

BABERGH AND MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCILS

Minutes of the meeting of the **JOINT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held in the King Edmund Chamber, Endeavour House, 8 Russell Road, Ipswich on Monday, 18 September 2023

PRESENT:

Chair: Mary McLaren

Councillors:	Jane Carruthers	Terence Carter
	Kathryn Grandon	Adrienne Marriott
	John Matthissen	Mary McLaren
	Brian Riley	Laura Smith
	Rowland Warboys	John Whyman

In attendance:

Councillor(s): Andrew Mellen

Witness(es): Grant Tuffs – Regional Engagement Manager – Anglian Water
Natasha Kenny – Head of Quality Regulation & Enforcement – Anglian Water
Ben Marshall – Senior Environmental Officer – Environment Agency
Alison Parnell – Area Environment Manager – Environment Agency
Nikolas Bertholdt – Senior Advisor – Natural England
John Kemp – River Stour Trust

Officers: Director for Operations (ME)
Director for Planning (TB)
Corporate Manager – Public Realm (NC)
Strategic Projects and Delivery Manager (SS)
Corporate Manager – Governance and Civic Office (JR)
Lead Officer for Overview and Scrutiny (AN)

Apologies:

Councillors: James Caston
Leigh Jamieson
Janet Pearson
Dr Ross Piper
Miles Row
Keith Scarff

24 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTIONS

24.1 Apologies were received from Councillors Caston, Jamieson, Pearson, Piper, Row, and Scarff.

24.2 Councillor Carruthers substituted for Councillor Jamieson.

24.3 Councillor Warboys substituted for Councillor Pearson.

24.4 Councillor Matthissen substituted for Councillor Row.

24.5 Councillor Marriott substituted for Councillor Scarff.

25 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

25.1 None declared.

26 JOS/23/14 TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE JOINT MEETING HELD ON 21 AUGUST 2023

26.1 Councillor Grandon proposed that the minutes of the meeting on 21 August 2023 be confirmed and signed as a true record.

26.2 Councillor Whyman seconded the proposal.

By a vote of 5 For and 5 Abstentions

It was RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting from 21 August 2023 be confirmed and signed as a true record.

27 TO RECEIVE NOTIFICATION OF PETITIONS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE COUNCIL'S PETITION SCHEME

27.1 None received.

28 QUESTIONS BY THE PUBLIC

28.1 None received.

29 QUESTIONS BY COUNCILLORS

29.1 None received.

30 JOS/23/15 REVIEW ON CURRENT LEVELS OF UNTREATED SEWAGE DISCHARGES TO WATERS IN BABERGH AND MID SUFFOLK

30.1 The Director of Operations introduced the item to the Committee outlining before Members the approved motion from both Councils in November 2022, stakeholder responsibilities, and the background information provided by internal officers in the information bulletin.

30.2 Anglian Water provided a presentation to the Committee outlining before Members the operational background of the organisation, the current strategic

goals, the five “Get River Positive” commitments, investment into the reduction of storm spills, water recycling programmes, storm overflows and their designated permits, and event duration monitors (EDMs) installation and maintenance.

