

Board Meeting

Minutes of the Board meeting held on Monday 8 January 2024 via MS Teams

Present

Alan Lovell	Chair
Robert Gould	Board Member
Stewart Davies	Board Member
John Lelliott	Board Member
Caroline Mason	Board Member
Ines Faden Da Silva	Board Member
Sarah Mukherjee	Board Member
Mark Suthern	Board Member
Lilli Matson	Board Member

In attendance

Philip Duffy	Chief Executive
Nicola Lawton	Chief Operating Officer
Caroline Douglass	Executive Director, Flood & Coastal Risk Management
John Leyland	Executive Director, Environment & Business
Sarah Chare	Executive Director, Local Operations
Clare Jeffreys	Director, Finance
Ilana Conn	Deputy Director, Operational and Local Communications
Laura Milton	Director, Legal & Audit Services
David Hill	Defra Director General, Environment Group
Harry Leeder	Deputy Director, Governance & Engagement
Corry McDiarmid	Board Governance Manager
Alex Hole	Board Governance Senior Advisor
Beth Lamb	Board Governance Advisor

Item 5

Helen Wakeham	Director, Water Transformation
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Item 6

Rowan Sunflower	Deputy Director, Finance
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Item 1 Apologies and declarations of interest

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting.
- 1.2 **Apologies**
Apologies were noted from Judith Batchelar, Deputy Chair.
- 1.3 **Declarations of interest**
No new declarations of interest were raised.

Item 2 **Update on recruitment: Board Members, Executive Directors and Finance Director**

- 2.1 The Chair provided an update on the progress regarding Board member recruitment and noted that the shortlist was awaiting approval from Number 10.
- 2.2 The Chief Executive gave an update on the recruitment of a new Finance Director, and a new Executive Director of Strategy, Transformation and Assurance. The Board noted that the Finance Director appointment was awaiting sign off from the Permanent Secretary, and that both appointments were expected to take up post in March.
- 2.3 The Board also noted that the recruitment for a new Executive Director of Local Operations was underway.

Item 3 **Incident preparedness, recovery & recent incidents update**

- 3.1 The Executive Director of Local Operations provided an overview of flood planning for the remainder of the winter season, lessons learned from Storms Ciaran and Babet, as well as an update on the response to flooding caused by Storm Henk.
- 3.2 The Board noted that key learning points from the response to Storms Ciaran and Babet had been around scaling up incident response early, MP engagement, incident rosters during school holidays as well as response during periods of industrial action.
- 3.3 **Action:** The Board asked the Executive Director of Local Operations to bring back a comprehensive item on lessons learned from the Winter 2023/24 flood response to a future Board meeting.
- 3.4 The Board noted the figures on properties flooded and properties protected during storm Henk and that Defra would shortly be conducting a rapid review of the response.
- 3.5 The Executive Director of FCRM highlighted to the Board the impacts of Storm Henk across Europe and that Environment Agency learning had been used and referenced by the Dutch in response to this storm. The Board noted that the Environment Agency were assessing maintenance costs to feed into Defra's spring budget bids.
- 3.6 The Board discussed the need for a more strategic review of the impact of flooding on farming and Internal Drainage Boards (IDBs).
- 3.7 **Action:** The Board asked the Executive Directors of Local Operations and FCRM to include the impacts of flooding on farming/farmland and

Internal Drainage Boards (IDBs) as part of a broader conversation on Agriculture at a future Board meeting’

- 3.8 The Board discussed wellbeing support in place for staff who have worked in response to flooding and environmental incidents over the festive period and how their work is being recognised. The Board noted their thanks, along with those from Ministers, to all of those who had worked on recent incident response.

Item 4 Update on business priorities, 2024/25 Corporate and Balanced Scorecard development and timetable

- 4.1 The Chief Operating Officer provided an update on the progress of business planning, establishing business priorities and predicted allocations for 2024/25. The Board noted the update.
- 4.2 The Director of Finance gave a progress update on the development of the corporate scorecard for 2024/25. The Board noted the changes that were likely to be made from the 2023/24 scorecard and discussed progress towards achieving consistency with Defra.
- 4.3 The Board noted the update given by the Defra Director General, Environment Group, regarding ongoing conversations with Ministers to establish planning and funding priorities.

Item 5 Update on progress of actions in relation to Water Companies following Decembers Board meeting

- 5.1 The Board welcomed Helen Wakeham to the meeting. The Chief Executive gave an update on the progress and discussions since the last Board meeting as well as the Secretary of State’s (SoS) view regarding the charge proposals and the 10-point plan for water.
- 5.2 The Board noted that a meeting with the SoS would be taking place in the following days on the topic of charge proposals.
- 5.3 The Board discussed progress on delivering upgraded IT systems to handle a more sophisticated suite of water industry metrics and data, as well as funding for the SoS’s proposed 10-point plan for water.
- 5.4 The Board discussed the water company price review and how the Environment Agency is working with Defra and Ofwat on this.

Item 6 Finance Update

- 6.1 The Board welcomed Rowan Sunflower to the meeting. Rowan provided an overview of the in-year budget position including current resource pressures.

- 6.2 The Board noted the update and the arrangements regarding local levy along with other activities to manage the funding pressures.
- 6.3 The Board discussed the reprofiling of the capital programme and noted that negotiations with His Majesty's Treasury (HMT) were still ongoing.
- 6.4 **Action:** The Board asked the Director of Finance to bring back a '1-3 year strategic look at financial planning' item to the Board in due course.

Item 7 Directorate Hot Topics

Chief Operating Officer (COO)

- 7.1 There were no further updates from COO for Board awareness.

Environment and Business (E&B)

- 7.2 The Board noted an update from the Executive Director of E&B on the previous week's Oxford Farming Conference and noted that 'waste' was to be a topic of focus at the February Board meeting.

Flood and Coastal Risk Management (FCRM)

- 7.3 The Executive Director of FCRM gave a brief overview of recovery work which was due to start shortly following the response to Storm Henk, as well as the uptake and progress of the Environment Agency's natural flood management funding scheme.

Local Operations

- 7.4 The Executive Director of Local Operations gave an update on permitting performance and the Board noted that there would be a session on this at the February Board meeting.

Item 8 AOB and date of next meeting

AOB

- 8.1 The Board Governance Manager reminded all Board members to complete the Board review survey ahead of the feedback discussion at the February Board meeting.

Date of next meeting

- 8.2 The date of the next meeting was noted as Thursday 8 February.