

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

MONDAY, 2 DECEMBER 2024 - 10.00 AM

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs M Davis (Chairman), Councillor E Sennitt Clough (Vice-Chairman), Councillor B Barber, Councillor G Booth, Councillor J Carney, Councillor L Foice-Beard, Councillor A Hay, Councillor P Hicks, Councillor Dr H Nawaz and Councillor D Roy.

APOLOGIES: Councillor S Imafidon and Councillor A Woollard.

Also in attendance: Councillor Boden, Councillor Murphy and Councillor Wallwork.

Officers in attendance: Peter Catchpole (Corporate Director and Chief Finance Officer), Carol Pilson (Corporate Director and Monitoring Officer), Amy Brown (Assistant Director), Dan Horn (Assistant Director), Garry Edwards (Engineering Manager), Phil Hughes (Head of Leisure Services/SRO March Future High Street Project), Mark Mathews (Head of Environmental Services), Annabel Tighe (Head of Environmental Health and Compliance Manager) and Helen Moore (Member Services and Governance Officer)

OSC20/23 PREVIOUS MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of 21 October 2024 were confirmed and signed.

OSC21/23 ANGLIAN WATER

The Chairman welcomed Grant Tuffs, Regional Engagement Manager, Natasha Kenny, Head of Quality Regulation and Enforcement, and Lucy Hodge, Water Recycling Network Manager, from Anglian Water (AW) to the meeting.

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

- Councillor Sennitt Clough stated in the Ofwat 2023/24 report, the overall categorisation of AW was 'lagging behind' even the widely criticised Thames Water was considered 'average' and she found it shocking that AW were one of only three water companies to be 'lagging behind'. She asked what is AW doing about this? Grant Tuffs responded, as stated in the presentation, AW accept that the performance in certain areas is not as good as it should be, and a 10-billion-pound proposed investment plan is in place to tackle some of those issues and the Performance Commitment Plan in the presentation outlines all those details which include climate change impacts. He continued the underperformance was justified and the 38-million-pound fine was a rebate which has been paid back to the customers which means next year customers will see a reduction in their water bills. Grant Tuffs stated that leakage has been reduced by 40% since the company was privatised and they are now industry leaders, there will be more money spent in the next cycle on smart meters to be able to find more leaks in customers properties and the aim is for every customer to have a smart meter fitted in their home by 2030, which will show a continuous flow in properties that can help identify leaks which can be fixed via the customer which is just one example of AW making some positive changes to increase the leakage performance. He added the Per Capita Consumption was another issue shown in the presentation, AW are one of the lowest in the industry, customers in Fenland are good at saving water mainly though the fact that the Fenland area is drought prone with a fragile infrastructure and water supply, there is a supply and demand approach in place to be able to supply enough water to people but in

return AW ask people to use less of what is provided to save water and be more water efficient in their homes. Grant Tuffs explained that the water industry averages around 133 litres per day and is predicted to reach 159 litres by year 2025 with there being a 20-million-pound planned investment into water efficiency by 2030 to reduce further leakages and another 130-million-pound investment into the smart meter scheme. Natasha Kenny stated to support the Per Capita Consumption, AW are also seeking new innovative ways of being able to reduce water usage within the region, one example AW are working with the Environment Agency on enabling new regulations to allow some customers where it is appropriate and safe to use the final effluent from the water recycling centres, so where AW discharge effluent into the receiving water courses that water is clean enough to be discharged into the river and there may be opportunities for AW to use that within the industry where it is safe to do so instead of the industry using clean potable water, for example the local golf courses around the region could use the effluent water to water their greens instead of using the clean portable water. She added that AW are working with the Environment Agency to free up some opportunities to enable that to be used.

