



Norfolk County Council

Scrutiny Committee

**Minutes of the Meeting Held on Wednesday 20 March 2024
at 10am at County Hall Norwich**

Present:

Cllr Steve Morphew (Chair)
Cllr Daniel Elmer (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Carl Annison
Cllr Phillip Duigan
Cllr John Fisher
Cllr Tom FitzPatrick
Cllr Keith Kiddie
Cllr Mark Kiddle-Morris
Cllr Brian Long
Cllr Ed Maxfield
Cllr Jamie Osborn

Substitute Members Present:

Cllr Michael Dalby for Cllr Lesley Bambridge

Also Present:

Lisa Bush	Head of Pollution Strategy, Anglian Water
Grahame Bygrave	Interim Executive Director of Community and Environmental Services
Henry Cator OBE	Chair of the Norfolk Strategic Flooding Alliance
Jonathan Franklin	Strategy, Resourcing, and Intelligence Manager
Kat Hulatt	Director of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer
Cllr Andrew Jamieson	Deputy Leader of the Council
Fiona Johnson	Partnership Manager - Highways
Matthew Moore	Strategic Flood and Partnerships Manager, Anglian Water
Mark Ogden	Flood and Water Manager
Gail Pickles	Head of Spill Strategy, Anglian Water
Peter Randall	Democratic Support and Scrutiny Manager
Rory Sanderson	Environment Agency
Rachael Storr	Environment Agency
Laine Tisdall	Committee Officer
Cllr Eric Vardy	Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste

1 Apologies for Absence

- 1.1 Apologies were received from Cllr Lesley Bambridge (substituted by Cllr Michael Dalby) and Cllr Brian Watkins.

2 Minutes

- 2.1 The minutes of the meetings held on the 25 January 2024 and 14 February 2024 were confirmed as an accurate record of proceedings and signed by the Chair.

3. Declarations of Interest

- 3.1 There were no declarations of interest

4. Public Question Time

- 4.1 No public questions were received

5. Local Member Issues/Questions

- 5.1 No Local Member questions were received.

6 Call In

- 6.1 The Committee noted that there were no call-in items at this meeting

7. Anglian Water: Update on Combined Sewer/Storm Water Overflows

- 7.1 The Committee received the annexed report (7).
- 7.2 The Chair welcomed outside attendees to the Scrutiny Committee. These were as follows:
- Lisa Bush, Matthew Moore, and Gail Pickles from Anglian Water
 - Rory Sanderson and Rachael Storr from the Environment Agency
 - Henry Cator OBE, Chair of the Norfolk Strategic Flooding Alliance (NSFA)
- 7.3 Representatives from Anglian Water introduced the report, which was produced in response to the Committee's request for an update on combined storm water overflows/sewage discharges following the March 2023 meeting of the Scrutiny Committee. The report provided an overview of the issue and an outline of activities carried out by both Anglian Water and the Environment Agency to monitor and prevent sewerage and drainage issues in the 12 months since the previous update to the Committee.
- 7.4 A short presentation from Anglian Water was shown to the Committee, the main points highlighted were as follows:

- Due to recent adverse weather and changes in climate, Combined Sewer Overflows (CSOs) were being stressed in ways for which they were not designed. CSOs were commonly used across the UK and Europe, effectively acting as pressure valves for the combined network. Anglian Water currently managed 1,433 sewer overflows. Use of the CSOs was permitted by the Environment Agency, enabling them to be used in times of heavy rainfall and snow melt. None of Anglian Water's CSOs were deemed unsatisfactory. However, CSOs were one of the main contributing factors towards the recent admission that only 14% of the UK's rivers currently had a good ecological status.
- Anglian Water, in partnership with Severn Trent Water, announced five River Pledges a two years ago. Pledge 1 was a commitment to reducing storm spills by an average of 20 per year by 2025. Pledge 5 related to being transparent as to how infrastructure assets were operating.
- 2022 data illustrated that this was a very dry year for the UK, with the average number of spills across storm overflows being 15. The 2023 data was currently with the Environment Agency but given the current levels of rainfall seen across the country, it was natural to expect the amount of spills to increase once the 2023 data was approved.
- Anglian Water now had 100% coverage in monitoring CSOs. It was planned that in April 2024, real time coverage maps would be launched on their website, which would show when the asset was operating or last operated. This was Phase 1 of the project, with further iterations of the map expected to come on board in the future.
- Data relating to CSO performance in Norfolk during 2022 was shown to the Committee.
- It was hoped to invest £123m worth of improvements into storm overflows during the 2025-30 period. A substantial proportion of this investment would be within Norfolk County Council's area.

