Press release: Water companies make environmental improvements but Environment Agency urges more action

The majority of the UK's water companies achieved close to or exceeded targets set to improve water quality, according to a new report published by the Environment Agency today.

Wessex Water and United Utilities were the top performing water companies, repeating last year's success.
In a year when the Environment Agency introduced tougher standards, water companies made good progress in meeting the new targets. However, the total number of pollution incidents increased by 160 in 2016, the first increase since 2012.

While water companies continue to improve their reporting of pollution to ensure impact can be minimised and wildlife protected downstream, the Environment Agency has urged some water companies to make significant improvements to bring down pollution levels.

The report which ranks the nine big water and sewage companies in England on a range of measures needed to protect the environment also showed:

- All companies achieved the target to complete work to build and upgrade infrastructure which will improve water quality, water resources and river biodiversity.

- Eight out of nine water companies gained full marks for protecting water supply security. This is crucial following the dry winter as some rivers, reservoirs and groundwaters are lower than normal for the time of year but there are no water supply issues.

- Safe recovery or disposal of sewage sludge took place 99.9% of the time and was mostly used to improve agricultural land, generate heat or power. And compliance with permits at sewage treatment and water treatment works is at 98.6% on average, while good is still short of the 100% target.

- The number of serious pollution incidents has continued to decline. However there was an increase in total numbers of incidents and of the most damaging pollution incidents, nine up from four in the previous year.

Dr Toby Willison, Executive Director of Operations for the Environment

Agency, said:

> Water companies work hard to protect the environment. We have set more stringent targets and we are glad to see overall improvements but want to see more effort to avoid pollution incidents.
>
> As a fair and effective regulator we are committed to publishing results, highlighting best practice but also taking action to address any poor practice.
>
> While we welcome the good progress being made we will continue to address any failings and will take enforcement action in the most serious cases.

2016 was also the first year to see several million pound fines handed out by the courts to water companies for pollution incidents.

All water companies provide an essential public service and affect the health of rivers and how water can be used downstream by others. High environmental performance from water companies protects rivers and seas, supports wildlife and ensures people can enjoy the environment. Water companies also contributed £127 million last year to reduce risk of sewers flooding homes and protect local communities.

Annual water and sewerage company environmental performance reports are available on GOV.UK.

News story: Stabilisation Unit leads international policing visit to Kosovo

Earlier this year, the Stabilisation Unit (SU) undertook a visit to the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX). A delegation of senior UK police officers joined SU on a four day fact-finding mission, with delegates given a comprehensive overview of what an international deployment looks like and what has been achieved through international policing in Kosovo. The EULEX mission provides crucial support to Kosovo’s rule of law institutions and assists Kosovan agencies in key areas such as corruption, organised crime, historical war crimes cases and public order offences.

The delegation received briefings from a number of senior officials including the Head of EULEX Mission, senior Kosovo police, the Kosovan Deputy Prime Minister and the British Ambassador to Kosovo. Delegates learnt about the benefits that international policing had brought to Kosovo and the positive impact it has had. As a result of UK-led assistance, training and expertise, the Kosovo Police were now better prepared, at the strategic and tactical level, to engage in community policing, enabling the police to build stronger relationships with local communities that in turn contributes towards peacekeeping and crime prevention.

Delegates and members of Kosovo Police in Mitrovica, Kosovo

Delegates were also able to hear from deployees to EULEX Kosovo about the benefits international experience offered for UK officers and UK policing: for example an improved understanding of the criminal pipelines for modern slavery and drugs trafficking and how that can contribute to building safer communities at home as well as abroad. They heard about how engagement in a new and challenging context helped officers develop enhanced community policing skills such as problem solving, communication and engagement. Delegates were also interested in exploring how engagement overseas supports efforts to tackle issues 'upstream' before they reach the UK.

News story: Spanish state visit 2017

King Felipe and Queen Letizia of Spain are in the UK on the first official Spanish state visit in more than 30 years.

