

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET PANEL ON THE ENVIRONMENT

MEETING HELD IN THE REMOTE MEETING
ON WEDNESDAY, 19TH JULY, 2023 AT 7.30 PM

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Steve Jarvis (Co-Chair), Amy Allen (Co-Chair), Amy Allen, Steve Jarvis, Dominic Griffiths, Chris Hinchliff, David Levett and Louise Peace*

In Attendance: *Georgina Chapman (Policy & Strategy Team Leader), Ellie Hollingsworth (Policy & Strategy Trainee) and Eleanor Hopcraft (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer)*

Also Present: *At the commencement of the meeting approximately 13 members of the public, including registered speakers.*

68 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 3:20

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Michael Muir.

Councillors Cathy Brownjohn and Gerald Morris were absent.

69 MINUTES - 22 FEBRUARY 2023

Audio Recording – 3:44

Councillor Steve Jarvis, as Chair proposed and Councillor Amy Allen seconded, and it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 22 February 2023 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

70 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 4:25

- (1) The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council policy this meeting would be recorded. The recordings would be available on both the Council's YouTube page, as well as the Council's ModGov site.
- (2) The Chair reminded Members to make declarations of interest before an item, the detailed reminder about this and speaking rights was set out under Chair's Announcements on the agenda.
- (3) The Chair reminded Members that the Council had declared a Climate Emergency. This was a serious decision and means that, as this was an emergency, all of us, Officers and Members had that in mind as we carried out our various roles and tasks for the benefit of our District.

71 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 5:00

There was no other business notified.

72 INFORMATION NOTE: WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2023/24

Audio recording – 5:10

The Policy and Strategy Team Leader gave a verbal presentation and advised:

- The report highlighted the proposed items scheduled in the work programme for the 2023/24 civic year.
- The proposed themes for the Panels this year would be Work Programme and Water in July, Sustainable Development in September, Waste in December and Achievements in March 2024.
- The Action Tracker was currently under review by the Policy Team and would be brought to the September meeting to highlight any changes.
- North Herts Council was leading on the Biodiversity Strategic Action Plan for the Herts Climate Change Sustainability Partnership (HCCSP). It was currently under review by the sub-group to take into account actions to date.
- The second round of the Solar Together Scheme would open for registrations in August until October.
- Work was being done on a Climate Risk Log. This would identify risks to Council Services and the wider district from Climate impacts, and actions that could be taken.
- The second round of Home Upgrade Grants was currently being worked on, which would allow for eligible households to apply for retrofitting measures. This round would be available for off-gas properties, properties rated EPC D to G and those who had an income of less than £31k per year.
- London Luton Airport Documents were being reviewed which covered climate resilience, green-control growth, infrastructure and air quality.
- The Climate Hive continued to provide residents with updates on bee corridors, wildflower areas, events and green courses.
- Work was ongoing to align the Climate and Environmental goals with planning projects such as the Baldock Expansion.

In response to a question at the last meeting from Councillor Chris Hinchliff, the Policy and Strategy Team Leader advised that iChoosr was monitoring the investigation into forced labour allegations in the Global Solar Supply Chain. iChoosr were a Member of Solar Energy UK and were signed up to the UK Solar Energy Supply Chain Treatment.

73 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 11:40

Tim Beech from Thames Water gave a presentation with slides and advised:

- Water treatment was a biological process which involved filtering effluent and removing solids, with samples taken at the final stage before being fed back into the environment.
- Storm tanks were filled if the inlet flow was too high. If the storm tanks reached capacity, it would discharge water back into the environment.
- Causes of overflows included infiltration, misconnection, inundation, physical damage, dual manholes and unauthorised connection.
- The water industry was a cause of poor water quality, along with other factors such as agriculture, urban and transport.

