

Confirmed minutes

Title of meeting:	NRW Board Meeting (Public)
Location:	Teams
Date of meeting:	29 th July 2026
Members present:	Neil Sachdev, Chair Ceri Davies, Chief Executive Sarah Albon Mair Gwynant Dr Hushneara Begum Dr Rebecca Colley-Jones Dr Pete Fox Prof. Calvin Jones Lesley Jones Prof Rhys Jones Mark McKenna Helen Pittaway Adam Taylor
Executive Team Members Present	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 Louise White, Executive Director of People, Facilities and Fleet
Attendees present:	Phil Williams, Head of Governance and Board Secretary (All items) Sarah Williams, Head of Corporate Strategy and Programme Management Office (PMO) (All items) Meinir Wigley, Head of Communications and Digital Transformation (All items) Charlotte Morgan, Wellbeing, Health & Safety Manager – item 8 only
Observers present:	

Apologies:	Prys Davies, Executive Director of Strategy, Policy and Evidence
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	Dr Rebecca Colley-Jones – Board Member of Group Cynefin

Item 1. Open Meeting

Sponsor and Presenter: Neil Sachdev, Chair

1. The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed everyone. Declarations of interest and apologies were noted as above. The Chair noted that he had stood down as Chair from Connecting Places Catapult board on 27th July 2026.

Item 2. Review Minutes

Item 2A. Review Minutes from 20th May Public Meeting

2. The minutes from the public Board meeting on 20th May were reviewed and agreed with minor amendments.

Item 2B. Review Action & Decision Log

3. The Action and Decision Log was reviewed.

Item 3. Update from the Chair

Sponsor and Presenter: Neil Sachdev, Chair

4. The Chair introduced the item and provided an update on matters since the last Board meeting. NRW had hosted the Statutory Nature Conservation Body meeting in North Wales in June, and the Board were reminded that Professor Rhys Jones would represent NRW on the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) going forward. The Chair highlighted meetings with the Chairs of both water companies, Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water (DCWW) and Hafren Dyfrdwy (HD), and the President of the National Farmers Union (NFU). The relationship between NFU and NRW would be further developed, to support farmers but also to continue to hold them to

account through NRW's regulation role. The Chair had also met with the Chair of the Welsh Revenue Authority (WRA) and attended the Public Bodies Chair meeting.

5. The recruitment process had begun for the new Chief Executive, and the Board would be kept updated. Colleagues were commended for their work during the Royal Welsh Agricultural Show (RWAS), and this had been a good opportunity for the Chair to meet with a wider range of colleagues. The Chief Executive was thanked for her leadership, which was reflected in feedback the Chair had received from colleagues and stakeholders.
6. The Chair had also undertaken site visits across Wales including Welshpool, Ceri Forest, New Pool Reservoir and Newtown Flood Protection Scheme.
7. The Chair thanked all colleagues that had been working tirelessly on the recent wildfires and asked that this be extended from the Board. Communications would be pursued with local teams being nominated to work on incidents whilst supporting the community. The Chair expressed his frustration that colleagues were being trolled on social media and noted that the Place focused approach may need revisiting if this continued.

Item 4. Update from the Chief Executive

Sponsor and Presenter: Ceri Davies, Chief Executive

8. The Chief Executive (CEO) introduced the item and highlighted key issues. The Chief Executive reiterated their thanks to all colleagues working on the wildfires and noted that this had been disseminated to colleagues via the CEO update email and the Manager's Monthly Update call. It was emphasised that the trolling and negative commentary on social media was being taken seriously, and the Social Media Policy and Procedure were being reviewed to consider what further actions be taken. The Place focused approach would continue to be followed, but appropriate action would be taken if this way of working was being abused.
9. The Chief Executive had spoken on a leadership panel for the Biodiversity and Business Live summit in Edinburgh, and they had been invited to hold their next session in Wales in 2027. NRW would host this with Welsh Government (WG), and this would be a good opportunity to have a debate on the balance between ensuring a sustainable environment whilst growing the economy.
10. NRW were recently awarded with the Silver Carbon Literate Organisation accreditation, but the next aim would be for the Gold accreditation. This would include the Board members undertaking the Climate Literacy training and the Board Secretariat would provide details of this course to the Board.

ACTION: Board Secretariat to provide details of the Climate Literacy training to the Board.