- Councillor Hicks asked if it rains would the effluent water not run into the dykes and enter back into the water system again? Natasha Kenny agreed that this was correct and stated that it currently gets discharged into the water chains so regardless of whether it is coming straight out of the works and going straight into the river, it has got set limits and conditions it has to comply with, those set limits and conditions would also apply if AW are looking to discharge it into land so, therefore, the environment would still be protected.
- Councillor Sennitt Clough made the point that when Grant Tuffs was speaking his voice dropped and she could not hear the reason why it was harder for AW to reach their targets than other water companies and asked him to explain this again. Grant Tuffs responded the example he gave was the leakage levels in which AW have the lowest levels in the UK so that the targets given are harder to reach, with other companies lagging with their previous leakage performance, so AW have historically been very good at targeting leakage and have invested over the decades in water resilience and leakages repairs and to improve the target AW are looking to invest satellite imagery and in meters in households plus other initiatives. He stated that the Cambridgeshire area is very different compared to other areas and this can prove challenging when looking at the geography and population being served and these are the facts that have to be taken into consideration when comparing AW with other companies in different areas. Councillor Sennitt Clough stated she would like to understand why it has taken so long to get to this point of finding all this technology, for example this satellite imagery as leaks are not a new thing for water companies. Grant Tuffs responded that AW have had to find the right way to spend bill payers money and prioritise the best way to deliver the best outcome for the customer, leakage is a top priority but so is environment protection and flooding pollution and AW have to make choices as to where to spend customers money as there is not the ability to increase water bills too much in this current cost of living crisis. Natasha Kenny added there is a lot of new technology coming out and AW are seeking ways in which to find out what technology is right for AW to use within the networks, when new technology is adopted there is a period of learning which involves millions of lines of data and all of that data needs to be validated in order to make it valuable and to ensure that there is the right expertise in place before this new technology can be adopted and used to deliver improvements to the service AW provides. Lucy Hodge provided an example stating that there are 22 thousand new monitors in the sewer networks with alarms that alert engineers if there is a blockage or a potential leakage problem and, for this to work effectively, the monitor has to assess the normal level of flow through the sewer first then once this is in place it works from the algorithms which can flag any potential problems and her team can act accordingly but the technology takes time to learn.
- Councillor Booth stated he would like to understand more about how the finances are managed especially concerning the 7-billion-pound debt AW have and the fact that 24% of bill payers money is going towards servicing this debt plus 12.6 billion taken out in dividends for the shareholders, asking is the priority customers or shareholders? Grant Tuffs responded the financial model works in a way that the shareholder and private investors

invest their money first which equals 10-million-pounds which is money invested in the long term and then returns are paid back through dividends and the assets of the projects. He stressed that AW shareholders are investing for the long term, and they always put the customer first. Councillor Booth acknowledged that the finances are a balancing act but there is still the case of the 7-billion-pound debt since privatisation which does raise questions about the service provided.

- Councillor Sennett Clough commented the Ofwat reports states that AW 'show concerning underperformance on WRMP delivery for a third consecutive year' and failure to 'meet the performance commitment level for four consecutive years. She asked why has there been under performance for three consecutive years regarding the company's Water Resources Management Plan and four years in regard to pollution incidents commitment levels? Grant Tufts responded the company's Water Resources Management Plan was affected by many factors in the last few years with Covid increasing the per cap consumption point because more people were at home using more water which affected the performance, then there were the severe weather storms in 2022 which increased leakage and the war in Ukraine affected the supply chain to get pipes across to build the water pipeline as quickly as originally planned, but all of those issues are being addressed in the new plan mentioned in the presentation. Natasha Kenny commented there is a Pollution Incident Reduction Plan in place, which has identified several areas in which AW want to focus on improvements. She continued this system has been in place for a while and AW recognise that improvements need to be delivered as the company is currently sitting at a 2-star rating on the environmental performance assessment, there are several area of improvement which are being addressed such as targeting maintenance and resilience programmes, bolstering detection in each catchment area and looking at pressure devices and the potential for a mains burst. Natasha Kenny stated that AW are proactively monitoring across the catchment areas and making informed decisions, plus delivering operational control standards and ensuring they are fit for today's standard, alongside this AW are looking to improve the operational excellence making sure all of the people who deal with and look at pollution across the catchment area have got the right skills to make sure they can problem solve or escalate if there are any issues. She added in reference to the 100-million-pounds shown in the presentation that the investors are reinvesting into the pollution focus, 32 million of that is about focusing on health interventions and asset improvements, 17 million on improving system capacity, 22 million on improving rising mains, 22 million on blockage prevention and 7 million on improving capability and insight across the teams.
- Councillor Hicks stated he understands AW are doing well with leakage now. Grant Tufts responded that AW are leading in the industry on leakage detection and repair but there is always more to be done. Councillor Hicks continued the reason he asked is because recently there was a water leak in March Town and from reporting it to getting it repaired took two months in total, why did this take so long? Grant Tufts stated that any job which comes in is prioritised on urgency and then a team is deployed accordingly. Councillor Hicks stated that the leak in March Town was a big leak and now there is a second leak which has been reported, will this take as long? Grant Tufts indicated he will investigate.
- Councillor Nawaz stated it was interesting to hear that money is being invested yet the same problems keep occurring year after year concerning dead fish, fats, leakages etc. He continued considering AW are aware of this is there a case for regular servicing of these networks on an annual basis in the interest of prevention and he would also like to understand more about the nutrients within sewage. Natasha Kenny responded when using the nutrients within sewage the process works where AW are issued a discharge permit from the Environment Agency and those conditions in the permit drives how the incoming sewage is treated, and the water recycling centre will be built for investing in delivering those targets before the discharges are released into the environment. She stated there are 2 ways the sewage leaves the treatment site, one stream is the final effluent which discharges to the water course and those limits within the permit will determine the standards expected to protect the ecology of the receiving water course, within that discharge there may be a small amount of nutrients which get lost to the river but there is