7.5 The following points were discussed and noted:

- A Committee Member commented that some residents in rural communities were connected to septic tanks rather than storm overflows, stating that connecting septic tanks to a mains system should be an ultimate goal for any water company. The Committee Member queried if Anglian Water had any plans to increase capacity into the main sewer while also considering the effect of nutrient neutrality in Norfolk. An Anglian Water representative confirmed the company had a plan to connect rural properties onto an Anglian Water system, however it was acknowledged there were some customers who had expressed their preference to retain their septic tanks. The plan would take the form of a rolling programme of works, following guidance issued by the Environment Agency. The Committee Member stated there was a village in his division which had been subject to serious flooding issues; however Anglian Water had advised their connection programme was not due to reach them in the next 10 years. The residents of the village were now investing in their own treatment plants as the septic tanks were no longer fit for purpose and they wished to stop run-off leeching into the River Wissey. An Environment Agency representative commented that other organisations were delivering their own treatment plants across Norfolk along with septic tank conversions. These solutions were considered in terms of nutrient neutrality.

- A Committee Member queried if Anglian Water would prioritise concrete towers or natural wetland systems for stormwater storage, highlighting a wetland system on the River Ingol in the Ingoldisthorpe area of Norfolk which had proven successful. Representatives from Anglian Water commented that the company would always seek to favour green, nature-based solutions over “grey, concrete engineering,” but would take a pragmatic approach towards its asset base. The main aim of the Ingoldisthorpe installation was the removal of phosphate, with the water storage being a useful extra function.
- A Committee Member commented that £200m was being invested on storm overflow improvements as opposed to £800m total investment, asking representatives if this was the maximum level Anglian Water could commit towards infrastructure or simply the required level of investment to maintain the current level. An Anglian Water representative stated that OFWAT would determine whether business plans were viable and if customers could fund them. The current investment was approved as part of the 2019 business plan. It was important for the company to liaise with agencies to get a full picture of the situation.
- A Committee Member queried how much investment was required for Anglian Water to achieve zero spills. Anglian Water representatives commented that the company was part of a nationwide project to reduce spills. Approximately £650bn of investment was required in the UK to achieve zero spills nationally. Investment in new solutions needed to be balanced towards maintenance of legacy systems. A substantial amount of work was required to separate surface water runoff from combined systems. Anglian Water was committed to achieving zero spills, but this was a 25 year ambition.
- The Chair stated that one of Anglian Water’s duties was to turn wastewater into clean water and discharge this back into the environment. The 2020-25 investment programme referred to £800m investment into CSOs. The Chair expressed concern, as Anglian Water served six million customers, meaning the total average investment per customer was small, and asked what level of investment was required per person in Norfolk over the next five years. Anglian Water representatives stated that while the figures were not available in time for this meeting, they could be provided to Scrutiny Committee members afterwards. The 2025-30 business plan was due to be finalised in December 2024, as part of a £9bn overhaul programme. Norfolk had a number of areas affected by spills, therefore part of the programme had to be targeted at sustainable preventative maintenance. A full list of proposals was to be circulated to Committee Members and the NSFA in good time.
- The Chair of the NSFA commented that groundwater levels in the Broads and North Norfolk were substantially higher than average over the winter, resulting in extra water leaking into sewers, with residents left unable to use amenities in their properties. Climate change would likely result in warmer, wetter winters and high groundwater levels being sustained. Anglian Water representatives were asked if there were any solutions that could ensure a better outcome for residents if similar weather was experienced next winter. A representative acknowledged that groundwater levels had posed significant challenges for Anglian Water over the past six months. Gravity sewer systems of the type used in Norfolk were not designed to be open systems to cope with groundwater. Anglian Water planned to follow its infiltration reduction plans, which were approved by

the Environment Agency. It was planned to reduce abstraction rates over the next 12 months in rural areas suffering from high groundwater levels, such as Burnham Market and Grimston. Collaborations between local authorities, water companies and outside agencies was key to securing funding towards smarter drainage solutions, including water storage for potential drought scenarios.

