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OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday, 11 June 2025 in the Council Chamber - Council Offices at 9.30 am

**Committee
Members Present:**

Cllr P Bailey

Cllr J Boyle

Cllr C Cushing

Cllr A Fletcher

Cllr M Hankins

Cllr P Heinrich

Cllr V Holliday (Chairman)

Cllr N Housden

Cllr C Rouse

Cllr K Bayes

**Members also
attending:**

**Officers in
Attendance:**

Democratic Services Manager and Assistant Director for Finance,
Assets, Legal & Monitoring Officer

**Also in
attendance:**

Mr G Tuffs, Mr A Outram (Anglian Water)

14 SUBSTITUTES

None.

15 PUBLIC QUESTIONS & STATEMENTS

None received.

16 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 9th April were approved as a correct record, subject to the following amendments:

Page 3 – paragraph 6 should read ‘hard to quantify’

Page 3 – paragraph 3 should read ‘Norwich/Ipswich area’

Page 7, Minute 291 – change ‘dome’ to ‘some’

The minutes for the meeting held on 14th May 2025 were approved as a correct record subject to the following amendments:

List of attendees – Cllr Dixon should be listed as present

Page 10, paragraph 3 – should read ‘cash deposits ‘from’ residents

Page 12 – paragraph 4 – should read ‘progress had been made recently’

Page 12 – paragraph 3 – change from ‘during’ to ‘drawing to a close’

Page 14 – paragraph 8 – should read ‘Angliana Water’

17 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

18 ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

None received.

19 PETITIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

None received.

20 CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTER REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE BY A MEMBER

There were no matters for consideration referred to the Committee by a member.

21 RESPONSES OF THE COUNCIL OR THE CABINET TO THE COMMITTEE'S REPORTS OR RECOMMENDATIONS

There were no responses of the Council or Cabinet to the Committee's reports or recommendations.

22 DELEGATED DECISIONS MARCH TO MAY 2025

The Chairman explained that this was a statutory report, presented for the committee's information.

It was **RESOLVED**

To receive and note the report and the register of decisions taken under delegated powers.

23 ANGLIAN WATER BRIEFING - UPDATE ON SEWAGE OUTFLOWS IN THE DISTRICT

The Chairman introduced Mr G Tuffs (Regional Engagement Manager) and Mr A Outram (EDM Regulation Manager) from Anglian Water to speak. They opened the session with a presentation which covered the following:

- An overview of storm overflows, why they occur, how they are monitored, planned improvements and AW's annual 'spills' performance
- A summary of proposed investment across the region by Anglian Water between 2025 and 2030.
- An overview of AW's 'Just Bin it' campaign.

The Chairman thanked them for the presentation.

She reminded members that some questions had been submitted in advance of the meeting and these would be addressed first.

Cllr J Toye had asked a general question about AW's work programme and planned improvements and these had been covered by the presentation. The Chair said that it would be helpful to understand the percentage of investment in North Norfolk. Mr Tuffs said that £103m was a significant amount considering the size of the district, population and geography and the state of existing assets in the area. All investment was done on a priority basis – such as maintaining water flow and dealing with pollution.

Cllr C Cushing sought clarification on the size of the region referred to by AW – how large was it and which areas did it cover and he then asked how the schemes for North Norfolk were prioritised. Mr Tuffs replied that AW's region was the largest by geography in the UK, stretching from North Lincolnshire, across to Oxfordshire and down as far as East London. There were 6 million customers and the landscape was challenging, including bore holes, rivers, coastline and a flat landscape. He added that there was a lot of investment in environmental protection, as mandated by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and consequently, some of the money was already allocated for this purpose. He said that there were two new reservoirs in East Anglia, both of which were huge infrastructure projects. There was also a large desalination project at Bacton and the construction of a 500km strategic pipeline from North Lincolnshire to Cambridgeshire and then Suffolk and Essex.

Cllr N Housden said that investment of £103m over 5 years amounted to effectively £21m a year and the desalination at Bacton would diminish this amount substantially. Mr Tuffs replied that it was a long-term project and he didn't have the cost figures available but would provide them after the meeting. He confirmed that research and development came out of the overall 'pot'.

