excess of the expected asset lifetime, it is not sustainable. You say that you will accelerate work when you have sufficient understanding of the network condition to prioritise, and that you expect to monitor more of the network with devices to detect pipes in poor condition and at risk of bursting. But since you only plan to increase monitoring coverage from 16% to 25% by 2025, it does not seem likely that you will achieve the knowledge you say you need within this time frame. If you are not going to step up mains renewal so dramatically as to renew the bulk of the network within a few decades (and we recognise that this would be very costly) then we urge you to get a much more urgent picture of the network condition so that you can soon begin to target vulnerable sections of pipe in a way that is both cost-efficient and highly effective at reducing the risk of bursts.

As a further point on trunk mains renewal, stakeholders still wish you to share more information on your renewal programme. We welcome your agreement with TfL to provide information within six months; this should have happened sooner and we will monitor delivery. We also heard at our meeting that borough Leaders do not have an understanding of where water mains in their area come in your priority order. This kind of transparency would be very desirable. We would encourage a deepening of the co-operation represented by the Infrastructure High Level Group, and endorse the suggestion that there could be an infrastructure co-ordination unit and geographical units to co-ordinate local works. These bodies should liaise as necessary with the relevant local authorities.

I would be grateful for your reply to the points raised. Please copy your response to the Committee's Scrutiny Manager, Ian Williamson – ian.Williamson@london.gov.uk

Once again, thank you very much for your time.

Yours sincerely,



Léonie Cooper AM

Chair of the Environment Committee