



David Sproul – Chair, SWW
Susan Davy – Group CEO, SWW
Cc Perran Moon – MP Camborne and Redruth
Consider cc Surfers Against Sewage
Consider cc Cornwall County Council
Anyone else

Draft letter of no confidence to South West Water

Dear Chair and Chief Executive of South West Water

The residents of Portreath asked Portreath Parish Council to consider a vote of no confidence in South West Waters’s existing systems and processes for the management of the sewage infrastructure affecting the sea water in Portreath. There were several presentations from individual parishioners and considerable discussion amongst councillors in considering this proposal.

Portreath Parish Council concluded that the frequent activation of the Portreath storm overflow and other relevant combined storm overflows (CSOs) has resulted in residents and visitors being unable to enter the Portreath bathing water confident in the knowledge that it is safe to do so. Additionally, the wider environmental impact is a matter of great concern. Given this unacceptable position the Parish Council agreed to the vote of no confidence.

The context of this vote of no confidence is the frequent activation of relevant CSOs. The activation of the Portreath storm overflow up to October 2023, which may not include the sustained period of overflows in November and December, is detailed in the table published on your website as follows:

Number of spills

	2023	2022	2021	2020
Bridge pumping station overflow	120	80	94	152

According to the real time information provided by the Surfers Against Sewage app, there have been a considerable number of days during the winter and spring of 2024 when the Portreath sewage overflow has been activated. Clearly you will agree that nearly 200 consecutive days of overflow or aftermath cannot be considered the exceptional frequency that is permitted for the use or CSOs.

The Portreath storm overflow is the main source of local raw sewage pollution but Tolskithy Lane CSO and Sunnyside Tank CSO also emit raw sewage that is directed into the Portreath

Stream then into the Portreath Tunnel and out into our sea. Only 2 km further away than that from Portreath, the Red River with its seven CSOs also emitting raw sewage into our local sea additionally add to our concerns.

The removal of the valuable amenity of sea swimming and surfing, along with the associated physical and mental benefits from safe use plus the wider environmental issues are the key concerns that the Parish Council and its residents find unacceptable.

The Parish did of course take note of the Environment Agency reporting of consistently excellent bathing water quality measurements over recent years during the bathing season. It is unfortunate that the measurements taken by the Environment Agency since May 2024 have largely taken place on days other than when the Portreath overflow has been activated. We are also aware that South West Water are in court currently answering thirty charges brought by the Environment Agency relating to "many hundreds" of alleged illegal water discharges and breaches of environmental permits.

Portreath Parish Council took note of the latest South West Water Business Plan for 2025-30 and its statement that "we also acknowledge that we have lost the trust of the public and our customers as a result of sewage, pollutions and the use of storm overflows". Further the Parish Council notes from your business plan that there is a commitment to invest £760 million to deal with storm overflows that affect bathing waters and fisheries by 2030. To quote from your plan "tackling 100% storm overflows at beaches by 2030 – ahead of government targets (2050) – maintaining bathing water quality all year round". Finally, we also note from your business plan that you "commit to a never seen before sampling and monitoring regime to rebuild confidence in our communities and ensure everyone can be confident of the water quality across our region". Given your year-round commitment to bathing water quality by 2030 we assume that the enhanced monitoring system will also be year-round.

As you can see, we have looked fairly at the available data so we can understand the issues and some of the complexities. We appreciate your commitment to increased monitoring but the core issue remains: the very frequent discharge from the CSOs near Portreath, in particular from the Portreath CSO.

I am sure you will understand why the current position has led to this vote of no confidence. Portreath Parish Council and its residents need South West Water to prevent sewage entering the bathing water in all but extreme conditions. We also need you to have the monitoring in place that will enable residents and visitors to Portreath to have informed year-round access to the bathing water at Portreath without fear of the potential ill effects or environmental issues of untreated sewage contamination from any of the ten CSOs that discharge into our local bathing water.

In summary we want and need you to get it right in the future to rebuild the trust you acknowledge you have lost. On this basis Portreath Parish Council and its residents are of course willing to engage with South West Water to hear and feedback on your plans specific to Portreath.

Clerk@portreath-pc.gov.uk

Chairman – Councillor Mr Simon Goodwin

Clerk to The Council & RFO - Lucy Jose

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We do not want to be drawn into operational or management detail, but we do need a substantial strategic response from South West Water that will restore confidence in your ability to stop sewage pollution as represented by the current frequent CSO discharges. Portreath Parish Council therefore asks you to set out and share the:

- specific plans and timetable to all but eliminate the current frequent use of the Portreath sewage overflow;
- plans and timetable for year-round sampling, monitoring and publishing of bathing water quality information.

Portreath Parish Council look forward to receiving a response as described that fully and clearly addresses the issues identified in this vote of no confidence.

Yours sincerely

Simon Goodwin

Mr Simon Goodwin
Chairman
Portreath Parish Council

Clerk@portreath-pc.gov.uk

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