Confirmed Minutes

Title of meeting:	NRW Board Meeting (Public)
Location:	Llandarcy Office and Teams
Date of meeting:	20 May 2026
Members present:	Neil Sachdev, Chair Ceri Davies, Chief Executive Sarah Albon Dr Hushneara Begum Rebecca Colley-Jones Dr Pete Fox Prof. Calvin Jones Lesley Jones Prof Rhys Jones Mark McKenna Helen Pittaway Adam Taylor
Executive Team Members Present	Prys Davies, Executive Director of Strategy, Policy and Evidence Sarah Jennings, Executive Director of Communications, Customer and Commercial Rachael Cunningham, Executive Director of Finance and Corporate Services Dominic Driver, Executive Director of National Operations Lyndsey Rawlinson, Executive Director of Place Operations

Attendees present:	Phil Williams, Head of Governance and Board Secretary (All items) Meinir Wigley, Head of Communications and Digital Transformation Mark Collins, Business Finance Team 2 Manager – item 6 Sarah Williams, Head of Corporate Strategy and Programme Management Office (PMO) – item 7 Sian Williams, Head of North West Wales – item 8 Mary Lewis, Head of Natural Resource Management Policy – item 8 Becky Favager, Head of Regulation & Permitting – item 8 Huwel Manley, Head of South West Wales Operations – item 8 Rhian Jardine, Head of DPAS and Marine Services – item 8 Rhian Thomas, Sustainable Water & Nature Manager – item 8 Gareth Davies, Operations Manager, South West Wales – item 8 Matthew Lowe, Team Leader, Environment Team – item 8 Jonathan Jones, Team Leader, Environment Team – item 8
Observers present:	Ulfa Bennett Matthew Hywell Thomas
Apologies:	Mair Gwynant, Board Member Louise White, Executive Director of People and Facilities
Secretariat:	Rhiannon Spencer, Board Secretariat Team Leader and Deputy Board Secretary Sian Johnston, Board Secretariat Team Lauren Hughes, Board Secretariat Team Deb Lee, Board Secretariat Team
Declarations of Interest	Mark McKenna - Planning application on a Down to Earth site adjacent to/including a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)/RAMSAR (Wetlands of International Importance)/Special Area of Conservation (SAC) designated area

Item 1. Open Meeting

Sponsor and Presenter: Neil Sachdev, Chair

1. The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed everyone, including new Board member Sarah Albon. Declarations of interest and apologies were noted as above.

Item 2. Review Minutes

Item 2A. Review Minutes from 18 March Public Meeting

2. The minutes from the public Board meeting on 18 March were reviewed and agreed with minor amendments.

3. Lesley Jones raised a matter from the minutes relating to the Wales Fisheries Forum. She had recently visited a Hatchery, and it had been suggested on this visit to review the use of the Hatchery for Atlantic salmon. It was explained that in the early years of NRW, an evidence review of introducing salmon from the hatcheries into the environment demonstrated that it could introduce greater vulnerabilities to the salmon population. The Board suggested that this be reviewed as the situation may have changed, as well as a cost benefit analysis. Assurance was provided that the original decision had not been influenced by cost.

Item 2B. Review Action Log

4. The Action Log was not reviewed.

Item 3. Update from the Chair

Sponsor and Presenter: Neil Sachdev, Chair

5. The Chair introduced the item and provided an update on matters since the last Board meeting. The new Board members had been assigned to committees; Sarah Albon would be a member of the Finance Committee (FC) and the People Committee (PC), and Mair Gwynant had been appointed as Chair of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC).

6. A site visit had taken place with the Marine team and the Chair emphasised that improved communications was needed on the excellent work that was being undertaken by colleagues across the organisation. The Chair and the Chief Executive had also met with the new Minister for Rural Resilience and Sustainability and provided an overview of the meeting, which had been a positive engagement. The Minister would be invited to a future Board meeting.

Item 4. Update from the Chief Executive

Sponsor and Presenter: Ceri Davies, Chief Executive

7. The Chief Executive introduced the item and highlighted key issues. The Forestry Commission England Board were planning a visit with NRW colleagues to discuss and learn on energy delivery. This would likely take place during the week of the Royal Welsh Agricultural Show (RWAS) and Board members would be invited to attend. NRW were also working with Forestry Commission England on Wellbeing, Health and Safety (WHS) and a group event was being organised to discuss this.