potential for those nutrients within the discharge to be used if that final effluent were to be discharged onto land to irrigate golf courses, which means that the golf club owners would not need to use fertilizers as there is natural nutrients within them. Natasha Kenny continued the other stream that comes off the sewage treatment process is the sludge and the sludge is taken away to one of the sludge treatment centres, it is heated up for a set period of time to remove the pathogens and the harmful bacteria within it, that sludge is then dried out into a biosolid and then that biosolid will be transferred under license to agricultural land and used as a biological nutrient product on land, which is permitted by the Environment Agency. Councillor Nawaz commented that it does contain lots of valuable nutrients but it does also contain lots of toxic chemicals so how can the public be sure that all toxins have been filtered out? Natasha Kenny responded AW act as a regulator for any upstream non-domestic discharges into the catchment area, there are a list of hazardous substances that are published on the Environment Agency website and AW have a duty to comply with any of the standards set out in relation to those hazardous substances so if it known there is a high risk trader that wants to connect into the sewage network AW will carry out an assessment under the trade effluent scientific team to determine, using models, how much of the treatment process will remove those harmful contaminants and, if the treatment process cannot remove those harmful contaminants then AW will make sure that when permission is given to that trader to discharge into the sewer network they are issued with a trade effluence consent under the rules of the Water Industry Act which will have set conditions within that permit so those harmful chemicals are not discharged into the catchment area which allows AW to know that what is discharged into the rivers or within the biosolids does not contain harmful levels of any contaminants. She added that these sites are monitored regularly and if they do not comply with the regulations AW will prosecute. Councillor Nawaz asked how many traders have AW prosecuted? Natasha Kenny replied one trader was taken to court last year and they were prosecuted and fined. Councillor Nawaz asked in view of what has been talked about at this meeting what steps will be taken to prevent leakages with toxic substances in them including contagion into the waterworks? Natasha Kenny replied AW will continue to take their role seriously as a regulator under the Water Industry Act and AW will make sure there are surveillance systems and good regulation in place to performance manage traders to prevent harmful chemicals entering into the system and that traders are performing in line with their trades.

- Councillor Nawaz stated it was mentioned that AW are not a statutory consultee in individual cases or in larger developments, how can the local planning department help assist in regulating illegal connections? Grant Tuffs responded AW planning team do work closely with local planning officers and make requests for conditions to be put on planning applications.
- Councillor Booth stated a few years ago O&S raised the concerns around low pressure in the rural villages, particularly to the South and West of Wisbech, following that meeting there was evidence of some pipe replacement work, but in the presentation, there was no evidence of this work continuing in the future for investment in new pipework within the surrounding villages. Grant Tuffs responded the scheme which was recently completed this year in Friday Bridge has reduced the calls about low pressure in the area, all systems are monitored all of the time and any changes in pressure will flag up on the radar and if an investment is needed in that area then AW have the ability within the next business plan to divert funds to target any possible areas around pressure over the next five years. Councillor Booth asked for evidence of the business plan once it is finalised.
- Councillor Carney asked what the relationship was like between AW and Highways because in his experience there have been times when a problem has been reported to AW and they have said it is Highways responsibility and vice versa and he would like to understand how this can be rectified. Lucy Hodge stated that this is something which is being investigated as part of AW multi-agency groups, meetings have been set up and Highways are attending every month, AW and Highways have attended site visits together and have picked up on several points in their particular areas to act on.

