Confirmed minutes

Title of meeting:	NRW Board Meeting (Public)
Location:	Aberystwyth and Teams
Date of meeting:	18 March 2026
Members present:	Neil Sachdev, Chair Prof Steve Ormerod, Deputy Chair Ceri Davies, Chief Executive Karen Balmer 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 embers 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, Place Operations
Attendees present:	Phil Williams, Head of Governance and Board Secretary (All items) Meinir Wigley, Head of Communications and Digital Transformation
Observers present:	Fen Turner
Apologies:	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
Declarations of interest:	None

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. Prof Steve Ormerod had been asked by the Bank of England to join its expert panel to draw up a wildlife shortlist to be added to the next series of bank notes.

2. The Chair wished an Eid Mubarak to those celebrating.

Item 2. Review Minutes

Item 2A. Review Minutes from 12 February Public Meeting

3. The minutes from the public Board meeting on 12 February were reviewed and agreed with minor amendments.

Item 2B. Review Action Log

4. The Action Log was reviewed, and an update was provided on action 6. It would be difficult to close this action as it was an ongoing discussion regarding multiyear plans and funding. The Board agreed to close this action based on it being business as usual.

Item 3. Update from the Chair

Sponsor and Presenter: Neil Sachdev, Chair

5. The Chair introduced the item and thanked Prof Steve Ormerod and Karen Balmer for their tenure on the Board. Two new Board members had been appointed and they would begin shortly; security clearance was awaited.

6. The Chair informed the Board of meetings he had attended since the last Board meeting. A meeting had been held with the Deputy First Minister (DFM), and he was

thanked for his leadership for the environment in Wales. An in-person meeting had also been held with Jane Hanson, the Chair of Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water (DCWW). The intent of doing the right thing for water in Wales was clear from DCWW, but it was emphasised that it was unacceptable for rivers and seas to be polluted.

7. The Chair would now be a member of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) given that Prof Steve Ormerod was due to step down. Other meetings included an introductory call with the Trade Union lead representatives, and regular meetings with Welsh Government (WG) where timber had been discussed. The Chair had also visited the NRW Cross Hands office and would return for another visit soon. Colleagues needed reassurance from the Board and ET that NRW's work would continue no matter the outcome of the Senedd election.

Item 4. Update from the Chief Executive

Sponsor and Presenter: Ceri Davies, Chief Executive

8. The Chief Executive (CEO) introduced the item and highlighted the key issues from her Report. The UK Government response to the Nuclear Regulatory Review undertaken in 2025 had been received the previous week. The CEO had met with the Economy Secretary and the Deputy First Minister (DFM) to discuss their views on this; NRW would need to work with both the UK Government and WG on this. NRW were supportive of the Review in principle but would also emphasise that devolution needed to be considered. A WG-led task force would be set up for Wales to ensure that the environment was protected in Wales but with streamlined systems in place. NRW's response would focus on streamlining the permitting and planning advice system to get the best for Wales from nuclear development, including protecting the environment. The Executive Director of National Operations (NatOps) would be the Executive Team (ET) lead on this.

9. The Board discussed the ambition and support for nuclear energy in Wales. The Wylfa site and the Trawsfynydd site had been identified as lead and learn sites for the UK, to set the scene for what would follow elsewhere in the UK. Both the UK and Welsh Governments were working together to see what could be done in Wales to drive the nuclear agenda forward. The policies were well established and the Wylfa site had always been a key site for nuclear development in Wales. A discussion may be needed at the Board on nuclear in a future meeting.

10. The development of a skillset for nuclear in Wales or NRW was queried. This had been discussed with the DFM as these skills needed to be strengthened in Wales amongst other environmental skills. NRW continued to have a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with the Environment Agency on nuclear work.

11. The situation in the Middle East was referred to, issues such as shortages of water treatment chemicals and fuel supplies could be an impact. The Board were assured that NRW had considered business continuity plans for situations such as this in the past with the Ukraine war and were reviewing these to ensure they were resilient.

12. A meeting had been held with the DFM, Prof Steve Ormerod and the CEO to discuss the National Park decision making. All evidence following the period of consultation had now been provided to WG and a decision was likely prior to the dissolution of the Senedd.

13. The Marine Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) Task Force was described, with further information available in the CEO Private Board Report. There was a way forward for positive recovery in the Marine SACs, with collaborative solutions being worked on. In response to a query, it was confirmed that the tools being developed could be used in other settings such as river catchments where nutrient neutrality was also an issue. Partnership working was discussed and the Board were reminded of the Public Service Boards (PSBs) as a good example of this.

14. Grid connections were queried, and it was explained that there were several ways of considering this including putting the cables under the ground. The advice and narrative of grid connections needed to be presented in a user friendly way outlining the benefits.