8. A new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) had been signed with the Welsh Revenue Authority (WRA) to expand efforts against illegal waste activity. Consideration would also be given to closer collaboration with local authorities on this matter. A joint stand was being considered for the next 'Conversations with NRW' event with the public, to show how NRW and WRA worked together using both the criminal and tax system to tackle illegal waste dumping.

9. The challenges of illegal waste and fly tipping was discussed including the regulatory limitations and the need for stronger enforcement powers. The Board were informed that this had been raised with the Minister. The importance of support to those working in the sector and whether this could be improved was highlighted. There was agreement that a discussion was needed at a future Board meeting regarding regulation.

ACTION: Secretariat to add Regulation to the Board Forward Look.

10. A meeting would be held shortly with the North Wales Ambition Board to understand what NRW could do in response to the provocation session from the Board Strategic Planning Day in April, and what actions could be undertaken to coordinate relationships. A similar approach was being undertaken with Swansea Council to build relationships for NRW to be included in early discussions when developments were taking place. Working with the Swansea Bay City Region Joint Committee would be a good example of how NRW could work in other areas across Wales, to ensure earlier involvement in development planning and environmental standards setting. The Board would be kept informed of this work.

11. Two meetings had been held with the Future Generations Commissioner (FGC) since the March Board meeting, one being a regular meeting and the other being focused on Wellbeing Objective (WBO) 4, which had been refreshed following their views and comments.

12. In response to a query regarding NRW's discussions with the FGC on looking to the future, it was explained that the use of the WBOs needed to be considered and how their use could be expanded. Clarification was provided that NRW needed to do more communications on bringing other bodies together to discuss the future and how others could contribute.

13. The Board were assured that some elements of the WBOs had been rewritten to mirror the language of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, as well as following the FGC’s input to WBO4. NRW had offered their assistance to support the FGC’s work.

14. ET had been focused working with the Leadership team, supporting them in relation to leading both staff and for the environment. There would be a leadership event in the autumn to focus on the behaviours discussed during the Strategic Planning Day, resulting from the Stakeholder Perceptions Survey.

15. Work had progressed on nuclear since the March Board meeting. One of the key areas of focus was reducing complexity through the application process and improving pace for investors to be able to invest. The Welsh Government (WG) had established an Officers Group to replicate the DEFRA Group for key partners in Wales, recognising devolution but also progressing with work that could be done in the meantime.

16. Nuclear skills capacity was queried, and it was explained that NRW and the Environment Agency (EA) had a strong relationship and the EA provided resources paid for by NRW. Discussions were also ongoing with WG for investment to grow nuclear skills and it had also been raised with the new Minister.

17. In response to a query, the prospect of judicial review had been discussed when senior regulators for nuclear came together. All partners were aware of the different legislation and policy perspectives across Wales and England.

18. The Teifi Fyw Project was discussed, including learning from working in new ways. The Strategic Projects team were managing this, and their remit included being a centre of excellence for project management for the organisation. Learning from projects was embedded in their work, to take this forward for future projects.

19. The status of the proposed National Park with a new Government was queried, however this was yet to be discussed with the new Minister. Another area of work queried was the Marine Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) with a new Government in place. NRW would continue to discuss this with WG as it was a key area of concern for the new Government.

20. The new Chief Executive of Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water (DCWW) was focused on delivery, with a desire to progress work at pace. Working with WG and OfWat following the Independent Water Commission, NRW were focused on ensuring action taken by them would drive positive performance and behaviour change in DCWW.

21. The options on the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal were discussed, and it was explained that the ongoing focus was on a longer term, more sustainable solution, looking at wider demands instead of only one part of the river. A meeting would be held in the coming week on this.

Item 5. Update Report of Committees

Sponsors and presenters: Committee Chairs

Evidence Advisory Committee (EAC) – 12 May

22. Prof. Rhys Jones, the Chair of EAC, noted that the Committee had held their May meeting in NRW's Swansea Laboratory, an informative tour of the Lab and its work had been provided. The committee restructure had been discussed and EAC had emphasised the importance of maintaining a link between the Board and the Committee. Evidence needs had been discussed and the issue of whether NRW had the capacity to analyse the data. NRW's relationships with universities had been raised, as this could help with the gap in capacity for generating and analysing data. A five year Social Science draft Plan had been presented; the focus of social science had changed since NRW had developed and it was suggested that investment was needed in this area.

