

Annex 2

OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL RESPONSE ON WATER RESOURCES WEST EMERGING REGIONAL PLAN

Consultation closing date: 28th February 2022

1. Oxfordshire County Council is responding to this consultation along with the consultations on some of the other emerging water resources regional plans.
2. We believe that Water Resources West (WRW) and Water Resources South East (WRSE) need to work more closely together, and with adjoining regions, to address water needs, and that such work should lead to changes in the emerging regional plans.
3. We are pleased that the emerging WRW regional plan indicates that there is potential for transfers of water from the West into the South East. Page 15 of the consultation document states: 'it is clear that Water Resources West can help other regions meet their needs via such transfers, while maintaining our own regional resilience and security of supply'. Page 47 of the consultation document further explains: 'we are in a position to put forward a wide range of options not needed locally (some of which are relatively low-cost) to support transfers of water. Such transfers can support the needs of our region as well as other regions.'
4. Page 47 of the consultation document indicates that WRW recently proposed a total of 16 potential transfer options out of its region, of which 11 were to the South East. Although totalling 11, they can be summarised as 2 with sub-options: the Severn Thames Transfer and the Grand Union Canal.
 - Severn to Thames Transfer:
 - unsupported flow element (4 options).
 - supported from United Utilities sources via Vyrnwy (1 option).
 - support mitigation via alternative supplies to Shrewsbury (1 option).
 - support from Severn Trent sources (2 options).
 - supported by Minworth wastewater treatment plant effluent (1 option).
 - Grand Union Canal supported by Minworth wastewater treatment plant effluent (2 options).
5. We have not found a timeframe on such transfers within the WRW consultation document. We consider that strategic transfers into the South East would reduce the need for a South East Strategic Reservoir Option (SESRO) in Oxfordshire. Oxfordshire County Council has numerous concerns about the SESRO proposal which is being pursued in the emerging regional plan for the South East. The WRSE emerging regional plan indicates that the SESRO should be built first, and strategic transfers follow later after 2040 if needed. We think that research

into the strategic transfer options should be hastened so that the emerging regional plans are changed. Oxfordshire County Council opposes the SESRO, the most recent motion to that effect being on 2nd November 2021. We consider that strategic transfers of water may better be included in best value regional plans.

6. The Grand Union Canal transfer option does not travel through Oxfordshire, instead it travels through counties to the north. This option appears to sensibly and sustainably use an existing canal resource to get water from the Midlands to London. Severn Trent Water and Affinity Water are jointly promoting this option, including new pipeline connections and treatment facilities, through RAPID. It is understood that this option could supply customers in the South East with up to 100MI/d.
7. The Severn to Thames Transfer option will involve either a pipeline from Deerhurst in Gloucestershire to Culham in Oxfordshire; or reinstating parts of the Cotswold Canals from Gloucester Dock to Culham together with pipelines along part of the route. It is understood from the RAPID decision published in December 2021 that this option could supply customers in the South East with between 300 MI/d and 500 MI/d depending on sub-option. The Severn to Thames Transfer is being put forward jointly by United Utilities, Severn Trent Water and Thames Water. To date there has been little opportunity to comment on the specifics of a Severn to Thames Transfer proposal which would involve land in Oxfordshire. We are likely to want to comment on the relative merit of the two routes, potential for invasive species migrating, construction effects and biodiversity.
8. It is our view that any strategic option should only be pursued with a full understanding of the forecast need for additional water and the water savings that can first be achieved through reduced pipe leakage, innovation and reduced water consumption. If that test is passed, both or either of these strategic transfer options, if used early, would avoid the need to progress the SESRO proposal at this point in time, and potentially at all at any of its size options, and we urge the regional groups to look for ways of doing that. Of all the options, we consider that the SESRO sticks out as impacting on large numbers of residents, in a relatively densely populated area that is subject to further development proposals. Oxfordshire County Council has stated its opposition to the SESRO, our most recent resolution on this being made at full Council on 2nd November 2021.
9. We note that WRW discusses the options for additional water supply within the West region and includes a table of options from pages 74 to 78 of the document. The indicative water supply of the options listed, which number more than 50, vary from 1MI/d to 80MI/d and the accompanying text indicates that there is a longer list of feasible options that WRW will continue to explore as the draft plan is prepared. Given this, it seems that there is ample potential for future water supplies in the South East to be secured by means of transfers from WRW without the need for the SESRO.

10. The first question in your consultation document is: *‘Should we share water resources outside of the region to reflect national challenges? If yes, then what would you expect in terms of avoiding adverse economic, environmental, wellbeing, resilience or water quality impacts to the source area?’* We ask that you consider the text above as a response to that question. In summary, we think that WRW should share water resources with WRSE. We would expect that adverse impacts to the source area would be able to be appropriately avoided or mitigated. Although we require further information and engagement, we are hopeful that a network which involves shared water would avoid the need to progress the SESRO proposal.