Their Majesties the King and Queen of Spain have started their 3-day state visit to the United Kingdom today, 12 July, at the invitation of Her Majesty the Queen.

This will be the first state visit to the UK by King Felipe and Queen Letizia. The last state visit from Spain was by King Juan Carlos I and Queen Sofia in 1986.

The visit will celebrate the very close royal, historic, cultural and commercial ties between our 2 countries.

Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson welcomes the King and Queen of Spain to the UK:

Boris Johnson welcome for the Spanish state visit

The UK and Spain are close allies: partners in NATO, the UN, G7 and G20 among numerous international organisations. We continue to co-operate in the European Union, and once the UK leaves the EU we want to strengthen our strong and constructive UK-Spain bilateral relationship.

The UK and Spain are major business partners. Spain is the 10th largest export market for UK companies, the UK exports more to Spain than India and Brazil combined.

British Ambassador to Spain Simon Manley talks about the close ties between our 2 countries:

Simon Manley talks about Spanish state visit

Press release: Businesses to access millions in government export support through partnership with high street banks

Secretary of State for the Department for International Trade, Liam Fox, has today announced that UKEF will partner with five of the UK's biggest banks to deliver government-backed financial support to exporters more quickly and efficiently.

Partnering with Barclays, HSBC, Lloyds Banking Group, RBS/NatWest and Santander, UKEF will also be able to extend its support to supply chain companies of UK exporters, significantly increasing the number of businesses able to access UKEF-backed trade finance.

As a result, smaller companies that support big UK exporters will be able to secure government-backed financing to deliver products and services and benefit from their clients' international business.

Secretary of State for International Trade, Liam Fox, said:

> As an international economic department, this new partnership shows the Department for International Trade's commitment to help small businesses seize the global demand for British exports. Providing easily accessible finance, backed by UKEF's guarantee, will lift a common barrier to exporting. Providing that finance to suppliers as well as exporters means spreading the benefits of global trade, supporting more jobs and growth for companies large and small.

Jeff Longhurst, UK Finance Head of Commercial, added:

> The industry is committed to making it easier for UK exporters to access finance and UK Finance has worked closely with lenders and UKEF to make this process simpler. With nearly 70% of international SMEs planning to grow in the next 12 months, today's announcement is a boost for both SMEs and the wider economy, helping support

> businesses across the country.

Through this new model, banks will be able to provide export-related trade finance, for example working capital loans and bonds required by overseas buyers, to support their SME customers directly, and with UKEF’s guarantee in place should it be needed.

At the same time, UKEF will make trade finance support directly available to direct suppliers supporting UK exporters, in a major enhancement to its existing offer. This will allow thousands of companies in manufacturers’ and service providers’ supply chains to access contract bonds and working capital loans with the government’s guarantee.

All of this is being delivered to banks through a new and secure digital platform to help ensure the quickest response times and most efficient customer experience.

John Mahon, Head of Barclays Corporate Banking, said:

> Barclays’ partnership with UKEF is an important part of our trade and working capital strategy, and this initiative will allow us to deliver more comprehensive support to our clients. Delegated authority will make accessing UKEF guarantees simpler for many businesses and will help companies we work with grow more quickly. Both exporters and companies involved in international trade through supply chains will benefit, and we look forward to further collaborating with UKEF and our colleagues across the industry to find more new and innovative ways to help UK businesses take full advantage of export opportunities.

Ian Tandy, Head of Global Trade and Receivables Finance at HSBC, added:

> HSBC supports many of the UK’s SMEs so we welcome any initiatives designed to help our customers. We look forward to working closely with UKEF and continuing to support the UK’s hard working, creative and inspiring SMEs.

Steve Everett, Head of Propositions & Product for Lloyds Bank, Global Transaction Banking, added:

> In line with our helping Britain prosper commitment, the Government and Lloyds Banking Group are working closely to deliver even more comprehensive and streamlined support for our customers to trade internationally.

