

Present: Councillor Judith Skinner (Chairman), Councillor Judy Welbourn (Vice-Chairman), Councillors Alison Austin, Peter Bedford, Katie Chalmers, Paul Goodale, Neill Hastie and Yvonne Stevens

In attendance:

Officers –
Assistant Director - Regulation, Insights & Transformation Manager and Democratic Services Officer

33 MINUTES

Committee agreed the minutes of the previous meeting held on the 7th December 2021.

34 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were tabled by Councillors Tom Ashton and Anton Dani with no substitute members.

35 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Councillor Alison Austin referenced the performance reporting which included homelessness and noted her position as a Director of Centrepoint Outreach.

36 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No public questions were tabled.

Prior to moving into part 2 of the agenda Madam Chairman welcomed Dr Robin Price and Ms Rose Shisler thanking them for agreeing to attend and present on behalf of Anglian Water

37 ANGLIAN WATER

Dr Price provided an in-depth overview of the presentation displayed, confirming it would be provided to Members for their reference of detailed information in respect of the corporate data after the meeting. His comments included the following:

The Company welcomed scrutiny of its environmental performance by campaigners, partners and the public. Anglian Water has been the first company in the UK to produce a Climate Change Adaptation Report and had won three net zero awards during 2020 – 2021.

Anglian Water employed 5000 staff and serviced 7 million customers across Eastern England. The area was classed as a dry region with on two thirds of the average UK rainfall. The area was fast growing with an expected 175k new homes by 2025. Currently 1100 recycling centres served the area with 400 water treatment sites and 76k kilometres of sewers.

The ambition of the company was to bring environmental and social prosperity to the region with the four key goals guided and identified by the needs of its stakeholders being, to make life better for residents; delivery of its 2020 – 2025 final determination; deliver its' identified business priorities and create a sustainable future for the region.

Their 25 year strategic ambition was to reduce their net carbon by 70% by 2025, to work with others to achieve significant improvements in ecological quality, to make the East of England resilient to the risks and flooding and drought and finally to enable sustainable economic housing growth in the fastest growing area of the Country, being a statutory consultee for planning applications.

Anglian Water would be looking at reducing emissions within its own build material including the carbon embodied within concrete and pipes. Furthermore, due to the low lying land within the area it would need to continue pumping and as such look to increase renewable energy including use of wind-power and renewables. Being aware of the need to off-set, the Company recognised that it would need to invest in nature based solutions and not just off-set by replacing trees.

Addressing a question tabled in respect of the carbon footprint of its existing fleet, Dr Price confirmed that Anglian Water whilst having 180 electric cars on order, were looking at minimising the business travel of its employees and were re-imagining its existing offices to address working in more efficient ways. They aspired to have 25% of their existing vans changed over by 2025 and were setting strong targets looking at alternative ways to fuel their tanker movements including consideration of liquid nitrified gas and potentially the use of bio methane gas which they already produced, some of which was exported to the gas grid. Their aspiration was to have 90% of their overall fleet changed over by 2030.

Referencing issues with storm overflows, Dr Price confirmed that Anglian Water were investing £200million in looking at the issues. This would include £80million in installing additional storm tanks; £56million in increasing water capacity at the water recycling plants and £20million in installing new drainage solutions.

Their aims included, to see the statutory need to tackle storm overflows ensuring prioritisation through the price review process; a joint owned national plan for rivers; an end to the automatic right to connect to their service and a collaborative action to restore rivers and national habitats. The Company would embrace working with farmers, local authorities and campaign groups.

Stating that historically the practice had been to discharge direct into the rivers in order to protect homes and business as rivers would dilute and dispel the discharge, moving forward consideration had to be given on how to protect the environment as well as homes and businesses. Furthermore, the company recognised that discharge of its own assets into rivers and the sea was also on occasion not acceptable and whilst it was a long complex process to address, they would be actioning the issues.

Locally 85% of water was used for drinking and household/business use with the remaining 15% used to irrigate crops. In London the rate being 98% - 2% was very different. By 2050 the prediction for water use would rise by 100%.