Cllr P Heinrich commented that there was a significant amount of development planned for the next 10 years and he asked how AW's investment plans had taken population growth into account. Mr Tuffs replied that AW's business plan had been developed before the current Government's uplift in housing development and therefore did not reflect the impact this would have on water supply and drainage. He added that in the next 20 years, there would be an additional 700k new homes built and AW would be working with local authorities to plan ahead and ensure they were prepared. It was important to find the balance between supporting the provision of new homes and protecting the environment. Cllr Heinrich replied that it seemed to be a 'hope for the best' approach. Mr Tuffs confirmed that this effectively was the case as housing growth numbers had changed after the company's business plan had been submitted to the Regulator.

Cllr Heinrich then referred to the question that he had submitted in advance of the meeting, specifically the significant growth planned for North Walsham and the impact on water provision and if there were any planned improvements for the Marshgate treatment works to ensure that pollution at Mundesley beach and the North Walsham & Dilham Canal was prevented. Mr Tuffs replied that AW had a duty to provide water to new houses. The rollout of smart meters would help manage consumption and also help to identify leaks and they would work with local authorities as new homes came online. Regarding Marshgate, he said that there was currently sufficient capacity and that spill data for this facility was very low. Cllr Heinrich said that it would be helpful for North Walsham Town Council to have a presentation on this matter.

Cllr J Boyle referred to the earlier presentation and the information on spills data. She said that it was hard to ascertain the direction of travel from the slide that had

been shown and to understand whether there was a correlation between rainfall and spills. Mr Tufts replied that he would extract the data relating to North Norfolk and share that after the meeting in a written update. Mr Outram added that line by line spill data was available now, so it was possible to see as much detail as required.

The Chair said that several members were concerned about the impact of overflows and discharge on chalk streams in the district. Mr Tufts said that AW appreciated that chalk streams were a precious resource and they carefully managed both extraction and discharge, to minimise any impact.

Cllr Fletcher was invited to speak to his pre-submitted question, which related to chalk streams. He referred to the increase in housing development in Briston and asked what measures would be put in place to ensure that the headwaters at the River Bure were protected. Mr Tufts replied that tighter environmental standards had been placed on water companies and for AW this included eleven phosphorous removal schemes, with one at Briston, aimed at protecting chalk streams as well as additional ammonia protections.

Cllr Fletcher asked whether the district's chalk streams could accommodate the impact of the increase in housebuilding and whether the current projections were based on earlier figures that did not include the anticipated housing growth. Mr Tufts replied that AW would scale up projections to deal with demand.

Cllr C Cushing referred to the River Wensum and said that Fakenham had two sewage treatment works and in 2024, there were 847 hours of storm overflow discharge which seemed large for such a delicate environment, especially as they had storm overflow tanks. Mr Tufts said that he didn't have information on overflow events in Fakenham to hand but added that there was an accelerated programme in place to remove phosphorous. He said that he would provide data on investment in Fakenham together with overflow events. Cllr Cushing said that Fakenham was part of the urban area extension programme, with 950 new homes planned and this gave even greater cause for concern regarding the impact on the River Wensum.

Cllr P Neatherway referred to his pre-submitted question regarding Felmingham, where the sewerage treatment unit was not capable of handling the amount of waste currently being passed to it and Anglian Water were tankering away the excess daily to stop the effluent overflow from contaminating nearby homes and allotments. He wondered, given the anticipated housing growth in the village, what were Anglian Water's plans for resolving these issues and asked about the possibility of connection to mains sewerage. Mr G Tufts replied that the decision regarding the installation of mains sewerage was not driven by AW. Residents had to apply to the Environment Agency (EA) and AW initially. The sewerage projects for the next five years had already been agreed, so it would be at least 5 years before a new application was considered. He acknowledged the tankering issue at Felmingham. AW was aware of the pressure on the system and they were looking for new solutions, with testing ongoing. One option was to construct a new soakaway and other solutions such a pump away arrangement or a change on the discharge point.

Once a decision had been made then AW would share this with the local community.

