

**BOURNEMOUTH, CHRISTCHURCH AND POOLE COUNCIL**  
**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD**

Minutes of the Meeting held on 31 January 2022 at 2.00 pm

Present:-

Cllr S Bartlett – Chairman  
Cllr V Slade – Vice-Chairman

Present: Cllr L Allison, Cllr D Borthwick, Cllr L Dedman, Cllr B Dion,  
Cllr M Earl, Cllr J Edwards, Cllr D Farr, Cllr M Howell, Cllr D Kelsey,  
Cllr T O'Neill, Cllr C Rigby and Cllr A M Stribley

Also in attendance: Cllr M Anderson, Cllr M Greene, Cllr A Hadley, Cllr P Miles

148. Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllr S Gabriel.

149. Substitute Members

Cllr D Borthwick substituted for Cllr S Gabriel for this meeting of the Board.

150. Declarations of Interests

There were none.

151. Confirmation of Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 January 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

152. Public Speaking

There were no public questions, statements or petitions for this meeting.

153. BCP Surface Water Runoff and Sewage Overflows

The Chairman explained that the purpose of this item, originally requested by Board member Cllr C Rigby, was to gain a greater understanding of the issues involved around water pollution in the BCP area and consider the action being taken to address this.

The Board received presentations from Ruth Barden, Director of Environmental Solutions, Wessex Water (WW), and Ian Withers, Area Environment Manager Wessex, Environment Agency (EA). WW had been asked to explain the current situation regarding water pollution: where it comes from, its severity and impact, what was being done to reduce pollution and how long would this take. The EA had been asked to explain

its role and responsibilities as regulator, what standards were required and achieved, and what were its future expectations. The presentations were circulated to Board members in advance of the meeting, copies of which appear as Appendix A to these minutes in the Minute Book.

Following their presentations WW and EA responded to a number of points raised by the Board, including:

- What is being done to monitor water quality all year round?

Board members referred to the rising number of incidents reported by local residents, the growing popularity of cold water swimming and other activities outside of the traditional 'bathing season' (May to September). WW reported that it was working with local community volunteers in some locations to take regular and responsive samples out of season and it was working with the surfing community to monitor illness. Board members challenged the statement that swimming with your mouth open may result in illness. WW clarified that even bathing waters graded 'excellent' were not free from bacteria, for example from bird and dog fouling, and therefore could potentially cause illness.

The EA acknowledged the need to respond to society's increasing use of coastal and inland waters all year round and to consider where the costs of making environmental improvements lay. The EA representative undertook to report back to colleagues on the points raised.

- What is considered to be a storm event, in terms of design and frequency and taking into account climate change?

WW explained that the requirements for sewage infrastructure depended upon the overriding legislation and location. Discharges were permitted up to 10 times per year in the bathing season over a 10 year period average (to allow that some years were wetter than others) and up to three times all year round per year for shellfish areas. These figures were based on rainfall levels and some modelling for climate change. The sewage network was designed for a one in 50 rainfall event but in developing the drainage and waste management plan a higher return period of one on 100 was being considered.

With regard to discharges permitted over the 10 year timescale WW clarified that this did not mean that problems were not investigated and prioritised as they arose.

- Are WW and EA lobbying Government if the current regulations are considered insufficient to achieve the changes required?

WW was represented on Defra's storm task force and was active in tackling issues such as wetwipes misuse by campaigning for change and educating customers. As a government body the EA did not lobby itself but

its data was used by the water companies and the Government as evidence to identify and address issues.

- Board members questioned whether the cost of improvements should fall on the consumer when dividends continued to be paid out, particularly when investment was linked with future profits? A Board member also commented on the consequences of privatisation on the infrastructure and the customer.

The role of Ofwat as the economic regulator of the water and sewerage sectors in England and Wales was noted. In respect of wider points raised, the Chairman reminded the Board that the purpose of this item was to gather information about local issues affecting the BCP area.

- Who is responsible for dealing with the impact of new development and is there legislation in place to address this?

WW confirmed that both legislation and planning policy encouraged sustainable drainage. However, if developers were unable to dispose of surface water on site they were entitled to connect into the combined sewer and many did so. Although WW was not a statutory consultee it did undertake capacity assessments on development proposals. However, there was no requirement on developers or the Local Planning Authority (LPA) to accept its findings. Within WW there was a developer services group which considered future plans, projections and capacity. WW explained that while developers were happy to provide on-site sewage treatment works, they were reluctant to manage and maintain the system for its lifespan. WW would prefer not to have on-site sewage works because they often did not meet required standards and the problems were then passed on to WW and the customer to resolve.