Investment was also ongoing into monitoring practices across the region to enable the company to be held to account and also to allow a wide information service for the public on its website. The introduction of smart water meters along the same lines as electricity metres, would allow residents to see how much they were spending and on what. Currently UK residents used 140 Litres per day whilst in Scandinavia it was 50 Litres

Looking forward Anglian Water would be introducing three reservoirs, 2 in South Lincolnshire and one in the Fens with a start build time of 2025 to deliver by 2030. A shortlist of suitable sites had been compiled and the intent was to make them destinations by providing not only irrigation for farmers, but to make them natural habitats and tourist assets and maximise their benefits for the local communities.

Referencing the Boston area, Dr Price advised that they would be investing £9million over the next five years. This would include £8million at the Frampton Water Recycling Centre to increase capacity, £87k to increase capacity at other centres across the borough and £100k for monitoring locally. Referencing the capacity of the nine sites within the borough, six sites had significant capacity, Fishtoft had capacity for the next ten years with the remainder with the sites being monitored as they may potentially require further investment over the next 25 years. Further information noted that all the sewers had been historically assessed and continued to be so, ensuring Anglian Water were aware of the risks, enabling them to go and replace and upgrade them to keep the sewage flowing.

Addressing questions submitted in respect of the tankers moving around the town and concern on speeding, Dr Price confirmed that any such incident should be reported with evidence if possible, as it would not be tolerated. The tankers operated within the borough during the hours of 0730/0840, 0910/1520 and 1550/1800 outside of school hours. 12 tankers per day delivered to the sites and 20 tankers collected from the sites.

Clarifying the cargo, Dr Price confirmed that it was sludge and not raw sewage that was being transported. The treated sludge was broken down at the recycling sites with the solids being taken from the water and made in fertiliser – known as cake.

Further concerns noted the stock piled cake at sites which had not been delivered to farmers and the real possibility of odours which could emanate from it in warmer weather, impacting on the amenity of neighbouring residents. Dr Price confirmed the HGV fleet was managed centrally with all vehicles having telematics installed. He confirmed he would be happy to facilitate a conversation with the site manager to address the concerns raised including the potential issue of odour.

Additional questions by Members followed with responses provided when possible and assurance given that a follow up answers after the meeting would be provided, where required, these included:

Referencing concerns in respect of odour (unpleasant odour) from the clean water discharge of out Frampton works, Dr Price assured committee that the performance of the site was monitored and performed very well within the operating permit of the Environment Agency. He would however check direct with the site to see if it had received complaints and revert after the meeting.

In response to a question in respect of the Environment Agency Regulatory Position Statement regarding the spreading of bio-solids, committee were advised that Anglian Water had submitted, alongside other water companies, a proposal to the Environment Agency to include a package of 20 additional controls associated with their bio solids recycling operations. It included avoidance of sandy and high risk shallow soils and completing risk assessments when operating in specified sensitive catchments, to minimise the risk of diffuse pollution and allow agricultural recycling operations to continue in compliance with Farming Rules for Water. Anglian Water has recently met with the Environment Agency to progress this and were hopeful they could agree a practicable resolution.

There was agreement that the 20 measures went above and beyond compliance with Farming Rules for Water and should provide the reassurance the Environment Agency need, that our operations pose a very low risk of diffuse agricultural pollution.

Querying who would be delivering a new scheme in central Kirton and also what recent works had been undertaken on Middlegate Road, Dr Price confirmed that answers to both would be provided after the meeting.

Further questions in respect of surface water provision on new developments were tabled and members were advised that Anglian Water had a pre-development team and whilst not being a statutory consultee on planning applications, they did seek to comment on applications of 10 dwellings or more, or in areas of particular concern. They worked directly with housing developers to promote the use of Sustainable Drainage Solutions (SuDS) having promoted the use of SuDS on new and redevelopments, and they did adopt sustainable drainage systems with adoption often seen as a blocker in promoting these solutions.