- The River Health Action Plan aimed to discharge high quality effluent that met required standards and eliminate pollutants. Working collaboratively with partners was also part of the action plan.
- An interactive overflow map had been introduced to document the position and performance of treatment works.
- There were six treatment works in North Hertfordshire, with upgrades planned to be completed in 2024.
- £9million was being investment across 3 'Smarter Water Catchments' to test innovative ways to manage water environments. It was hoped more catchments would be invested in from 2025.
- Long term investment was needed over a 25-year plan to reach the goal of higher quality water.
- There was a catchment strategic plan for Hertfordshire, which broke down the level of investment needed by factors such as flood risk and climate change.
- The Drainage and Wastewater Management Plan (DWMP) would be used in the next business plan to ask for a substantial amount of funding.

N.B. Councillor Dominic Griffiths joined the meeting at 19:54

In response to the questions from Councillor Steve Jarvis, Mr Beech advised that the objective was to produce higher quality effluent. Weston Treatment Works was not a priority site as there were other sites that had more storm overflow.

Councillor Steve Jarvis commented that it seemed that treatment works in rural areas had more spillage problems than treatment works in urban settlements. Mr Beech commented that it was likely to be due to the rural works being more susceptible to infiltration, and urban works tend to have bigger capacity and infrastructure.

Joe Stack from Anglian Water gave a presentation with slides and advised:

- Water Recycling involved the return of wastewater to the environment.
- Strategic goals for Anglian included achieving environmental and social prosperity across the network, creating a sustainable future for the region and to achieve significant improvement and resilience to drought and flooding.
- The Get River Positive Campaign was launched in March 2022 in partnership with Severn Trent, with goals including ensuring storm overflows do not harm rivers and to be open about the performance of the organisation.
- £811million was being invested as part of the Water Industry Natural Environment Programme over the next five years.
- Agriculture, urban developments, non-native species and misconnections all had an impact on river water quality.
- Factors that affect sewer operations included debris, fats and grease, misconnections and root ingress.
- Aims included eliminating serious pollutants by 2025, with less serious pollutants reduced by 45%. Storm overflow spills would be reduced to 20 per year by 2025.
- Removal of storm overflows would involve re-plumbing and defence measures. Areas had been prioritised where there was a higher environmental risk.
- Communications with customers included the publication of real-time data, environmental requests, pollution watch, engagement with stakeholders and education programmes.

In response to the question from public participant Doug Kennedy, Mr Stack advised that the use of suds and nature-based solutions were a preference in the investment plan of the organisation, as they would decrease the flows coming into the network and decrease carbon emissions.

Clare Carlaw from Affinity Water gave a presentation with slides and advised:

- Affinity had the primary role of water supply with no waste treatment in operation.
- Challenges that had influenced planning included leakage, groundwater supply abstraction, limited water storage and climate change.
- A draft Water Resources Management Plan (WRMP) was released in November 2022, with comments from consultation currently under review to publish an update on 31 August 2023.
- Water Resources South East was a collaborative alliance across many organisations including Affinity and Thames Water. This alliance allowed data sharing, insight and exploration of solutions together.
- The consultation had responses from local government, businesses, environmental organisations and community groups as well as individual customers.
- More than half of responses received felt that the draft WRMP was well-balanced, but 44% wanted a faster timescale for abstraction reduction.
- Changes made from the consultation included an accelerated abstraction reduction scheme, which would be front end loaded and most of the planned actions to reduce abstraction, around 70%, were scheduled to take place before 2035.
- Other targets on the plan included smart meter rollout, improved connectivity, supporting strategic schemes and leak reduction.
- The proposed Grand Union Canal (GUC) Scheme was a strategic transfer of water which would transfer water from the Midlands into the area that Affinity operates.
- Water would be taken from the Severn Trent Minworth site via a closed pipeline canal. The scheme would require upgrades to pumps and locks, as well as a new water treatment works at Leighton Buzzard. This scheme was hoped to be delivered by 2031/32.