Alison Rose, CEO, Commercial and Private Banking at NatWest welcomed the initiative, saying:

> We're delighted to continue our partnership with UK Export Finance, working to support businesses that export. As part of our mission to become a simpler bank for our customers, we are committed to making it as easy as possible for all UK businesses to access export finance whenever it is required.

Mike Ellwood, Managing Director, Santander Corporate & Commercial, added:

> We want to help businesses prosper and for many, going international will help them do just that. We're passionate about connecting up our five million SME customers around the globe, and enabling them to make the most of the exporting opportunities that exist. SMEs make up the majority of British business, yet four in five of them do not export. We are fully supportive of the objectives of UKEF, specifically the delegation and digital projects which are aimed at making it easier for SMEs to access finance and making that process more efficient.

Since UKEF's trade finance products were launched in 2011, nearly 300 companies have benefited from nearly £500 million in support for several billion pounds worth of overseas contracts. This development follows a partnership agreement between the Department for International Trade and the five banks signed in July 2016.

Notes to editors

1. UK Export Finance is the UK's export credit agency and a government department, working alongside the Department for International Trade as an integral part of its strategy and operations.

2. It exists to ensure that no viable UK export should fail for want of finance or insurance from the private market. It provides finance and insurance to help exporters win, fulfil and ensure they get paid for export contracts.

3. Sectors in which UKEF has supported exports include: manufacturing, construction, oil and gas, mining and metals, petrochemicals, telecommunications, and transport.

4. UKEF has a regional network of 24 export finance managers supporting export businesses.

5. UKEF supports exporters with a range of products that include:

    - Bond insurance policy
    - Bond support scheme

- Buyer & supplier credit financing facility
- Direct lending facility
- Export insurance policy
- Export refinancing facility
- Export working capital scheme
- Letter of credit guarantee scheme

News story: Government announces further funding to tackle gang related violence

This funding will allow the expansion of local area reviews and targeted support offered as part of the government's ongoing commitment to Ending Gang Violence and Exploitation (EGVE).

Sarah Newton, Minister for Crime, Safeguarding and Vulnerability said:

> Gang related violence devastates lives and I am pleased to announce further funding to tackle these appalling crimes.
>
> It's often the young and most vulnerable in our society who become ensnared in gang activity having been preyed upon by gang members.
>
> This government is determined to do all we can to protect them by ending this cycle of exploitation and the crimes that inevitably go alongside it.

The £99,000 funding for 2017/18 was announced by the minister at a government forum held to bring partners – including from the police and key charities – together to tackle the issue of gangs.

It will enable a further 15 local area reviews to be conducted in regions who are experiencing gang related issues to assess their resilience and help address the issues they face.

Once the areas who will be reviewed are selected, an expert team will help local authorities and their partners map gang problems in their area, review how effectively they deal with it, and make recommendations to help improve their response.

Local areas will also be able to benefit from tailored follow on support to help them implement the suggested changes and do more to tackle the issue of gangs. This could include developing multi-agency action plans to tackle county lines, training and support, and help to develop relevant town and city centre safeguarding measures.

The funding will also support several regional strategic reviews to identify a common framework that the police, Police and Crime Commissioners and partners can agree to effectively tackle the damage caused by county lines gangs.

This further funding follows a number of measures taken by the government to reduce gang activity. This includes an amendment to the Digital Economy Bill to significantly disrupt drugs gangs by compelling communications providers to disconnect a mobile, SIM card or phone number where it can be proven they are being used in connection with drug offences. This will also protect children and vulnerable people who are being exploited as couriers moving drugs and money between suburban areas, market and coastal towns and their urban hub.

The government has also banned the sale of so-called ‘zombie knives’ and major retailers have signed up to a voluntary agreement to prevent the underage sale of knives.

This government is committed to providing meaningful alternatives to gangs, such as education, training and employment to end the detrimental impact they have on our society.