11. The CEO outlined NRW's primary responsibility during wildfire incidents, which was to support the Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) on the land NRW managed. During the wildfire incidents, NRW had access to a helicopter service on contract, but this was a UK wide resource where the helicopter service was available to other organisations across the UK, and prioritisation arrangements were in place. Internal colleagues had been supporting the FRS with land management activity, communications, social media and the deployment of the helicopter when available.
12. The Executive Director of Place Operations (Place Ops) thanked the colleagues for their response to the recent wildfires, and noted that stakeholders had also expressed their thanks. There had been significant operational pressures, including wildfires in other areas, which contributed to the difficult and intense time-period for colleagues. Following the negative media coverage with reference to the helicopter, Members of the Senedd (MSs) had been informed of NRW's roles and responsibilities with wildfire incidents. The Communications team prepared a brief for the MSs to correct the misinformation. However, it was suggested that the media also needed to be sufficiently briefed on NRW's roles and responsibilities. The Board were notified that due to the focus on these incidents, business as usual work and budgets would be impacted.
13. NRW's investment in adapting to climate change on the land they managed was highlighted. This included what was planted and when, the design of fire lines, training for colleagues and aerial support for FRS. Relationships had also been built in communities and with the FRS. The expectation of the aerial support for this year had been higher than what was possible, and there had been discussions between NRW and the FRS Chiefs. Work was underway to develop an enhanced, Wales-wide approach to aerial support. Short-term options continued to be explored given the ongoing risks.
14. The CEO also highlighted that drought status had been declared for parts of North and South East Wales due to concern on river levels. The Board were assured that reservoir levels were currently sufficient, however the water companies were urging appropriate use of water to sustain this. Increased monitoring of river levels would be implemented, along with increased regulatory work on abstraction. Measures could be taken if river levels were to decrease further including releases from reservoirs.
15. The First Minister's multi-disciplinary review on the wildfires in Wales was noted. It was suggested that NRW could look into the processes from other countries, to further inform NRW's response going forward. The Board were assured that there would be continued effective collaborative working with other UK countries, including developing a UK wide wildfire strategy. There was an England and Wales Wildfire Board that met regularly, and discussions would take place with European partners as well. Lessons learned in Wales would also be fed back to the UK Government via WG. It was also suggested that the multi-disciplinary discussion in Wales should focus on all serious incidents, not only wildfires.

16. In response to a query on developing a strategy on prevention of wildfires, it was explained that NRW had an ongoing campaign including educating the public on how they could help with prevention. The FRS Chiefs across Wales were also informing local communities of their role in reducing the risk of wildfires.
17. A discussion on water quality was suggested, including whether NRW had the right resources to deal with this adequately or if the approach needed to change. The Board were assured that this was still a significant priority for NRW and specific areas were being used as test beds such as in Southwest Wales.
18. An incident exercise plan had been developed. ET held an annual discussion on NRW's strategic approach to incident response, and there was a focus on resilience and prevention. ET and the Leadership Team (LT) also undertook Gold Command training with other public bodies as Duty Strategic Managers, and NRW worked across local resilience forums too. Due to the pace of climate change impacts, NRW were keen to have deeper exercises with partners.
19. Habitat restoration needed to be considered as this could be multi-beneficial by addressing flooding, water quality, droughts and wildfires. NRW could be innovative and bold to show what was possible in managing land in a different way. Teams across directorates were working collaboratively to review Nature-Based Solutions, adapting to all climate change impacts and considering the wider context.
20. The roles and powers of NRW with misconceptions relating to bathing water was queried, and it was agreed that partnership working was required with the local authorities to ensure that misconceptions were rectified.
21. The variety of reasons for NRW's objections to the Mid Wales windfarms were queried, specifically how NRW balanced their different roles and responsibilities when responding to infrastructure developments. When reviewing these applications, NRW reviewed both visual impacts and the wider environmental considerations to determine the most appropriate overall solution. NRW were advocating for better strategic planning at a national level to provide clear direction on the location of future developments.
22. In response to a query, it was confirmed that resources for renewable energy work related to planning was always a challenge. NRW would continue to advocate to WG for further support to ensure that NRW could fulfil its role in facilitating sustainable development for the prosperity of Wales. The Board were made aware that WG had asked NRW to consider reductions in the budget. It was confirmed that this would be difficult but the priorities of the work being delivered would be reviewed prior to upcoming discussions with WG.