- The Chair of the NSFA stated abstraction licences for farmers had been reduced across the Broads recently and asked Environment Agency representatives what flexibility the agency had to increase abstraction licences and encourage farmers to build more reservoirs. A joined up sustainable system to tackle drought and flood situations would be a prudent futureproofing investment, but there appeared to be no sign of such plans in the pipeline. An Environment Agency representative stated abstraction licences were affected by a change in regulation. Improved water management was key to the situation, as was bringing all affected parties into a meeting to plot a path forward. The Environment Agency was attempting to arrange such a meeting by the end of April 2024.
- A Committee Member asked how Anglian Water planned to achieve its zero spills ambition, noting there was targets to reduce the frequency of spills but not necessarily the volume. An Anglian Water representative acknowledged that while there had been a £169m dividend paid out to shareholders; the company had reinvested £1.1bn into its business. There was a dedicated officer at the company whose role was focused on ensuring Anglian Water reached its zero spill ambition.
- The Vice-Chair stated that while Anglian Water had a zero spill ambition, the company's actual target for 2050 was an average of 10 spills per storm drain. As there were 192 storm drains in Norfolk, this meant that the 25 year target was a maximum of 1,920 spills. The Vice-Chair asked Anglian Water representatives if it was possible to provide specific millstones to reach zero spills, what percentage in reductions was forecast for 2030 and 2040. Anglian Water representatives commented that while the forecasts were not available for this meeting, they could commit to showing the data at future meetings. The 25-year plans were subject to OFWAT approval, with a draft submitted to the regulator who would decide what investments were fair and just for the consumer. Anglian Water had the ability to further invest in solutions using its reserves. Over 100 storm overflow permits had been revoked over the previous 12 months, reducing the number of discharges directly into the environment. Day-to-day activity was ongoing to improve the position. The Chair requested that the forecast data be brought in front of the Scrutiny Committee before OFWAT approved the next five-year investment cycle.
- The Vice-Chair asked what the net reduction of spills would be from the £123m in planned investment into Norfolk. Anglian Water representatives confirmed that while overflows still provided a function, the company was still committed to reducing spills.
- A Committee Member commented that Anglian Water recently invested £3m on a pumping station upgrade between Belton and Bradwell, which helped to mitigate flooding issues in his division. This was a positive development; however concern was expressed that the work was only conducted after a sustained lobbying effort through local media channels. Anglian Water representatives acknowledged there had been communication issues in the past; however the company's Public Engagement Team had expanded to tackle the issue. Over 700 letters had been received from local MPs regarding flooding issues across the Anglian Water region, which had all received a response and action

plans put in place. In addition, Anglian Water had plans in place to invest £50m in two pilot areas within the East of England through its Advanced Water Industry National Environment Programme (A-WINEP). The areas chosen were Great Yarmouth and Southend-on-Sea. The aim of this programme was to remove as much surface water from combined systems while eliminating potential spills and CSOs, which would reduce flooding in the area. Anglian Water acknowledged that the work would likely cost more than £50m. The pilot aimed to attract further investment through grants and the government's Levelling Up fund.