- Councillor Hay stated that in the report it says that AW have submitted a storm overflow action plan to DEFRA to ensure that they are not discharging more than 10 times a year. She added that this is said to occur during high rainfall and due to the age of the sewers, and also the type of sewers, namely the combined sewers that take both sewage and rain water, the aim is to get this down to 10 times or less a year and asked what is the average discharge at this present time and how many of these combined sewers are in the district and she would also like to know what plans do AW have to replace these types of sewers? Natasha Kenny responded Fenland have 18 storm overflows within the catchment and currently for 2024 the average spill per storm overflow is 29, the raw data is still being collected and verified so this is a draft figure of 29 as an average. She stated that over the next five-year investment period AW are looking at the best way in which to reduce spills by looking at alternative storage systems with the resilience to retain that 10 spills target. Councillor Hay asked if there was a report of a spillage would AW replace the pipes with an updated system? Natasha Kenny replied yes that would be possible providing the funds were available as some of the money is for maintenance and some is for enhancement, which does include storm overflows.
- Councillor Sennitt Clough asked if phosphorus was the cause of the EA category 1 incident in September where almost 1000 fish and other wildlife died? Natasha Kenny responded that this case was not to do with phosphorus and the reason AW are investing in reducing phosphorus across the Anglian region is because when phosphorus is discharged to water courses it encourages alga growth in the rivers and that alga growth can cause oxygen depletion within the rivers and that makes it difficult for invertebrates and other wildlife to thrive in that type of environment so, therefore, the removal of phosphorus will enable AW to deliver an environmental enhancement e.g. it will reduce the amount of alga growth in rivers which will enhance the ecology in the rivers. Grant Tuffs stated that, regarding the incident in September, AW are one of several that discharge into that water course and the investigation is still ongoing.
- Councillor Sennitt Clough asked if the incident last year in Whittlesey was due to the algae? Natasha Kenny responded when phosphorus is discharged into the water it has a long-term impact and is a gradual issue, but when there is a pollution event that can cause immediate low oxygen levels or high ammonia levels, which has an immediate impact on the wildlife.

Members noted the information provided and agreed that further questions will be sent to Anglian Water for answering after the meeting and added to the action plan.

OSC22/23 PROGRESS OF CORPORATE PRIORITY - ENVIRONMENT

Members considered the Progress of Corporate Priority – Environment.

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

- Councillor Roy stated that in the report it mentions that FDC approved 154 properties for energy related grants and he would like to know if any of that success has been measured or if there has been any feedback from information collated from recipients of those grants and if the financial outcomes or reductions in carbon footprint were achieved? Annabel Tighe responded one of the big projects is the home upgrade grant funding from Central Government and the project works through a partnership which is led by Cambridgeshire City Council on behalf of all the District and local authorities. She stated that 154 properties have been allocated for the opportunity for the funding, they have not all accepted to go ahead but the key performance measure is using the energy performance certificate which is a recognised method of what the efficiency of the property is currently and what improvement could be made, and those are graded from A to G so there would need to be an improvement in terms of the work put in place. Annabel Tighe continued, in terms of the written feedback to the questions asked previously, there is a survey that is completed with residents but because that data is held by the City Council this is not available but for future reports the feedback can be included.