Item 5. Update Report of Committees

Sponsors and presenters: Committee Chairs

Audit & Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) – 4th June & 8th July

23. Mair Gwynant noted that the Annual Report and Accounts (ARA) had been the main focus of both ARAC meetings, with ARAC endorsing the ARA in July prior to Board for approval. The Board's attention was drawn to the changes in the risk management framework process, simplifying it but also embedding risk ownership across the organisation; the use of PowerBi dashboards should help in this area. ET had begun to undertake deep dives into the Strategic Risks (SRs) and ARAC would provide oversight and seek assurance that the deep dives were effective. This new way of reviewing the SRs would ensure a proper Board assurance framework.

Finance Committee (FC) – 2nd July

24. The Board took the report as read and Helen Pittaway highlighted key discussions from the meeting. Two financial approvals had been brought to FC, one for an increased budget for the Telemetry Replacement Project, to ensure that it could be finalised. A lessons learned exercise needed to be carried out in relation to this Project and discussed further at FC. The Salmon for Tomorrow 2 Project had also been discussed and challenged by the Committee, as there needed to be a cost benefit analysis. A session was also held on programmes as these now reported to FC.

People Committee (PC) – 24th June

25. Mark McKenna noted that the June PC meeting had been held in person, allowing Board members time to connect with the People team. An update was received on Waterfall Country following PC's site visit last September. The draft Strategic Equality Plan had been presented and a session with the Trade Unions had been held. The Annual Welsh Language Report had been received and PC acknowledged that improvements were needed on the uptake of Welsh language in the organisation.
26. The Board queried whether the Report could focus on how using the Welsh language could make NRW work differently and improve in some areas. The Teifi Fyw Project was provided as a good example of using the Welsh language whilst also focusing on protecting nature. In response, it was explained that a Welsh Language Strategy was being developed.

Protected Areas Committee (PrAC) – 11th June

27. Adam Taylor provided key highlights from the PrAC meeting. The Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) notifications had been discussed, with an expanded list of proposed sites. Issues for SSSIs such as wildfires had also been discussed. The 30by30 Strategy had been presented; additional resources were required to help achieve this. However, it was acknowledged that NRW could not achieve 30by30 alone and collaborative work with partners was needed.

Strategic Delivery Committee (SDC) – 13th July

28. Dr. Pete Fox reminded all Board members that they were welcome to attend SDC meetings. SDC had looked at Corporate Planning and Performance, and it was agreed that the Committees role would be to review the planning aspect of the delivery cycle. SDC had noted the lack of metrics in the 30by30 Strategy. Water company performance had also been discussed, and a combined response to the Cunliffe, Fingleton and Corry reviews would be brought to the Board for approval.

Wales Land Management Forum – 6th June

29. The Board took the report as read.

National Access Forum for Wales (NAFW) – 7th July

30. Lesley Jones highlighted that a note of the meeting would be available at the next Board meeting. NAFW had discuss urban and accessible green spaces, generating much interest. Good connections had also been made for the stakeholders.

Item 6. Finance Performance Report

Sponsor & Presenter: Rachael Cunningham, Executive Director of Finance and Corporate Services

31. The Executive Director of Finance and Corporate Services (F&CS) introduced the Q1 Performance Report and change in forecast. It was reported at the end of Q3 there was an increase in income from Timber, however the forecast remained the same.
32. The expenditure trend was slightly ahead at £36.2 million, which was 3% above the planned expenditure profile due to staff and capital projects. There was a central provision due to cover the additional staff costs, including the pay award and any adjustments to opening staff budgets. There was an overprogramming of £2.6 million which was reduced from £3 million from the original budget.
33. Overprogramming had been increased in the Nature and Climate Emergencies (NaCE) Programme Portfolio to £4 million, which planned to reduce throughout the year. The Flood Capital Programme had also been increased to a total of £2 million. The team wanted to avoid any unexpected overspends towards the end of the year. The Board discussed reasons for previous underspending in the Flood Programme, including recent resource reallocation and increased over-programming to ensure full use of available capital.
34. Recruitment had improved with positive engagement scores, and an ongoing effort to improve retention whilst monitoring the impact on finance.

35. The Board discussed incorporating more Nature-Based Solutions into flood capital spending to deliver multi-beneficial outcomes and mitigate potential underspend.

DECISION: The Board approved the change in forecast from £320.6m to £322.4m.