- If new developments upstream did not deliver on site solutions, how did this affect existing properties downstream with older sewage systems?

WW explained that subject to the results of the capacity assessment the developer could be required to pay for infrastructure to connect into a different part of the network.

- A Board member commented on the substantial increase in WW discharges recorded at many locations and was concerned that this now appeared to be the norm rather than the exception.

The Board was advised that WW and the EA had a shared aspiration for zero discharges, but this was very difficult to achieve due to the needs of a growing population and the behaviour of others in causing pollution.

- What issues would WW recommend lobbying MPs on?

WW would seek recognition that surface water should not be in the sewage system. It would support further research to clarify any specific

harm to health and the environment caused by overflows and a wider discussion on what the solutions should be.

- There were concerns that the amount and frequency of discharges into Poole Harbour was escalating way beyond permitted levels. It was reported that the oyster farm had been closed for five months due to norovirus caused by human sewage and that in the summer of 2020 ecoli levels nearly resulted in the permanent downgrading of the shellfish beds.

WW clarified that the discharges were not in the form of solid waste. It was rainwater which included foul sewage and other contaminants from water run-off. Discharging was a passive procedure necessitated by system overload. The Board was reminded that pollution also came from other unrelated sources. In terms of testing WW was working with the fish health inspectorate (CEFAS) on a method to analyse for norovirus and was also working with public health bodeis. Five overflows in Poole were being monitored. WW operated Coast Watch, an online overflow notification system which contacted interested parties when discharges were active.

WW confirmed it was working with Bournemouth University to share data from its research into higher mortality levels in oysters compared to similar locations in France. The EA explained that it was very difficult to model tidal marine environments but assured members that there was collaborative work taking place to respond to the issues affecting shellfish.

- Were the wider issues of water catchment and cumulative impact being addressed?

WW advised that the entire length of water courses were being looked at, to establish the impact of other conurbations upstream and to consider the impact of WW's own operations. The results of this work would help inform future decision making.

- How was surface water being addressed in low lying areas where soakaways were not viable?

WW explained that more collaborative work was needed to identify the best solution for specific locations. Options may be to separate and discharge elsewhere and/or consider more nature based solutions.

The Portfolio Holder was asked about the role of the Council in making the public aware when discharges occurred. He explained that when this happened for example in Boscombe the Council assessed the data and if required put up red flag alerts on the beach. Officers confirmed that the Council did have a responsibility to alert the public when there were water quality issues and would close off areas of the beach if necessary. The Portfolio Holder was asked about lobbying the local MPs. He advised that he was already making arrangements to meet with the MPs, WW and the EA to lobby on various issues, many of which had been raised at this

meeting, and he would be happy to report back to the Board on the outcome.

The Chairman thanked Ruth Barden and Ian Withers for their attendance and contributions to the meeting.

**RESOLVED to recommend that the relevant Portfolio Holder write to all BCP MPs and Ofwat expressing BCP Council's concerns on the level of use of combined sewage overflows and the effect of this on both bathing water quality and the shell fishing industries, requesting that they lobby Government for legislation to be improved and action taken to address what are currently unacceptable water quality levels.**

154. Scrutiny of Transport Related Cabinet Reports

The Portfolio Holder for Sustainability and Transport presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each member of the Board and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'B' to these minutes in the Minute Book. The Portfolio Holder and officers addressed a number of points raised by the Board including:

- Franchising – The Portfolio Holder confirmed that this had been discussed as an alternative option at an earlier stage but had been disregarded by BCP and the vast majority of other Councils due to the huge resource and commitment required, not least in preparing for it.
- Governance arrangements – At this stage it was not yet clear whether meetings and minutes would be made public. If so, it was noted that some redaction may be required where issues of commercial sensitivity were disclosed.
- Bus speed – The Portfolio Holder was asked whether the targeted increase in bus speed would have the desired transformational impact and encourage new bus users. The Portfolio Holder explained that going from 12 to 13.2 miles per hour constituted a 10% increase in speed, which he felt was significant particularly at a time of increasing congestion. Studies showed that even a 1% increase in speed resulted in a 1% improvement in patronage. There were elements in the Plan which targeted both new users and a greater take up by existing users
- Tackling the school run in order to transform peak journey times – The Portfolio Holder reported that there were aims in the Plan to reduce fares for young people and increase the number of school children using the bus to deal with this key issue.
- Pricing and Fares – Board members commented on the current cost of bus travel, especially for families, and asked how much influence the Plan could have on the bus companies in reviewing fares and ticketing. The Portfolio Holder explained that although commercial confidentiality did have an impact on the extent of joint discussions with the Council, the partnership aimed for greater cooperation and was a legally binding agreement. He agreed there was a need for proper, simplified cross ticketing. There was also a need to review

those high frequency routes with too much cross over of services  
This could free up drivers and vehicles to enable increased frequency on other routes.

