

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

MONDAY, 1 DECEMBER 2025 - 10.00 AM



PRESENT: Councillor Mrs M Davis (Chairman), Councillor B Barber, Councillor G Booth, Councillor L Foice-Beard, Councillor A Hay, Councillor P Hicks and Councillor A Woollard

APOLOGIES: Councillor J Carney, Councillor N Meekins and Councillor D Roy

Officers in attendance: Amy Brown (Assistant Director), Anna Goodall (Assistant Director) and Helen Moore (Member Services and Governance Officer)

OSC25/23 PREVIOUS MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of 3 November 2025 were confirmed and signed.

OSC26/23 UPDATE FROM ANGLIAN WATER

Members received a presentation giving an overview of Anglian Waters (AW) work and development by representatives of Anglian Water, Grant Tuffs and Gavin Naylor.

Members made comments, asked questions, and received responses as follows

- Councillor Woollard asked which places in Fenland have the biggest problem with storm overflow and when will the problems be fixed? Gavin Naylor responded the storm overflows happen across Aws network because there are combined flows, with the highest number of spills AW see is at sewage treatment works, because they are draining the whole catchment area and a high volume of water collect there, with these areas being in Chatteris, Manea and March. Grant Tuffs added that in some problem areas like Barkers Lane in March some of the issues are due to bad connections and old pipework which are being investigated.
- Councillor Hay asked would AW expect the spills in the second part of the year, which tends to be colder and wetter, to be a higher number and if so, have AW got a more up to date figure to share? Gavin Naylor responded that AW do hold figures up to the end of October and verify the data on a monthly basis with the number of spills showing as 125 on the presentation and because of the dry weather there has not been any more spills since the summer and if this does happen it is treated with the upmost importance with an investigation and root cause.
- Councillor Barber made the point regarding overflows and road flooding, specifically in Leverington, there seems to be some confusion over the responsibility of AW and highways, and asked if they could explain the difference? Gavin Naylor confirmed that there are combined systems in place that take on surface and foul sewage, and highways do have their own drains with their own separate systems which they are responsible for maintaining. Grant Tuffs added that with highways the misconnections mentioned, could be a surface water highways misconnection into the AW foul system, which makes this a multi-agency approach dealing with flooding. He continued AW work with highways to disconnect those wrong connections of surface water into AW's network which then exacerbates the flood issue which is where working with councils, parishes and the Environment Agency come into play to put plans in place to avoid other floods elsewhere. Gavin Naylor confirmed that an internal team has been set up to deal with these issues as they arrive.
- Councillor Mrs Davis stated that AW are planning on spending £1 billion fixing overflow

problems, and that AW are planning to reduce spills by 17% by 2030 but would like to know what that relates to in real data, and is this realistic? Gavin Naylor responded the data used is held over several years in terms of overflows and the number of spills so the base line figures used make those assessments. He continued in terms of the funding, there are several storm overflows and sewage work that are part of the business plan, which have been identified through investigations and there is every confidence that this target will be achieved. Gavin Naylor continued the areas which are the worst offenders will be prioritised for the funding, with the plans in place and AW is convinced that this will be achieved, which is part of the business plan. He added that part of the solution will include screen fittings to the overflows to stop the un-flushables. storage tanks will be replaced and additional ones installed for the more nature-based solutions and there will also be plans to install additional treatment capacity which will give an additional environmental benefit.