15. NRW had been advised by WG to tell its stories effectively, focusing on outcomes that were important to the public, and to use its statutory voice to advise WG when policies or legislation was not fit for purpose. They would continue to work with the Future Generations Commissioner (FGC) on issues where a united voice could be presented.

Item 5. Update Report of Committees

Sponsors and presenters: Committee Chairs

Audit and Risk Assurance Committee – 5 March

16. Karen Balmer, the Chair of ARAC, noted that the Committee had discussed risk management across the organisation and suggested that NRW's maturity was not yet in the desired position. ARAC discussed the need to discuss risks through all of the committees and this could be done through Power BI.

17. The Committee also discussed the final draft of the accounts, which would be presented to the Board in July. The progress on the internal audit limited outcome on the P11D was presented and ET were reviewing how the recommendations could be progressed.

Finance Committee – 12 March

18. Helen Pittaway, Chair of FC, provided an update on the recent FC meeting, where they had discussed the budget strategy and financial approvals that would be noted in the Boards private session.

People and Customer Committee – 4 March

19. The Chair of PCC updated the Board on the PCC meeting from 4 March, where they discussed NRW moving to business as usual (BAU), the WH&S Q3 Report, the Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Report and the gender pay gap analysis.

20. PCC also discussed the difference between each strategic risk and how the risk scores could be achieved. It was suggested that it would be useful to see the link between the data gathered and the strategic risk for People to ensure it was embedded across NRW. It was recognised that staff would need to be provided with the correct tools to report against near misses.

21. The Committee had been presented with and endorsed the WH&S Q3 Report, which had now been provided for the Boards approval.

DECISION: The Board approved the WH&S Q3 Report.

PrAC – 26 February

22. The Chair of PrAC provided an update on the recent PrAC meeting.

Wales Land Management Forum

23. Prof. Rhys Jones, the Chair of the Wales Land Management Forum, provided an update on the recent meeting and noted the ongoing work to broaden the membership of the forum. The theme on nature renewal had been discussed at the meeting, with ongoing work to apply outcomes and results to landowners. Landowners would also be asked to consider what they would do to respond to any challenges that had arisen in the Report.

National Access Forum for Wales – 3 March

24. Lesley Jones, Chair of National Access Forum for Wales, provided an update on the NAFW meeting on 3rd March. There had been a sporting and challenge event with a range of organisations, and it was suggested that this could be an area led by NRW. The potential conflict on the value of the task and finish group was explained, with the need to ensure the environment was being protected. NRW's manifesto was presented to the forum and had been well received.

Wales Fisheries Forum – 17 February

25. Prof. Steve Ormerod provided an updated on the Wales Fisheries forum, where they discussed the future of Atlantic Salmon. There was a focus on development within the Fisheries team, and this was an area that could be prioritised. The Board discussed the evidence related to the decline in the Atlantic Salmon population and emphasised catchment management. In response to a query, it was confirmed that there were issues with hatchery releases and the development of ideas on how to

maintain particular strains of Atlantic Salmon that could be used in the future had been discussed.

Wales Water Management Forum – 12 March

26. An update on 13 November Wales Water Management Forum was provided by Prof. Steve Ormerod. The Forum had discussed a number of issues, including the recovery rate of rivers, due to pharmaceuticals, nutrients, and agriculture.

Item 6. Finance Performance Report

Presenters: Rob Bell, Head of Finance

27. The Executive Director of Finance and Corporate Services (F&CS) introduced the item. The Head of Finance provided an overview of the Finance Performance Report, key points included that the timber income looked more favourable than previously reported. Expenditure was 1% behind profile, with an anticipated year-end underspend. A £4 million revenue reduction had been communicated to WG, with mitigations in place. WG had provided £6m for pensions, and this would be given to the Environment Agency Pension Fund (EAPF) before year end.

28. There was an underspend in Capital for various reasons, although this had been used to supplement the surrender lease for Kilvey Hill and the purchase of land in Mid Wales. The sale should complete before the end of the financial year. Clarification was provided that the purchase was not for loss of tree cover but to compensate on the size of the land, this was a good net gain for NRW. Of the remaining £2m Capital, £600k had been used therefore £1.4m would be returned to WG. Relating to the Flood Capital, £700k would be returned.

29. The personal use of the Fleet, which had been discussed at FC and ARAC, was likely to be included in the accounts as an unquantified liability. The work was yet to be completed on the sampling exercise of the Fleet to understand if there would be a liability. As this could not be ruled out, it would be included as an unqualified liability. The Chair of FC confirmed this had been discussed, as well as looking ahead at the next financial year and the Financial Strategy. The Board welcomed the Report and approved the change in forecast for year end.

DECISION: The Board approved the change in forecast for year end to £293m.