Cllr K Bayes said that he also had concerns about capacity issues in Stalham with the planned increase in housing growth. He then asked whether AW had any plans to cope with storm overflow events by engaging with landowners to treat the effluent by reed bed or similar structures. Mr G Tuffs replied that regarding capacity, there was headroom to cope with growth in Stalham. He said that AW had a wetland project at Inglethorpe and more were planned across the region and they would be working with farmers and landowners to develop this approach. Storage of floodwater was also being explored.

AW had a landowner/farmer engagement team and they would put any interested parties in touch with their catchment team.

Cllr Bayes then asked about discharge data and whether there was a correlation between when the discharge took place and when rainfall occurred. Mr A Outram replied that there was a project ongoing that was looking at dry day spills and this information would be assessed against rainfall data. He explained that some catchments took a while to feed through to the monitor, so there could be discrepancy there. All the available data was being reassessed and consideration would then be given as to how to address problem areas. Cllr Bayes said that it would be helpful to see the reasons behind dry day spills.

Mr Outram said that every spill was assessed and there were new staff focussing on spill reduction and visiting areas of concern.

Cllr N Housden referred to the issue of run-off from areas of hard standing in new developments and whether AW was able to impose any controls. He also asked whether there were any elements of legislation regarding rainwater harvesting. Mr Tuffs replied that regarding hard standing run-off, this was a matter to be addressed at the planning stage and not AW's responsibility. He added that water companies were not statutory consultees in planning applications and this was an issue that they would like to see addressed. He went on to say that AW would like to see new developments being required to have systems in place to deal with 'grey water and water efficiency measures in every new home. He said that AW would deal with run-off from hard-standing if it got into their infrastructure. He agreed with Cllr Housden that water companies should have input into planning applications and said that AW would be supportive of the Council lobbying local MPs and central government on this matter.

Cllr M Hankins asked for more information about AW's relationship with the regulators (OFWAT, Environment Agency and the Drinking Water Inspectorate) and whether they were just 'scrutineers' or were actively involved in the early stages of the business plan process. Mr Tuffs explained that the regulators analysed AW's proposals very closely and in the EA's case mandated environmental spend. He said that AW's business plan was approved by OFWAT and any changes they made could be challenged. Ultimately AW had a positive relationship with the regulators.

Cllr A Brown, Portfolio Holder for Planning, said that the Council had the foresight to submit a Local Plan early and hoped to alleviate pressure regarding housing growth. He asked AW how they would cope with the pressure of an additional 1.5m homes. Mr Tuffs replied that they had robustly challenged the pace of growth and said that there was currently capacity to accommodate all of the applications approved so far. AW continued to push for homes with planning permission to be built first.

Cllr Brown asked if AW was disappointed that there were no new reservoirs to be built in North Norfolk. Mr Tuffs replied that there was one in Cambridgeshire in the Fens and water could be transported across the region from there.

Cllr W Fredericks, Portfolio Holder for Housing, said that AW were a consultee on planning applications. She then referred to new developments in rural areas and said that there were considerable challenges following the Grenfell recommendation regarding water pressure so that fire hydrants were able to extinguish house fires. There was no adequate pressure in many rural villages to comply with this requirement and housing associations were having to sink large tanks below ground into rural development schemes, at a huge cost – approximately £100k. She asked whether AW would be willing to work with the Council and HA's to try and find a solution to this problem. Mr Tuffs agreed and said he would be happy to discuss further. He wasn't sure on the rules for water used by the fire service and said that he would look into it.

The Chair followed this by asking whether there was a wider issue with low water pressure in rural villages. Mr Tuffs said that demand, leaks and hot weather could place pressure on the system. There were set limits on water pressure levels and residents should report it if they were having issues. Cllr Holliday then asked about Langham & Great Walsingham sewerage treatment works and whether there were plans to upgrade them. She referred to 1500 hours of overflow at Gt Walsingham last year. Mr Tuffs said that this would be covered in the detailed response provided after the meeting.