- A Committee Member expressed concern regarding the small percentage of water rates which were reinvested into infrastructure, commenting that the UK introduced sewer management from the 1850s onwards, and while the country used to be at the forefront of technology, the infrastructure was now outdated. Some of the current infrastructure was installed by urban district councils, the last of which were abolished in 1974. The Committee Member stated that Anglian Water's debt level of £7bn+interest was a drag on investment, as revenue was being used to service the debt. Anglian Water representatives stated that the company was in a good position with a strong credit rating. Shareholders were on board with the 25-year strategy. There was a need to ensure the water business was a strong and attractive market for outside investment. Storm overflows were a small but crucial part of Anglian Water's portfolio. The company was committed to its pledge to reach zero spills and confirmed that no additional CSOs would be introduced into the environment.
- A Committee Member expressed concern that the 25-year plan was not ambitious enough, suggesting that a 10-year plan would be more prudent to deliver the required changes given the coming effects of climate change. A representative from Anglian Water commented that the reason for a 25-year plan was to ensure that a long-term strategy could be delivered, whereas a 10-year plan might be undeliverable. The company acknowledged that customers did not want to face increased water bills. Collaborating with agencies in partnership work was key to delivering the pledges within the 25-year plan.
- A Committee Member asked the Chamber what they would like to have seen within the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 to help alleviate the issues currently being seen with CSOs and surface water. An NCC officer stated that the ability and funding to mitigate existing flood risks in communities was key. Schedule 3 of the Act, which had not yet been implemented in England, only related to new developments rather than maintaining existing infrastructure. The ability to replace outdated infrastructure would also be welcomed. An Anglian Water representative stated the Act was largely geared towards coastal and river flooding, with groundwater only briefly mentioned. The ability to give more focus to groundwater issues would be preferable to the current situation.
- A Committee Member commented that sustainable drainage solutions (SuDS) should be considered with every new infrastructure project, Anglian Water stated there was a trial installation of 30 SuDS pods in Grimston, which were designed to blend into the local environment. This was a substantial investment, as there were many longstanding issues with groundwater and CSOs within this area.
- A Committee Member expressed concern regarding the Norwich area, which had the second highest level of spills on record. Water quality was also a pressing issue, as

E.coli had been discovered in the River Wensum, used by residents for swimming and boating activities. The Committee Member asked how Anglian Water would focus investments on areas where the water quality was toxic. An Anglian Water representative commented that river users were considered when interventions were planned. River health and bacteriological status were different factors to be considered. The Committee Member expressed concern, as the current state of rivers in the Norwich area needed to be urgently resolved and not just part of a 25-year strategy. A representative from the Environment Agency commented that river quality was measured through various units, with ecological health being a driving factor. The overall score for each river would factor into remedial work. A considerable proportion of rivers in the UK were not in their optimum condition due to various reasons. The Committee Member suggested that the ecological health of rivers in Norfolk could be looked at in more detail during a future meeting of the Scrutiny Committee.

- A Committee Member queried the total cost of the pilot schemes in Great Yarmouth and Southend. An Anglian Water representative stated that the company only had a rough estimate of the total cost at present. The pilot schemes were devised as a test of partnership work, details of which were provided to the Committee. The Committee Member asked if there was a timeline to roll out the schemes in other areas if the pilots proved successful. Anglian Water representatives expressed hopes that the pilots would pave the way for future installations in other parts of their region. It formed part of their rolling 25-year action plan. Lessons from the Ingoldisthorpe installation had been used on other projects, one of which was a wetland in the South Essex area of Benfleet doubling up as a treatment centre for storm discharge. This installation was a first for the water industry and if successful, Anglian Water would roll out similar schemes on other suitable sites.
- The Chair proposed that a letter be sent to Anglian Water forthwith to reflect on discussions during the meeting. In addition, it was proposed that Anglian Water be invited to another meeting of the Scrutiny Committee later in 2024 for a progress update. This was **AGREED** by the Committee.
- The Chair recommended that Cabinet write to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs regarding Schedule 3 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010. This was **AGREED** by the Committee.

7.6 Having considered the report from Anglian Water and the verbal evidence provided by the Environment Agency, the Scrutiny Committee **RESOLVED** the following:

1. **PROVIDED** feedback and recommendations where appropriate.
2. **DISCUSSED** the potential for future scrutiny activity regarding Anglian Water and **OUTLINED** an expected timetable.
3. **RECOMMEND TO CABINET** that the Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste write to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to encourage an expedited implementation of Schedule 3 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010.

