

Scrutiny Committee

Summary of meeting 11 February 2011 with United Utilities and Electricity North West.

The Committee received presentations from representatives of Electricity North West (ENW) and United Utilities (UU)

The presentations covered Street Lighting faults and connections; Water management (principally on the hosepipe ban 2010); water quality; flood risk assessment; and streetworks

The discussion was wide ranging. Area of particular interest to the Cabinet Committee were:

Water management

UU explained the events leading up to the hosepipe ban imposed on 9 July 2010 (lifted on 19 August 2010). It was explained that actions taken were in line with UU's published drought plan, following the driest 7 month period in 74 years.

In response to questions, UU advised the reservoir levels were currently at 96% of average levels for the time of year, compared to 91% last year, and stressed that hosepipe bans were uncommon in the North West, the last one before 2010 being in 1996.

Committee questions focussed on the question of tackling areas with longstanding problems of flooding. Whilst UU advised that such areas tended to be caused by a complex set of factors, there was some feeling that UU ought to be doing more to address those areas suffering from repeat flooding.

Some concern was also expressed at the current level of water supply loss caused by leaks. The figure was at 22%, and this was not forecast to fall significantly in the future. Whilst this figure had virtually halved since 1995, the committee expressed some concern at what was perceived to be a high level, and the lack of intended action. UU said their customer research indicated a willingness to accept occasional hosepipe bans in preference to higher bills to pay for leaks. This area was one of concern for members.

Water Quality

The Committee were updated with the position on deemed discharge consents, recognising that UU's objections were essentially based on practical issues, and that they were working with the Environment Agency on these.

The committee also heard evidence that the decline in bathing water quality was largely due to urban diffuse pollution and adverse weather conditions in Summer 2010. Work had taken place to tackle specific "point source discharges" more directly under UU's control.

Flood Risk Assessment

The Committee heard from UU that they had recently changed their data sharing policy to improve joint working with local authorities, and were also working much more closely with the Environment Agency. UU recognised Lancashire as a leading authority on this in the North West, and had been working hard over the last year to develop good relationships and demonstrate UU's commitment to co-operation on flood risk assessments.

Next Steps

The Chair and Deputy of the Committee are to meet to decide which issues to take forward for further consideration. As well as the issues covered above, highways reinstatements and street lighting fault repairing were clearly concerns.

The Committee workplan currently includes scrutiny of the Flood Risk Assessment currently being produced at the June meeting.

The full minutes and webcast can be accessed here:

<http://council.lancashire.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=120&MId=334&Ver=4>