Item 7. Business Plan Performance Dashboard Q3

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

30. The CEO introduced the item and reminded the Board that this was a developing piece of work. The Performance Dashboard had been scrutinised at an ET meeting, where Directors had challenged each other to see how performance could be

improved. ET were working with the Leadership Team (LT) to lead them on the journey to multi-year planning, with horizon scanning and ensuring that they were on the right trajectory. ET had also reviewed the internal performance with key points included in this paper. These sessions at Board would ensure that ET were being held accountable for NRW's performance, by demonstrating the pathway to green or explaining when measures needed to be continued.

31. In response to a query, it was explained that the work on impacts and strategic indicators for the Corporate Plan had been delayed due to the Case for Change (CfC). Although this would be further work for the team going forward, additional resources had been considered in this area for planning and performance.

32. It was suggested that the data behind the service metrics for turnover time on responses and planning approvals required more of a narrative, as the experience of the customer may be different to that of NRW. NRW needed to be mindful of the impact on their customers with delays, as this in turn impacted their businesses.

33. Measure C18 relating to farm inspections was discussed as this was reporting Red. The changing of the targets and the SLA was acknowledged but it was queried what would happen following this. It was explained that this level of non-compliance was not expected when the targets were first set. Discussions continued with the farming unions to consider how members could improve their compliance; this would allow NRW to focus on more problematic areas. It had been emphasised with the farming unions that many of the regulations had been in place prior to the Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS). Other tools such as Land Management Agreements (LMAs) were being considered. It was suggested that funding through green finance should not be given until there was an appropriate level of compliance in the sector.

34. It was emphasised that the new metrics for 2026-27 needed to be achievable, with clear SLAs in place. An improved dialogue was needed between NRW and the agricultural sector, as they had a duty of care to the environment owning most of the land in Wales. It would be important to bring them with NRW on a journey. Consideration was needed to understand how NRW could help landowners with the SFS.

35. The Board welcomed the discussion and approved the Q3 Performance Dashboard.

DECISION: The Board approved the Q3 Performance Dashboard.

Item 8. Wellbeing Objective 4

Sponsor: Rachael Cunningham, Executive Director of Finance and Corporate Services
Presenters: Sarah Williams, Head of Corporate Strategy and PMO; Fen Turner, Team Leader, Integrated Approaches for Natural Resources and Climate Change; Derek Walker, WFG Commissioner; Helen Nelson, WFG Office

36. The Executive Director of Finance and Corporate Services (F&CS) introduced the item and presented an overview of the Wellbeing Objective 4 (WBO4), How We Work, as the ET lead. The WBO had been drafted and approved by the Board in 2025, and the next steps were outlined. There would be six areas of focus including: leadership and culture; customer service; digital services including simplification of processes; communication, partnering and advocacy; data and evidence. The Marine Customer Platform was provided as an example on the digital services focus. Although there was not a dedicated digital budget from WG, these examples would show WG what could be done if funding were to be provided.

37. The Executive Director of Strategy, Policy and Evidence (SPE) provided an overview of the Teifi Catchment Project, and how this had differed from other projects. There had been a focus on the community and those who used the river, to understand how working collaboratively could improve the water and benefit nature. The result of the National Lottery Heritage Lottery Fund (NLHF) would be imminent, and this bid had included demonstrating how the culture and community would be considered. A similar approach was currently being undertaken with the Uwch Conwy project.

38. Looking holistically at work needed to be implemented across the organisation, but this would be long-term. Alternative data would also need to be considered for future work, such as in the Natur a Ni Project when people's experiences had been included as data. These issues would be addressed through developing the leadership and culture of the organisation. Confidence would need to be developed in colleagues for them to build relationships with stakeholders and communities.

39. In response to a query, it was explained that perception surveys had been conducted to understand what frustrations there were for those working with NRW. Coordination across the organisation was highlighted as a key theme, and how to speak as one voice would need consideration. Although there were good examples of working with NRW, this was not consistent and a culture shift was needed.

40. The conflict between working on a national approach against a local approach was queried, and it was explained that working on a local approach worked best for building trust with communities. This was an advantage of having a Place focused approach, however also proved difficult when needing to work on a national approach. The Board were informed that one way NRW had worked with the FGC was by using one of their tools to understand the maturity of NRW working with others. The FCG explained that the tool was a self-evaluation exercise and had proved useful to other public bodies. NRW were encouraged to use this further, and the FGC would be able to advise following analysis of the results.

41. It was suggested that the five ways of working should be at the centre of WBO4. There would be different ways of monitoring the performance of WBOs with the implementation of the new ET Portfolio Board. There was no specific programme on WBO4 as most of the work would be done through business as usual. The draft of the WBO would be sent to the FGC following the meeting.