Finance Committee (FC) – 6 May

23. Helen Pittaway, Chair of FC, provided an update on the recent FC meeting, where they had discussed the Financial Performance, approved the financial approval for Software Licenses, and received the twice yearly update from Programme Management Office (PMO) and Contract Management Support Service (CMSS). The budget had changed slightly since the last time the Board had seen it, and FC endorsed these changes following approval by the Chief Executive and the Executive Director of Finance and Corporate Services (F&CS).

24. The Forward Look had also been discussed considering the new committee structure, and it had been agreed that all Capital projects would be brought to FC for monitoring. The Finance Strategy had also been received at the meeting, and this would be brought to the July Board meeting.

Flood Risk Management Committee (FRMC) – 29 April

25. Dr. Pete Fox, Chair of FRMC, highlighted they key issue discussed at the latest FRMC meeting, on discounting rates. As the benefits eroded over time, there was a challenge to be made to WG on discounting rates as future generations needed to be considered.

Land Estate Committee (LEC) – 7 May

26. Prof. Calvin Jones, Chair of LEC updated the Board on the recent LEC meeting. The regular Head of Land Stewardship and Head of Strategic Commercial Development reports were received. Other items discussed were the Timber Sales Plan and the Growth and Value Strategy. Two issues were raised during both items, one being that there were limitations for NRW whilst adhering to WG's aspirations and directions. The second being that holistic metrics were needed to ensure any

value NRW provided was captured, and the Board agreed that these were needed. These could also help when lobbying for funding from WG.

Wales Land Management Forum – 9 March

27. Prof. Rhys Jones, the Chair of the Wales Land Management Forum, highlighted an issue not included in the Report. The membership of the Forum was being explored, to consider if the membership could be expanded to include organisations such as the RSPB. In response to a query, it was explained that there was a wide variety of views on the Forum relating to species in peril.

National Access Forum for Wales (NAFW) – 7 March

28. Lesley Jones, Chair of National Access Forum noted that there was no further update as the Board had received an update on the last NAFW meeting in the March Board meeting. However, she reflected again on the positive discussions that was had in the workshop, engaging with a wide range of organisations.

Item 6. Finance Performance Report

Presenters: Mark Collins, Business Finance Team 2 Manager

29. The Executive Director of Finance and Corporate Services (F&CS) introduced the item and noted that Rob Bell, Head of Finance was due to retire in September 2026.

30. The Business Finance Team 2 Manager provided an overview of the Finance Performance Report, key points included financial performance and summary of focus areas from this financial year. Overall, the budget had increased by £1.2m since January 2026 taking the final budget to £294.2m. The increase was related to £4.4m WG Grant in Aid (GiA) which was offset by reductions in commercial, charge balances, European and external income of £3.2m.

31. The performance against the last forecast was good and 99% of the proposed forecast was spent alongside 98% of the original budget. The Nature and Climate Emergency (NaCE) Programme was the only exception with an underspend of £1.5m. A review had been undertaken which would be presented to ET to explore the reasons behind the underspend.

32. Income was ahead of profile at the end of March, with the main variant being in relation to commercial income which included an increase in timber income, surrender-able wind energy and NRW Estate income. It was noted there had been an improvement on NRW’s ability to forecast this year.

33. The team had finalised their reportable position which would be presented to FC in early June.

34. With regards to lessons learned and NRW's focus areas for this year, these included being nearer to the affordable structure, less risk averse on the overprogramming level, review the level set for Flood and NaCE capital Programmes and work on the delivery of Finance's Innovation Plan. The team would review last year's performance with each director to identify optimism bias and where general behaviours could be improved. The Board agreed they were content to approve the end of year Finance Performance Report.

DECISION: The Board approved the end of year Finance Performance Report.

35. The Executive Director of F&CS explained the profile was up and down in terms of expenditure however, reassured that NRW had spent and delivered on budgets in this financial year. The Board discussed consequences for missed targets and the introduction of mechanisms to ensure early flagging of potential underspends for leadership and management teams. The CEO highlighted that the Finance team provided a clear picture around issues in budgets and the teams were provided with detailed budget performance data.

36. It was noted that the Report was well received at Finance Committee because they had been well-sighted throughout the year and there had been continuous open dialogue with WG. For the upcoming financial year, the Board agreed that finances should be committed early in preparation for a new government.