- ‘Getting About’ Ticket – The Portfolio Holder agreed that this needed to be looked at. It was currently operating with a 20% premium rate, so the 0.05% take up was understandable.
- A Board member felt that the proposed schemes requiring funding as set out in Annex A were underwhelming - The Portfolio Holder cited one of these schemes, the review of on street parking, as an example which the bus companies had identified as the biggest barrier to reliability and speed. He explained that the Plan needed to be realistic and fully funded to succeed.
- Lack of direct routes – A Board member commented on how the lack of a direct bus route was a key barrier to bus use. There was no direct service between Bournemouth and Ashley Cross to Poole Quay and Poole Regeneration sites and the siting of Poole Bus Station remained an issue. The Portfolio Holder acknowledged that the lack of direct service to Poole Quay for residents and visitors needed to be addressed, particular in view of the Council’s ambitions for area. The partnership would provide opportunities to influence services and look at the possibility of through routes and/or loops via the Quay and Hamworthy.
- A Board member felt that there was lack of ambition in the Plan and that the objectives were ‘woolly’ – The Portfolio Holder explained that the Plan needed to be realistic in order to achieve funding and that the objectives would become more refined over time. He confirmed that cross border work was already taking place but for the purposes of the partnership a boundary was required. The overall ambition was for a fully integrated system, with a more frequent rail service, more north/south and circular bus services, alongside cycling and walking The partnership assumed that the transforming cities fund projects will be delivered.

155. Climate Change Enquiry Round Up

The Chairman explained that the purpose of this item was to consider any actions, opportunities, next steps or recommendations following the Climate Change Enquiry Session held at the Board’s last meeting on 5 January 2022.

As he had not received any recommendations from Board members in advance of the meeting, the Chairman had circulated a draft set of recommendations by email and had amended these to incorporate suggested amendments and additions.

The Board proceeded to debate the draft recommendations and clarified those it wished to consider as part of this item. The following draft recommendations were set aside to be discussed at a later date:

- That energy management, sustainable energy generation and ecology/biodiversity become a serious inclusion in the development of the Local Plan.
- That in the absence of safe, reliable, cost-effective alternatives to the car, and acknowledging that many residents will continue to have personal transport, that the Council reconsiders the Parking Supplementary Planning Document and its current detrimental effects on local streets and the potential effect it may have on a decline in the value of housing stocks and the local economy.

**Resolved to recommend that the Cabinet notes the Overview and Scrutiny Board's:**

- a. appreciation and acknowledgement of the work carried out by officers for the period of the Annual Report particularly with regard to the reduction in Co2.**
- b. recognition that the Climate Team is not yet fully staffed, and that the resources available to date have limited the development of some aspects of the Climate Emergency Strategy, Plans and tasks.**
- c. welcome of the additional investment to expand the Climate Emergency Team, and in particular, the appointment of a Head of Climate.**
- d. recognition and understanding that it will take some time for the new Climate Team to be recruited and for it to become fully effective.**
- e. expectation that a BCP Climate Emergency Strategic Policy and Risk Assessment will be developed, from which an Implementation Plan is produced, that clearly details how the strategic policy is to be achieved. The plan should provide SMART objectives, and describe the organisation and organisational responsibilities for achieving these. The Strategy, Risk Assessment and the Implementation Plan should cover both the 2030 Council Targets and the 2050 National Targets, and should apply to aspects that are directly under the Control of the Council, and those within the greater BCP area where the Council can lead, facilitate, and promote the Climate Emergency, through its relationships with organisations, businesses, industry, other partnerships and local residents. It is also requested that the Head of Climate start a programme of member seminars and climate literacy training for all staff.**
- f. expectation that Climate actions are supported with local data where possible to ensure actions are not skewed by the use of misleading national data. Data should include an assessment of emissions of Council employees working from home and this should be included within the Council's emissions footprint.**
- g. expectation that the existing Climate Action Plan i.e. the task list, is further developed to include all requirements of the Implementation Plan.**
- h. intention to further consider the Council's progress towards meeting its Climate Emergency aims at a meeting in September 2022.**