ACTION: The Head of Corporate Strategy and Programme Management Office (PMO) to send the draft WBO4 to the FGC.

42. It was challenged that the WBO4 should be different from what was already in place, and it was explained that this would be a focus on culture change and a line of sight on to how NRW worked. It was also suggested that the draft WBO needed to be done collaboratively with colleagues for transparency.

43. An example was provided of WBO2 with decarbonisation in Wales and NRW working with developers. If the economic development could be enabled, this would achieve 30% of decarbonisation. Collaborative working was beneficial to establishing the responsibilities between both parties. Good practice would be taken into other areas for improvement.

44. There appeared to be a misalignment with NRW and the FGC on WBO4, and it was suggested to be more open and transparent, to present the draft WBO4 when it was ready to the FGC. It was clarified that there was a good relationship between both organisations and was particularly useful when advocating to WG together. The main theme from the recent FGC Report was that public trust in public organisations was at an all-time low. It would be vital to bring the public with NRW and the FGC to improve the environment, as community work would be imperative.

45. In response to a query, the FGC noted that the Co-Production Network would be helpful to provide advice to NRW on WBO4, as well as the FGC themselves. Helen Nelson noted that they could also review the self-assessments that public bodies had undertaken to see if there was any learning that could be adopted. The Co-Production Network would be facilitating the Board Strategic Planning Day in April.

46. An example was provided of WBO3 with the Marine SAC issue and the need to achieve nutrient neutrality for three designated sites. This was not as established as other projects, but this presented an opportunity to learn from these projects. The Marine SAC Taskforce was a positive way to bring organisations together but there was still a significant amount of work to do.

47. NRW and the FGC were committed to working together and at pace to finalise the WBO4, to ensure a resilient, prosperous Wales. Caution was emphasised not to add an additional unnecessary governance layer.

Item 9. Place Presentation

Sponsor: Lyndsey Rawlinson, Executive Director, Place Operations
Presenters: Gavin Bown, Head of Mid Wales Operations

48. The Executive Director, Place Operations introduced the item. The Head of Mid Wales Operations presented an update on the work ongoing throughout Mid Wales. An update was provided on the Welsh Government Woodland Estate (WGWE) and forests. The opportunities to support and work with others in relation to sustainability

were outlined. There were various demands on the land in NRW's care that would need to be prioritised and the challenges with managing the increase in various costs were presented.

49. There was an increase on the impacts on plant health and wildfires. NRW managed 4k hectares of National Nature Reserves (NNRs) across Mid-Wales and a number of flood risk assets, whilst working alongside landowners and communities. The Mid-Wales Operations team were working with local authorities to strengthen local preparedness and resilience.

50. An organogram was presented on the current staff, new staff and vacant posts within the team and highlighted the progress on recruitment and the priorities for the coming years. The deployment of the teams within Mid-Wales Operations was presented, from both the working areas and the distribution across the primary WBOs.

51. An overview of the Mid-Wales Area Statement was presented, alongside the ongoing work to support the Sustainable Management of Natural Resources (SMNR). The State of Natural Resources Report (SoNaRR) had recently been published and the Area Statements were being used to frame the work carried out in the team, including how to collaborate with others. The connection between the Area Statements and the WBOs were presented, which included how NRW would respond to the climate emergency. There was an opportunity to work in partnership, produce climate change risk assessments, coastal change, and to identify the factors that were affecting the environment.

52. An updated was presented on the Land and Assets team. An outline of how the management of NRW's estate could be used to increase the delivery of services on a catchment scale and the cost of any changes that could be made. Additional members of staff had been taken on, including students that had decided to stay on in NRW. A graduate programme was in place, and the number of applicants had been greater than expected. The challenges within Mid Wales and NRW's response as a place team were highlighted. The effects of Storm Darragh (2024) were presented, and the team were in the process of assessing and mapping the impact, including the safety of both staff and contractors.

53. NRW managed 1300km of roads and the liabilities that were managed in Mid-Wales were outlined. The Midway Through Project was presented, including examples of the work that had been completed. An overview of the National Nature Reserves (NNRs) and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) that NRW managed were presented.

54. NRW's regulatory and enforcement role was explained in relation to both protected sites and water quality and quantity. Also presented was the special landscapes in Wales and SSSIs and agricultural compliance. It was noted that 26 of the SSSI's also had a Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) status, and there were 40k hectares of special protection areas. There was an expectation on NRW as

regulators in relation to agricultural compliance, fisheries enforcement, and waste management.

55. The role of pylons through DPAS and how NRW respond to the statutory consultation was presented, which had involved a range of different teams across NRW. Concerns had been raised around the various grid infrastructures, including responses that had been formed by evidence and the role of NRW.

Item 10. AOB

56. There was no AOB.

Close Public Meeting