8. Climate Policy for Norfolk County Council

- 8.1 The Scrutiny Committee received the annexed report (8).
- 8.2 The Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste introduced the report The policy was considered by Cabinet on the 4 March 2024, and it was agreed that it would progress to Full Council via the Scrutiny Committee for inclusion on the County Council's Policy Framework.
- 8.3 The Cabinet Member stated that the UK had made significant progress towards emissions reduction, being the first country to enshrine Net Zero targets into law. Norfolk County Council set out a comprehensive climate strategy in June 2023, resulting in the county being independently ranked 2nd among county councils for its efforts to combat climate change. The Climate Policy restates the Council's countywide vision to align with the national trajectory to reach Net Zero by 2050, committing to a 50% cut in emissions by 2035.
- 8.4 The policy aimed to illustrate that Norfolk was open for green investment, while taking a pragmatic approach towards the county's farming industry, given that Norfolk played a vital role in food production within the UK. In addition, the policy restated the Council's commitment to make its estate reach Net Zero by 2030. There had already been a nearly 60% reduction in NCC's emissions compared to 2016/17 levels, with the Council striving to reach a 90% reduction by 2030, with the remainder being offset to reach Net Zero.
- 8.5 The following points were discussed and noted:
- A Committee Member commented that the proposed amendments to the Council's Environmental Policy referred to "conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of Norfolk", along with "ensuring a clean and plentiful water supply". These were laudable aims; however concern was expressed that there was no mention of The Wash and North Norfolk Marine Partnership, who had identified a number of natural solutions to enhance water quality in the area, given that the North Norfolk Coast was designed as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The Committee Member asked if it was possible that the policy document could be aligned with the aims of the Council's partners, while ensuring financial prudence for the population of Norfolk. Officers stated that the amendments to the Environmental Policy were limited to ensure there were no contradictions between it and the Climate Policy when both were eventually enshrined in the Council's Policy Framework. The team would aim to match environmental sustainability with financial prudence.
 - The Chair requested that review and expiry dates be included in the policy before it was ratified at the Full Council meeting on the 26 March 2024, as per the Council's constitution. Members discussed broader activity to include these for all policy framework items.

- A Committee Member praised the policy but expressed concern regarding the agricultural sector's contribution to emissions in Norfolk. Due to the significant amount of agricultural land in the county, reaching Net Zero would prove challenging. If Net Zero could not be reached by agriculture, this would place additional strain on other sectors in the local economy to reach Net Zero. The Committee Member asked what was being done by the Council to reduce emissions from the agricultural sector, as it appeared there was little room for targets to be missed. Officers acknowledged that agricultural emissions were higher in Norfolk than other counties, with land use emissions being the second highest in the UK due to the level of food production. However, land use emissions nationally were already considered Net Zero, offsetting Norfolk's contribution. This was balanced on a county by county basis. The Committee Member requested clarification as to how agricultural emissions were being forecast up to 2050. Offsetting emissions sector by sector would result in less headroom in achieving Net Zero across the board. Officers stated that agricultural emissions took into account not only inputs into the land, but also the use of diesel in farming equipment and other agricultural inputs. Agricultural inputs accounted for 20% of Norfolk's emissions, while land use emissions accounted for a further 14%. It was clarified that Norfolk's land use emissions were due to agricultural on its fertile soils rich in organic carbon. In addition, carbon sinks such as forests had to be considered when calculating net land use emissions across the country. Sustainable farming techniques and the use of environmentally friendly equipment would also see a positive effect.
- A Committee Member asked if the modelling within the policy took into account potential changes in people's diets, as eating less meat was considered one of three major driver in reducing emissions, along with decarbonisation of the power grid and reduction in aviation. Less meat production would see a significant reduction in land use emissions. The Committee Member additionally asked what the Council was doing to encourage and support the public to change their way of living, while acknowledging that it would be improper to tell people what they could eat or not. The Cabinet Member stated that with its Net Zero commitments and actions, the Council was effectively acting as an influencer to effect changes in the way people lived in the community. It was acknowledged that approximately 80% of global emissions related to animal agriculture, while the Council would liaise closely with the agricultural sector to effect change in the future. The Committee Member suggested that a report on how Net Zero targets were being met should be brought to a future meeting of the Scrutiny Committee.
- The Vice-Chair commented that the Council needed to focus its influence on sectors such as transport and economic development, where a significant impact could be made towards reducing carbon emissions. It was felt unlikely that Council advice regarding diets would be taken seriously by the population. It was important that a different approach be taken towards the agricultural sector, due to the need to ensure food security in the country along with the opportunities it provided for Norfolk.
- The Chair asked how the Council's Net Zero targets would be measured and if there was a timeline for expected outcomes. An officer confirmed that the Council had a clear target to reduce gross emissions on its own estate by 90% to reach Net Zero by 2030. Government data for local area emissions lag by two years so are limited use in following progress. Guidance was awaited to understand expectations of local area contributions

