

# Minutes of the board meeting held on Tuesday 18 March 2025 at Tyneside House, Newcastle and via MS Teams

## Present

Alan Lovell  
Judith Batchelar  
Stewart Davies  
Ines Faden Da Silva  
Robert Gould  
Brittany Harris (virtual)  
John Lelliott  
Maya Leibman  
Sarah Mukherjee

Chair  
Deputy Chair  
Board Member  
Board Member  
Board Member  
Board Member  
Board Member  
Board Member

## In attendance

Tamara Bruck

Executive Director, Strategy, Transformation and Assurance

Anna Caffyn  
Sebastian Catovsky  
Sarah Chare  
Matt Cornford  
Chris Davis (virtual)  
Caroline Douglass

Director, Finance  
Defra, Director, Floods and Water  
Executive Director, Local Operations  
Director, Strategy  
Deputy Director, Communications  
Executive Director, Flood and Coastal Risk Management  
Executive Director, Environment and Business  
Director, Legal and Audit Services  
Deputy Director, Governance and Engagement  
Board Governance Manager  
Board Governance Senior Advisor  
Board Governance Advisor  
Board Governance Officer  
KPMG Auditor

John Leyland (virtual)  
Laura Milton  
Verity Zurita  
Corry McDiarmid  
Alex Hole  
Beth Lamb  
Precious Okeme  
Katie Dillon

## Item 2

Dan Hutley

Deputy Director, Health, Safety and Wellbeing

## Items 6 and 7

Lucy Ward

Performance Manager

## Item 8

John Russon  
Drew Oram

Director, Portfolio Management and Assurance  
Manager, Portfolio Management Office

## Item 9

Alex Robinson

Sustainable Funding Manager

#### Item 10

Oliver Moores  
Alice Mayne

Programme Manager  
Deputy Director, Strategy

#### Item 11

Jamie Fletcher

North East Area Director

#### Items 12 and 13

Georgina Collins

Director, Energy and Resources

#### Item 12

Liz Parkes

Deputy Director, Climate Change, Chemicals and  
Markets

Matthew Womersley

Manager, Chemicals Regulator Development

Steve Dungey

Manager, Environment and Business

Toni Cadwell

Advisor, Chemicals Regulator Development

Rob Bradburne

Chief Scientist

#### Item 13

Chris Jenkins

Deputy Director, Energy, Radioactive Substances  
and Process Industry

Kathryn Richardson

Deputy Director, Energy and Resources

Item 1: Apologies, declarations of interest, minutes and matters arising

#### Apologies

- 1.1 The board noted apologies from Mark Suthern, Lilli Matson, Philip Duffy and David Hill.

#### Declarations of Interest

- 1.2 John Lelliott declared he had been appointed as a trustee of the Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution.
- 1.3 Judith Batchelar declared she had been appointed interim Chair of the Institute for Agriculture and Horticulture.

#### Minutes of the meetings held on 15 November 2024, 17 December 2024 and 11 February 2025 and matters arising

- 1.4 **Decision: The board approved** the minutes of the 15 November 2024 meeting.
- 1.5 **Decision: The board approved** the minutes of the 17 December 2024 meeting.
- 1.6 **Decision: The board approved** the minutes of the 11 February 2025 meeting.
- 1.7 The Executive Director of Strategy, Transformation and Assurance (STA) provided an update on the review of mandatory training. The

board noted that all mandatory training has been reviewed and is now being controlled centrally.

- 1.8 The board noted that action reference Board2023-37 would be reallocated to the Executive Director of Environment and Business.
- 1.9 **Action:** Board Governance team to add a deep dive on Water resources (including desalinisation) to a Board agenda for Q3 2025/26.
- 1.10 **Action:** Executive Director of STA to provide the most recent monthly health of the organisation (HOTO) summary slide in each board meeting pack.
- 1.11 The board asked that actions should only be closed once completed rather than when planned.