- Councillor Mrs Davis asked how much of FDC's sewer system is worn out and how is this affecting the problems people are seeing? Grant Tuffs responded there are over 70,000 kilometres of sewers in AW's region, which has an aging infrastructure with much of it being Victorian, and there is a big maintenance plan in place to repair and improve that network over time and since becoming a private company there has not been the investment in the past that AW would have liked to have seen, as a result of this bills are going up so more can be invested into the repairs of the older systems sooner including investment on both sides of clean water and waste water. He added that there are teams on the ground responding to issues as they are reported, 50,000 monitors have been installed across the whole of the AW region helping monitoring in real time the performance of the networks, and providing data which allow the team to be proactive in terms of responding to issues and also giving an indication to where the trouble spots are so a plan can be formulated and a fix can happen or a prevention plan can be added.
- Councillor Booth stated that it has been pointed out in the media that AW were using no flow results to pass the fact that there was no pollution, has this practice been stopped or is it still happening? Gavin Naylor responded the programme that was talked about on the media was in regard of the regular monitoring of the treatment works and to monitor the quality of the treated water that goes out which works on a batch system, and it was a sample of this that was missed which was reported but has been rescheduled for a different time. Councillor Booth asked if this practice has now been stopped because he believed it was suggested it was going to be stopped in the new water bill? Grant Tuffs responded that in the process of treating sewage AW need time and what AW are working on is monitoring the flow properly and Environmental Health have access to the sites and do monitor and inspect the sites regularly. He extended an invitation to the committee to visit the water treatment centres to see how the process works.
- Councillor Booth stated he would like to understand why the system is not scheduled better so samples do not get missed. Gavin Naylor responded that part of the reason is the way the sampling system is operated and designed.
- Councillor Foice-Beard asked how AW were advertising and educating customers on the new 'Just Bin It' campaign and by what routes? Grant Tuffs responded that bin lorries have had posters put on them, education sessions have been held at schools and colleges, plus adverts on radio and on social media, but stated any further help and support from the Council would be greatly received. Gavin Naylor added that there have been some in person events held too in town centres and supermarkets to raise awareness with the focus being to target the hot spots and the worst areas from the data AW hold. Councillor Foice-Beard complimented them on the in-person activities as she feels this is important and stated that if there has not been an in-person activity in the Fenland area lately, she would recommend one. Grant Tuffs stated he would take this up with head office and arrange some dates.
- Councillor Hicks asked, when talking earlier about most of the overflow water is rainwater, most if not all, and what is the percentage of the other parts and figures? Grant Tuffs confirmed that 95% is rainwater. Gavin Naylor added that a lot of sewage works have storm tanks, and these store the first flush of rainfall and the first flush of contaminants, which is

then returned to the treatment centre after the rainfall stops.

- Councillor Hicks asked how many contaminant parts per million is in the drinking water and what is the national accepted average for the public to drink safe water? Gavin Naylor stated that the tests for the drinking water is of a very high standard and all levels of contaminants are taken out, with AW being the cleanest water in Europe.
- Councillor Foice-Beard asked is there much communication between AW and companies or manufacturers around the 'Just Bin It' campaign as there are a lot of adverts encouraging the public to use flushable wipes and as consumers they will do as they are told. Grant Tuffs agreed that just because it says flushable on the packet does not mean that it does not cause the water company issues as these sit in the sewers and cause problems hence this is why the campaign is called 'Just Bin It', AW are not telling consumers to not buy wipes etc but just not to flush them down the toilet and the water companies are working with manufacturers to make some changes.
- Councillor Booth stated that a few years ago in partnership with Anglia College there was an open day which he attended and was very well attended, would there be any chance of this happening again in the future? Grant Tuffs stated that this is something he will take away and feedback.
- Councillor Mrs Davis asked if AW do not get all the funding they want from OFWAT, which FDC projects would be pushed back or cancelled first? Grant Tuffs replied that they could not answer this question as they did not know what the outcome will be, but all the funding received is on a priority basis and ultimately what is in the business plan AW would want to deliver in the five years stated if possible.
- Councillor Booth stated that he asked a question last year concerning villages south and west of Wisbech where some work had been carried out and it was discovered that there were more pipes that needed work, and questioned whether this work is included within that five-year plan? Grant Tuffs replied there is a map with information on all the pipes that are going to be replaced over the next five-year period which equates to 61,8696 metres of pipes being replaced, with 13 million pounds worth of investment on those water mains replacement over the next five years.
- Councillor Barber asked what concerns have residents raised and what are they going to change to reflect that? Grant Tuffs stated that the consultation remains open until the 10 December, but from the questions asked and concerns shown so far it is items like construction materials being moved onto site and from this AW are looking to bring some of the aggregates in via rail, the visitor centres has been another discussion point where one was originally planned but there are now two planned after customer feedback.
- Councillor Mrs Davis stated in terms of Stonea and Manea and moving construction materials along the fen roads, which are not in the best condition, has AW been in talks with Highways at Cambridgeshire County Council, because some of the roads used will need to be drastically improved. Grant Tuffs responded that before any work is carried out AW do work with Highways to carry out a highways survey to help assess the condition of the roads before starting anything and agree to put the roads back as they are now or make improvements as the project moves on.
- Councillor Mrs Davis asked how will AW ensure that the reservoir benefits the environment and does not just replace what they will damage during construction? Grant Tuffs answered that biodiversity net gain is very much a feature of the reservoir and AW have to improve the environment that they are affecting which is a statutory part of the DCO process to ensure the environment is left in a better position than before AW arrived. He continued the reservoir will include wetlands, walks, visitors' amenities and public access points but will also be protecting the environment.
- Councillor Foice-Beard asked where will the contractors working for the reservoir be housed, and is there any indication of numbers and how this increase in population will impact local services such as doctors surgeries and hospitals? Grant Tuffs replied that AW will be looking at local supply chains once the plans reach the design and delivery stage, as of yet there are no numbers to share regarding construction workers, but AW will be looking at temporary accommodation in the local area and different ways of travelling to and from