Cllr K Bayes spoke about leakage data and said that the figures indicated that leakage volume in the network was greater than the amount abstracted for annual food production. He queried whether this was true and also asked for a wider update regarding leakage data. Mr Tuffs replied leaks were a big issue for AW and they were constantly dealing with them, adding that AW was the best performing water company in this regard in the UK. Mr Tuffs said he would check the comparison between leaks and abstraction and report back. A lot of work was ongoing reminding customers to report leaks and manage their water use carefully. Smart meters were an effective tool in identifying leaks as were satellite systems and AW continued to prioritise reducing leaks.

Cllr C Rouse commented that central government had recently blocked bonuses for Anglian Water and he wondered how they could justify paying out dividends when discharges into water courses continued to be a problem. Mr Tuffs replied that the

withholding of bonuses from Chief Executives when a category 1 pollution event had occurred, was a recent change introduced by the government. He said that the link between environmental performance and bonus payments may be reviewed by the regulator in the future but currently, it was accepted that it was the penalty.

Cllr M Gray referred to the earlier discussion on leakages. He said that there were ongoing problems in North Walsham which were now eroding the roads. He asked when the town would be prioritised for these issues to be addressed. Mr Tuffs replied that investment was coming forward across the district and plans for North Walsham would be covered in the report provided following the meeting.

The Chair thanked Mr Tuffs and Mr Outram for attending the meeting and responding to all the questions raised.

Members considered the recommendations that they wanted to make and it was proposed by Cllr V Holliday, seconded by Cllr N Housden and

RESOLVED:

1. That a letter be prepared on behalf of the Committee and sent to the Secretary of State and Local MPs requesting that the following be considered and addressed:
 - i. Water companies should be required to review their current business plans and ensure that they reflect the impact of new housing developments on service supply and demand, including the management of surface water drainage and run-off
 - ii. The possibility of a change in the legislation regarding the status of water companies as statutory consultees in the planning process.
2. That written responses to the questions raised by the Committee are provided by Anglian Water within 2 weeks and that the following additional information be included:
 - i. Data for North Norfolk regarding 'dry day' spills, including dates, location, rainfall levels and the reasons for the spill.
 - ii. Data regarding leakages in North Walsham for the last 12 months
 - iii. Information setting out how Anglian Water consults and engages with landowners regarding nature-based solutions for dealing with overflows and spills – such as reed beds.
3. That Anglian Water should attend in 6 months' time to provide an update to the committee.
4. To support Anglian Water's campaign on preventing blockages by sharing information with local communities.

24 THE CABINET WORK PROGRAMME

The Democratic Services Manager updated the Committee on changes to the Cabinet Work Programme. Cllr M Hankins sought clarification on the process for sign off of the final version of the Local Plan.

25 OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKER

The Democratic Services Manager outlined the updated Action Tracker and Work Programme to the Committee. Cllr Cushing requested that the Net Zero Action Plan

was reviewed within the next few months rather than waiting until next March. Cllr Hankins asked whether BT could attend a meeting to give a presentation on the digital switchover programme. The Chair added that it would be helpful for telecoms providers to also attend to respond to questions on mobile connectivity. It was agreed that the data recently collated on mobile connectivity should be shared with members initially and then providers should attend a meeting to respond to questions. It was felt a presentation by BT to all members would be preferable to one just to the committee.

Cllr L Shires raised a concern about access for residents to substance abuse support services and wondered whether this was a topic the committee could look into. Members supported this.

The Committee **agreed** the following:

Action Tracker

- To request that the NZAP report comes to the committee within the next 3-4 months and to be added to the work programme
- That the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Growth circulates via email to members, the data collected regarding mobile phone coverage in the District. This will then be reviewed ahead of inviting telecoms providers to attend a meeting to respond to questions.
- To explore options for a review of substance abuse support services in the District and prepare a scoping report for members to consider and feed into.
- To contact British Telecom (BT) and request that they provide a presentation to all members on their digital switchover programme.

Work Programme:

- To add the NZAP report to the work programme within the next 3 months
- To add Anglian Water's attendance in 6 months' time
- To add attendance by Telecom providers by the end of the year.

26 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

The meeting ended at 11.37 am.

Chairman