## Item 2: People matters

### Health, safety and wellbeing

- 2.1 The board welcomed Dan Hutley to the meeting. Dan provided an update on the development of the health, safety and wellbeing (HSW) strategy (which will be brought to the June meeting for review), key workstreams, significant incidents since the last meeting, as well as an overview of performance.
- 2.2 The board queried what processes were in place for learning from incidents and implementing improvements.
- 2.3 The board scrutinised the HSW performance. The board noted the safeguarding update provided and discussed board oversight of this matter.
- 2.4 **Action:** Executive Director of STA to confirm governance for HSW, specifically around Executive and Board level responsibilities including safeguarding.
- 2.6 The board discussed mental health as the primary cause of ill health, they considered the support in place to help get colleagues impacted by poor mental health back to work.
- 2.7 The board discussed difficulties achieving consistent reporting of HSW incidents, in particular they noted trends around mental health and 'techno stress' reporting across the organisation.
- 2.8 The board queried the performance on the internal assurance metric. The board noted teams were carrying out assurance visits and were currently facing a backlog of actions as a result, and that work was underway to improve performance.
- 2.9 The board told the team that more action was needed to quickly improve performance on lost time incidents (LTIs) and injuries, diseases and dangerous occurrences regulations (RIDDOR) to bring the Environment Agency more in line with other organisations on HSW.

- 2.10 **Action:** Executive Director of STA to organise a session to discuss how the Environment Agency can bring about a step change in our HSW performance, with Lilli Matson, Alan Lovell, Dan Hutley, Sarah Chare and Tamara Bruck.

### **Employee relations**

- 2.11 The Executive Director of STA updated the board on pay negotiations, the synergy programme and the summer development internship programme for 2025.
- 2.12 The board noted that the respect and inclusion review had concluded and would be published by the end of March.
- 2.13 **Action:** Executive Director of STA to share an embargoed copy of the respect and inclusion report with Board members, ahead of publication.

### **Item 3: Board updates**

#### **Chair's update**

- 3.1 The Chair told the board that Jonathan Watts had been appointed as a new board member from 1 April 2025.
- 3.2 The Chair updated the board on the progress of the outstanding Deputy Chair and other Committee Chair role appointments, noting that these would require board approval.
- 3.3 **Action:** Board Governance team to organise an extraordinary board meeting for the end of March to approve changes to board member responsibilities, spending review bids and 2025/26 business plan.

#### **Chief Executive's update**

- 3.4 The board noted the updates provided in the paper.
- 3.5 The board commended the executives and their teams for achieving the 4000 water inspections target for 2024/25.
- 3.6 The board noted the 75% reduction in freedom of information (FOI) requests since the Environment Agency has been publishing data on the 'water data explorer' portal.

### **Item 4: Committee and area updates**

#### **Board member area updates, risks and issues**

- 4.1 Board members reported back on issues and notable updates from each of their areas.
- 4.2 Board members reflected on conversations with area staff regarding levels of uncertainty surrounding major issues such as EAX and the Flood and Coastal Investment Programme.

## Recent Committee meeting updates

- 4.3 The board noted topics of focus at all Committee meetings since the last board.
- 4.4 The board noted that the Pensions Committee had been looking at the investment strategy and discussing the response to the government consultation on the local government pension scheme (LGPS). The board noted that the Chief Pensions Officer will bring an update to the board on this matter in due course.

### Item 5: Regular finance items

#### Finance update

- 5.1 The Director of Finance laid out the key points in the paper outlining the 2024/25 January month end position and the board noted the forecast financial position for year end and the actions the Executive Directors Team (EDT) were taking to manage the forecast overspend back to budget.

#### Spending review strategy update

- 5.2 The Director of Strategy provided an overview of the spending review strategy and the Environment Agency's submission for new business cases which look to support Government priorities.
- 5.3 The board noted the key elements of the Environment Agency's spending review proposal. The board raised queries around the process for spending review bids.
- 5.4 The board noted the financial summary of the key spending review cases provided in the pack and asked how these compared with the 2024/25 actuals and 2025/26 plan.
- 5.5 **Action:** Director of Finance and Director of Strategy to provide the board with updated financial figures on the spending review including actuals for 2024/25 and plan for 2025/26, and showing 'additional' spending review money, baseline financial allocations, charge income and total budgets for all years to 2030.
- 5.6 The board discussed the budget for digital transformation, they noted Digital, Data & Technology Services' (DDTS) spending review bid would cover artificial intelligence (AI), security and digital transformation.
- 5.7 The board wished to approve the spending review bid before it was submitted to the Secretary of State (SoS). They noted this would be included on the agenda for the additional March board call (see action at 3.3).