the accommodation with maybe a shared bus service etc. Councillor Foice-Beard asked if AW will be keeping in contact with the local authorities as the project progresses? Grant Tuffs answered that the community liaison team will be working with local community groups and there will be lots of public drop-in days and information sessions to keep the public up-to date on all stages of the project.

- Councillor Mrs Davis stated that many members of the community are worried that their water bills will be going up to pay for the reservoir, and asked how AW are planning on protecting people who are already struggling to pay their bills? Grant Tuffs responded that all AW customers will be paying for the reservoir and not just the residents in Fenland. He continued that AW have many schemes in place to help people if they are struggling to pay the bills. Gavin Naylor added if anyone is struggling to pay their bill, they can ring in and talk to the contact centre and they will be able to help. Councillor Mrs Davis suggested that a flyer goes out to rural villages to let residents know that there is a help line for them to call as not everyone is on social media. Grant Tuffs stated that from April onwards there is a campaign reminding residents of the water bill rises and the help line number will be with this information.
- Councillor Barber asked about the Barton Road situation in Wisbech as this is an ongoing issue Grant Tuffs replied there is regular weekly updated information on AW's website including video footage specifically about Barton Road with extra information being shared with MP Steve Barclay and local councillors. Councillor Barber asked if councillors could get updated via email. Grant Tuffs replies that AW are encouraging people to self- serve and use the website to keep up-dated with what is going on as this is a long project and will not be finished until March 2026

Members noted the information provided.

OSC27/23 LGO & 3C'S UPDATE

Members considered the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) and the Council Corporate 3Cs Annual Review Complaints, presented by Councillor Tierney.

Members made comments, asked questions, and received responses as follows:

- Councillor Woppard stated that, with refuse and recycling, whilst there is a very comprehensive breakdown, 12 of the complaints come under the category of other, what is this? Councillor Tierney responded that these complaints do not fall within existing categories and some of these relate to staff complaints so to protect the names of the staff it is logged under other.
- Councillor Mrs Davis stated that there were 27 complaints in planning development, and asked what specific improvement process is being considered to reduce dissatisfaction around decisions? She made the point off those complaints, 5 related to a single application, asking what, if any, procedural lessons have been identified from that case Councillor Mrs Davis referred to staffing with there being 17 related complaints, but it is not clear if this is a cluster of staff related complaints in particular teams, and if there is a need for targeted management intervention? Councillor Tierney responded that with the nature of planning one party is going to be happy with the decision made and the other side is not going to be happy, and one of the most common complaints, is that people are not happy with the planning decisions, but this does not fall within the Council's remit, the Planning Committee make their decisions and occasionally people get upset with the choices made. He continued any complaint is looked at and if procedurally it was wrong then it is dealt with, but he did not feel there needs to be a plan to improve the procedure in place as this is the nature of planning decisions. Councillor Tierney stated, in regard to staffing complaints he did not feel there was any pattern developing in the complaints, over the years, it is investigated and if there is a pattern developing then it means that it is not just usual business and there may be something going wrong but there has not been a pattern like this

emerging.