to meeting the UK's national net zero target. Cambridgeshire County Council is undertaking a pilot, funded by Innovate UK, to establish a framework to help local authorities understand what needed to be done with each sector to reach Net Zero. The Cabinet Member confirmed the policy was due to be reviewed again by Select Committee in Autumn 2024. It was hoped that measurements and outcomes would be clarified by this point. The team had developed Climate Action Plans across three tranches to track delivery of climate initiatives, with timescales built into them. Progress on delivering the tranches would be reviewed by the Infrastructure and Development Select Committee every six to twelve months.

- The Chair requested assurance that departments such as Adult Social Care and Children's Services had their own emissions reduction plans, as there was no reference to them in the report. An officer stated that emissions reduction in these departments would largely be through procurement, as a large quantity of the services were procured. Energy audits had been commissions for some of the Council's residential care providers to see where their emissions lay and whether buildings could be made energy efficient. A general guide for the residential care sector in Norfolk was to be drawn up to build a greater understanding. In addition, the Chief Executive Officer presently chaired a climate board which saw representatives from Adult Social Care and Children's Services regularly attend, along with other departments. This had driven the development of the Climate Policy.
- A Committee Member queried if the Council was ensuring that the electrical grid in Norfolk was fit for purpose. Officers acknowledged that grid capacity was a significant issue to be managed; however there was not a local area energy plan in Norfolk at present. The Council aimed to work alongside the National Grid and UK Power Networks to produce a plan of future grid upgrades to ensure that Net Zero targets were met.

8.6 Having considered the proposed Climate Policy for Norfolk County Council, the Scrutiny Committee **RESOLVED** the following:

1. **PROVIDED** comments and recommendations on the policy where appropriate.
2. **ASKED** officers to produce a report to the Leader and Cabinet Member on behalf of the committee in accordance with section 11b of the Norfolk County Council Constitution (Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules), providing feedback and recommendations where appropriate.

9. Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme

- 9.1. The Scrutiny Committee received the annexed report (9), which set out the current forward work plan for the Committee.
- 9.2. Following requests, a report on the Norwich to Tilbury pylons project was to be brought before the May 2024 meeting of the Scrutiny Committee.

9.3 A Task and Finish Group was to be set up to examine domestic violence, following conversations between officers and the Chair. The Chairs of the Norfolk Countywide Community Safety Partnership Scrutiny Sub Panel (NCCSPSSP), the Police and Crime Panel, and the People and Communities Select Committee would be contacted regarding the proposal, which would involve five members of the Scrutiny Committee and one member each from the other three committees engaging in a day long exercise with partners such as Norfolk Constabulary and Adult Social Services. A report would be compiled for a future meeting of the Scrutiny Committee. In his capacity as Chair of the NCCSPSSP, Cllr Mark Kiddle-Morris suggested that the Chair of the Norfolk Safeguarding Adults Board also be invited to the session. The Vice-Chair expressed concern regarding the potential gender make-up of the Task and Finish Group.

9.4 The Scrutiny Committee **RESOLVED** the following:

- **NOTED** the current forward work programme.
- **DISCUSSED** and **SUGGESTED** items for future inclusion on the forward work plan.

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 12:47

**Cllr Steve Morphew, Chair
Scrutiny Committee**



If you need this document in large print, audio, Braille, alternative format or in a different language please contact Customer Services on 0344 800 8020 or 18001 0344 800 8020 (textphone) and we will do our best to help.