## Financial scheme of delegation (FSOD)

5.8 The board noted the items which had received approval.

Item 6: Quarter 3 performance – corporate and balanced scorecard review

6.1 The board noted the improvements since the Q2 performance and significant uplift across several key performance indicators (KPIs). The board thanked the executives for this achievement.

6.2 The board noted the improvement on planning and permitting. They asked about the status of agriculture and water company inspection measures and what impact this was having.

6.3 **Action:** Executive Directors of Local Operations and Environment and Business to consider providing more explanation for what ‘successfully influenced’ means in relation to scorecard measure EO1.

6.4 **Action:** Executive Director FCRM to confirm the revised target for the FCRM investment programme, F01, due to the resetting of the programme.

6.5 **Decision: The board approved** the Q3 Corporate Scorecard, as laid out in Appendix 1 of the paper.

6.6 **Decision: The board approved** the quarter 3 Balanced Scorecard, as laid out in Appendix 2 of the paper.

Item 7: Progress update on business planning and approval of balanced scorecard targets 2025/26

7.1 The Director of Finance introduced the item and set out the progress update. The board noted the business plan would be taken to EDT the following week and would be shared with the board at the additional March board call (see action at 3.3).

7.2 The board considered the corporate scorecard and balanced scorecard target proposals which they noted were being used to inform part of the 2025/26 business plan. The board encouraged EDT to ensure these were aligned with the delivery of EAX.

7.3 The board queried whether the metrics were robust enough to deliver on HSW and asked whether LTIs and RIDDORs should be included here.

7.4 **Action:** Executive Director of STA to consider the HSW measures that are included on the scorecard and whether these are appropriate and need altering/adding to.

7.5 **Decision: The board approved** the principles and assumptions for targets.

7.6 **Decision: The board approved** the balanced scorecard targets subject to the Executive Director of STA looking into the HSW measures.

Item 8: Flood and coastal risk management (FCRM) grant in aid (GiA) approval

8.1 The board welcomed John Russon and Drew Oram to the meeting. The Executive Director of FCRM introduced the item and John Russon provided a summary of the 2025/26 allocations for the FCRM investment programme and asset maintenance programme.

8.2 The board raised questions around projects over budget and how this is being taken into account for future projects and allocations. The board noted work was underway to manage this.

8.3 The board discussed engagement with the Regional Flood and Coastal Committee Chairs (RFCCs).

8.4 **Decision: The board approved** the FCRM Grant-in-Aid (GiA) capital and resource allocations for 2025/26 as laid out in sections 3 and 4, and appendices B and C of the paper.

Item 9: Charges approvals

9.1 The board welcomed Alex Robinson to the meeting and the Director of Finance introduced the item.

9.2 The board noted the proposed charging policy and scheme proposals. They asked about the total income for the charging schemes, including how these are broken down by category. The board urged the team to be cautious when considering the communication of charge increases.

9.3 **Action:** Directors of Finance and Strategy to create a charge income plan which will provide the board with information on our overall strategy for charges, current annual charges income, predicted future income and communication and engagement plans.

9.4 **Decision: The board approved** the charging proposals for reducing waste crime and updating Environment Agency time and materials charges.

9.5 **Decision: The board approved** reviewing and extending the existing charges for its regulation of the UK Emissions Trading Scheme.

9.6 **Decision: The board approved** introducing charges for the Environment Agency's Fluorinated Gases and Ozone Depleting Substances regulation.

- 9.7            **Decision: The board approved** the use of discretionary powers under Section 43 of the Environment Act to introduce three new services.

Item 10: EAX

- 10.1           The board welcomed Alice Mayne and Oliver Moores to the meeting. The Director of Strategy introduced the item and set out purpose of the session.
- 10.2           The board noted the first full draft of EAX as well as the plans for internal and external engagement. The board discussed the impact of EAX and how the strategy team planned to keep it relevant over its lifespan.
- 10.3           The board felt the current draft was too cautious, they encouraged the team to be braver and clearer about the changes the Environment Agency intends to implement and how it is going to get there. The board wished to see more clarity around the Environment Agency's long-term vision.
- 10.4           The board asked about the Environment Agency's role with regard to driving nature improvements. They cautioned the team not to conflate the Environment Agency's role in this space with that of Natural England.
- 10.5           The board discussed communication of the strategy. They acknowledged that the language used as part of the previous corporate strategy (EA2025) was too expansive and did not help staff to see their own role within it. The board encouraged the team to be as clear as possible on how staff fit within the next strategy. The board also emphasised the importance of a clear narrative reflecting the language and objectives of the government's environmental improvement plan (EIP).