- Councillor Mrs Davis commented that in the report it states a 3.11% increase in complaints with a reduction in compliments but further down it points out that this is not down to any particular trend and she would like to understand whether there has been more complaints in certain categories such as refuse and recycling were up and, was this to do with the increase in charges? Councillor Tierney responded that the 3% might sound a lot but over the year that equates to 6 complaints across every department which means there is one complaint every other month which shows that it was much the same as last year with no trends having been identified over that time, he did not feel it was something to be worried about as the Council has a good record at responding to complaints. Councillor Mrs Davis asked if the public felt inclined to make complaints because they are paying a bit more money? Councillor Tierney did not feel that the numbers stack up because there has been a reduction in complaints within that department and stressed that the bin collections that the Council charge for are the lowest in the region and there has been a lot of work put in place to keep those prices down and deliver an excellent service.
- Councillor Mrs Davis stated as far as the complaints process goes, the complaint process will move to a 2-stage system next year, and asked how will this relate to efficiency and improving customer experience? Councillor Tierney replied that the staff are embracing the changes that the Ombudsman recommends and is the system many other Councils use, FDC have gone from a three step process to a two-step process, the first step of this change will be looking at the complaints in much more detail before deciding how to deal with it and who to send it to. He continued this process has proved to be much quicker and more efficient and has shaved the response time down by 10 days which people seem to be happy with. Councillor Booth added that in a previous job role that firm operated a two-stage complaint process and he feels that a three-stage process puts up too many barriers and frustrates the customers and agreed the two-step process should be welcomed as this will offer a better streamlined process and deal with complaints in a more reactive way.
- Councillor Booth made the point in regard to the planning complaints that there have been a number of appeals that have gone against the Planning Committee, are those considered because he can recall two which have gone against the fact that Planning Committee have not come up with full reasons why and that is why the Inspector has granted the appeal, asking how does this factor into the root cause analysis? Councillor Tierney stated that this was outside of his portfolio and falls into the planning portfolio, but it was his understanding that it is the job of the Planning Committee to do their best to look at the situation and listen to all the advice given, and then to come up with what they think is the right solution, but sometimes it will not be supported by an Inspector when it gets to an appeal but he felt that it is still a valid democratic process and members should not be afraid to make decisions that might go against the Council and cost the Council some money, it is more important for the committee to come to the right decision in their minds based on the evidence as they see it. Councillor Booth suggested that if the decisions made does go to an appeal this needs to be factored into the Council's higher-level analysis and that is where he feels the changes need to be made and additional training required to help councillors put forward a stronger case if they are going to refuse an application and improving the situation over a wider picture. Councillor Mrs Davis suggested in Councillor Law's absence that the question be put to her for her to respond.
- Councillor Barber stated that she thought Overview and Scrutiny was to actually scrutinise what is happening and sometimes all that is discussed are the bad things and the good things get overlooked and she commended the 219 compliments received in a time when people find it easier to complain, which she feels this is a very good result and congratulated the team.

Members noted the information provided.

Members considered the progress of the Communities Corporate Priority, with Councillor Hoy giving a verbal presentation covering homelessness and the issues surrounding this.

Members made comments, asked questions and received responses as follows:

- Councillor Mrs Davis stated, in relation to supporting vulnerable residents, what risks have been identified around the transition to the crisis resilience fund and how will the allocation meet local needs? Councillor Hoy responded this is difficult to judge as there is never a clear picture of what problems are coming in to deal with and she can only speculate what some of those problems might be or expect so things are managed as they come in case by case, with members, partners, and officers all working well together to communicate the problem coming down the line, what can be done about it and keeping the channels open.
- Councillor Mrs Davis asked how the Council deal with the lost contacts and how does the Council know that they are safely accommodated? Councillor Hoy stated that when contact is lost it is very difficult to know whether that person is safe or not or even if they have stayed in the District but outreach workers can go out to see people plus the other workforces in the Council are asked to keep an eye out and if a rough sleeper is called in by a refuse man etc, outreach will go along and help identify that person and offer them help or keep revisiting sites. She continued that rough sleepers are known to move around so this can prove challenging and this is where the Council work with partner agencies to do the same and refer, with it being important to remember that there are a few charities that are out there helping rough sleepers but these people never get referred to the right authorities and she would urge them to encourage as many referrals as possible so people get the right help. Councillor Mrs Davis stated that some people on the streets do not always want the help, and she is aware of several cases in Fenland. Councillor Hoy explained there is a fine line between the fundamental human right to live how you choose as long as they are not affecting other people's human rights, however how much of that anger and resistance is because of past trauma and history, and there is also that balance of how much can you give somebody because yes some people do have complex pasts and they need a lot of help but at the same time how long do you spend on an individual who is not engaging as this needs to be a two way process.
- Councillor Foice-Beard noted that there will be a leaflet distributed to the homeless and asked if there is a date for the launch and if this will be available digitally as a link and will it be in different languages to help. Councillor Hoy stated that the leaflet will be going digital and in other languages. Dan Horn added that the leaflet is being rolled out this week.
- Councillor Barber stated that it was good to see Bed and Breakfast figures have improved, and asked what factors have driven reductions and is the progress sustainable? Councillor Hoy responded that she hopes it is sustainable but the risks are those pressures that are not seen, for instance a person becomes homeless there is a legal duty to house them and if the accommodation is not available they have to go into a B&B and with the changes in the renters reform this could have the potential to lead to a large increase. She continued that the Council are trying to put the mitigations in place, so this does not get pushed onto the taxpayer but there is a fine balance. Councillor Hoy added that Cabinet made a decision to spend one million pounds on purchasing some flats, nine flats have been purchased across the District with the tenth still going through, but the only issue with this is if Fenland District Council or Clarion own the building to house people they will need the full amount of housing benefit subsidy from the Government, whereas if it is someone who is not a registered provider, like a charity or Bed & Breakfast for example, the Council do not get the full rate back so it is a direct cost to the authorities and that is why with the flats the Council would get the full money back because FDC are the legal owners of them. She continued also with some of the charities the Council place homeless people with they are being asked to register as a homeless provider ASAP, which would take the Council cost down and she was happy to report that the team are almost in a place where things are getting signed and the Council should receive the subsidy back. Councillor Barber asked, once people have moved into the flats that the Council have bought is this their permanent

accommodation? Councillor Hoy confirmed that this would not be their permanent accommodation, but the resident would go onto a housing register, where their banding will be assessed then they will stay there until a permanent house is found. She added this is not the best solution, but it is better than leaving a person in a B&B long term because the length of time could be the same, but it is less of a cost to the Council.

- Councillor Booth asked for clarification on page 35 of the report where it talks about 61 properties being available to the Council stating there are 33 units owned by the district council and there is a 7-unit hostel, questioning whether that hostel is not owned by the district council or does the Council just have the use of it? Councillor Hoy confirmed that the hostel is owned by the Council. Councillor Booth pointed out that means there are 40 units and asked if this is a route the Council are going to carry on with to bring even more savings to the Council, and would it help even more with the situation regarding homelessness? Councillor Hoy agreed there are lots of opportunities including the Government Local Authority Housing Fund which allows the Council to purchase properties and the Council have used that very successfully. She stated that the only small caveat to this opportunity is that the Council is slower and less cost effective in terms of maintenance than a private individual would be and the other risk factor is that the Council are not building any new properties, the 20 flats bought are now 20 less homes for someone else to own or rent privately so it has not helped the net profits. Councillor Booth stated that Fenland are getting 500 units each year through planning applications, so the situation is improving just very slowly Councillor Hoy responded that the Government keep saying there is a housing crisis and a shortage of houses nationwide, and population obviously does increase every year with birth rates and immigration.
- Councillor Mrs Davis asked how the Council is fairing with affordable homes coming online? Dan Horn responded that there is an improved pipeline from working with Housing Associations, this has created a significant move forward year on year with rural exception sites ring fenced for families which will free up flats for single people and move them out of the B&B situation Councillor Booth commented on the rural exception houses in Parson Drove which has been very successful for the people living there especially with their local connections to remain in the area and they are now looking to build more houses in this area. Dan Horn stated that it has been a great help working with the Parish Councils to remind those local people that if they need help to register with Home Link so local people can apply for local properties in their area.
- Councillor Barber stated that 104 homes have been investigated, is this just the tenants who can ask for a home to be investigated or can a member of the public do that, and would they be taken any notice of? Councillor Christy stated that reports come from all kinds of different sources, anybody can report a problem, sometimes members get contacted by tenants to raise concerns as well as the emergency services and trading standards. He added that the Housing Enforcement Policy on the website explains all the relevant information along with information on fines and debts which can be put in place if landlords are struggling to pay their debts or are having debts written off, maybe due to a business loss etc, but this is the last resort when all other avenues have been exhausted.
- Councillor Woppard stated that there have been various interventions with CCTV, Policing etc, are there any specific outcomes that have been achieved by these interventions particularly effecting March or anywhere else in Fenland? Councillor Wallwork responded that, funding was given to youth groups in Fenland to help with the anti- social behaviour and they have just received another year's funding. She continued that through this group young adults were made aware of knife crime etc and encouraged to join youth groups like kickboxing and other local sports, the team also worked with youth clubs and outreach groups to tackle the most hardest to reach young people who were not engaging in any other organised groups and happily this has worked and the project will continue through next year with the funding granted.
- Councillor Barber asked if the CCTV team are now fully staffed after their recent advertising for recruits? Councillor Wallwork responded that all shifts have been covered.
- Councillor Hay asked when CCTV goes down are the relevant Town Councils and Parish