37. The Executive Director of Communications, Customer and Commercial confirmed that a deep dive into timber market volatility and forecasting was underway with comparisons to practices in England and Scotland, and consideration of contractual provisions to manage supply chain.

Item 7. Business Plan Performance Dashboard Q4

Sponsor: Ceri Davies, Chief Executive
Presenters: WBO Leads; Sarah Williams, Head of Corporate Strategy and PMO

38. The CEO introduced the item. The Head of Corporate Strategy and PMO presented the Q4 Business Plan Performance Dashboard and highlighted strong overall results and positive news with regards to consistency with reporting and forecasting on the Key Performance Indictors (KPIs). The Red, Amber and Green (RAG) status in the year-end Performance Report showed 18 Green, nine Amber and one Red indicator, with most objectives on track and clear reporting of areas needing improvement, particularly in Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS) and pollution minimisation.

39. On the SFS KPI, significant recruitment had been undertaken however, there had been difficulty in finding candidates with both Welsh language and the technical skills for an Environment Officer. Welsh speaking was essential for such a rural role, and the team have been considering alternative recruitment and training strategies.

40. On the Internal Performance Report, there had been a 38% increase in Access to Information Requests which led to a shift from Green to Amber at year-end. The team continued to work on improving the content on the website to answer any reoccurring questions, and direct users to self-serve information.

41. The CEO confirmed that metrics around planning permission reporting would be built into future reports. It was noted that around 80% of responses were within the statutory deadline, however the Executive Director of National Operations (NatOps) confirmed his team were working to increase this.

42. The Board discussed the Wellbeing Objective 3 (WBO3): Pollution is minimised KPI. The Executive Director of Place confirmed that work was ongoing with the general trend focussed on NRW going out to more high-level, impactful pollution minimising events however, there was less work focussed on the preventative action. Further resource was due to fund a project manager to focus efforts on WBO3.

43. The Board discussed the recruitment of project managers to begin achieving the Pathway to Green however, questioned if these issues could have been pre-empted and recognised earlier. Board discussed whether lessons learned from those KPIs that were already Green could be utilised. The CEO confirmed that WBO leads explored multiple options to achieve their Pathway to Green however, recognised that a cultural shift was needed to encourage new ways of spending budgets through recruitment, temporary arrangements, education, and apprenticeships.

44. The Board welcomed the discussion and approved the Q4 Performance Dashboard.

DECISION: The Board approved the Q4 Performance Dashboard.

Item 8. Water Quality (WBO3)

Sponsor: Lyndsey Rawlinson, Executive Director of Place Operations; Sian Williams, Head of North West Wales; Mary Lewis, Head of Natural Resource Management Policy; Huwel Manley, Head of South West Wales Operations

Presenters: Becky Favager, Head of Regulation & Permitting; Rhian Jardine, Head of DPAS and Marine Services; Rhian Thomas, Sustainable Water and Nature Manager Gareth Davies, Operations Manager, South West Wales; Matthew Lowe, Team Leader, Environment Team; Jonathan Jones, Team Leader, Environment Team

45. The Executive Director of Place Operations introduced the deep-dive into WBO3 - Pollution is minimised, with a focus on water alongside a South West Wales place focused presentation, focused primarily on the impacts relating to water quality. Water was highlighted as central to the Corporate Plan, cross-cutting across all the WBOs.

46. The Head of Natural Resource Management reported that whilst water quality improvements had been made in the last 30-years, through legislation, regulation, and technological advances, significant challenges remained. Insufficient water quantity issues would exacerbate water quality issues. The increasing public, media and political scrutiny was understood. The improved trend, cited in the Water Framework Directive Regulations was noted.

47. The Head of Service for Water highlighted the number of incidents received per sector and explained the differences in how pollution incidents were reported compared to other incidents. The Board were assured that data was used to track trends and cumulative environmental impacts of pollution incidents. A strong emphasis was needed on prevention rather than reactive enforcement. Water company performance, particularly Dŵr Cymru, had declined, with increases in both the number and severity of pollution incidents. Enforcement action continued as required; however, the main priority was prevention. Alongside wider regulatory developments, and a £44.7m Ofwat penalty that, if enacted, could support future infrastructure investment. Although there would still be significant challenges in delivery, areas for improvement had been earmarked and work was ongoing for the next pricing review 2029 (PR29).

