

CIBSE's SoPHE response to the Independent Water Commission Report

Monday 4 August, 2025

The Society of Public Health Engineers ([SoPHE](#)), a society within CIBSE, welcomes the publication of the [Independent Water Commission's Final Report](#) and strongly supports its call for transformational reform across the UK's water sector.

This report arrives at a pivotal moment, as climate volatility, ageing infrastructure and systemic underinvestment intersect with growing public concern over water quality, pollution, and drought resilience. SoPHE commends the Commission's transparent, evidence-led approach and particularly endorses the following themes:

SoPHE's position – Key support points:

- **Integrated water systems thinking:**

SoPHE has long advocated joined-up strategies that embed surface water, foul drainage, SuDS, greywater reuse, and water demand reduction within the built environment and support the Commission's call for an industry-wide shift toward system-level resilience

- **Regulatory reform & accountability:**

SoPHE echoes the Commission's recommendation for a clearer governance model with simplified regulatory architecture ensuring accountability for performance outcomes, aligned with incentives for innovation and sustainability.

- **Infrastructure investment & climate resilience:**

The report rightly identifies the urgent need to upgrade the UK's outdated water infrastructure. SoPHE members see firsthand the consequences of underfunded assets — from combined sewer overflows (CSOs) to constrained network capacities. It is SoPHE's belief that new developments must be future-proofed for both flood and drought resilience.

- **Water efficiency & demand management:**

SoPHE champions the Commission's stance on accelerated water efficiency standards across all building types, with minimum performance requirements on fittings and plumbing systems. Incentivising innovation in smart metering, leakage detection, behaviour change and public awareness are all critical to water security in the future.

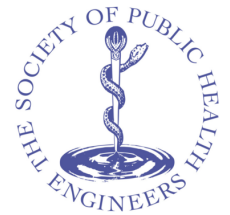
- **Skills & technical competence:**

The role of skilled public health engineers is central to helping deliver the Commission's vision. We support investment in training, professional development, and clearer technical leadership pathways across both consultancy and delivery.

Strategic recommendations from SoPHE:

1. **Adopt a Whole-Life Water Cycle Design Mandate** for new developments, integrating supply, drainage, reuse, and nature-based solutions.
2. **Mandate SoPHE-Chartered professionals** for strategic public health infrastructure schemes and planning gateway reviews.
3. **Accelerate national SuDS adoption** through Building Regs Part H reform and enhanced drainage hierarchy compliance.

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4. **Embed long-term outcomes** into procurement models — ensuring water efficiency, carbon performance, and service quality are rewarded.
5. **Strengthen the digital thread** — encouraging smart, sensor-based system monitoring integrated into Building Information Modelling (BIM) and digital twins.
6. **Encourage the water authorities to adopt smart metering**, aligned with design usage targets by incentivising lower costs based on lower usage.

Closing statement

SoPHE, a CIBSE society, stands ready to contribute to a new era of water system governance in the UK. We urge policymakers and stakeholders to view this report, not as a critique, but as a clarion call to collectively reshape the way we manage and value water — not just as an asset, but as a shared human right and ecological imperative.

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