- 30.3 Representatives from the Environment Agency, Natural England, and the River Stour Trust introduced themselves to the committee and outlined before Members their organisation’s purpose in managing rivers in the Districts.
- 30.4 Councillor Matthissen questioned the reasons for the frequency of storm spills given, on average, the districts receive very little rainfall. Anglian Water responded that external factors, such as fats in the sewage system and blockages, were affecting activations of storm spills and that a third of these activations were false events.
- 30.5 Councillor Warboys queried if Anglian Water were able to provide planning officers with more detailed information regarding costs and capacity in their consultee responses. Anglian Water responded that they were not statutory consultees in the planning process and that there were legislative restrictions to the information that they could provide.
- 30.6 Councillor Marriott queried if there was a strategy for removing excessive plant growth from rivers. The Environment Agency responded that greenery in the rivers would be cut back if there was a direct benefit to domestic properties and businesses but that there were mitigations in place, specifically regarding flow rates and nutrient levels, that would reduce plant growth.
- 30.7 Councillor Marriott requested if Councillors could receive more educational training on catchment sensitive farming to work collaboratively with farmers in their wards to protect water quality. Natural England responded that was a session they would be keen to support and deliver.
- 30.8 Councillor Grandon questioned what could be done to improve the levels of biodiversity and wildlife in the rivers in Hadleigh. Anglian Water responded that there was a phosphorous scheme being delivered at the Hadleigh Water Recycling Centre which would reduce the levels of phosphates in the system, therefore reducing plant growth and encouraging wildlife to return. The Environment Agency responded that, if needed, an aerator could be added to the water supply to increase oxygen levels and improve the habitat for wildlife.
- 30.9 Councillor Riley questioned how soon improvements could be made to water quality in the rivers to raise their status from “poor” to “good”. The Environment Agency responded that there were regulations to make improvements with a deadline of 2027 and that it was possible only one measurable aspect of the river was resulting in its “poor” status rather than the whole river being below standard quality.
- 30.10 Councillor Carter questioned whether the presence of external influences in our rivers were resulting in storm spill events during periods of wet weather

not being accurately reported. Anglian Water responded that automatic verification checks were now taking place to improve the accuracy of storm spill devices reporting incidences but that there was always a risk that some spills would not be identified.

- 30.11 Councillor Carter further questioned what tests the Environment Agency carry out on a river when a storm spill has been recorded. The Environment Agency responded that the tests carried out are based on information provided by Anglian Water and that investigations into the causes of storm spills are carried out dependant on frequency and risk.
- 30.12 Councillor Carruthers queried the government ban on wet wipes by 2024 and what could be done to educate the public on materials that should not be put into the sewage system via domestic properties. Anglian Water responded that there were consultations to ban the plastics in wet wipes and that these should be disposed of in bins rather than flushed. Anglian Water further responded that they were running a “Keep It Clear” communications campaign to remove “unflushables” from the sewage system.
- 30.13 Councillor Smith questioned if the Sudbury Water Recycling Centre had phosphorous removal equipment installed. Anglian Water responded that there were plans to install this equipment and that this would be concluded by 2024.
- 30.14 Councillor Smith further questioned what tests would be conducted in the rivers should a bathing water status application be granted. The Environment Agency responded that if an application is granted then the area will go into a monitoring programme, where the water will be tested regularly for pathogens, and that improvement measures could be made to the quality of the water once it has received a classification from the government.
- 30.15 Councillor Whyman queried how the Environment Agency could control water run-off from farms, particularly open pig farms, that were connected to the river system. The Environment Agency responded that there were several pieces of legislation that granted the organisation powers to bring pig farms into compliance with nitrate vulnerable zone (NVZ) regulations and that there was a team dedicated to such pollution incidents. Natural England responded that they were able to get involved with enforcing regulations if the pollution was affecting protected sites.
- 30.16 Councillor McLaren questioned if there were any discussions with pharmaceutical companies concerning how certain drugs getting into the sewage system may affect water quality. The Environment Agency responded that some collaboration was taking place with DEFRA regarding certain chemicals and their impact on the river system.
- 30.17 Councillor Carter questioned what triggers Anglian Water to invest in new infrastructure when significant housing developments are built in the catchment of water treatment works. Anglian Water responded that investment is made if the water treatment plant does not have sufficient

capacity to deal with the increased load.

30.18 Councillor Carter further questioned if Anglian Water were paying more money out in dividends to shareholders than what was invested into new or improved infrastructure. Anglian Water responded that this was not the case and that a breakdown of figures was provided annually via a public report.

A short break was taken between 11:52am and 12:10pm.

30.19 Councillor Matthissen questioned what position the Councils were in regarding the collection of evidence concerning new housing developments and their cumulative impact on the sewage system as part of the new Joint Local Plan. The Director of Planning responded that some evidence gathering for part two of the Joint Local Plan was underway but that this did not relate to the issues detailed currently.