In response to the question from Councillor Louise Peace, Mr Stack advised Anglian was working on strategic piping to reduce abstraction from chalk rivers, which aimed to be completed by 2025. This scheme aimed to reduce abstraction by 31,000 megalitres.

Councillor Louise Peace commented that it was disappointing that there was no current plan to reduce abstraction from the River Hiz and Ivel.

In response to the question from public participant Roger Lovegrove, Ms Carlaw advised that the proposed GUC Scheme and Abingdon Reservoir would feed into water-saving. Further, Affinity helped customers utilise saving measures such as water butts.

In response to a question submitted by email by a member of the public, Ms Carlaw advised that Affinity was due to start a Tariff Trial which would look at altering the way Affinity charges customers.

Sarah Perry from Herts Middlesex Wildlife Trust (HMWT) provided a presentation with slides and advised:

- HMWT had worked on chalk river conservation over the last decade.
- Only 1% of Hertfordshire land mass was wetland, compared to the national average of 5%. This meant wetland needed to be restored and protected to hold more water.
- The aim was to have 30% of land and water in good condition by 2030. Agriculture, the water industry, urban, transport and over-abstraction were all contributors to poor river quality.
- River catchments in the area included the Ivel, Hiz, Purwell and Upper Beane.
- Chalk stream health relied on water quantity, water quality and a natural habitat.
- HMWT hosted the Upper Lea Partnership with the Upper Ouse and Bedford Partnership Chalk Stream Working Group. This partnership supported landowners to develop management recommendations for chalk rivers.
- The River Enhancement Plan involved working with the Council, Hitchin Lavender, Environmental Agency, Ickleford Parish Council and the Countryside Management

Service. For the Love of Water (FLOW) had been commissioned this year to provide more detailed designs for the plan.

- The Plan would improve resilience, address dredging, modification and access, improve habitats and increase connectivity and quality of the rivers.
- An options reports would be produced and partners would be consulted in August 2023. More detail would be added to the options in October 2023. An application for an Environmental Agency permit would be submitted in December 2023 and construction would commence from 2024 dependent on funding.

Councillor Steve Jarvis commented that the projects that HMWT were currently working on were much shorter-term than some of the interventions from the water industry.

In response to the questions from Councillor Steve Jarvis, Ms Perry advised:

- The Rivers Hiz and Purwell were less impacted by abstraction than other chalk streams due to their augmented flow. There were some good sections of reference habitat, however some sections were degraded by dredging.
- A construction plan would be put out to tender which would give more information on the base funding required.

Councillor Steve Jarvis thanked the presenters and commented that the water industry operated on a longer timescale and expressed interest in hearing more about the Abingdon Reservoir Project. He hoped that there would be some recognition that change was needed in the way the water industry provides its services to address the issues highlighted.

Mark Wilkinson, public participant thanked the Panel and advised:

- It was a valuable opportunity to bring parties together to discuss plans for North Hertfordshire.
- In 2022, there were nearly 4,000 hours of sewage spills in Hertfordshire, with 90% within the River Lea catchment and 10% in the River Colne catchment.
- Anomalies in individual sewage treatment works such as Therfield and Barkway needed further scrutiny.
- Current levels of abstraction were excessive and damaged the chalk stream.
- The water industry had not addressed the infrastructure and needs of the population.

Councillor Steve Jarvis commented that there had been some interesting points raised during the meeting and there were areas of significant over-abstraction. He was encouraged that there was now recognition of this. Water companies needed to change the way they were providing water to customers and the Council needed to continue putting pressure of the industry to deliver their goals. It would be worth exploring local issues outside of the meeting to see if changes could be made within the community which could have an impact more quickly.

Tim Beech commented that sites and trends would be looked at in further detail. Population growth had a minor impact on the higher number of spills, with climate change and weather patterns being the primary causes of this.

Councillor Steve Jarvis thanked the attendees for their participation at the meeting.

The meeting closed at 9.14 pm

Chair