- Councillor Roy stated that residents often express their frustration about the inappropriate use of FDC operated car parks, there is a trend where the car parks because they are free are being used by people who have got bus passes which results in reduced car parking spaces. He asked what are the current plans for FDC car parks and how use can be regulated? Garry Edwards responded the Council has been looking over the last few years to introduce Civil Parking Enforcement (CPE) which would allow regulation of car parks both off-street and the on-street areas, but due to the shortage in funding for introducing CPE that is currently on hold and the only other choice would be to introduce a district wide off-street parking policy order which would allow more enforcement for all of the sites. He stated that currently the Council has 28 parking facilities, 21 of those are public car parks and 7 are associated with Council public buildings, but only 6 of the car parks have off-street parking place orders on them which makes it difficult to enforce some of those overstaying or vehicles being used for the motor trade etc. being stored in the car parks. Garry Edwards continued the reason why there has not been a district wide order is because investigations are in place to look at CPE, and this is something the Council needs to decide if it wants to introduce in the future. Councillor Roy stated that the loss of income by not having CPE given that the communities across the whole of Fenland have grown maybe outweigh the reasons for not having this in place. He asked are there any timelines or is it on the agenda for review and how long after the off-street parking will this come into play? Garry Edwards stated to his knowledge there is no proposal to introduce car park charging, if the Council was to introduce CPE there would be no income generated through pay parking it would only be through prosecution of fixed penalty notices, generally speaking those CPEs do not run with a profit unless there is pay parking which means they would run at a deficit in the absence of paid parking. He stated that if the Council does not introduce CPE and decides to go along the off-street parking route across the district, then the Council could prosecute offenders through fix penalty notices or by using a penalty charge notice system but the more enforcement that is carried out the more resources will be needed.
- Councillor Barber asked while CPE is on hold are there any plans for restricting parking in the local car parks with the view to time and if that is in the plan how would it be enforced? Garry Edwards responded as mentioned there are very few parking place orders on the car parks locally and the ones that do have off-street parking place orders have the maximum stay period which is 24 hours this then becomes difficult to enforce for overstaying because what constitutes the start and the end of one 24-hour period. He stated that CPE is very different to a off-street parking place order, and if the Council determines not to move forward with the CPE because of the shortage of funding which it faces presently, the only way that an off-street parking place order can be used across the district would be to agree to designate which car parks are short or long stay and each car park would then have a new maximum stay period which would be determined by members.
- Councillor Nawaz asked for clarification on the statement in the presentation around landfill waste credits. Mark Mathews responded recycling credits are a legal requirement for the County Council (CC) in a two-tier authority, for every tonne of material that is processed for recycling CC provided a recycling credit which is currently £58 and the 1.5 million pounds shown in the presentation is the offset costs, if that material were to have all gone to landfill that is how much it would have cost the CC.
- Councillor Nawaz asked for clarification concerning fly tipping in Wisbech and the rampant problem shown in the presentation figures and asked why there no extra CCTV cameras in place? Councillor Murphy responded there is always a need for more CCTV cameras in the area, but it is a challenge to fix cameras in place as there is a large amount of theft of these cameras especially in the more rural areas. He stated that the fly tipping in Wisbech shows as a larger issue within the figures because Wisbech is the biggest town out of the four main towns in the district and covers a larger rural area. Councillor Nawaz suggested the Council investigate this in more detail to define a cause so that a solution could be found. Councillor Murphy agreed that this is something that could be achieved.

- Councillor Barber asked what is the main cause of the issues in relation to recycling bins being rejected? Councillor Murphy responded a lot of the rejections are to do with the wrong items being put into the recycling bins and in the past sticker were added to bins that were not emptied with the reason why and although this did work it was very time consuming, but the Council are looking to bring this back in next year as a reminder of what recycling needs to go into the blue bin etc. Councillor Barber stated that in her ward people are keen to recycle but feels there is not enough information reminding the public to wash their tins out etc. Councillor Murphy stated that the Council have tried a variety of ways to get the message across and if members had any ideas, he would welcome the feedback.
- Councillor Booth stated he would like to understand why FDC are performing poorly compared to its peers in Cambridgeshire regarding the recycling rate and what is the overall plan to improve this? Councillor Murphy stated that the figures shown in the presentation and the figures published from DEFRA are compiled in a different way. Councillor Booth stated he understands that DEFRA set the standard for all councils to report, so it is comparing all councils against one another and the report clearly shows that FDC are doing poorly against other peers in Cambridgeshire. He made the point that the report shows that Cambridge has a disposal of 48% whereas Fenland has a disposal of 37% and it appears that Fenland are dragging down the recycling figures and he would like to understand what improvements FDC are going to make to improve this situation. Mark Mathews agreed it is the data and how it is analysed, when looking at this from a county perspective accepting RECAP includes Peterborough as well but when looking at the County Council figures the Fenland customers do recycle their household waste well with a rate of above 50%. He stated that the other thing to bear in mind is there is a correlation between demographics and recycling performance so to compare FDC with some of the other districts within Cambridgeshire is unreasonable but he did agree there was more that could be done. Mark Mathews added after the last task and finish group the figures were looked at in detail and the resolution of that was that the Council would wait to see what the now called 'simpler recycling guidance' would put forward because this is a recycling rate of residual waste where organics are included and it is not a reasonable measure across the whole of the country because the services are different, one of the biggest impacts is that when the Council compares itself to East Cambs they offer a free garden waste collection and their residual waste is collected on a weekly basis which makes it unreasonable to compare. He stated that when looking at the figures in the report shown today the 45% recycling rate is a simple comparison of what the customer puts in the blue bin and what is put in the residual bin and this is the behaviour that the Council wants to focus on which is why the figures were produced, the DEFRA figures also include fly tipping, litter, and street sweeping which as a local council cannot be directly influenced and taint that figure so to have an actual balance of behaviour to change as a performance measure that can be reported in real time is reflected in the performance indicator. Mark Mathews continued as a recommendation the Council are waiting to see what the new Government figures are and if carbon and energy are included or something that moves away from weight because as the manufacturers start to change and reduce packaging this can have a direct impact on the recycling rate but to sum up with the growth in planning the residual waste has gone down and the recycling rate has stayed the same and with the implementation of food waste this will create a new platform for people to engage. Councillor Booth stated he took the comments on board and as a committee recommend that a plan is developed to improve recycling rates once the guidance has been published.
- Councillor Hicks stated there is an income which is generated through subscriptions to the brown bin, where does the income in relation to the garden waste subscription end up within the Council, is it ring fenced and what happens if there are any extras or any short falls? Councillor Murphy responded the income generated through the garden waste subscription does not run at a profit because it is unable to with the way it has been set up. He added that the Finance Team look at the running cost and the only reason subscriptions are increased is to cover the cost-of-living increases like petrol, wages and maintenance with no profit made, this year it will be in a deficit which is why the yearly subscription payment has