Item 11: Staff engagement reflections

- 11.1           The board reflected on their engagement session with area staff at Tyneside House.
- 11.2           The board fed back on conversations they had had with staff relating to commercial processes, digital transformation, the impact of working from home on new starters, career progression and inconsistencies across communication channels. The board reflected that overall the feedback from staff had generally been positive.

Item 12: Chemicals – risks and regulation

- 12.1           The board welcomed Georgina Collins, Liz Parkes, Matthew Womersley, Steve Dungey and Toni Cadwell to the meeting. Georgina Collins introduced the item.



- 12.2 Matthew Womersley took the board through the role of the chemicals programme, the scale of the task of managing pollution from chemicals, how the Environment Agency is funded for work to regulate chemicals and gave an overview of the relevant government policy.
- 12.3 The board acknowledged the increasing public interest in this issue.
- 12.4 The board noted how the Environment Agency is currently benchmarking its progress on chemical regulation against other countries as well as its role in advising on contaminated land as part of planning decisions.
- 12.5 The board considered the importance of collaboration, and discussed opportunities to work with partners and stakeholders across a range of regulatory regimes and sectors to influence on the mitigation of future impacts, as well as convene to foster a sense of urgency in the need to address this issue.
- 12.6 The board discussed how the Environment Agency and central government could be work together to achieve a more strategic ambition and create a clear future strategy. The board encouraged the team to think about how the Environment Agency can get these conversations started.
- 12.7 The board acknowledged the gravity of this issue and that it was right for the Environment Agency to take a lead role and provide advice to government to assist the development of a long-term strategy. The board were supportive of keeping this issue in focus.
- 12.8 **Action:** Chemicals team to come back to the Board with a plan to work with Defra/others on chemical regulation.

#### Item 13: Transformation of COMAH

- 13.1 The board welcomed Chris Jenkins and Sue Hornby to the meeting. Georgina Collins introduced the item and Chris Jenkins provided an overview of the work underway to improve the Environment Agency's delivery of Control of Major Accident Hazards (COMAH) work.
- 13.2 The Executive Director of Local Operations updated the board on the work underway between Environment and Business and Local Operations to create a different operating model to regulate niche and complex sectors. The board noted the current reliance on Health and Safety Executive (HSE) systems as the equal partner competent authority on COMAH alongside the Environment Agency.
- 13.3 The board noted the objectives of the COMAH framework review. The board discussed how the review would address issues currently being

faced within the COMAH regime such as recruitment and training of COMAH staff, as well as pay and lease cars.

- 13.4 The board noted the challenges of recruitment, but felt more ambition was needed on the Environment Agency's COMAH recruitment aims. They recognised that charge uplift would be needed in order to effect the necessary changes to recruitment. The board were supportive of measures to manage the Environment Agency's risks around COMAH and asked to cover this topic again at a future meeting. The board wished to discuss what is needed in terms of headcount, charging and working more effectively with HSE.

- 13.5 **Action:** Executive Directors of Environment and Business and Executive Director of Operations to develop a plan outlining how our regulation of COMAH sites can be developed to match the scale of the challenge regarding COMAH regulation. This plan should demonstrate how an uplift in charging can help the EA deliver its COMAH ambition.

Item 14: Reflections on time on the Environment Agency Board: Judith Batchelar, Robert Gould and John Lelliott

- 14.1 The Chair thanked Judith Batchelar, Robert Gould and John Lelliott for their 7 years on the Environment Agency Board and for their Chairships of the Environment and Business, ARAC, RFCC Chairs and Pensions Committees during this time.

Item 15: Any other business, date of next meeting, review of meeting and summary of evening and next day arrangements

### **Any other business**

#### Environmental Performance Assessment – Information paper

- 15.1 The board noted the information paper included in the pack. The board were supportive of the revised EPA methodology.
- 15.2 The board queried whether the publication of EPA data can be more timely in future years.

### **Date of next meeting**

- 15.3 The date of the next meeting was noted as 7 May 2025.

### **Review of meeting**

- 15.4 The board reviewed the meeting.

### **Summary of evening and next day arrangements**

- 15.5 The Chair summarised the evening arrangements and timings for the following day's visit.

The meeting closed at 4:40pm.