30.20 Councillor Matthissen further questioned if point four of the original motion – to request that planning officers include in major development reports a section on the specific impact of that development on watercourses – was being carried out. The Strategic Projects and Delivery Manager responded that this was the case and that the consultation response template for Anglian Water had been modified to pick up these extra details.

30.21 Councillor Carter questioned if the Councils tested to make sure that the data they receive as part of a consultation response is accurate. The Strategic Projects and Delivery Manager responded that this was not within the capabilities of planning officers but that responses from other consultees, such as the Lead Local Flood Authority, allow for cross-referencing and checking.

30.22 Members debated the item on the following issues:

- Anglian Water's current capacity to deal with overflows
- The cumulative impact of future housing developments
- The lack of public warnings about the quality of rivers
- The limitations of consultee responses as part of the planning process
- A lack of response from OFWAT as requested in the original motion
- The current and proposed phosphate reduction programmes
- Citizen science projects to obtain more information and data on the quality of the water in our rivers
- More training for Councillors on how to support catchment sensitive farming

30.23 The Lead Officer for Overview and Scrutiny put forward the following recommendations based on the questions and debate from Members:

- That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee thanks Anglian Water, the Environment Agency, Natural England, and the River Stour Trust for

their attendance and for the answers provided.

- That the Chairs of Overview and Scrutiny provide a report and verbal update on the contents and outcomes of the Committee meeting at the next Full Council meetings in October.
- That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee requests for more information from the external representatives, specifically including the phosphate reducing programme, and asks that this be fed back to the Committee via an Information Bulletin.
- That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee requests for a wider publicity campaign for residents, staff, and Councillors regarding materials that cannot be put into the sewage system.
- That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee requests for Cabinet to investigate the possibility of running a campaign regarding the provision of water butts for residents.
- That Mid Suffolk District Council receives an update on their concerns over water quality in the District from OFWAT.

30.24 Councillor Matthissen proposed the recommendations as read out by the Lead Officer and made an additional recommendation:

- That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee requests for Council to consider supporting “citizen science” projects

30.25 Councillor Smith seconded the proposal.

By a unanimous vote

It was RESOLVED:

- 1.1. That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee thanks Anglian Water, the Environment Agency, Natural England, and the River Stour Trust for their attendance and for the answers provided.**
- 1.2. That the Chairs of Overview and Scrutiny provide a report and verbal update on the contents and outcomes of the Committee meeting at the next Full Council meetings in October.**
- 1.3. That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee requests for more information from the external representatives, specifically including the phosphate reducing programme, and asks that this be fed back to the Committee via an Information Bulletin.**
- 1.4. That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee requests for a wider publicity campaign for residents, staff, and Councillors regarding materials that cannot be put into the sewage system.**
- 1.5. That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee requests for Cabinet to**

investigate the possibility of running a campaign regarding the provision of water butts for residents.

- 1.6. That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee requests for Council to consider supporting “citizen science” projects.**
- 1.7. That Mid Suffolk District Council receives an update on their concerns over water quality in the District from OFWAT.**

31 JOS/23/16 FORTHCOMING DECISIONS LIST

31.1 The Forthcoming Decision List was noted.

32 JOS/23/17 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ACTION TRACKER

32.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Action Tracker was noted.

33 JOS/23/18 BABERGH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PLAN

33.1 Councillor Riley questioned when the proposed items from the August committee - an update on Corks Lane and an item concerning staffing, agile working, and productivity – would be timetabled on the work plan.

33.2 The Lead Officer for Overview and Scrutiny responded that initial conversations regarding these items had been held with the Chairs and that the items would be timetabled after further conversations about how these items would be brought to committee had been held.

33.3 The Babergh Overview and Scrutiny Work Plan was noted.

34 JOS/23/19 MID SUFFOLK OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PLAN

34.1 The Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Committee was noted.

The business of the meeting was concluded at 13:11pm.

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Chair