been increased.

- Councillor Hicks asked what the plans are regarding all the extra houses being built and due to be built in the future within the Fens? Councillor Murphy stated this is being assessed all the time, each time a new set of houses are being built the Council carry out a round control to see how the bin rounds can be managed more effectively or if a new round needs to be added.
- Councillor Mrs Davis stated in the report that waste is now being sorted and processed for onward sale to Biffa's Edmonton plant. She would like to know what the carbon footprint of transporting waste over a distance such as this, and how does that compare to the environmental impact of simply not recycling in this way and is there a better way to do it? Mark Mathews responded the Council are in the initial phase of the contract with the Biffa plant as they won the tender and the Council will benefit as it is in partnership with all of the authorities across Peterborough as this was a joint tender and procurement that the County Council ran for FDC so that it could deliver best value for money. He stated that when looking at the recycling and the carbon impact the bigger picture has to be taken into account as the MRF is only the first step as this is where the materials are sorted into their constituent parts they then go onwards across England to then be processed into something that can be returned back into whatever recycling system is appropriate, and it is important that the customer continues to separate their waste because there is a huge amount of energy in that waste, their textiles and eventually their food waste as plans are in place to implement that.
- Councillor Booth asked about the Community Safety Partnership and the action plan as there is no reference to road safety and speeding and this appears to have dropped off the radar and he requested it be put back in as this is a big issue for residents. He also went on to say he felt that community engagement could be happening at the big events that are held across the rural villages throughout the year as there will be a captive audience rather than arranging small coffee mornings that attract around 10 villagers. Councillor Wallwork agreed with Councillor Booth and added, if the committee are invited, they will attend plus she will ask the committee to flag up the events across the year and put some plans in place to attend.
- Councillor Barber asked if there were somewhere the Street Pride groups could find out the actual days the verges are being cut in their area? Councillor Murphy responded unfortunately this cannot be planned as other elements can interfere with the process like road works or the weather, there is a list, but it changes day by day. Councillor Barber responded when Street Pride are out litter picking after the grass verges have been cut some plastics are shredded and hard to pick up which is why it would be convenient to know before hand so the verge can be cleared before it is cut. Councillor Booth added that some parishes do verge cutting on behalf of the County Council which are carried out by local contractors, and he suggested talking to Parish Councils to see if this is undertaken by them then from there liaise with the contractor.

Members noted the progress against the Environment priorities.

OSC23/23 LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN AND THE COUNCIL CORPORATE 3CS

Members considered the Local Government Ombudsman and the Council Corporate 3Cs Annual Review Complaints.

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

- Councillor Sennitt Clough stated given the excellent record that has been described how can the Council avoid becoming complacent? Councillor Boden responded all the officers concerned are always vigilant and it is not merely a matter of dealing with complaints it is also a matter of learning from the complaints, as the Council continues to have a process of learning going on then the Council knows the system is working as it is meant to work, with it being closely monitored by the Head of Human Resources, so nothing is taken for

granted.