Councils informed? Councillor Wallwork stated when any CCTV goes down and it is a small camera it is fixed as soon as possible but, in some cases, when permission is needed some cases can take longer.

- Councillor Barber asked if the recent cost of living event that happened in Whittlesey is going to be repeated in any of the other towns? Councillor Boden responded that the cost of living events will be taking place across the other Fenland towns, these are run in conjunction with Cambridgeshire County Council, and the next one is likely to be in January at Wisbech but as these dates get firmed up advertising will take place nearer the time.
- Councillor Booth asked if any CCTV's will be deployed to rural areas? Councillor Wallwork responded that this can happen, but the advice would come from the Police about needs in the area unless this is something the community needs on a day-to-day basis it would not be something that would normally happen, if the Police contact CCTV they do have the ability to put the cameras in place but if it is not getting reported the resources cannot be put in place. Councillor Booth suggested that this is an area that needs to be tapped into now there are more Police in the area to work on using the mobile CCTVs to crack down on rural crimes. Dan Horn added that there is the ability to go out to rural areas but there can be a cost involved on a temporary or more permanent basis, but there is a scheme where villages can part fund the cost of a CCTV camera in their area.
- Councillor Hicks asked what the state of the cameras are in Fenland and how many need replacing? Councillor Wallwork stated the CCTV system in place is pristine with excellent picture quality and openly invited anyone from the O&S Panel to come and visit the CCTV room for themselves to experience what the team can see and the quality of service.
- Councillor Mrs Davis asked how will Active Fenland maintain the attendance levels despite the reduced funding they have had? Councillor Wallwork responded that realistically Active Fenland will not because there is not going to be the funding anymore and those staff members will be going over to the new provider that is running events. She continued that, FDC will still hold a 20 hour post so certain elements will still be delivered like the tea dance and the ramblers, but realistically the attendance will not be the same because FDC do not have the funding and the staff to deliver the projects.
- Councillor Mrs Davis asked what actions are being taken to address learning to swim? Councillor Wallwork stated that there are posters all over the venues and it is advertised on social media, the lessons do take place and seem popular.
- Councillor Woppard stated on page 7 of the report regarding housing back into use there are two tables, and they refer to LTP 6-11 months and LTP 12 months asking what does this mean? Councillor Christy responded that LTP stands for Long Term Empty which is over 6 months and LTP stand for Long Term Empty Premium which is over one year.
- Councillor Foice-Beard asked which areas within communities are most at risk of performance deterioration in 2026 Councillor Hoy responded that she felt all homelessness due to demand and does feel this could get worse due to the level and scale of changes being made by the Government.

Members noted the information provided.

OSC29/23 USE OF THE WAIVER PROVISION

Councillor Mrs Davis provided details of the one decision that she had waivered the need for notice to be given on the Forward Plan and for call-in procedures.

Members noted the waiver permitted by the Chairman since the date of the last meeting

OSC30/23 UPDATE ON PREVIOUS ACTIONS

Councillor Mrs Davis stated there was nothing further to report.

OSC31/23 FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

Councillor Booth suggested changing the agenda for the January item and stated that the fees and charges should be before the draft budget and the draft business plan.

Councillor Booth added that in the March meeting there is a visit scheduled for the road safety partnership update, and asked if this is Vision Zero and will there be someone from Vision Zero in attendance because they are the lead in this area.

12.00 pm

Chairman