Item 7. Annual Modern Slavery Statement

Sponsor & Presenter: Sarah Jennings, Executive Director of Communications, Customer and Commercial (CCC)

36. The Executive Director of CCC presented the Annual Modern Slavery Statement and the Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Prevention Commitments: Five-Year Plan (2026-31). The Board were assured that a robust discussion had been held at PC.
37. The Board discussed how the Plan would measure the improvement and reduction in Modern Slavery risks. The Plan would aim to demonstrate the difference it would make over the coming years via a baseline. It would investigate deeper into supply chains, move beyond compliance, and measure real impact. The comparative measures against sister organisations were highlighted in the first year of the Plan.

DECISION: The Board approved the Annual Modern Slavery Statement 2026-27 and the Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Prevention Commitments: Five-Year Plan (2026-31).

Item 8. Wellbeing, Health & Safety Annual Report

Sponsor: Louise White, Executive Director of People, Facilities and Fleet
Presenter: Charlotte Morgan, Wellbeing, Health & Safety Manager

38. The Executive Director of People, Facilities and Fleet introduced the Wellbeing, Health & Safety (WH&S) and Learning & Development Annual Report for 2025-26 and commended the team and wider colleagues for prioritising WH&S throughout their work.
39. The Wellbeing, Health and Safety Manager highlighted aspects of the Report, including increased engagement in hazard reporting, highlighting that several Wellbeing initiatives had been undertaken and 316 WH&S training courses were delivered throughout NRW.
40. The Board discussed Forestry risks and the benefits of collaborating with other agencies including benchmarking with Forestry Scotland, Forestry England, Environment Agency and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) to share best practices and data through quarterly meetings. However, it was discussed that the risks in Forestry were not inevitable and NRW were working to

improve safety standards, drawing lessons from the construction industry and the supply chain.

41. The Board discussed the Electric Vehicle (EV) issues highlighted in the Report including staff being anxious with regards to the range of vehicles, and the uncertainty of using automatic cars. It was agreed an EV category would be added to the Report to ensure EV specific queries would not disappear into other categories of data as the business transitioned to EV cars.
42. The Board discussed workplace stress and the efforts to analyse the causes, including the promotion of occupational health referrals through the Manager's Monthly Update (MMU), and to engage with employee groups to address root causes.
43. The uptake of the Learning Management System (LMS) was noted with further focus needed on the uptake of the Welsh version of the LMS. The Wellbeing, Health and Safety Manager discussed plans to enhance the learning and development reporting, succession planning and early talent management, aiming to improve retention and career development within NRW. It was confirmed that a quarterly training report would be developed and shared with Board.

DECISION: The Board approved the Wellbeing, Health & Safety and Learning & Development Annual Report for 2025-26.

Item 9. Business Plan Performance Dashboard Quarterly Update - Q1

Sponsor: Prys Davies, Executive Director of Strategy, Policy and Evidence (Ceri Davies, Chief Executive deputised)

Presenters: WBO Leads; Sarah Williams, Head of Corporate Strategy and PMO

44. The CEO introduced the item and presented the Q1 Business Plan Performance Dashboard. It was noted that further intensive work was underway on outcome measures, Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and performance management reporting. The Board were reassured that work was happening at pace to improve the outcome measures and reporting and that delivery of the Business Plan was on track.
45. Through Executive Team (ET) and the Portfolio Group there had been focus on learning from Green rated commitments and the CEO confirmed any highlights would be brought through the CEO Report to Board and further reporting would come through the PowerBi platform.
46. The Head of Corporate Strategy and PMO highlighted the progress on commitments and areas requiring intervention in the Amber rating, each outlined with detailed pathways to Green.

47. The Board identified Nature Conservation as an area of greatest concern due to limited regulatory tools and funding to remedy issues. Despite operational challenges, the Executive Director of Place Ops confirmed efforts to prioritise staff training. The Board challenged the ET to set more ambitious targets when the pathway to green was within NRW's remit and prioritise resources accordingly.
48. The impact of additional resources on planning and permitting was discussed, noting improvement may take up to two years to be reflected in metrics.

DECISION: The Board approved the Business Plan 2026/27 Q1 Performance Report.

Item 10. How did we do in this meeting?

Sponsor: Neil Sachdev, Chair

49. The Executive Director of NatOps highlighted the strategic discussion around the recent wildfires and asked the Board to keep the strategic approach in mind during the winter.

Item 11. AOB

50. No AOB was discussed.

Close Public Meeting