- Councillor Barber stated a noteworthy number of complaints are in relation to FDC staff. She asked what the nature of those complaints might be and what is the process for investigating these complaints? Councillor Boden responded there are several reasons why customers may complain about members of staff, but any complaint which is made about a named staff member is triaged by the HR team then it follows the 3C's process. He stated that where it is appropriate an HR business partner will provide support to the responding manager, but this is dependent on the nature of the complaint and ensuring that staff are supported throughout the process and that any investigation is thorough and personal details are never shared with customers as part of the response, however, feedback is always provided. Councillor Boden made the point that complaints vary in nature and further analysis has been carried out and there were no obvious patterns or trends in the complaints which name a particular member of staff. He continued it is worthy of note where complaints have been made about planning, housing, refuse, cleansing, council tax and benefits even if it is against a specific named member of staff, it tends to be about the outcome rather than about the performance of that individual. Councillor Boden stated that there is a plan to increase the frequency of customer service training for all staff and managers and they are encouraged to share their in-service complaints, anonymized so that their team get greater awareness, and they capture lessons learnt to improve customer service.
- Councillor Hicks asked if it was true that the figures shown are never entirely accurate? Councillor Boden responded figures like these can never be completely accurate and there is subjectivity about how something can be categorised, some cases are over reported and in some cases there is under reporting in terms of numbers, however, the work is undertaken meticulously and conscientiously and whilst it has some degree of subjectivity the numbers are created on a like by like basis year on year and there has been no change in procedure about the way in which the numbers are recorded which provides a good indication of the direction of travel.
- Councillor Booth suggested that the category of staff complaints should be recategorized once the investigation has been completed because it sounded like it is more against policy and process as opposed to the individual, this would then lead to a better trend analysis. He continued he would like to raise a point around the reporting of the complaints as there seems to be fewer complaints regarding elections in a year where voter ID was introduced and there was a lot of people complaining about it in the polling stations so how can the Council ensure it is not under reporting to be able to do a true trend analysis? Councillor Boden stated that he agreed with Councillor Booth's recommendation, and this would be investigated for next year along with a change of methodology explaining how this affects the figures so that there is still a means of comparing like for like. He continued concerning the second point, the complaints that are recorded all start within the 3C's system and if individuals are not being encouraged to use this system, which is the best way to get their complaints fully investigated, it will look like it is under reported in this report. Councillor Booth responded he felt the point was regarding overall complaints, if staff are not reporting verbal complaints then these are not being captured in the report and the report will show evidence of fewer complaints which does not then lend itself to a true trend analysis.
- Councillor Hicks made the point would it not be beneficial to show both reports to the public to compare the figures with last year's figures and to help as a stepping stone towards the new methodology of calculating the figures. David Wright responded some of the verbal complaints are logged as service requests and are dealt with immediately by the team where possible and would not make it into the 3C's system. He stated that the Election complaints will show up on this year's report and not the one shown in the presentation. David Wright agreed this is an area that needs to be addressed, and percentage changes are studied but there is no reason why using the figures available cannot be added to a summary from the previous year. Councillor Boden added that whatever is reported next year it will be made clear what the numbers would have been under the old system and what they will be under the new system to make it easy to see what the comparison is and

what the change is because whenever there is a change of process there can be a suspicion that the numbers are being fiddled, this will give full disclosure so no accusations can be made against the Council. Councillor Booth agreed with what had been put forward.

- Councillor Nawaz stated it was nice to see the number of compliments has increased by 22.5% and felt this committee should note, acknowledge and commend these results. Councillor Mrs Davis responded she would make sure his comments are passed on.

Members noted the information provided.

OSC24/23 FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

Members consider and noted the Future Work Programme, making the following comments.

- Councillor Booth suggested that the Fees and Charges should come first on the agenda then the draft Business Plan as this has an impact on the draft budget.
- Councillor Booth suggested that the meeting on the 29 April be moved to either a month before or after the elections because councillors will be coming into purdah as half of the Cabinet are also County Council members and will not be able to attend the meeting. Councillor Davis responded this is being investigated and if it is held it would be at the Boat House.
- Councillor Booth asked for calendar dates for after May so that plans can be put in place.

12.30 pm

Chairman