48. Opportunities from the Independent Water Commission Report and the WG Green Paper proposals were welcomed, particularly around regulatory reform, improved system planning and stronger enforcement. NRW would work closely with WG and the proposed Economic Regulator to support a more integrated, holistic, and strategic approach to water planning and a reset of the water sector.

49. Nutrient pollution remained a significant issue, contributing to condition failures, ecological decline, and development constraints, with approximately 16,000 planning applications currently on hold. NRW was progressing targeted regulatory actions and developing two South West Wales Catchment Nutrient Recovery Plans to support compliance and long-term environmental recovery.

50. The Head of South West Wales Operations gave an overview on the diverse landscape of the area, highlighting key regional challenges that included agricultural pressures, particularly in high density livestock areas such as the Cleddau, where farm compliance remained below 50%. Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) nutrient pollution issues were outlined and the importance of strengthening relationships with farmers and leveraging supply chain influence was highlighted.

51. One main issue was summarised, this was a major infrastructure failure of the Dŵr Cymru Marlas rising main, resulting in repeated sewage spills. An overground temporary fix was being implemented until funding became available in the next Asset Management Plan (AMP) period for a permanent underground solution. The Board raised concerns over other similar aging assets, investment constraints, and the capacity of water companies to respond effectively. It was assured that water companies were being encouraged to manage risks and horizon scan.

52. The Board welcomed the investment of £1.7m permanent funding from Grant in Aid (GiA) and £3.4m temporary funding from WG to support improvements in governance, compliance, data, and integrated catchment approaches. However, the Board emphasised that water quality was a national priority requiring sustained long-term funding, stronger legislative support and a whole-system approach linking land use, food production, biodiversity, and climate change. The outcomes NRW were looking to achieve, and the direction of travel were welcomed by the Board.

53. It was acknowledged that delivery of improvements was constrained by legislative restrictions, historical underinvestment by water companies and resource pressures. The need to shift further toward prevention, enhanced collaboration across sectors and improved data-led decision-making was reinforced. Whilst opportunities such as nutrient trading and market-based solutions existed, it was recognised that environmental recovery would take time due to agricultural historic nutrients in the soil taking time to drain.

54. The presentation was welcomed, the economic cost and social impacts of water quality issues were discussed, including the significant value of development currently paused. The Board reiterated concerns over water industry AMP settlement and ability to deliver with resources available. Funding received from the Heritage Lottery Fund for the Teifi Project was welcomed. There were complexities in comparing Integrated Catchment Management Plans across Wales and demonstrating support for stakeholders would be important.

55. The Board encouraged a focus on high-impact actions, strengthened partnerships and continued engagement with government, industry, and stakeholders to drive meaningful and lasting improvements; alongside the need for a balanced approach, combining incentives and enforcement. Production and supply chain influence, particularly the role of supermarkets, was highlighted as a key lever for change. A recent agricultural stakeholder workshop was an initial step forward.

56. The Board discussed regulating farms as businesses but understood the uniqueness of some family-run farm communities; however, environmental standards had to be adhered to, and the supply chain could be more demanding. Nutrient trading best practice to help with sustainable development was suggested but this would take time.

57. Plaid Cymru had a national food strategy on their first 100-day plan, and NRW had offered support. The Chair suggested contacting The Grocer and that he could write to the Institute of Grocery Distribution (IGD). The team were working with WG on a Natural Resources Policy to ensure wider consideration on land use and with a new Government there would be new opportunities.

58. Water sector expectations had changed over the last 10-years, and global societal understanding was needed. It was suggested that having a commercial aspect representative on the Board could be beneficial. Pre-constraints needed to be understood, what more could be done with more resource, and done differently. It was cautioned to not spread activities too thinly but to concentrate on those that

would make the most difference, effectively and a different way of working could be considered. The team welcomed the Board's engagement and feedback would be taken into consideration for plans to address the water quality issue.

Item 9. How did we do in this meeting?

Sponsor: Neil Sachdev, Chair

59. The Chair came back to this item during the end of the Private Board Meeting and Board agreed that the WBO3 Place Presentation was interesting, and it was agreed systemic change was needed with regards to livestock and the method of production.

60. The Board highlighted the positive impact of being available and visible to colleagues by visiting offices and meeting with colleagues.

Item 10. AOB

61. There was no AOB.

Close Public Meeting