Concerns were raised in respect of the lack of fluoridation in the borough with the area being so deprived and the effect on the populations teeth, and in particular those of the children, with Members asking how the area could have its water updated to include fluoride. Dr Price advised that Anglian Water could not make the decision to fluoridate an area and that it could only act on an official request from the OHID (Office for Health Improvement and Disparities). He advised that he would seek a detailed response with relevant contact details to enable the Council to proceed should it so wish, but advised that many areas preferred hard water as against soft water, noting its significant health benefits as a source of calcium with lime scale being a natural occurrence. Dr Price stressed that the water was not of poor quality and not contaminated.

Final comments included the support for promotion of the recycling of water domestically to include water butts and smart metres. Support of mandatory labelling on white goods and of standards for all new homes.

In conclusion the Chairman thanked Dr Price and Ms. Shisler for their informative presentation and attendance.

Dr Price confirmed that they would welcome the opportunity to return to committee with updates in respect of their ongoing plans.

38 WORK PROGRAMME - Q2 PERFORMANCE MONITORING

The Insights and Transformation Manager present the report advising it was in the same format as Q1 with all performance information tabled relating to both Scrutiny committees. A brief summary was provided prior to committee comments:

Housing and Wellbeing was better than target in respect of the number of properties improved through Council intervention. However the percentage of cases opened at homelessness prevention stage was below target but a lot of new work and new measures were now in place. The number of verified sleeps was worse than target but it was an aspirational target which the Council aimed to achieve.

The percentage of Alliance workforce who said 'yes' when asked if they felt valued at work was still below target however there was a marked improvement from the Q1 return (61.58%) to the Q2 return (73.03%). Increased liaison with those members of the workforce who did not feel valued continues to take place and the alliance would look to gather staff engagement data from other local authorities to benchmark its' own results.

Due to pending agreement from the Waste Disposal Authority in relation to changes in how recycling performance is measured, no data was available. However, the percentage of fly-tips collected within 3 working days of being reported was above target.

Whilst all planning was below target, the local performance measures did exceed the national minimum requirement as they did not include agreed time extensions. In addition, the ongoing changes and general workloads within the service did impact on performance in the short term. Major applications commonly are those which require negotiations, amendments, Committee decisions or legal agreements. The Council may revert to national targets.

The percentage of food premises inspections completed against the Food Standards Agency annual inspection plan were within tolerance. With the exception of a small number of fishing vessels which could not be inspected owing to the seasonal nature of their business, Boston was undertaking its food safety inspection programme as it did before the start of the pandemic. Unlike most, if not all, other local authorities, Boston has not had to implement the Food Standards Agency (FSA) recovery plan to retrieve the food safety inspection programme to where it was before the pandemic. As such the food safety inspections will be reported in the same way as before the service was disrupted by the pandemic, rather than against the FSA Recovery Plan.

The time to process new Benefit claims was below target which had been hampered by balancing high workloads and resources, including the diversion of experienced resources to deliver Test and Trace along with work required to clear the backlog of unprocessed records that accumulated prior to PSPS taking over the service.

The NDR collection rate was below target, but comparisons with targets and previous years are not valid, as the partial removal of Covid related reliefs part way through the year has meant that the liability is not distributed evenly throughout the year and is weighted towards the end of the year. A more accurate measure of performance would be available for in Q4.

Member comment and questioning followed which included:

Referencing the recent Member Working Group in respect of housing standards committee were asked to agree a way forward and their preference of which option of scrutiny. Committee agreed that a Task and Finish Group be convened.

Address the performance of the markets Members voiced concern at the continued low attendance of traders and the ongoing loss of reputation of the market as a destination. Concern was also noted on the detrimental impact Stickney Car Boot continued to have on Boston's market. It appeared that whilst Boston's charter which did not permit car boots on the market, East Lindsey District Councils charter did permit traders on a car boot event and had taken a number of Boston's Saturday traders, reducing the stalls on the weekend market. Referencing the alliance, Members felt that East Lindsey District Council should be made aware of the detriment their car boot had caused on the established Saturday market and further impact on other business in the town from visitors to the market. Committee agreed that a Member briefing be scheduled in the first instance to see the current position and the intentions to grow the market.

The Meeting Closed at 9.10 pm